

Whitehead says that "[t]he useful function of philosophy is to promote the most general systematization of civilized thought" (*PRc*: 17 [25 f.]). What does he mean by this?

What he means by being "civilized," presumably, is for human beings to possess, or better, perhaps, to make use of, "ideas of adequate generality respecting their own actions and the world around them" (*MTr*: 2 f.). In other words, to be civilized is to have an explicit, if not also a critically reflective, self-understanding, and, in this sense or to this extent, both a metaphysics and an ethics.

But since "[o]ur habitual experience is a complex of failure and success in the enterprise of interpretation," philosophy has its work cut out for it. Although "[p]hilosophy does not initiate interpretations," which it finds as "matters of practice" when it comes on the scene, "[i]ts search for a rationalistic scheme is the search for more adequate criticism, and for more adequate justification, of the interpretations which we perforce employ" (14 f. [22]). It is in this sense, then, that philosophy functions to promote the most general systematization of civilized thought.

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