

Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy, Queens College, Spring 2005
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Lecture Notes, January 31

I. Introduction to course, syllabus, and requirements.

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II. The Core Areas of Philosophy

1. Metaphysics

Most generally, metaphysics is the study of what exists.

Examples:

The physical world

Numbers

Souls

Electrons

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?

We will mostly focus on the history of philosophy.

Contemporary philosophy tends to presume the whole of philosophy's history.

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.

Two invalid argument forms:

A. Denying the antecedent:

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

B. 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.

A basic logical principle is non-contradiction.

A statement can not be both true and false.

Reductio proofs are based on non-contradiction.

Basic reductio form:

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:

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.

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.

Soundness vs validity

Validity concerns form of argument.

'p and not-p' is invalid, no matter what assertion we substitute for 'p'.

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