Introduction to Philosophy

Philosophy 110W
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Hamilton College, Spring 2011

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My office hours are 10:30am - noon daily.

Class 1 - What is Philosophy?
January 19, 2011

What is Philosophy?

Write, for five minutes.

I won’t collect them, but we will talk about it.

Metaphysics

- What is there?
- What is it like?
- Some things that one might think exist
  - Trees
  - Tables
  - People
  - Planets and Stars
  - Electrons
  - Numbers
  - Space-time points
  - Angels

Properties

- Red
- Square
- Moving at 25 miles an hour
- Located outside of space and time
- Being considered by you right now

Nominalism

a name may not refer to anything real

- Nominalism opposes realism.
- Santa Claus
- Properties: Is there redness, in addition to red things?
- Where should the line between nominalism and realism be drawn?

Reality

Is the world exactly as it appears?

Julian Beever, Anamorphic Art

More Julian Beever

Hans Holbein
The Ambassadors (1533)

Other Metaphysical Topics

- Causation
- The nature of space and time
- The relationship between mind and body
- Free will and determinism
- The nature of the good

Epistemology

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

Logic
The Primary Tool of Philosophy

- 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.

An Argument

Premise 1. All persons are mortal.

Premise 2. Socrates is a person.

Conclusion: Socrates is mortal.

More abstractly:

1. All As are Bs
2. x is an A.

So, x is a B.

Another Valid Form

1. Either the Packers or the Jets will win the Super Bowl.
2. The Packers will not win.

So, the Jets will win.

This Disjunctive Syllogism can be represented more abstractly as:

1. A or B.
2. Not-A.

So, B.

The Importance of Validity

1. All men are fish
2. Joe is a man.

So, Joe is a fish.

- If the conclusion of a valid deductive argument is false, at least one of the premises must be false.
- The conclusion of the argument is false.
- So we have to reject one of the premises.
- An argument is *unsound* when at least one of its premises is false.

Soundness and Validity

- Validity concerns form of argument.
- Validity is about whether some assertion follows from some other assertions.
- A valid argument is sound if its premises are true.
- 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).

Invalid Argument Forms

- Invalid forms are called fallacies, or logical errors.
- In an invalid argument, the conclusion can be false, while the premises are true.
- Two examples:

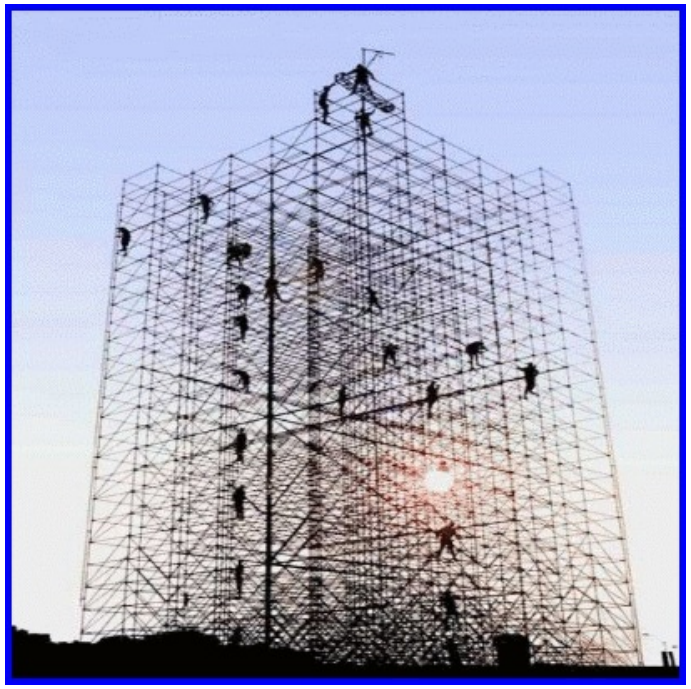
The fallacy of denying the antecedent:

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

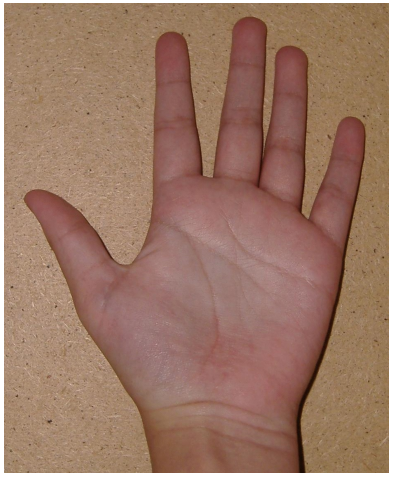
The fallacy of affirming the consequent:

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

Underlying Structure



Most philosophers do not write in argument form.



Reductio Arguments

- Based on the logical principle called non-contradiction
- A statement can not be both true and false.
- 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.

Contrast Two Arguments

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.
B is invalid, we do not have to go to the second step.
A is valid, passes the first test.
A is unsound - one of the premises is false.

Another Tool: Intuitions

- Not a spooky sixth sense
- The way that things seem
- Thought experiments
  - What if there were two suns?
  - What if I were of the opposite gender?
  - What if my parents never met?
  - What if machines could think?
  - What if no one had eyes?

Counterfactuals

- The notion of validity relies on counterfactual reasoning.
- It concerns possibility and necessity.
  - An argument is valid if the conclusion follows necessarily from the premises.
  - An argument is invalid if it is possible for the conclusion to be false while the premises are true.
- We will use our intuitions about counterfactual circumstances.
- Just like science!

Science

- We often think that our knowledge is based exclusively on sense experience.
- Many of us believe that science, our most sincere endeavor toward objective knowledge, relies exclusively on the gathering of data from experience.
- But, sense experience is complicated.
- And, science is not obviously so restricted to sense experience.

Galileo's Balls

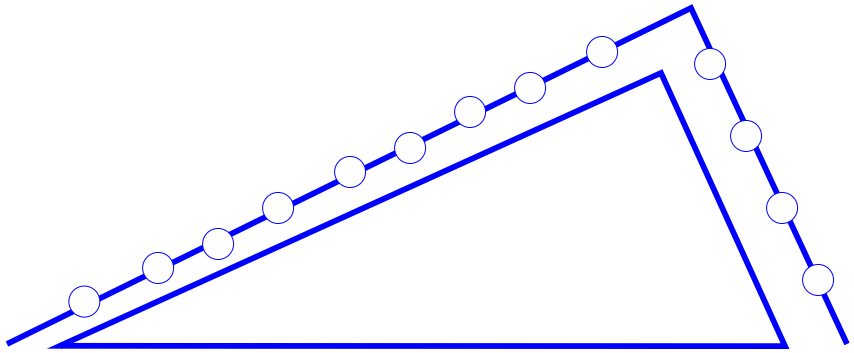
- Aristotle had claimed that heavier bodies fall faster than lighter ones. But...
- Consider a system consisting of the two bodies attached by a string.
- The rate it falls is S.
- Since, the light body falls more slowly than the heavier one, it should act as a drag on the system.
  - So, S < H.
- But, since the system is heavier than the single heavy body, it should fall more quickly.
  - So S > H.
- That's a contradiction.

Evidence

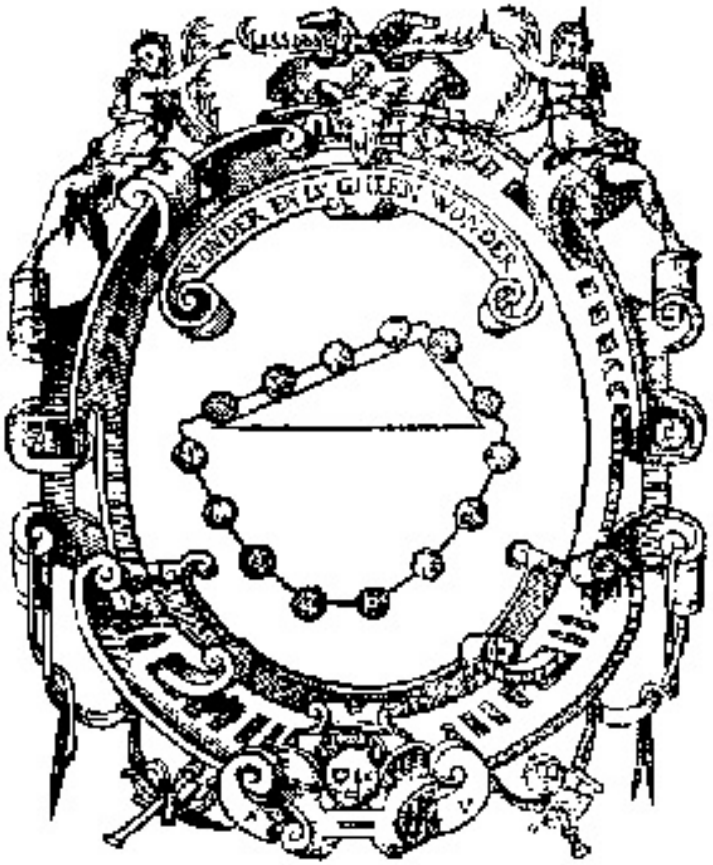
- In science, evidence is supposed to be observational.
- But, where is the evidence in Galileo's experiment?
- "So, you have not made a hundred tests, or even one? And yet you so freely declare it to be certain?... Without experiment, I am sure that the effect will happen as I tell you, because it must happen that way" (Galileo, *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*, p 145.)

Stevin's Chain

Which way does the chain fall?



Stevin's Solution (1605)



- "Unquestionably in the assumption from which Stevin starts, that the endless chain does not move, there is contained primarily only a *purely instinctive* cognition" (Mach).

The Syllabus

- Writing Intensive
- Course Website
  - Papers (links)
  - Reading Guides
  - Lecture Notes
- Presentation
- Four Papers
- Final
- Schedule

Consider

1. God is love.
2. Love is blind.
3. Ray Charles is blind.

So, Ray Charles is God.