

Teaching Philosophy to Non-Majors: Twelve Words to Guide the Way

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May 2019



What is philosophy?

PROBLEM: Non-majors taking an introduction to philosophy course need a simple definition.

Two ways to define “philosophy”:

1. analyze the core task/aim of *thinking* philosophically
2. synthesize the *experience* of doing philosophy

**First way, analyzing a paradigm for defining philosophy:
Philosophy is the *self-defining* discipline. How so?**

The First Way: 1. Defining any academic discipline is philosophical

- The task of *self-defining* is *the* essential philosophical task: Socrates' "know thyself".
- What is history? What is art? What is physics?
 - These questions fall not within the named discipline, but belong to the *philosophy* of history, the *philosophy* of art, and the *philosophy* of physics.

2. Self-definition within the discipline of philosophy

- Philosophy is the only discipline where the task of self-definition lies within the discipline itself.
 - Defining philosophy is what philosophy is (primarily) *about*.
 - Not true for other disciplines, even though they can *illustrate* self-defining.
- Cf. Socrates' famous maxim: "The unexamined life is not worth living." To what extent is this really true?
 - Socrates' maxim is a rhetorical device, urging people to *enhance* the meaning of their life *through self-defining* (or "self-awareness").

3. Self-understanding is inherently philosophical

- Philosophy, when done properly, enhances a person's own self-understanding.
- As such, the task of philosophy overlaps with the core task of psychology. I call this overlap “philopsychy”.
- “Philopsychy” combines academic philosophy and academic psychology. Both disciplines nowadays often depart from their original core goal by having more objective (“scientific”) aims.

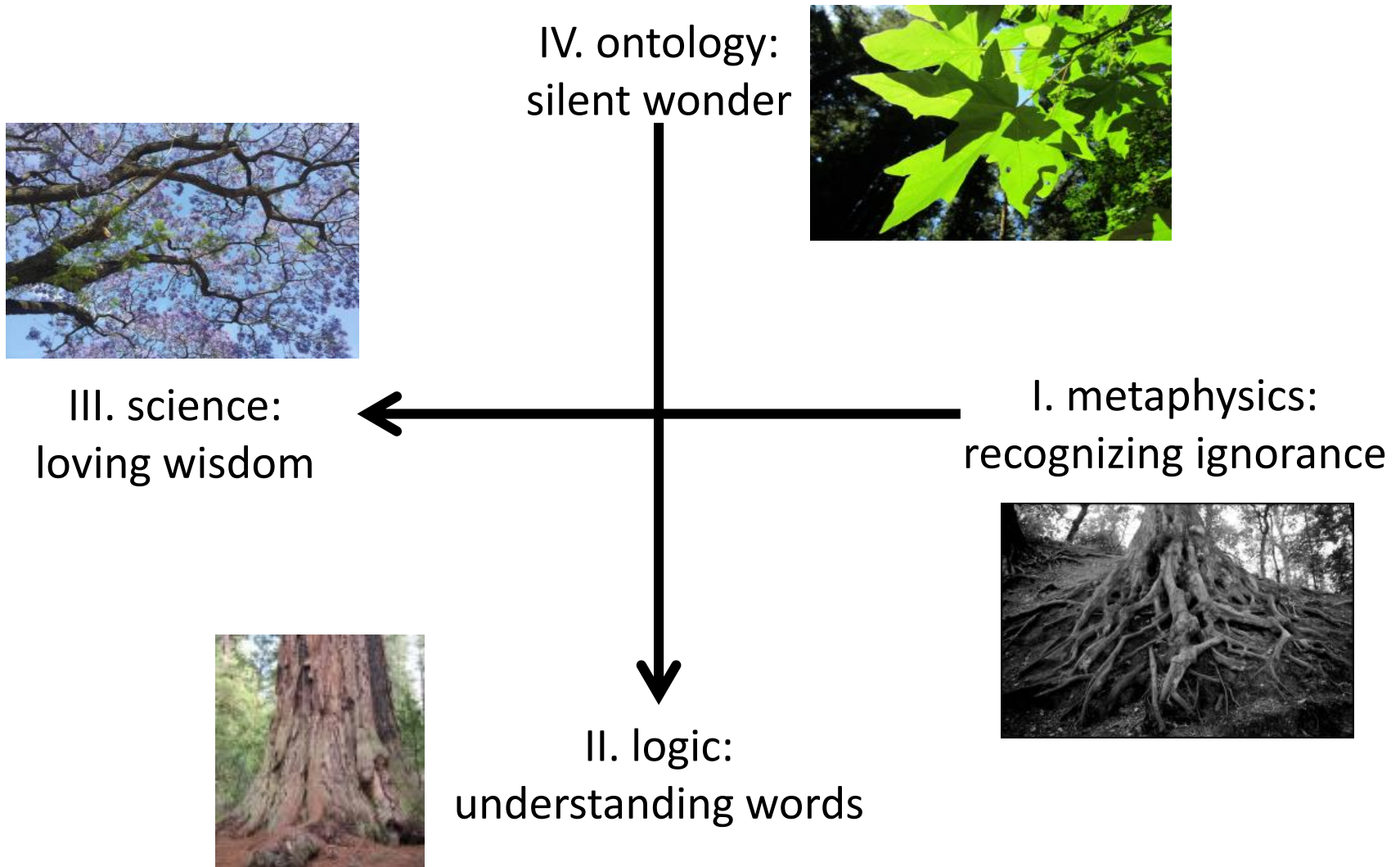
4. Self-definition as (paradoxically) self-authenticating

- Major problem: philosophers typically disagree with each other about how to define philosophy.
- Does my definition imply that “anything goes”?
 - *No*: nothing goes, if it fails the test of personal integrity: Does it conflict with *my own* sense of propriety?
 - Cf. Sartre’s notion of “bad faith”: we are not doing philosophy when we merely mimic someone else’s self-understanding.
- Genuine philosophy maximizes *ultimate* self-worth.

The Second Way: Twelve guiding words

- *The Tree of Philosophy* (Hong Kong: Philopsychy Press)
- Guiding myth: “Philosophy is a tree, and her name is philosophy”:
 - roots, trunk, branches, leaves
 - metaphysics, logic, science, ontology
- The fruit of the process is *insight*.

The four branches of philosophy and the goals of philosophizing



I. Metaphysics: recognizing ignorance

- Socrates' insight: the wise person is the one who knows that we humans are not wise.
- Plato's idealism vs. Aristotle's realism: two competing attempts to dig up the roots.
- Descartes' dualism doubles the trouble: we allegedly *know* both mental & physical reality as such.
- Metaphysics comes of age with *Kant*: he clearly defines the knowledge-ignorance boundary.



metaphysics: the roots

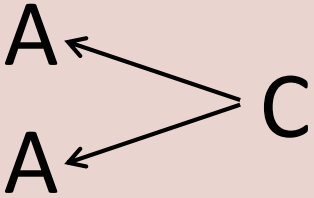
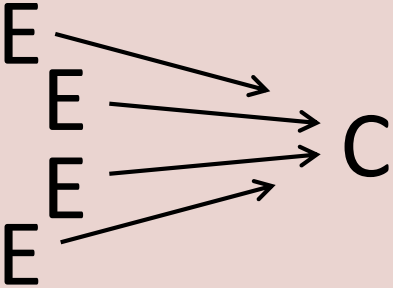
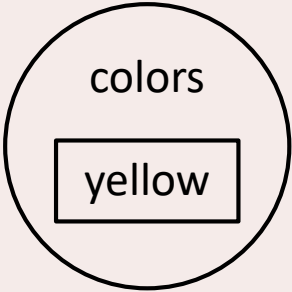
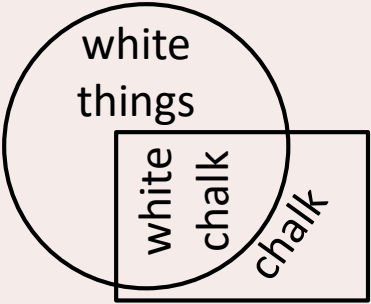
II. Logic: understanding words

- 1. three applications of the analytic-synthetic distinction
- 2. map-making as a practical means of making visible the formal relations between words
- 3. the centrality of language in three forms of twentieth-century philosophy: analytic philosophy; existentialism; and hermeneutic philosophy



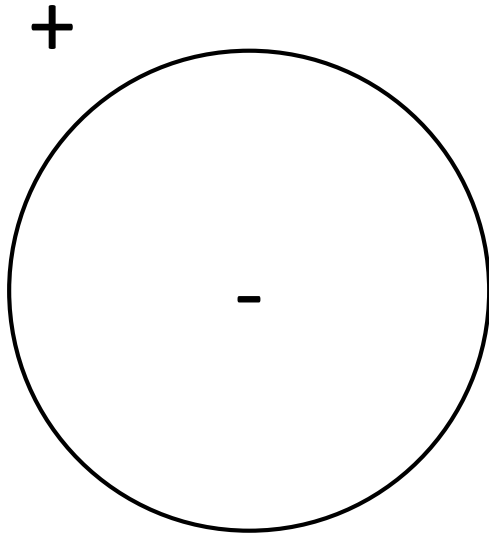
logic: the trunk

Analytic vs. synthetic Logic

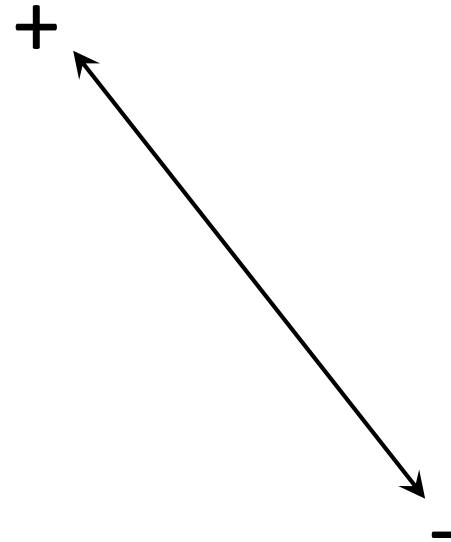
	Analytic	Synthetic
Methods of argumentation	<p>Deduction:</p> 	<p>Induction:</p> 
Types of proposition	<p>“Yellow is a color.”</p> 	<p>“This chalk is white.”</p> 
Kinds of logic	<p>Basic Laws:</p> <p>Identity: $A = A$ Noncontradiction: $A \neq \neg A$</p>	<p>Basic Laws:</p> <p>Nonidentity: $A \neq A$ Contradiction: $A = \neg A$</p>

The geometry of logic: 1LAR

(1LAR = “first level analytic relation”)



As demarcating a boundary

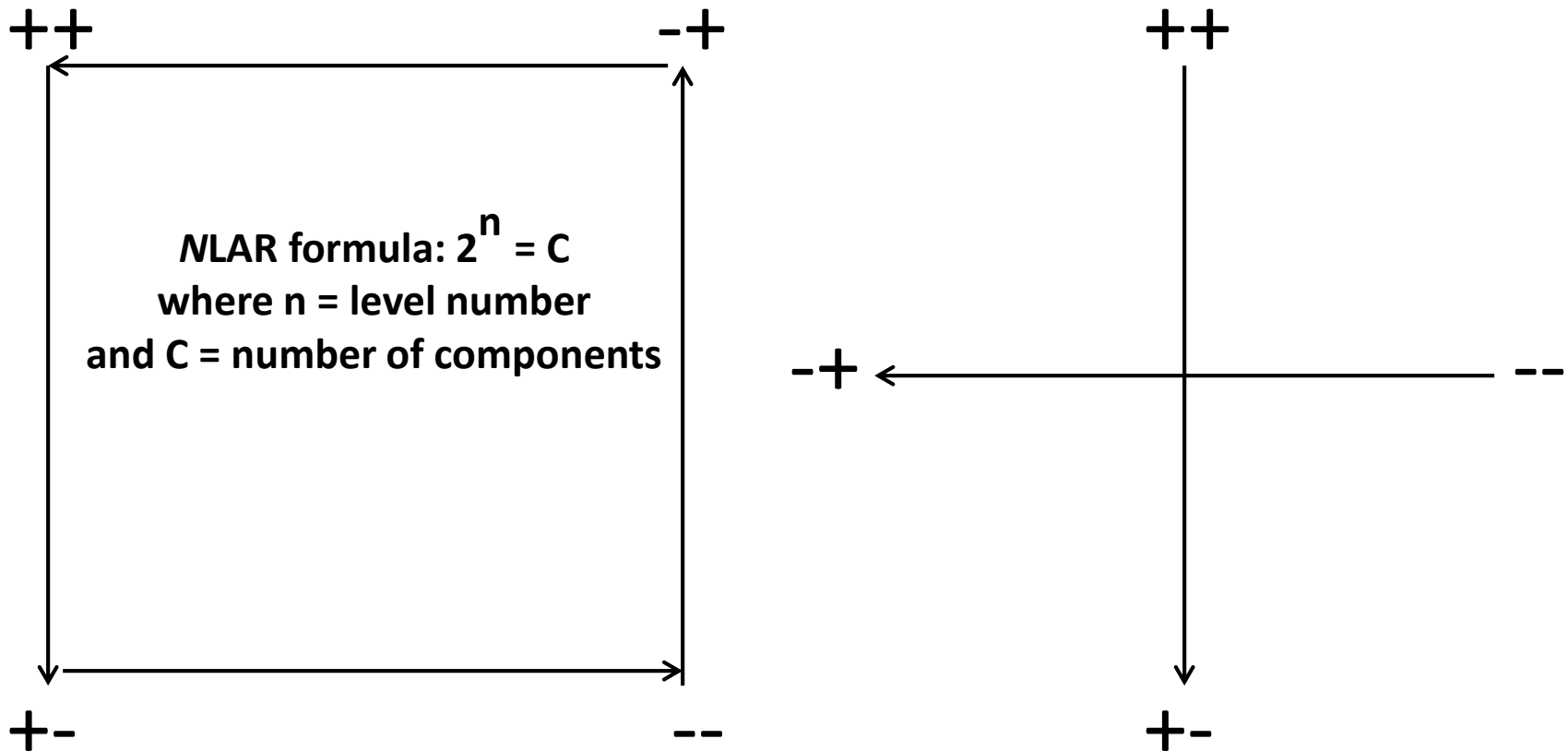


As opposing limits

Two Ways of Mapping a 1LAR

The geometry of logic: 2LAR

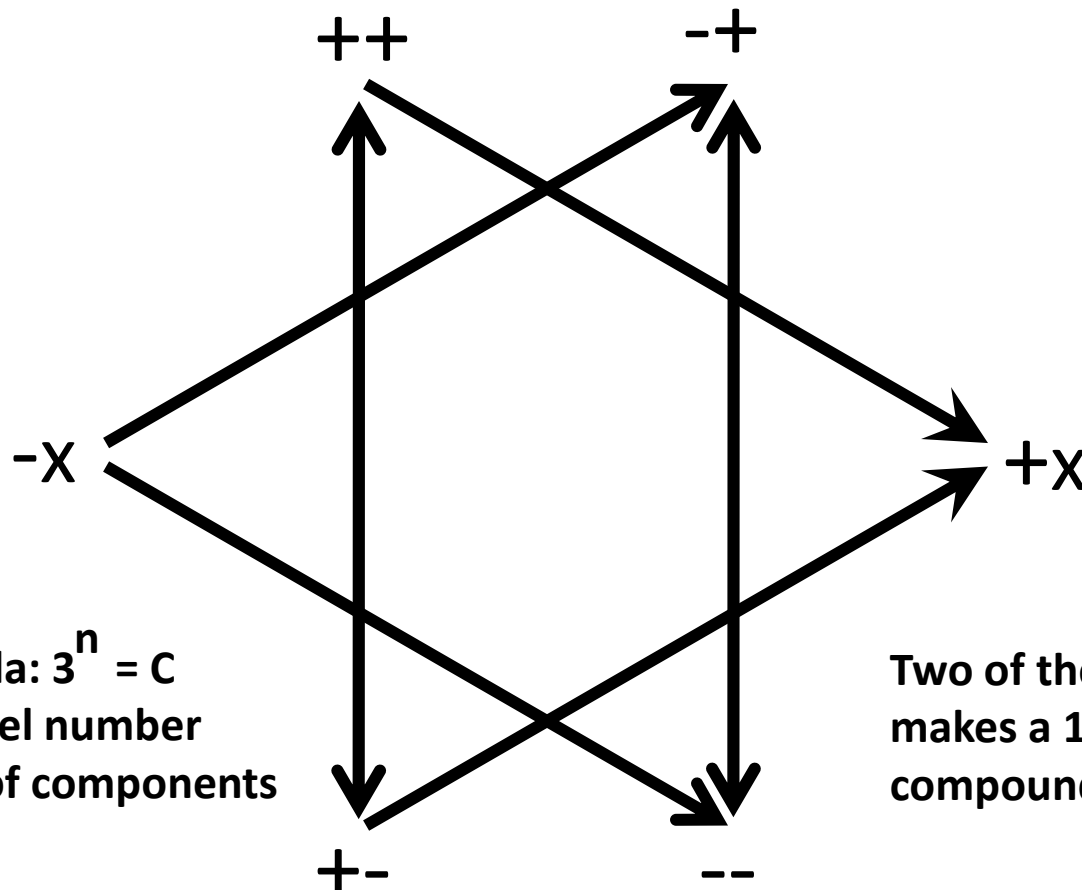
(2LAR = "second level analytic relation")



Two Ways of Mapping a 2LAR

Two 1LSRs mapped onto a six-pointed star

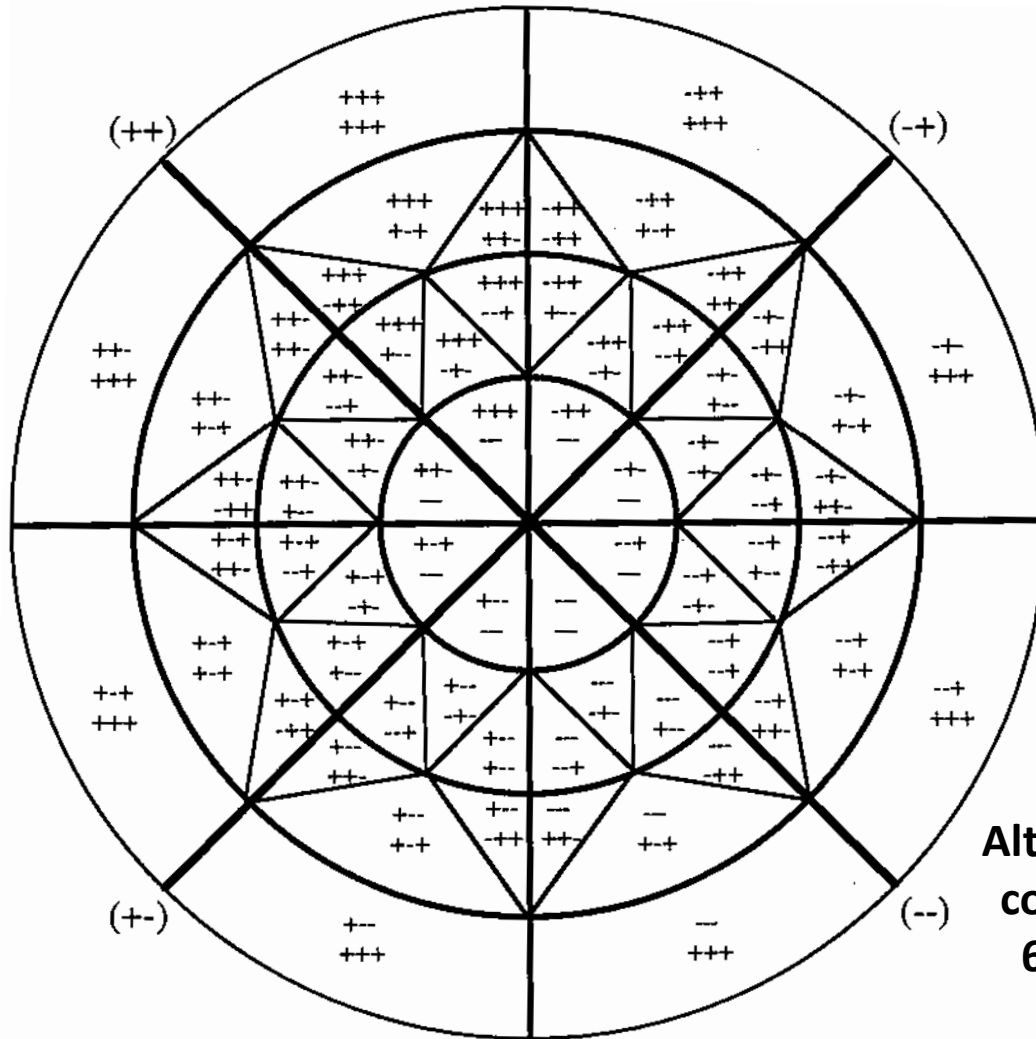
(1LSR = "first level synthetic relation")



NLSR formula: $3^n = C$
where n = level number
and C = number of components

Two of these double 1LSRs
makes a 12CR (12-fold
compound relation); cf. Kant.

The *Yijing* (*Book of Changes*) mapped onto a 6LAR



**Alternative mapping for
comparison with Kant:
 $64 = 4 + 12 + (4 \times 12)$**

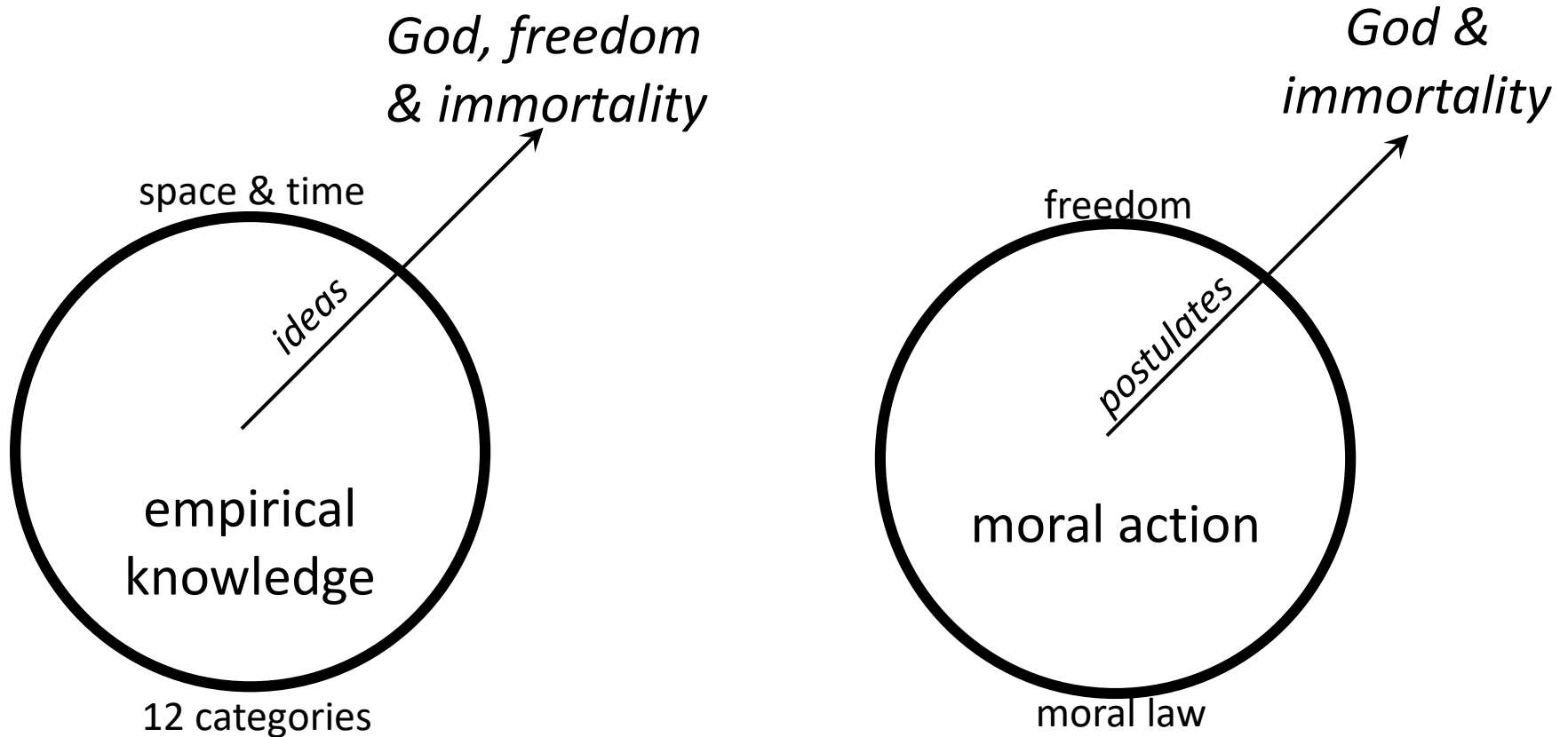
III. Science: loving wisdom

1. Science (“*scientia*” = knowledge) as the realm of the *knowable*.
2. Wisdom as *knowing how* to identify the boundary between the knowable and unknowable in any field of human thought.
3. Three examples: philosophy of science; moral philosophy; political philosophy.



science: the branches

Boundary-conditions for Kant's theoretical vs. practical standpoints



Question: where are the limits (Schranken) vs. boundaries (Grenzen)?

IV. Ontology: silent wonder

- 1. Silence as the ultimate ground of (synthetic) meaning. Plato: “Philosophy begins in wonder.”
- 2. Paradox is inevitable (and welcome) when we use words (cf. synthetic logic) to try to *explain* this ultimate ground.
- 3. An *experience* of mystery is the ultimate goal: beauty, love, religion, angst, death, etc.



ontology: the leaves

Books by S.R. Palmquist

Three textbooks for teaching non-majors (translated into Chinese as the “Philopsychy” trilogy)

- *The Tree of Philosophy: A course of introductory lectures for beginning students of philosophy*, fourth edition (Philopsychy Press, 2000 [1992]). Also in Chinese translation (Guangxi Normal University Press, 2010).
- *Dreams of Wholeness: A course of introductory lectures on religion, psychology and personal growth*, second edition (Philopsychy Press, 2008 [1997]). Also in Chinese translation (Guangxi Normal University Press, 2010).
- *The Waters of Love: A course of introductory lectures on love, sexuality, marriage, and friendship* (Philopsychy Press, 2003). Also in Chinese translation (Guangxi Normal University Press, 2010).

One book on the theology of politics

- *Biblical Theocracy: A vision of the biblical foundations for a Christian political philosophy* (Philopsychy Press, 1993).

Four scholarly monographs on Kant

- *Kant and Mysticism: Critique as the Experience of Baring All in Reason’s Light* (Lexington Books, forthcoming 2019).
- *Comprehensive Commentary on Kant’s Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2016).
- *Kant’s Critical Religion: Volume Two of Kant’s System of Perspectives* (Ashgate, 2000).
- *Kant’s System of Perspectives: An architectonic interpretation of the Critical philosophy* (University Press of America, 1993).

Five edited anthologies/translations relating to Kant

- *Kant on Intuition: Western and Asian Perspectives on Transcendental Idealism* (Routledge, 2018). 20 essays.
- *Cultivating Personhood: Kant and Asian Philosophy* (Walter de Gruyter, 2010). 67 essays.
- Introduction to: *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, tr. Werner Pluhar (Hackett Publishing Company, 2009).
- *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion* (Indiana University Press, 2006). 12 essays; co-editor Chris L. Firestone.
- *Four Neglected Essays by Immanuel Kant* (Philopsychy Press, 1994). Edited translations of four essays by Kant, supplemented with several supporting essays.

Path, courtesy Colby Stopa

<https://flic.kr/p/guDtn>

Furrows, courtesy sszd

<https://flic.kr/p/dhh1b9>

Roots, courtesy Steve Garry

<https://flic.kr/p/2RssAw>

IMG_1205, courtesy Simon Davison

<https://flic.kr/p/4ta3rJ>

Jacaranda tree in full bloo, courtesy vijay chennupati

<https://flic.kr/p/buJZ4d>

Leaves, courtesy Pug50

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Photo
Credits