

Answers to questions:

1. What kinds of problems are you interested in? Why do you think they are important?

I am interested in metaphysical questions about what the world consists of. I am especially interested in how causation and chance are embodied in properties of things, events and physical fields, and what this implies about the nature and direction of time, laws of nature, how our senses give us knowledge of the world and how our minds are related to the rest of the world. Since the answers to these questions are affected, although not determined, by what science discovers, it is constantly necessary to revise our metaphysics in the light of scientific discoveries. These questions are obviously important to anyone concerned to understand the nature of the world and the significance of what science tells us about it.

2. What difficulties are involved in your area of philosophical research?

The major difficulty is one that affects most areas of philosophy: namely, that answers to any serious question in it have implications for other parts of the subject. The constant need to consider these implications means that I cannot confine myself to one part of the subject or even to philosophy as a whole, but must always keep in touch with others, ranging from logic and philosophy of language, through decision theory, psychology and artificial intelligence to quantum physics and relativity theory. The difficulty is to see what is relevant and what is not, and to avoid being swamped by so much relevant information.

3. What concepts have you critically examined?

Probability, time, laws of nature, natural kinds, facts, universals, dispositions, causation, induction, the nature of the mental, computation, consciousness, the self, subjectivity, groups and individuals.

4. What grounds have you for your philosophical position?

I don't have a 'philosophical position'. I have worked out views on a wide range of philosophical questions, such as those listed in my answer to the previous question. I have grounds for each of these views, which I must of course check to see that they are consistent with each other. But about philosophy as a whole I have no view – except that I don't believe the philosophy of philosophy is a serious branch of the subject, or helpful in justifying answers to questions within philosophy. Classifying philosophers into schools (idealist, positivist, realist, etc.) is like classifying artists: a job for historians and journalists, not for those directly engaged in the subject.

5. What trend or school do you think you belong to?

I don't think this is an important question, for reasons given in my answer to the previous question. But for what it is worth, the answer is that I belong to a tradition of scientifically informed metaphysics exemplified in Cambridge by Bertrand Russell, Frank Ramsey, C D Broad and Richard Braithwaite.

6. What is your vision of the role of philosophy of science or philosophy of mind at present?

I don't have such a vision. The question implies that these subjects have to be justified by some external function, e.g. in guiding science in general or psychology in particular. I don't accept this, any more than I accept that pure mathematics has to be justified by its role in physics. Like mathematics, philosophy in general, and the philosophy of science and of mind in particular, are worth doing for their own sake: i.e. for the understanding they give of the nature of science, of the world that science studies, and of the mind. Only in that sense does it have a role, which is the same as that of any serious academic subject: namely, to increase our knowledge and understanding of the world and of our place in it.

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