

Is Philosophy Stupid?

Richard Carrier, Ph.D.

www.richardcarrier.info/philosophy.html

"Philosophy is the field that hasn't progressed in 2000 years, whereas science has ... philosophical speculations about physics and the nature of science are not particularly useful, and have had little or no impact upon progress in [science]."

—**Lawrence Krauss**

"Most of us do not spend most of our time worrying about [the big] questions, but almost all of us worry about them some of the time. Traditionally these are questions for philosophy, but philosophy is dead. Philosophy has not kept up with modern developments in science, particularly physics. Scientists have become the bearers of the torch of discovery in our quest for knowledge."

—Stephen Hawking

"Except for a patina of twenty-first century modernity, in the form of logic and language, philosophy is exactly the same now as it ever was; it has made no progress whatsoever. We philosophers wrestle with the exact same problems the Pre-Socratics wrestled with...[so we must concede] philosophy's inability to solve any philosophical problem, ever"

—Eric Dietrich

/s Philosophy Stupid?

- * "Philosophy is useless"
- * "... divorced from reality"
- * "... too esoteric and obscure"
- * "... just pointless nitpicking over trivial minutiae"
- * "... gets nowhere, teaches and discovers nothing"
- * "... just opinion masquerading as knowledge"

What Is Philosophy?

- * Philosophy as practiced in the **halls of academia**
- * ... vs. what philosophy was **invented to be**
- * ... and what it **should** and **could** be
- * ... and sometimes is.

What Is Philosophy?

- * Philos

- * ... vs.

- * ... and

- * ... and

Philo + Sophia

=

Love of Wisdom

=

Understanding Yourself
and the World

ademia

"Philosophy is only concerned
with the analysis of concepts,
not with facts"

FALSE

Philosophy is...

- * What exists and what doesn't.
- * What its nature is or isn't.
- * How much we can trust what we claim to know.
- * How should we behave—and organize society.
- * What we should infer from the facts of science to answer all of the above.
- * How we should integrate those facts with others, e.g. from history, journalism, personal experience.

Philosophy is...

- * "Who am I?"
- * "What should I do with my life? How can I be happy?"
- * "Do I have the right friends? Are these bad friends?"
- * "Am I a bad person? Should I be living my life differently?"
- * "What's worth making sacrifices for? How much sacrifice?"
- * "Am I in love? What is love?"
- * "Is there a god / afterlife / cosmic plan?"

PHILOSOPHY = WORLDVIEW

- * The analysis of concepts is only a **part** of philosophy.
- * Philosophy is the quest for **understanding**, of yourself and the world.
- * It is what you use to construct and test your philosophy of life, your **worldview**.
- * And as such it very much concerns itself with questions of fact that **science has not or cannot** gain access to or conclusively resolve.

**SO ARE YOU DOING IT WELL
... OR POORLY?**

**SKILLFULLY ... OR
INCOMPETENTLY?**

**INFORMEDLY ... OR
IGNORANTLY?**



"When I have the map, I will be free, and the world will be different, because I have **understanding**...of digital watches. And soon I shall have understanding of video cassette recorders and car telephones. And when I have understanding of them, I shall have understanding of computers. And when I have understanding of computers, I shall be the Supreme Being!"

"Philosophy is just *not oriented* to the outlook of someone who needs to *resolve* the issue, *implement* the corresponding solution, and then find out - possibly fatally - whether they got it right or wrong. Philosophy doesn't resolve things, it compiles positions and arguments. ... It would be one matter if I could just look up the standard answer and find that, lo and behold, it is correct. But philosophy, which hasn't come to conclusions and moved on from cognitive reductions that I regard as relatively simple, doesn't seem very likely to build complex correct structures of *conclusions*."

—Eliezer Yudkowsky

"Philosophy is just *not oriented* to the outlook of someone who needs to *resolve* the issue, *implement* the solution, *then* find out - whether it's right or wrong. Philosophy, it compiles a list of possibilities, it could be one matter if you ask a question, answer and find that, lo and behold, it is correct. But philosophy, which hasn't come to conclusions and moved on from cognitive reductions that I regard as relatively simple, doesn't seem very likely to build complex correct structures of *conclusions*."

Not philosophy **the subject of study**, but philosophy **as now conducted by the academic community**.

—Eliezer Yudkowsky

"Philosophy
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positions
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lo and bo
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- ✱ It fails to distinguish **good from bad** and **settled from unsettled** in the domain of results.
- ✱ And fails to synthesize well-tested results and **centralize them** for easy consultation.

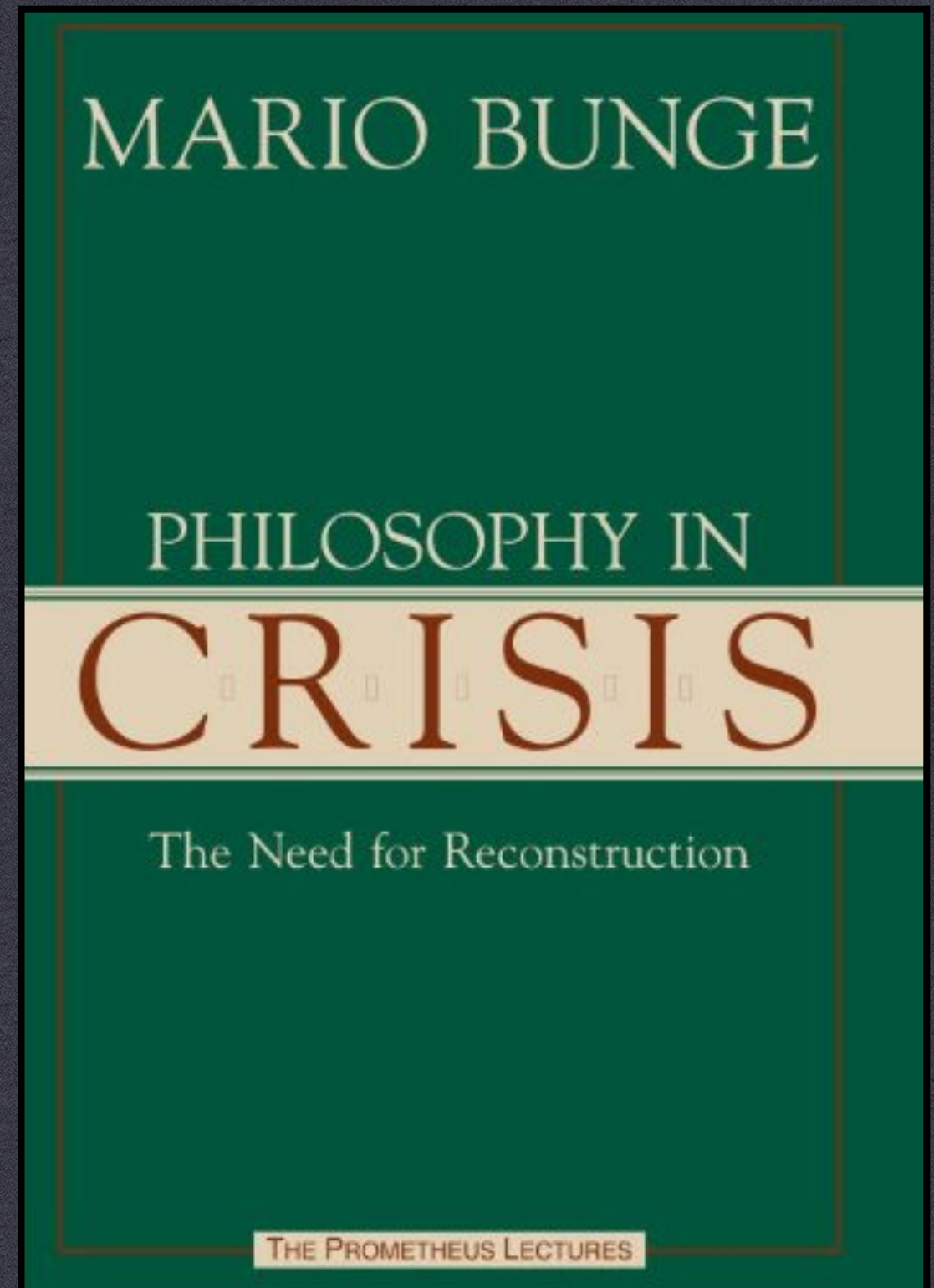
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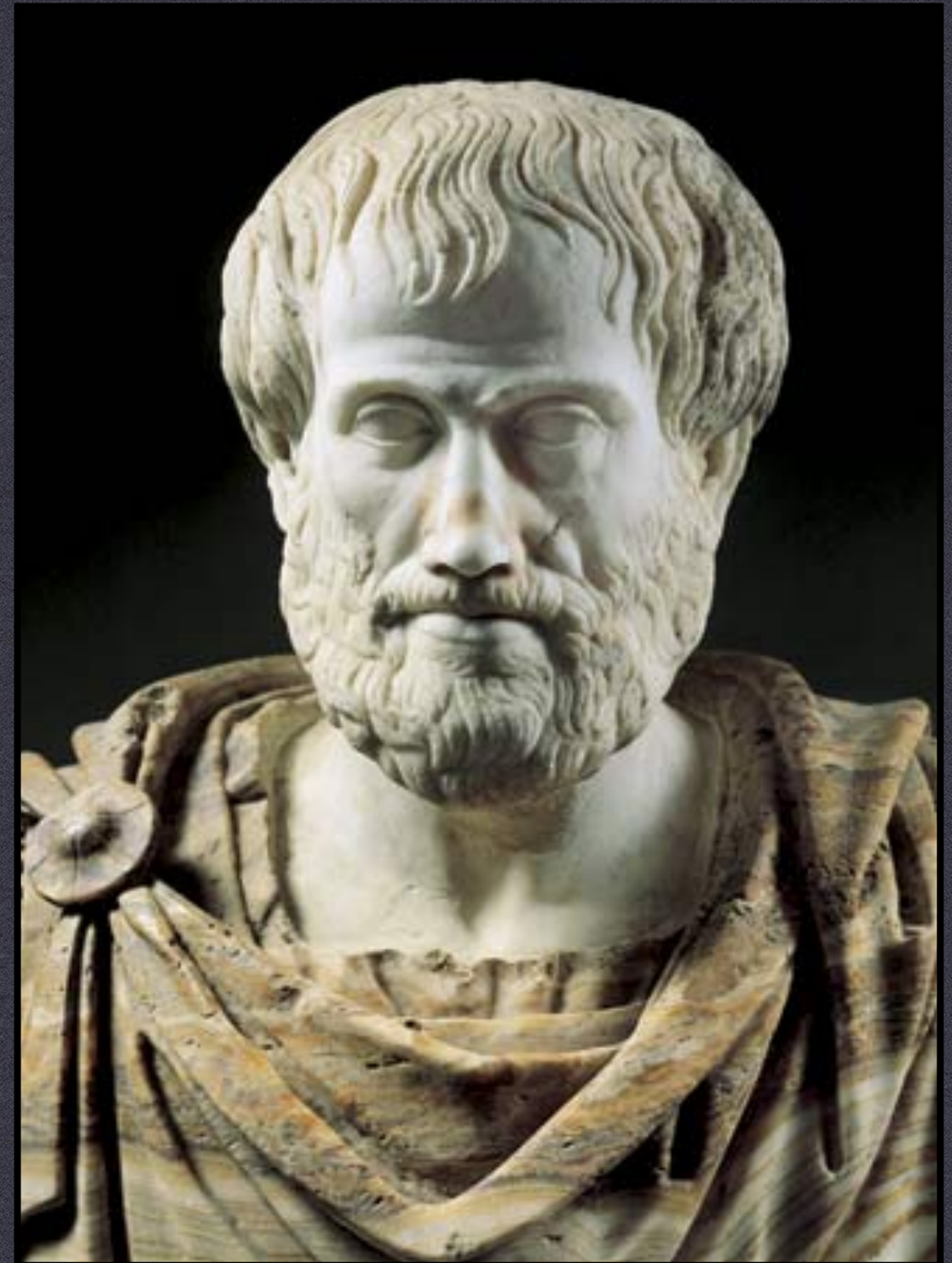
PHILOSOPHY IN CRISIS

THE NEED FOR RECONSTRUCTION

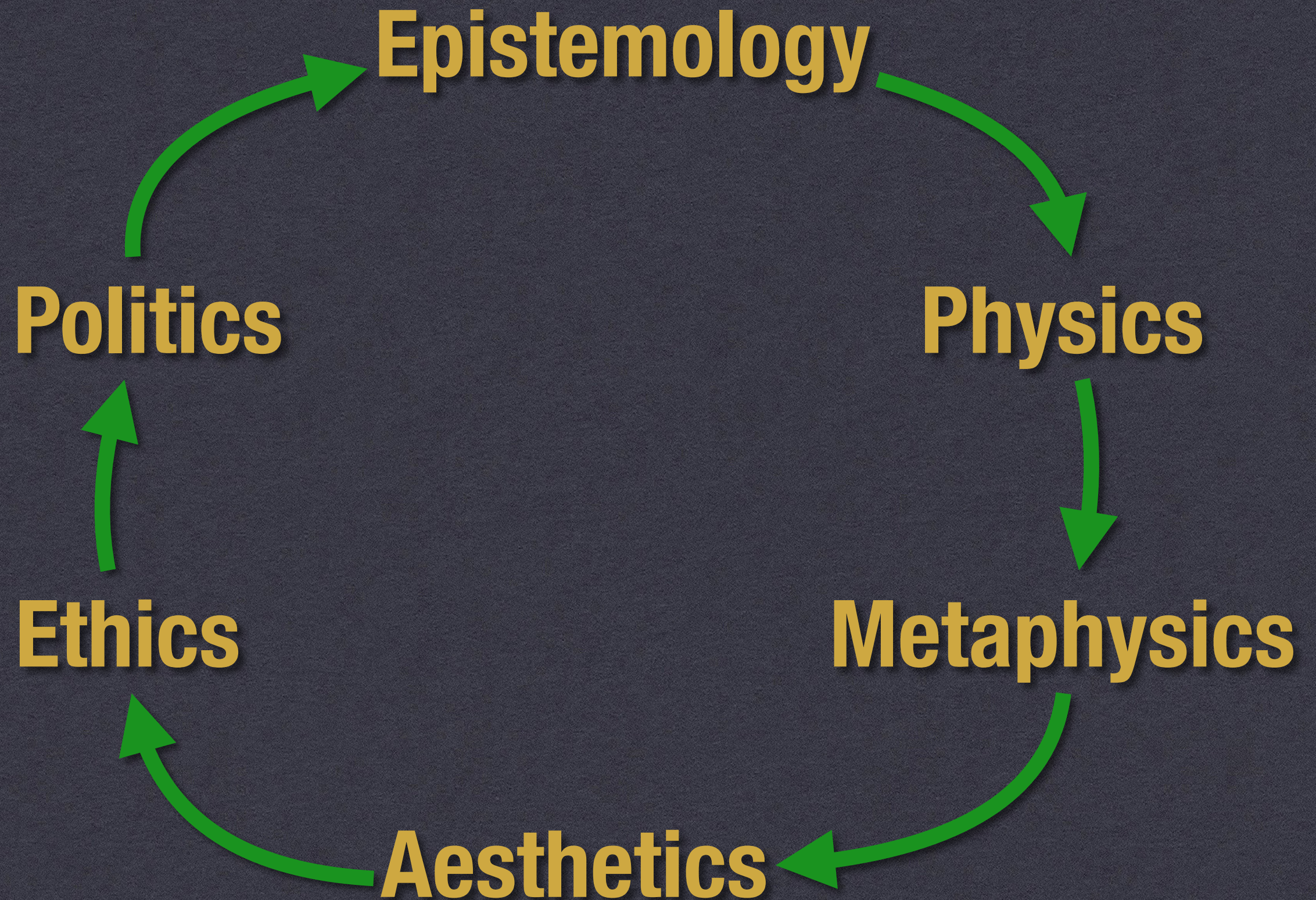


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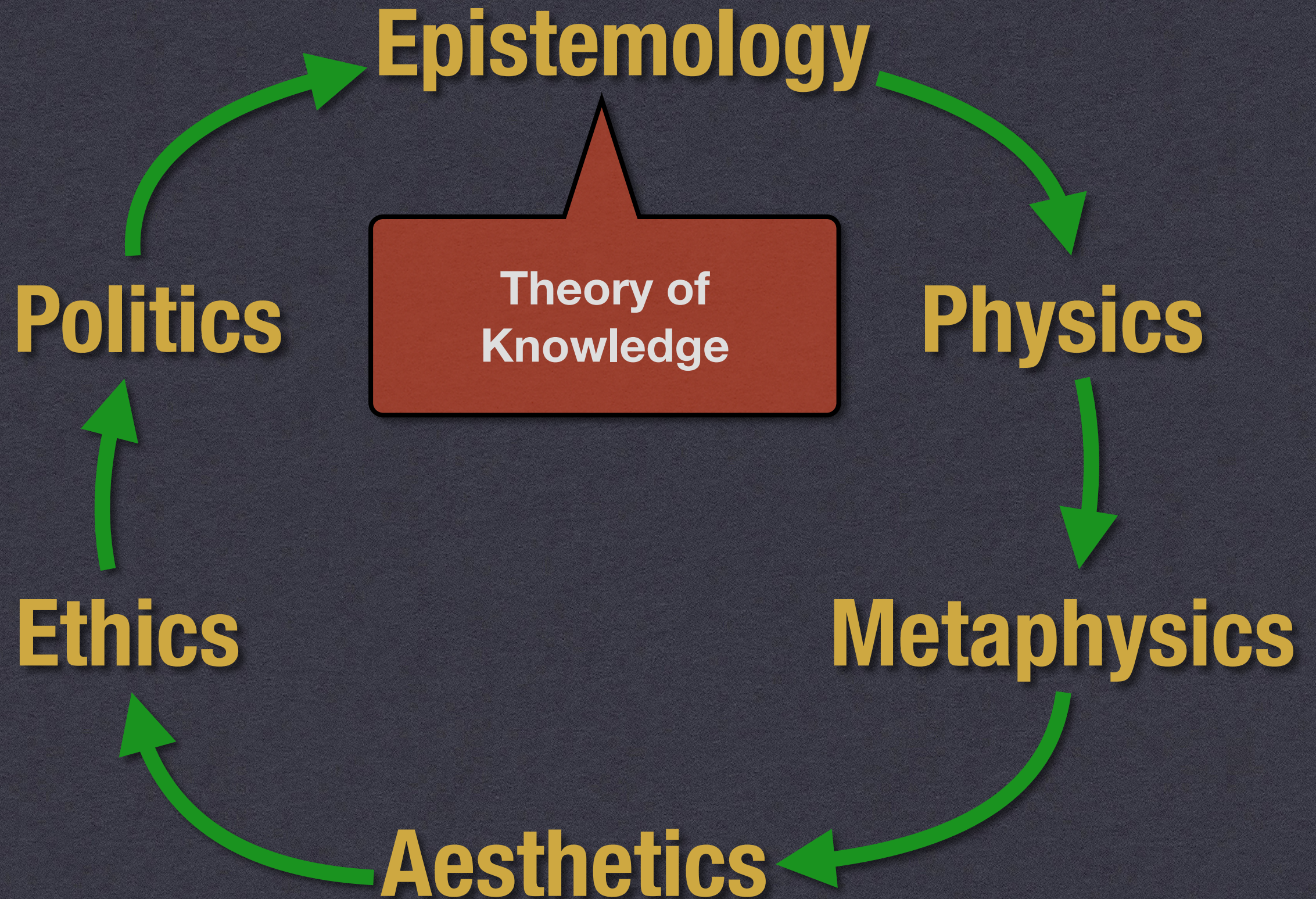
348 – 286 B.C.



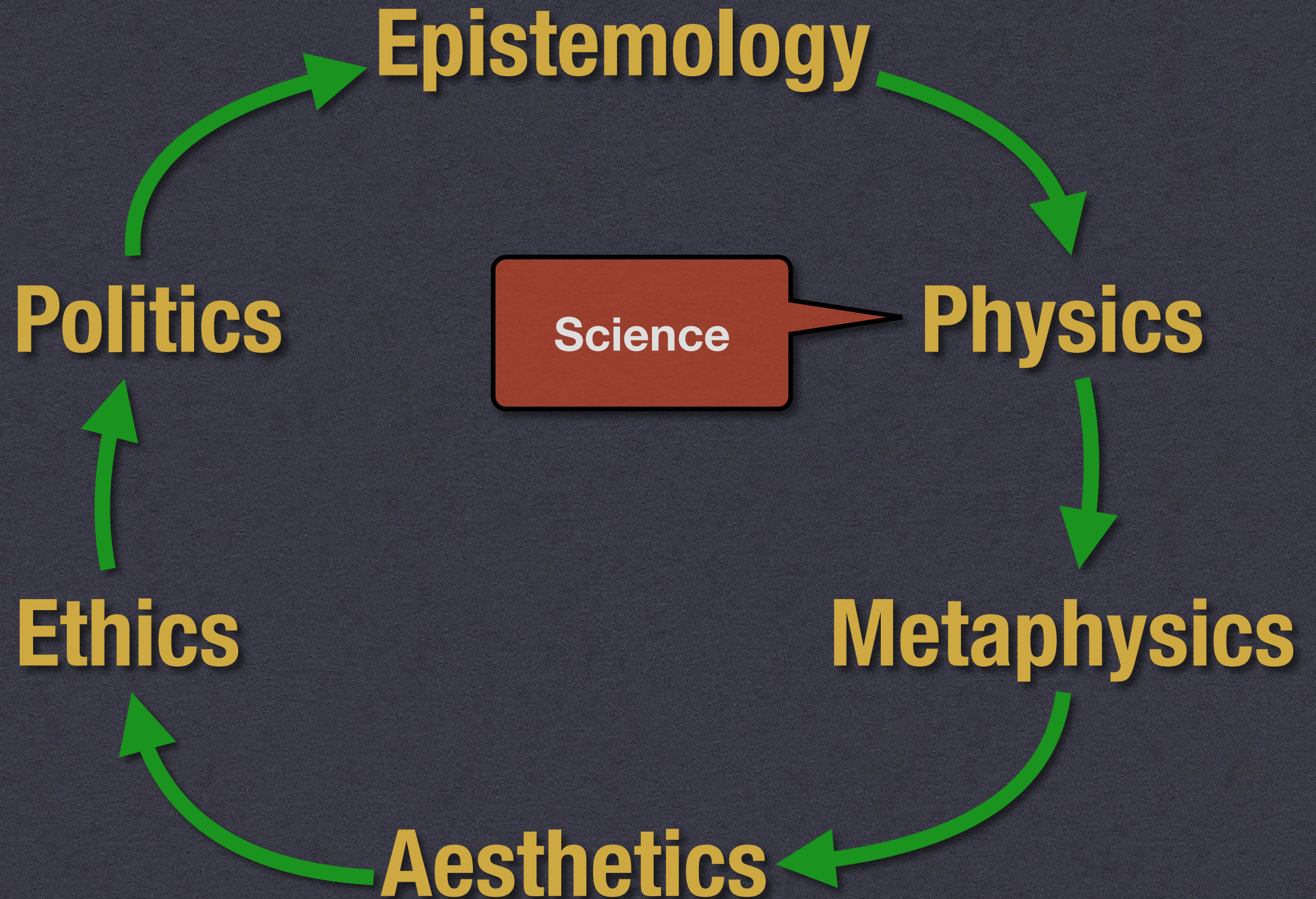
The Six Parts of Philosophy



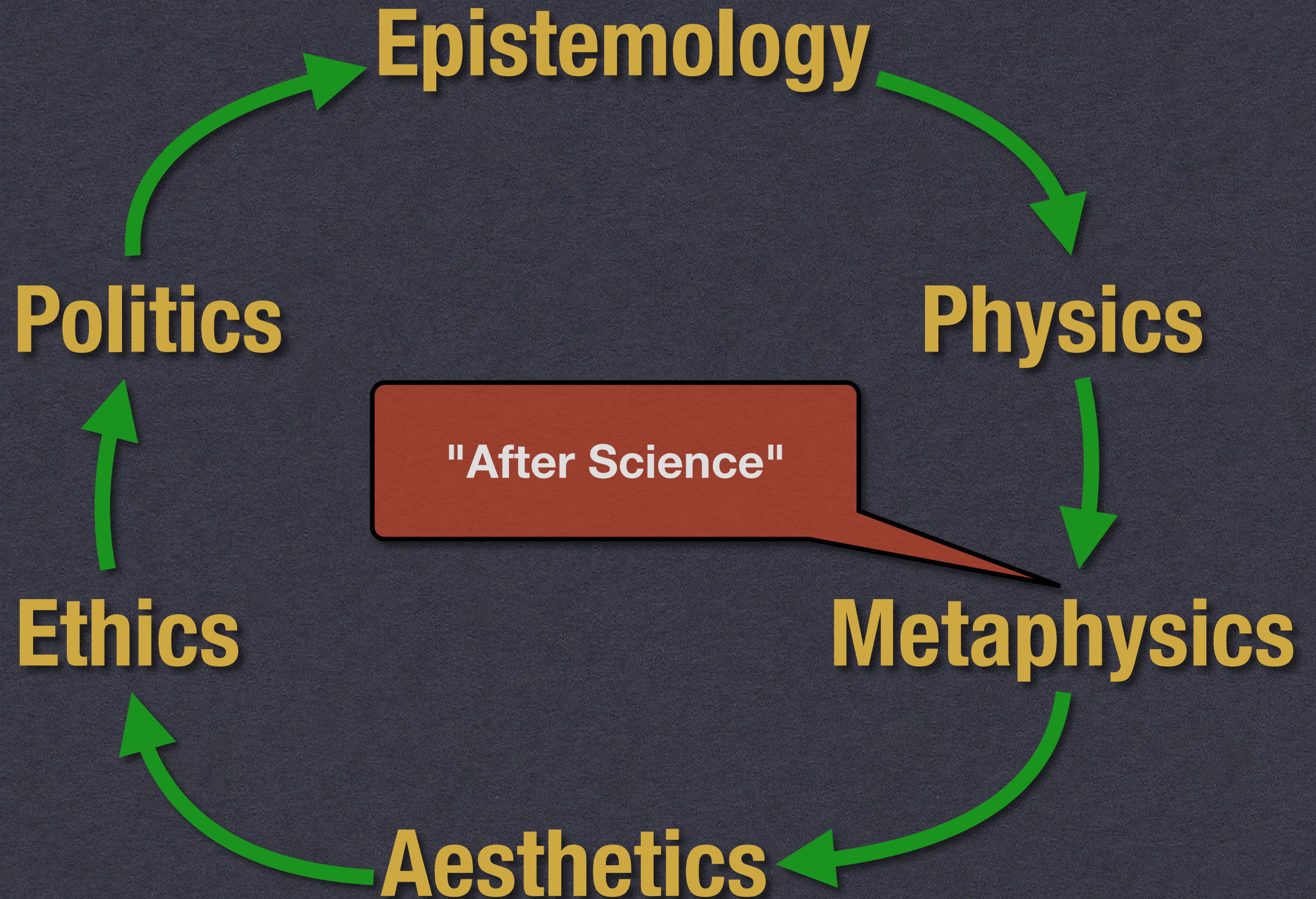
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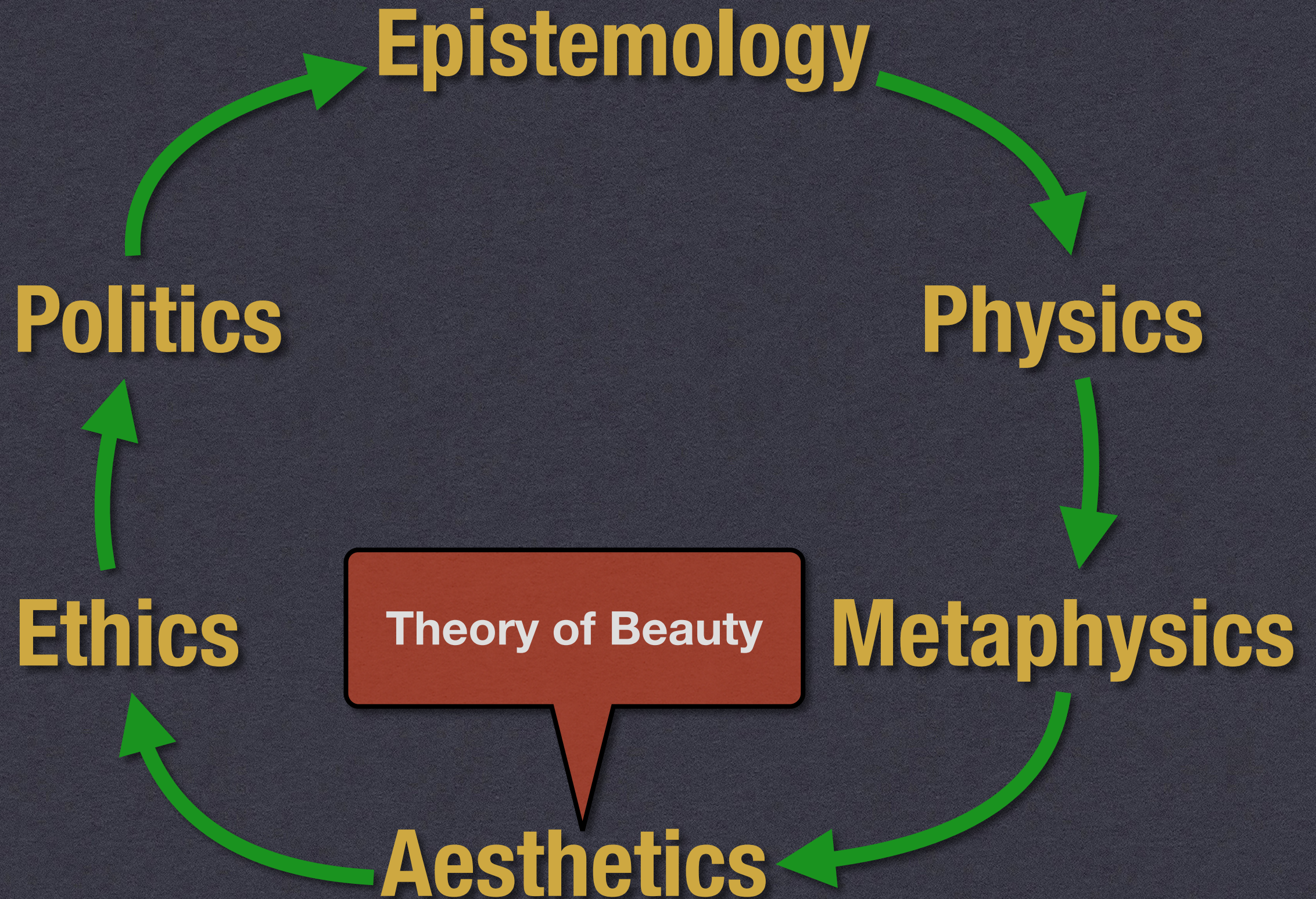
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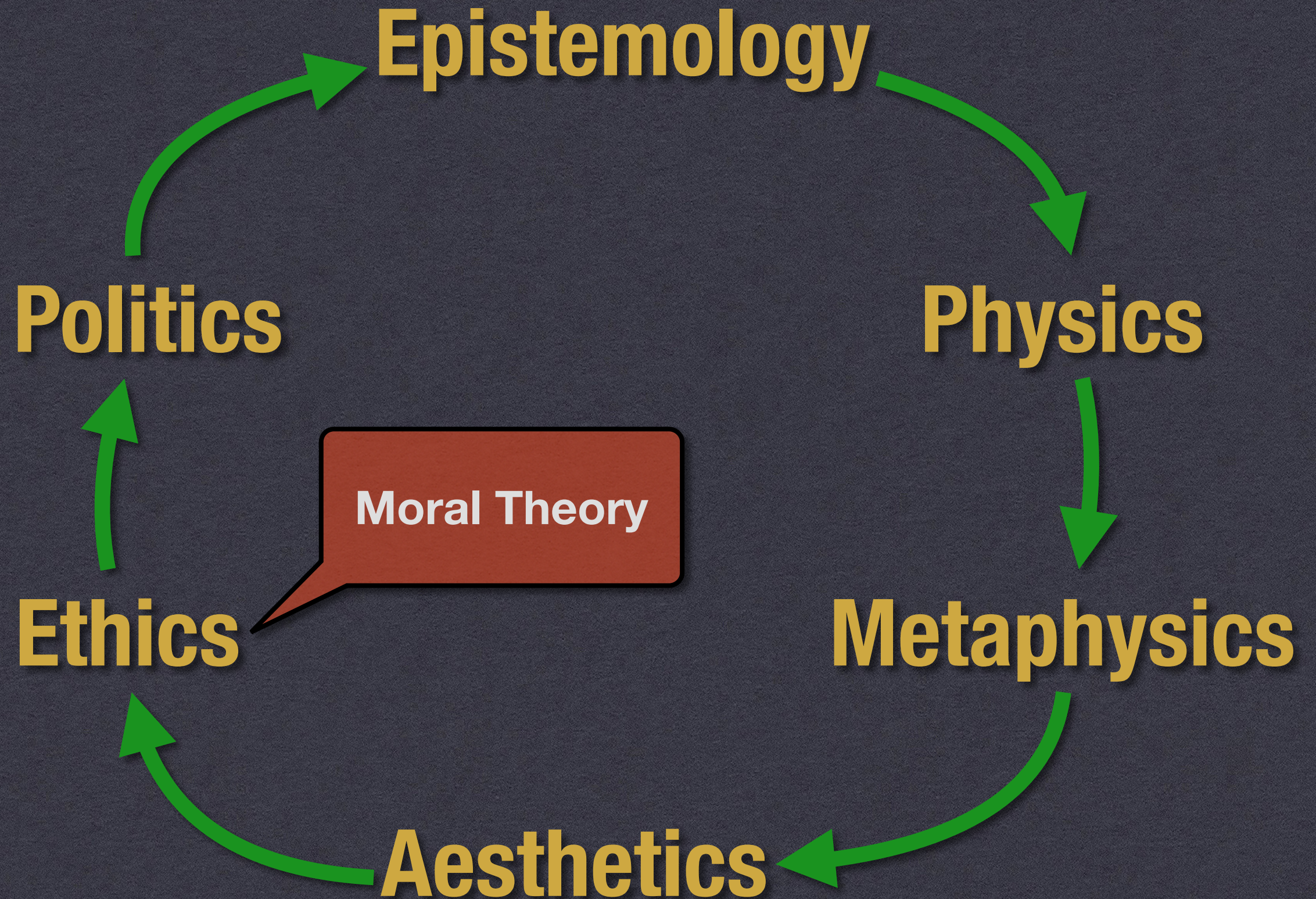
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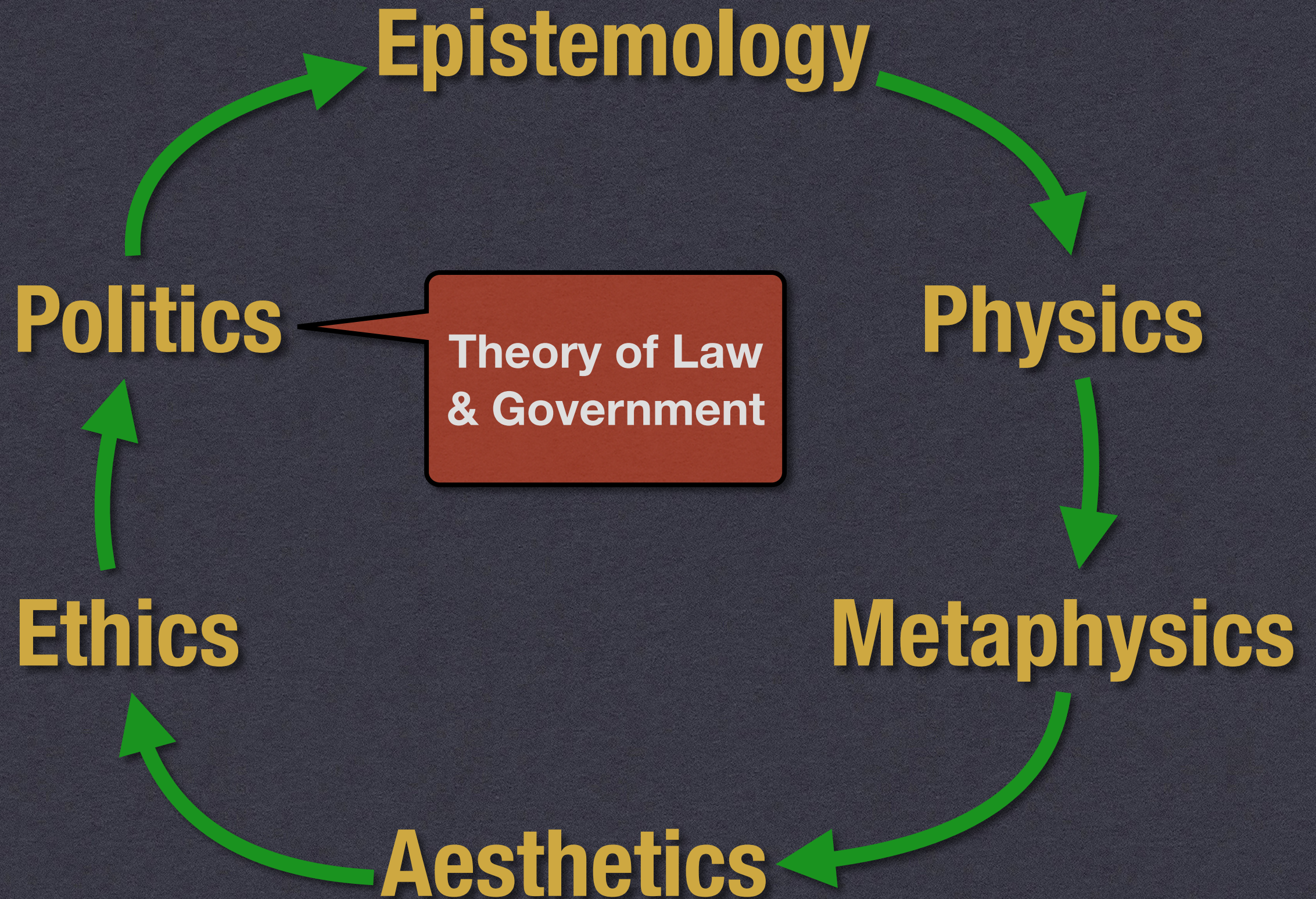
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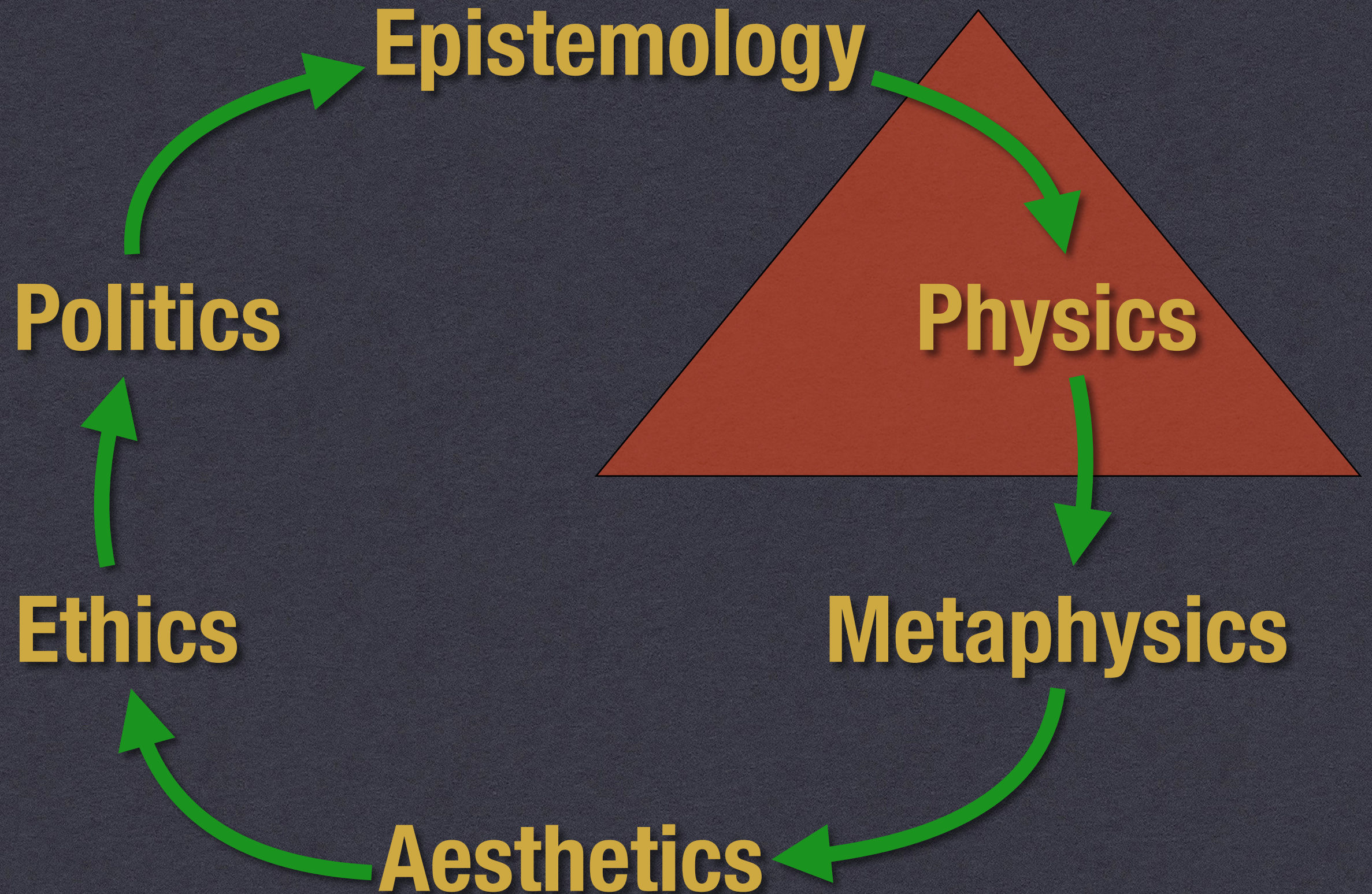
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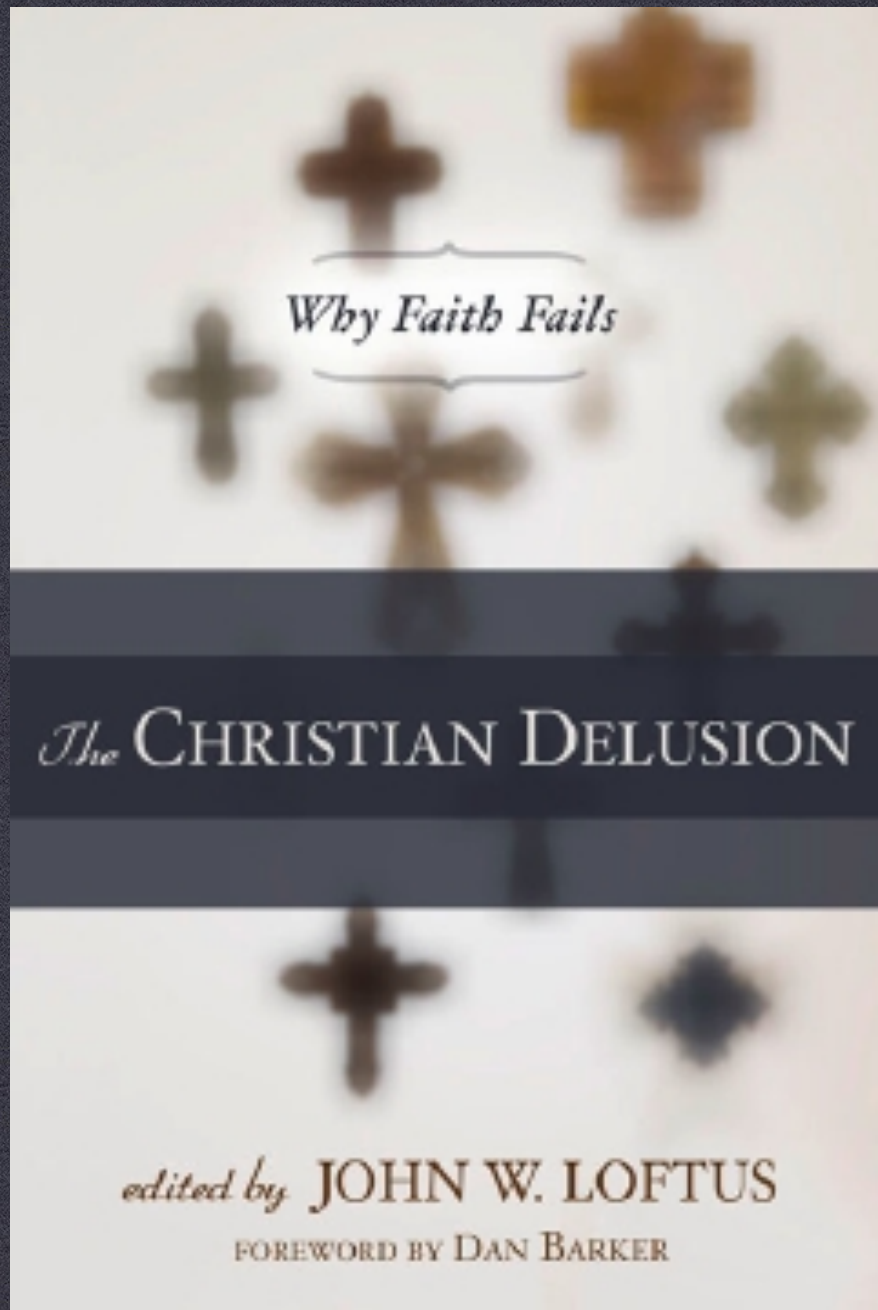


The Six Parts of Philosophy



**SCIENCE IS JUST PHILOSOPHY
WITH BETTER DATA**

**WHICH MEANS PHILOSOPHY IS
JUST SCIENCE WITH LESS DATA**



- * Ancient science had mathematical laws, precise observation, and controlled experiments.
- * The Scientific Revolution (17th Century) did not introduce any new methods for doing science.
- * Instead it recognized less reliable methods as less reliable (and attenuated belief to reliability).
- * It remained philosophy.

SCIENCE HAS ALWAYS BEEN PHILOSOPHY

- * What we now call science was still called **philosophy** all the way up to the 20th century
- * Natural philosophy, or physical or biological philosophy, or experimental philosophy, etc.
- * The word "scientist" didn't exist until the **1830s** (and wasn't popular until the **1890s**)
- * Galileo, Newton, Lavoisier, even Maxwell and Darwin, were all known as **natural philosophers**, never or rarely as scientists.

SCIENCE HAS ALWAYS BEEN PHILOSOPHY

- * They all published many of their scientific findings in **philosophy journals**.
- * The first science journal, published by the Royal Society of Britain, retains the same title it has always held since the age of Newton: **Philosophical Transactions**.
- * Even now scientists get doctorates in "**philosophy**" (Ph.D.).



P. M. HARMAN

The Natural Philosophy of James Clerk Maxwell

CAMBRIDGE

SCHOOL COMPENDIUM OF NATURAL AND EXPERIMENTAL PHILOSOPHY,

EMBRACING THE ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF
MECHANICS, HYDROSTATICS, HYDRAULICS, PNEUMATICS, ACOUSTICS, PYRONOMICS,
OPTICS, ELECTRICITY, GALVANISM, MAGNETISM, ELECTRO-MAGNETISM,
MAGNETO-ELECTRICITY, AND ASTRONOMY.

CONTAINING ALSO A DESCRIPTION OF THE
STEAM AND LOCOMOTIVE ENGINES,

AND OF THE
ELECTRO-MAGNETIC TELEGRAPH.

BY
RICHARD GREEN PARKER, A. M.,
LATE PRINCIPAL OF THE JOHNSON GRAMMAR SCHOOL, BOSTON; AUTHOR OF "AIDS TO
ENGLISH COMPOSITION," A SERIES OF "SCHOOL READERS,"
GEOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS," ETC., ETC.

Delectando pariter que monendo.
Prodesse quam conspicui.

CORRECTED, ENLARGED AND IMPROVED.

NEW YORK:
COLLINS & BROTHER, PUBLISHERS,
82 WARREN STREET.
1860.

SCIENCE HAS ALWAYS BEEN PHILOSOPHY

- * Darwin's theory of evolution was commonly referred to as a discovery in **physical philosophy** or **philosophy of biology**, and as the **philosophy of evolution**.
- * So even in Darwin's day the demarcation was **not** between science and philosophy, but between **two kinds of philosophy**.
- * In fact it was a **spectrum of reliability**, based on certainty of results, which in turn was based on access to data.

**THE SHIFT IN THE 20TH
CENTURY WAS NEVER
JUSTIFIED**

- * Science today is just the best philosophy we have, **not because it's free of error or fraud**, but because it works on questions we have the best data to answer.
- * But that does not leave the rest of philosophy with **no** data—just data insufficient to meet *scientific* standards of certainty.
- * But there are many degrees of certainty below the scientific (e.g. historical, journalistic, personal, **and philosophical**).
- * Hence atheism is a highly certain factual conclusion, but not a scientific conclusion (**there is no scientific paper proving it**).

Scientific hypothesis
formation **is** philosophy
(metaphysics)

Example:
Superstring Theory

BUNGE'S TEN CRITICISMS

- 1. Tenure-Chasing Supplants Substantive Contributions**
- 2. Confusion between Philosophizing & Chronicling**
- 3. Insular Obscurity / Inaccessibility**
- 4. Obsession with Language vs. Solving Real-World Problems**
- 5. Idealism vs. Realism and Reductionism**
- 6. Too Many Miniproblems & Fashionable Academic Games**
- 7. Poor Enforcement of Validity / Methodology**
- 8. Unsystematic (vs. System Building & Worldview Coherent)**
- 9. Detachment from Intellectual Engines of Modern Civilization**
- 10. Ivory Tower Syndrome**

SEPARATING GOOD PHILOSOPHY FROM BAD

- * How do you find the philosophy that avoids all ten of Bunge's defects?
- * Philosophy as an academic field simply isn't making any effort to.
- * Philosophy needs to be rigorously demarcated from pseudo-philosophy.
- * Just as science is from pseudo-science.
- * **Not all philosophy is pseudo-philosophy, but there is no easy way to tell** (published in the same journals and academic presses, presented at the same conferences, gain the same professorships)

PSEUDO-PHILOSOPHY IS...

- * Philosophy that relies on fallacious arguments to a conclusion.
- * And/or relies on factually false or undemonstrated premises.
- * And isn't corrected when noted.

**ALL SUPERNATURALIST
RELIGION IS PSEUDO-
PHILOSOPHY**

Religious philosophy is to philosophy
what "creation science" is to science

**ALL SUPERNATURALIST
RELIGION IS PSEUDO-
PHILOSOPHY**

"I found the [philosophical] arguments [in aid of religion] so execrably awful and pointless that they bored and disgusted me ... I now regard "the case for theism" as a fraud and I can no longer take it seriously enough to present it to a class as a respectable philosophical position—no more than I could present intelligent design as a legitimate biological theory. ... I do not mean to charge that the people making that case are frauds who aim to fool us with claims they know to be empty. No, theistic philosophers and apologists are almost painfully earnest and honest. ... I just cannot take their arguments seriously any more, and if you cannot take something seriously, you should not try to devote serious academic attention to it. I've turned the philosophy of religion courses over to a colleague."

—Keith Parsons
"Goodbye to All That"
Secular Outpost

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Same is often true of
secular philosophy

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"Goodbye to All That"
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**ONCE YOU DEMARCATÉ PHILOSOPHY
FROM PSEUDO-PHILOSOPHY**

**PROGRESS IN PHILOSOPHY
BECOMES APPARENT**

- * Like science, vast majority of “progress” in philosophy = tiny incremental advances that look small or pointless, but together amount to a significant body of knowledge. (*Just skim through science journals.*)
- * Julian Vincent, “**The Quantification of Crispness**,” *Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture* 78 (1998): 162–68.
- * Joseph Ford, “**How random is a coin toss?**” *Physics Today* 36.4 (1983): 40–47.
- * H. Benson et al., “**Study of the Therapeutic Effects of Intercessory Prayer (STEP) in cardiac bypass patients: a multicenter randomized trial of uncertainty and certainty of receiving intercessory prayer**,” *American Heart Journal* 151.4 (April 2006): 934–42.

TONI VOGEL CAREY
“IS PHILOSOPHY PROGRESSIVE”
PHILOSOPHY NOW ONLINE

✱ 1 — Progress as Destruction

- ✱ Eliminates options from logical space (*demonstrating incoherence internally or with well-established evidence*)
- ✱ Options in philosophy are enormously more constrained now than they were a hundred or even fifty years ago.
- ✱ No philosophy of magic, numerology, mysticism, astral planes, angels, demons, gods, souls, miracles (*all except as counterfactual thought experiments*), Platonism, Idealism, etc.

TONI VOGEL CAREY
“IS PHILOSOPHY PROGRESSIVE”
PHILOSOPHY NOW ONLINE

* 1 — Progress as Destruction



Remember what Dietrich said
about the Pre-Socratics...?



- * No philosophy of magic, numerology, mysticism, astral planes, angels, demons, gods, souls, miracles (*all except as counterfactual thought experiments*), Platonism, Idealism, etc.

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“IS PHILOSOPHY PROGRESSIVE”
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✱ 2 — Progress as Clarification

- ✱ Distinctions / Possibilities / Meaning & Implications
- ✱ Exposing Assumptions
- ✱ Real-world impact, e.g. legal decisions, like *Roe v. Wade* and *Kitzmiller v. Dover*.
- ✱ Less obvious:
- ✱ **Scientific speculation and theorizing** (Quantum Theory, Cosmological Theory [e.g. *Ekyriotic Big Bang Theory*], Superstring Theory, Quantum Loop Gravity Theory)
- ✱ **Mathematical theorems & discoveries** (discoveries in concept-space)

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“IS PHILOSOPHY PROGRESSIVE”
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* 2 — Progress as Clarification

- * Distinctions / Possibilities / Meaning & Implications

* ...and "Facts Most Probable"
* (remember atheism?)
*

- * **Scientific speculation and theorizing** (Quantum Theory, Cosmological Theory [e.g. *Ekyriotic Big Bang Theory*], Superstring Theory, Quantum Loop Gravity Theory)
- * **Mathematical theorems & discoveries** (discoveries in concept-space)

... NOT ALL THAT DIFFERENT FROM SCIENCE

- ✱ Most scientific progress consists of **destruction**: eliminating or narrowing hypotheses.
- ✱ Much of it consists of **clarifying the available options** given the known facts.
- ✱ The rest consists of building an edifice of **highly certain** conclusions to use in understanding and improving the world.

MAJOR **GENERAL** ADVANCES MADE BY MODERN PHILOSOPHY

1. **Naturalism** (metaphysics)

- * vs. Supernaturalism

2. **Evidentialism** (epistemology)

- * vs. mysticism, authoritarianism, dogmatism, *a priori* facts, faith

3. **Consequentialism** (ethics)

- * vs. authoritarianism / absolutism

4. **Democracy / Human Rights** (politics)

- * vs. fascism, aristocracy, autocracy, Athenian democracy

5. **Aesthetic Relativism** (aesthetics)

- * vs. cosmic aesthetics / aesthetics as morality

MAJOR **SPECIFIC** ADVANCES MADE BY MODERN PHILOSOPHY

1. Late 19th Century...

1. Set Theory
2. Symbolic Logic
3. Reduction of Mathematics to Axioms & Logic (Russell)
4. Transfinite Mathematics (Cantor)

2. 20th Century...

1. Game Theory
2. Gödel's Incompleteness Theorems / Dan Willard
3. Modal Logic
4. Bayesian Epistemology

SMALL BUT IMPORTANT DISCOVERIES MADE BY MODERN PHILOSOPHY INCLUDE...

Connecting meaning of a statement with its truth conditions (and corresponding advances in defining "truth")

Distinction between sentences and propositions (and its significance for cognitive science and AI research)

Demarcation of *qualia* as fundamental attribute of consciousness

Compatibilism (*proving that desirable versions of responsibility, self-determination and personal freedom are compatible with total causal determinism*)

More rigorous defenses of atheism

Judea Pearl, *Causality: Models, Reasoning, and Inference*

(Cambridge University Press, 2000)

"... a comprehensive exposition of modern analysis of causation. It shows how causality has grown from a nebulous concept into a mathematical theory with significant applications in the fields of statistics, artificial intelligence, philosophy, cognitive science, and the health and social sciences [including business, epidemiology ... and economics]. Pearl presents a unified account of the probabilistic, manipulative, counterfactual and structural approaches to causation, and devises simple mathematical tools for analyzing the relationships between causal connections, statistical associations, actions and observations. ... This book will be of interest to professionals and students in a wide variety of fields. Anyone who wishes to elucidate meaningful relationships from data, predict effects of actions and policies, assess explanations of reported events, or form theories of causal understanding and causal speech will find this book stimulating and invaluable."

Judea Pearl, *Causality: Models, Reasoning, and Inference*

(Cambridge University Press, 2000)

Remember Krauss saying philosophy of science contributed nothing to science?

Remember Hawking saying philosophy is dead and makes no progress?

MUCH LESS PROGRESS...

- 1. Vastly fewer personnel.**
- 2. Vastly fewer resources.**
- 3. Lack of focus (Bunge criteria).**

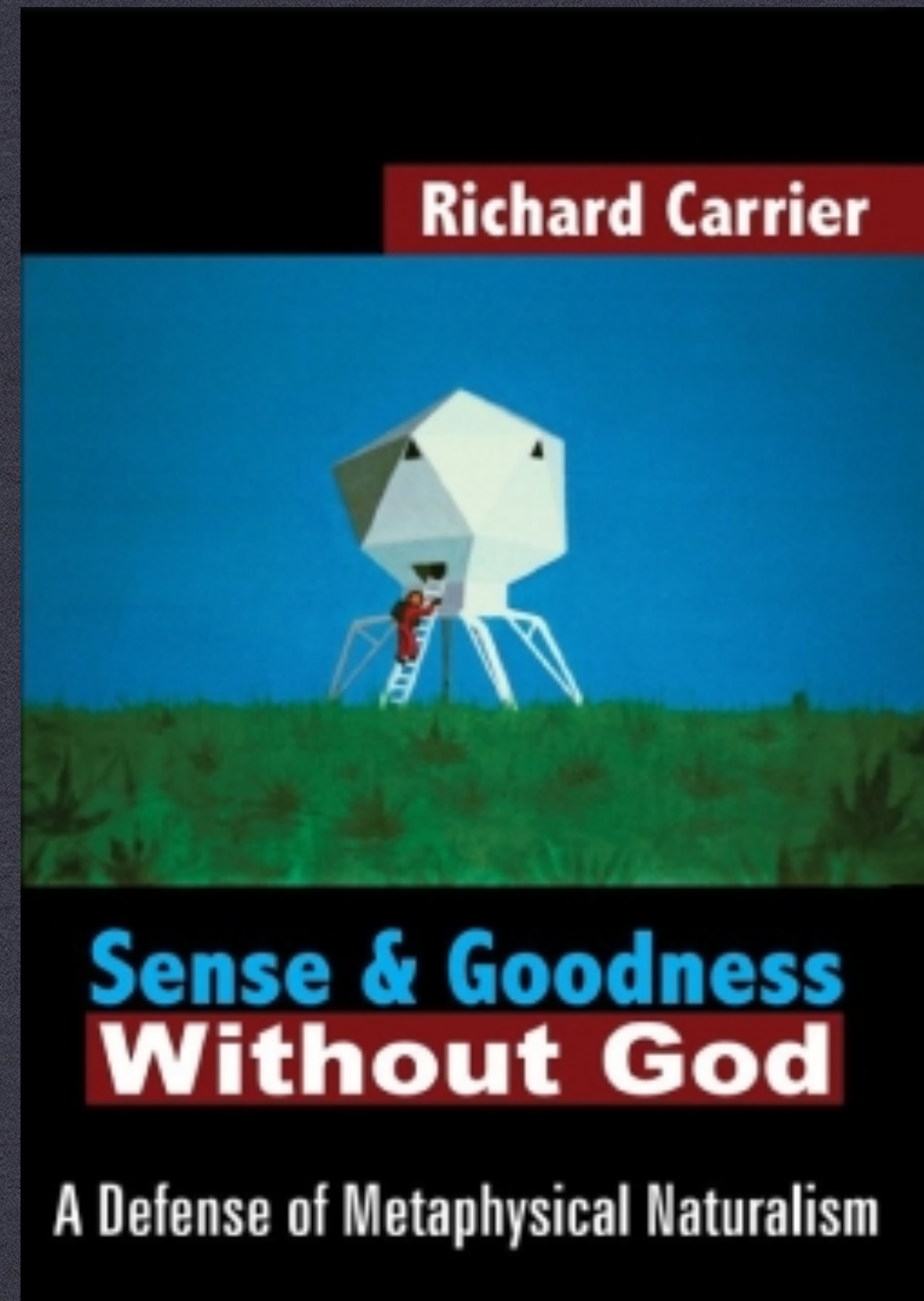
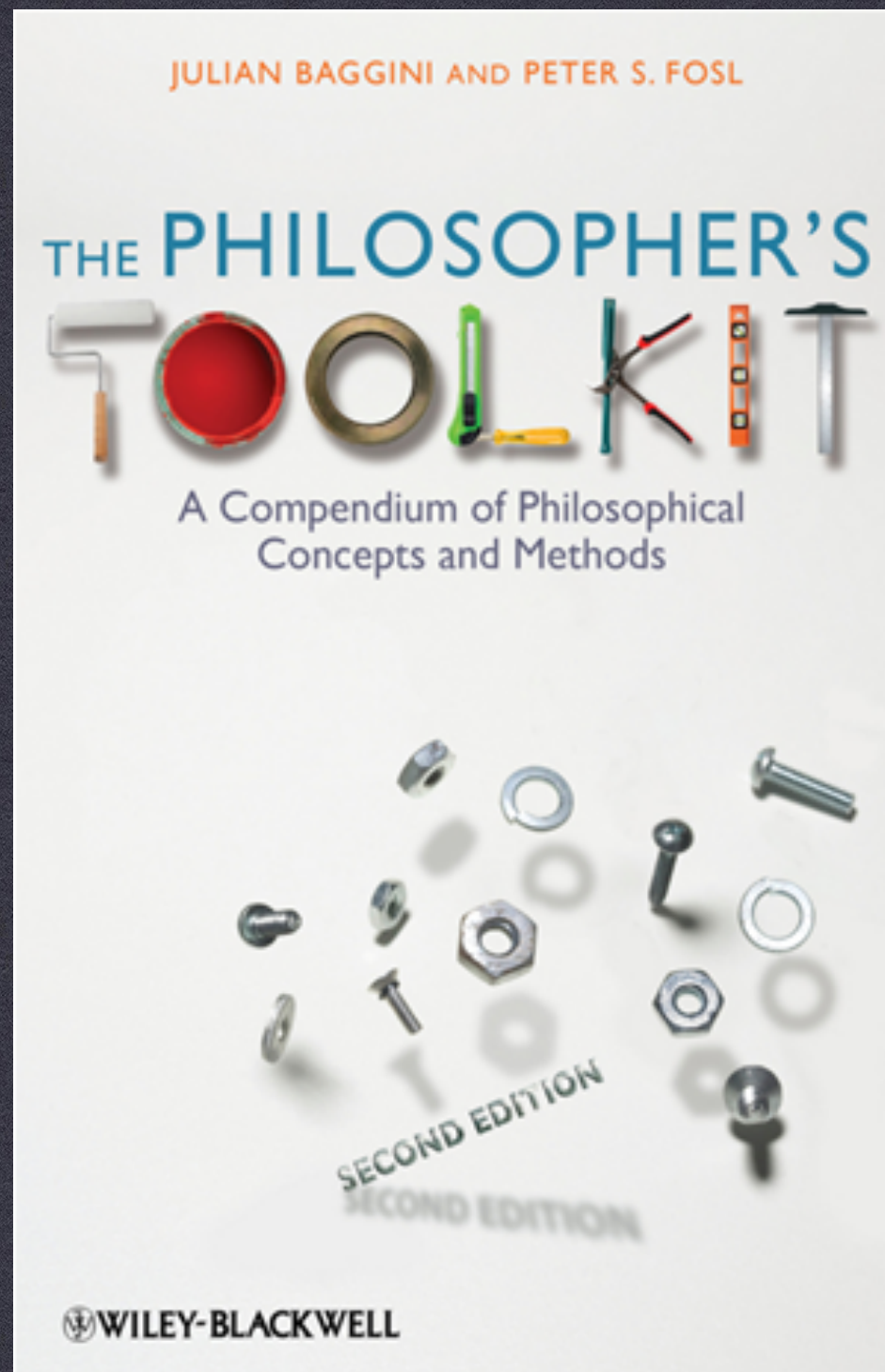
WHAT SKILLS ARE PARTICULAR TO PHILOSOPHY?

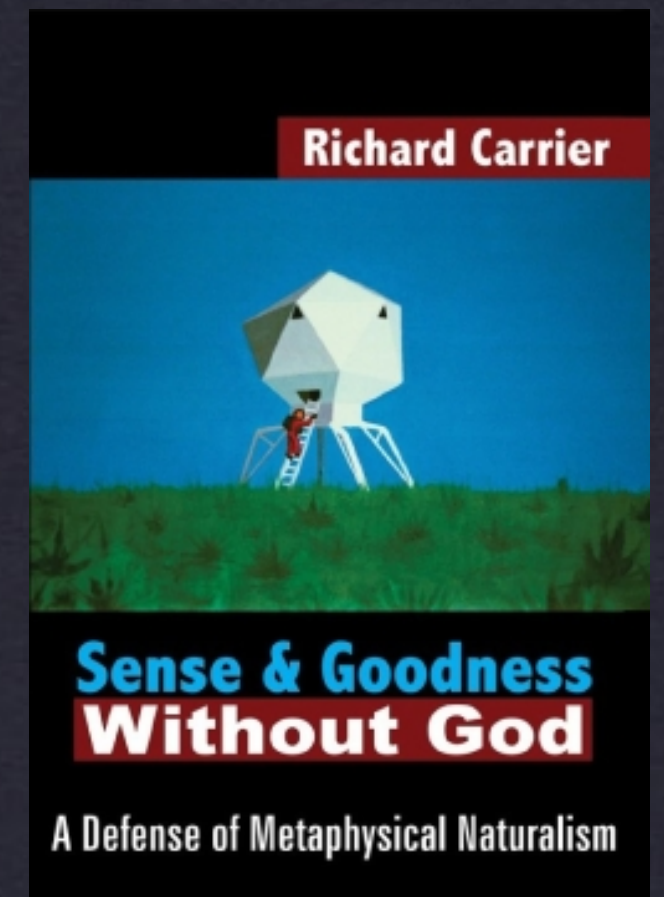
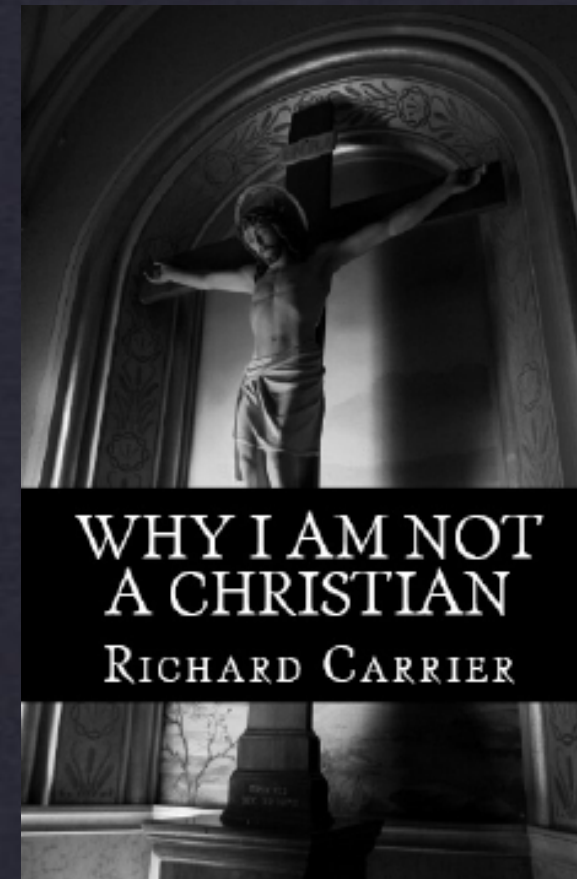
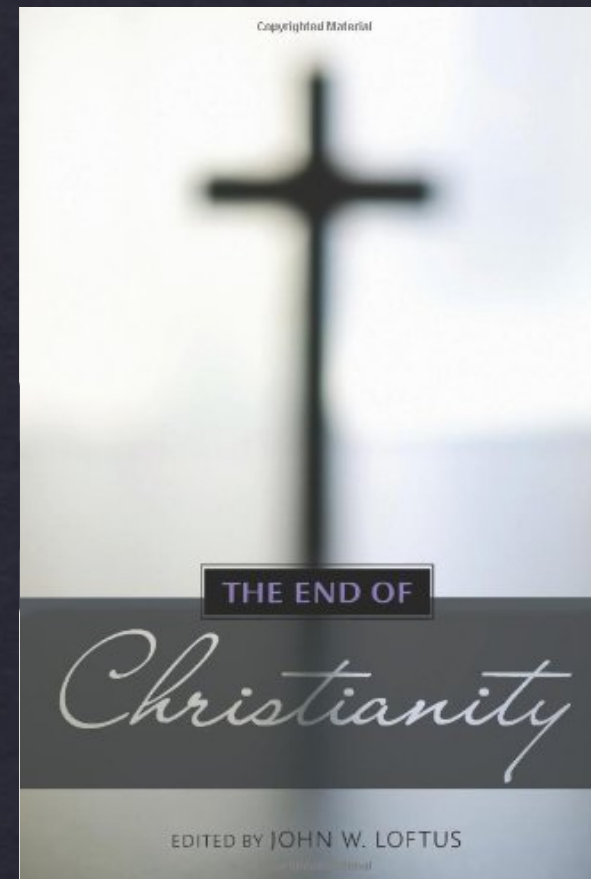
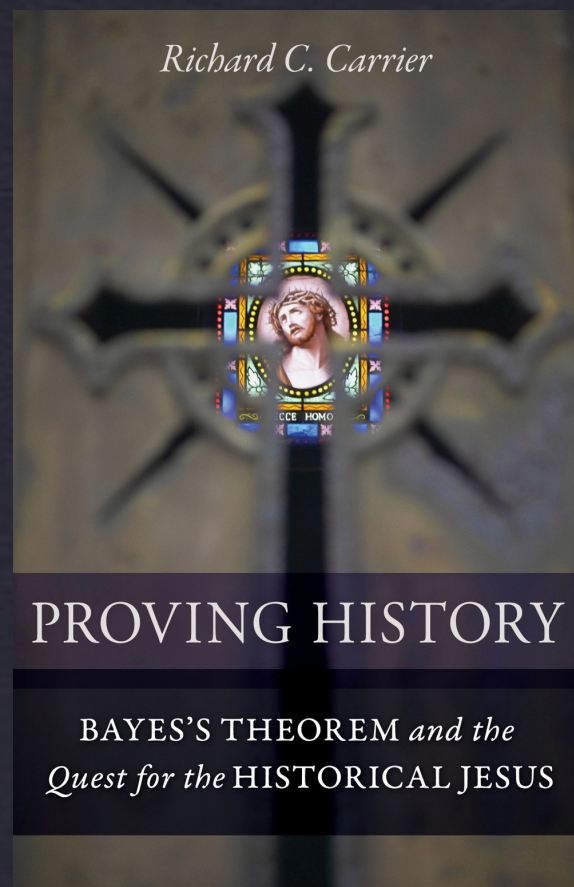
1. **Logics** (*building accurate logical models & fallacy-detection*)
2. **Conceptology** (*the study of ideas and the meaning and implications of words and concepts*)
3. **Conciliation** (*completing inferences from the results of science & other fields, determining the most probable*)
4. **Axiology** (*completing inferences from moral, aesthetic, and political values*).

WHAT ABOUT PHILOSOPHY FOR THE COMMON MAN AND WOMAN?

1. We don't need to be **scientists** or do **science** to broadly understand the results of science and apply it in our daily lives and personal philosophy.
2. In exactly the same way, we don't need to be **philosophers** or do **philosophy** at an expert or professional level to broadly understand the results of philosophy and apply it in our daily lives and personal philosophy.
3. We just have to figure out how to tell **good** philosophy from **bad**. The academy **should** be helping everyone do that.

www.richardcarrier.info/philosophy.html





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