Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy, Queens College, Spring 2006
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Lecture Notes, January 30

I. Introduction to course, syllabus, and requirements.

Reviewing syllabus:
Dates are tentative.
Texts are mandatory, many are handouts.
Most materials, including lecture notes, are available on line.
Exams should include no surprises. Questions will be taken directly from the reading guides.
The paper assignment will be detailed.
The pace of the course will be slow at first, but pick up significantly after the midterm.

Office phone: (718) 997-5287
Office hours: Powdermaker 350J, M, W: 12:15 - 1pm

In quizbooks, on first page, write:
Email, or other contact
Student status
Major
Why you are taking this class
Anything else I should know

General Grading Guidelines:
C: What the philosophers say.
B: Why they say it.
A: Whether they are right or wrong, and why.

II. The Core Areas of Philosophy

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

Here are some properties of these things:
Red
Square
Moving at 25 miles an hour
Located outside of space and time

There are other metaphysical topics:
Causation
Necessity
The relationship between mind and body
Free will and determinism

We will cover all of these topics, to some degree.

2. Epistemology
Epistemology is the theory of knowledge
How do we know what we know?
Through the senses only?
Or through reasoning as well?

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.

This is related to:
1. If A then B
2. A
So, B

The latter is called Modus Ponens and can be instanced as:
1. If x is a person, then x is mortal.
2. x is a person.
So, x is mortal.

Similarly, the following is called Modus Tollens:
1. If A then B.
2. Not-B.
So, not-A.

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.