Philosophy 110W: Introduction to Philosophy
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Hamilton College
Russell Marcus

Class 1 - What is Philosophy?

I. What is philosophy?

Ray Charles: here, here, here, and here.

Write: What is philosophy?

II. Two Core Areas of Philosophy: Metaphysics and Epistemology

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
Planets and Stars
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
Being considered by you right now

A nominalist about something believes that the name for that thing does not refer to anything real.
Nominalism opposes realism.
So, we are all nominalists about 'Santa Claus'.
Some people are nominalists about properties; others are realists.
Is there redness, in addition to red things?
One question we will engage this term is where the line between nominalism and realism should be drawn.

Another question we will engage is whether the world is just as we ordinarily think that it is.
In philosophy, we tend to examine and question everything.
We don't want to accept, uncritically, the world and the ways that people currently think about it.
We want to examine, evaluate, and understand it for ourselves.

There are other metaphysical topics, like causation, necessity, the relationship between mind and body, and free will and determinism
Much of the syllabus is substantially metaphysical.

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?
We will engage both epistemology and metaphysics all semester.

III. The Primary Tool of Philosophy is Logic

In order to determine whether to accept a philosophical position, we look at reasons for holding that position, which we call arguments.
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 called disjunctive syllogism.

> 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 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.

If the conclusion of a valid deductive argument is false, at least one of the premises must be false.
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.
This argument is unsound, which means that at least one of the premises is false.

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

So, soundness is about truth and falsity.
Validity is about whether some assertion follows from some other assertions.

In addition to valid argument forms, there are 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.

The logic of an argument is like its scaffolding, its underlying structure.
Most philosophers do not write in argument form.
So, part of our challenge, as students of philosophy, is to uncover the underlying structure of an argument.
Once we understand the structure of an argument, we can proceed to assess its soundness and validity.

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

VI. Intuitions

In addition to logic, one frequently used tool of philosophers is called intuition.
An intuition is not a weird, spooky kind of ability, like a sixth sense.
It is just an apprehension of the way that things seem.
We often arrive at our intuitions by considering thought experiments.
A thought experiment is what happens when we think about the way the world could be but is not.

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?

When we start a thought experiment, we think not about the way the world is, but about the way the world could be.
Such considerations are called 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.
In this class, we will think about possibility and necessity, using our intuitions about counterfactual circumstances.

You might think that appealing to intuitions makes philosophy unscientific.
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.

Consider Galileo's argument that all bodies fall at the same rate.
Aristotle had claimed that heavier bodies fall faster than lighter ones.
Consider two bodies, a heavier one falling at rate H and a lighter one falling at rate L.
According to Aristotle, H > L.

Galileo reasoned:

> 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.

To resolve the contradiction, Galileo supposed that all bodies fall at the same rate.

> So, S = H = L.

Notice that the evidence in this case is not observational at all.
The evidence is a thought experiment.
Concerning a different thought experiment, which concludes that a stone falling from a ship's mast will drop in the same place whether or not the ship is moving, Galileo writes:

> "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.)

Thought experiments are important in science.
They are essential in science fiction.
Twice in this term, I am going to ask you to look at science fiction movies: *Inception*, and *Blade Runner*.

VII. The Syllabus

VIII. Two Last Things

Evaluate both A and B.

A
1. God is love.
2. Love is blind.
3. Ray Charles is blind.
So, Ray Charles is God.

B This sentence is false