

Philosophy 110W - 3: Introduction to Philosophy, Hamilton College, Fall 2007
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Lecture Notes, August 28 (Class 1)

I. Review syllabus

My office is 210 College Hill Road, Room 201.

My office phone is 4056.

My office hours are Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:30am - noon.

Here are some general grading guidelines:

C: What the philosophers say.

B: Why they say it.

A: Whether they are right or wrong, and why.

II. Two core areas of philosophy: metaphysics and epistemology.

1. Metaphysics

Most generally, metaphysics is the study of what exists: What is there and what is it like?

Here are some examples of things that one might think exist.

Trees

Tables

People

Electrons

Numbers

Space-time points

Angels

Here are some properties of these things:

Red

Square

Moving at 25 miles an hour

Located outside of space and time

One might be a nominalist about some of these properties, rather than a realist.

We wondered a bit about where the line between nominalism and realism should be drawn.

We will return to these topics, in depth, later in the term.

There are other metaphysical topics:

Causation

Necessity

The relationship between mind and body

Free will and determinism

Sections 1, 4, 5, and 6 of the syllabus are substantially metaphysical.

2. Epistemology

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge

How do we know what we know?

Does all our knowledge originate in sense experience, or are there other ways of gaining knowledge?

Furthermore, how can we explain our predictive success in science, when we seem to be isolated from the laws of nature?

Sections 2, 3, 6 and 7 are substantially epistemological.

But, one can not separate metaphysics from epistemology.

III. The Primary Tool of Philosophy is Logic

In order to determine whether to accept a philosophical position, we look at arguments for that position.

An argument is set of assertions, called premises, that support a conclusion.

The premises and conclusion should be truth valuable, i.e. capable of being either true or false.

In a Valid Deductive Argument, if the premises are true, the conclusion must be true.

The validity of an argument depends on the form of the argument.

Consider an argument:

Premise 1. All persons are mortal.

Premise 2. Socrates is a person.

Conclusion: Socrates is mortal.

The same argument can be represented more abstractly, more generally, as:

1. All As are Bs

2. x is an A.

So, x is a B.

Another valid form is Disjunctive Syllogism:

1. Either the Red Sox or the Yankees will win the American League Pennant.

2. The Red Sox will not win.

So, the Yankees will win.

This Disjunctive Syllogism can be symbolized as:

1. A or B.

2. Not-A.

So, B.

Now notice that the following is a valid form:

1. All men are fish

2. Joe is a man.

So, Joe is a fish.

Since the conclusion of the above argument is false, given plausible assumptions, and the form is valid, we have to reject one of the premises, i.e. Premise 1.

If the conclusion of a valid deductive argument is false, at least one of the premises must be false.

We will try to represent the arguments of philosophers we study as valid argument, in order to use this logical result.

This argument is unsound, which means that at least one of the premises is false.

There are also invalid argument forms, which are called fallacies.

The fallacy of denying the antecedent:

1. If A then B.
 2. Not-A.
- So, not-B.

The fallacy of affirming the consequent:

1. If A then B.
 2. B.
- So, A.

In an invalid argument, the conclusion can be false, and the premises true.

IV. Reductio arguments

Another valid argument form is the reductio.

It is based on the basic logical principle called non-contradiction (or, sometimes, contradiction).

The law of non-contradiction says that a statement can not be both true and false.

(Actually, it says that a statement and its negation can not both be true, which is, for our purposes, the same thing.)

The form of a reductio argument:

1. Assume the negation of something.
2. Derive a contradiction (p and not- p), or other repugnant conclusion.
3. Conclude the affirmative of your assumption.

Examples of reductio arguments:

If everyone may do as (s)he pleases, then we must allow murder.

If we legalize drugs, then violent crime will increase, or productivity will decrease.

If we do not go to war in Iraq, then Saddam Hussein will use his weapons of mass destruction against us.

V. Soundness vs validity

Validity concerns the form of an argument.

The first step in evaluating an argument is to determine whether the premises entail the conclusion.

The second step is to see if the premises are sound (i.e. true).

Example A:

1. If AIDS were harmless then we would not need to take precaution against it.
 2. AIDS is harmless.
- So, we need not take precautions against AIDS.

Example B:

1. Any disease which threatens many lives is worth our concern.
2. Mumps is worth our concern.

So, mumps threatens many lives.

A and B are both bad arguments, but for different reasons.

A is valid, passes the first test.

B is invalid, we do not have to go to the second step.

A is unsound - one of the premises is false.

Much of what I will do in this class will be to introduce an argument in this form.

If we do not like the conclusion, we will try to discover which of the premises are wrong.

So, for example, consider:

1. God is love.

2. Love is blind.

3. Ray Charles is blind.

So, Ray Charles is God.

We discussed problems arising from the ambiguity of 'is', and the metaphorical nature of the first two premises.

Part I of the course: Philosophy of Religion

VI. Anselm's ontological argument

There are various consistent characterizations of the object to which we attempt to refer using the word 'God'.

For example, 'God' is taken to refer to a thing with all perfections, including omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence.

Or, 'God' is characterized as whatever necessarily exists.

Or 'God' refers to the creator and preserver.

Anselm (1033-1109) uses a different characterization: something than which nothing greater can be thought.

All of these characterizations are definitions of a term, a word.

It remains to be seen whether they actually refer to an object.

For example, I can characterize a bleen as a red swan.

Still, such a characterization leaves open the question whether there are any bleens.

Note the use of '' to indicate when I refer to the term, and not the object to which the term refers.

That is, there is no presupposition in this characterization that such a thing exists.

Or, so it seems.

Be careful, in general, to distinguish terms, ideas, concepts, and objects.

The ontological argument for God's existence (see §2 of the Anselm selection)

1. I can think of 'God'.

2. If 'God' were just an idea, or term, then I could conceive of something greater than 'God' (i.e. an existing God).

3. But 'God' is that than which nothing greater can be conceived.

4. So 'God' can not be just an idea.

So, God exists.