
Philosophy 427
Intuitions and Philosophy

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Hamilton College
Fall 2011

Class 1
Thought Experiments, Intuitions, and X-Phi
August 25

Three Themes in the Course

1. Epistemology in a post-foundationalist world
 - Or, How can we know anything if everything can be doubted?
2. Intuitions and their role in philosophy
3. Thought experiments, armchair philosophy, and X-Phi

Four Parts of the Course

1. Laying out the epistemological framework of the course
2. Some worries about human rationality, generally
3. Looking at the data concerning intuitions and experiments
 - ▶ presuming a range of philosophical background
 - ▶ special topic: gender, philosophy, and intuition
4. Reflecting on the lessons learned
 - ▶ trying to answer the question of whether intuitions play an appropriate role in philosophy.



Bonus

- Emily Esch, College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University, Wisconsin
 - ▶ Class visit: November 3
 - how to conduct x-phi
 - her work on personal identity and x-phi
 - ▶ Public Lecture: Friday November 4

An Epistemological Problem

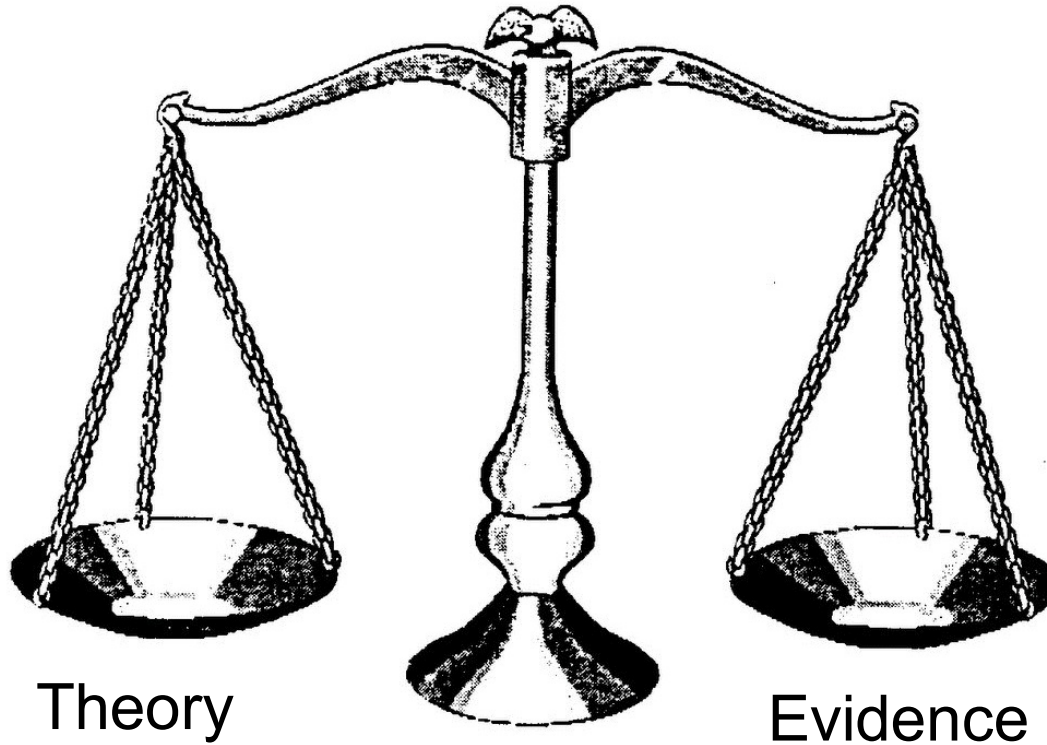
1. Beliefs must be justified either foundationally or coherently.
 2. No beliefs can be justified foundationally.
 3. No beliefs can be justified coherently.
 4. Some of our beliefs are justified.
- Uh-oh.



Reflective Equilibrium to the Rescue!



Reflective Equilibrium



Philosophical Evidence

- In science, the evidence is supposed to be observational.
- In philosophy, the evidence is often intuitive.
- Intuitions are often the results of thought experiments.
 - ▶ What if we met a race of non-carbon-based aliens?
 - ▶ What if mice could speak?
 - ▶ What if there were another world just like ours except...?

Bealer on Intuitions

- “We do not mean a magical power or inner voice or special glow or any other mysterious quality. When you have an intuition that A, it *seems* to you that A... a genuine kind of conscious episode.”
 - ▶ not beliefs
 - ▶ not spontaneous inclinations to belief
 - ▶ not the raising to consciousness of nonconscious background beliefs
 - ▶ not guesses, or hunches
 - ▶ not commonsense opinions
 - ▶ not merely linguistic intuitions
 - ▶ not judgments

Cohen

- “The term ‘intuition’ here is not being used in the sense of Spinoza, Bergson, or Husserl. It does not describe a cognitive act that is somehow superior to sensory perception. Nor, on the other hand, does it refer merely to hunches that are subsequently checkable by sensory perception or by calculation. Nor does this kind of intuition entail introspection, since it may just be implicit in a spoken judgment. Its closest analogue is an intuition of grammatical well-formedness. In short, an intuition that p is here just an immediate and untutored inclination, without evidence or inference, to judge that p .”
 - ▶ principled lack of sense evidence
 - ▶ no privileged epistemic position

Gopnik and Schwitzgebel

- “We will call any judgment an *intuitive judgment*, or more briefly an intuition, just in case that judgment is not made on the basis of some kind of explicit reasoning process that a person can consciously observe.”
 - ▶ isolation from our consciousness of its development

The Elephant and the Rider

from Jonathan Haidt

- In psychology, intuition (the elephant) is often aligned with automatic systems where reasoning (the rider) is aligned with analytic systems.
- Some people believe that their analytic systems, their ability to reason, overrides their intuitions.
- Our intuitions are actually in charge most of the time.
 - “The elephant dwarfs the rider, who will have a hard time getting the elephant to do anything it doesn’t want to. Still, one might think that the rider is basically in charge. Yet Haidt points out that the analytic system is a recent - and still somewhat buggy - evolutionary innovation, appended to a basically intuitive brain that previously managed pretty well without it... It’s not that intuition is a tool that a rational creature often employs; it’s rather, to put it crudely, that reason is a tool that a basically instinctual creature often employs to accomplish certain ends. For the most part, the intuitive system sets the agenda” (Haybron).

Cummins

- “Even if philosophical intuition *can* be calibrated, it never *is* calibrated, because philosophers could have no possible use for intuition in a context in which the relevant theory was well enough settled to form the basis of a credible calibration test. Philosophical theory in such good shape is ready to bid the Socratic midwife farewell and strike out on its own in some other department. Philosophical intuition, therefore, is epistemologically useless, since it can be calibrated only when it is not needed.”
 - ▶ Without calibration, intuitions are unstable and unreliable.
 - ▶ Where scientific evidence is often experimental and may be obtained by observation, many philosophical claims are counterfactual.

Sosa

- “At t, it is intuitive to S that p iff (a) if at t S were merely to understand fully enough the proposition that p (absent relevant perception, introspection, and reasoning), then S would believe that p; (b) at t, S does understand the proposition that p; and (c) the proposition that p is abstract.”
 - ▶ connection to belief
 - ▶ distance from empirical observation

Modal Beliefs

- Many philosophical claims depend on the notion of possibility.
- Frank Jackson's modal argument for epiphenomenalism.
- Jackson's epiphenomenalism is the claim that our conscious experience is not explicable in terms of physical laws and causal interactions.
- Jackson argues that even if we knew everything about the physical world, including brains, we would be missing an explanation of human conscious experience.
- No amount of physical information logically entails that another person is conscious.
 - ▶ "I think that there are certain features of the bodily sensations especially, but also of certain perceptual experiences, which no amount of purely physical information includes. Tell me everything physical there is to tell about what is going on in a living brain, the kind of states, their functional role, their relation to what goes on at other times and in other brains, and so on and so forth, and be I as clever as can be in fitting it all together, you won't have told me about the hurtfulness of pains, the itchiness of itches, pangs of jealousy, or about the characteristic experience of tasting a lemon, smelling a rose, hearing a loud noise, or seeing the ski".

Jackson's Modal Argument

zombies are possible



- “There is a possible world with organisms exactly like us in every physical respect (and remember that includes functional states, physical history, *et al.*) but which differ from us profoundly in that they have no conscious mental life at all. But then what is it that we have and they lack? Not anything physical, *ex hypothesi*. In all physical regards we and they are exactly alike. Consequently there is more to us than the purely physical.”
- If zombies are possible, then it is possible for the same physical structure (or functional organization) to correspond both to a conscious person and to a zombie.
- Thus, consciousness could not be explained by any physical properties of an organism (or functional structure.)
- There is a disputed modal intuition at the core of the zombie question.
- Some of us believe that zombies are possible; others don't.

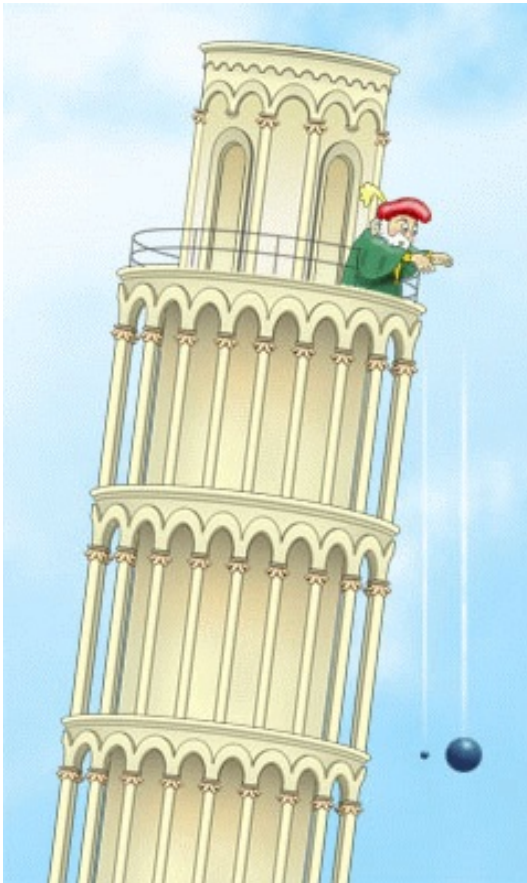
Necessity

- Other philosophical claims depend on the notion of necessity.
- The justifications of CT and NT seem to be different in kind.
 - CT There are four mangos in my fridge.
 - NT $2 + 2 = 4$
- NT is a necessary truth.
 - true in all possible worlds
 - independent of any facts about the world
- We can in principle have no observational evidence about possibility and necessity.

Science and Philosophy

- A standard view:
 - science proceeds empirically, from observation
 - philosophy proceeds *a priori*, from intuitions
- But proper scientific method is actually not empirical in the way that the standard view depicts.

Galileo's Balls



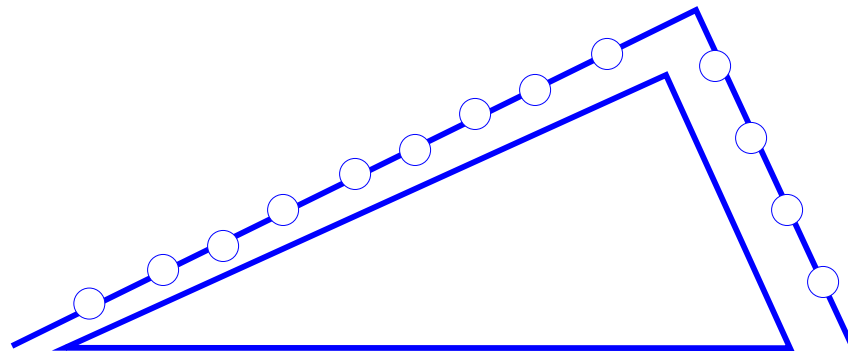
- Aristotle had claimed that a heavier body falls faster than a lighter one ($H > L$). But...
- Consider a system consisting of the two bodies attached by a string.
- The rate it falls is S .
- Since, the light body falls more slowly than the heavier one, it should act as a drag on the system.
 - So,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

Evidence

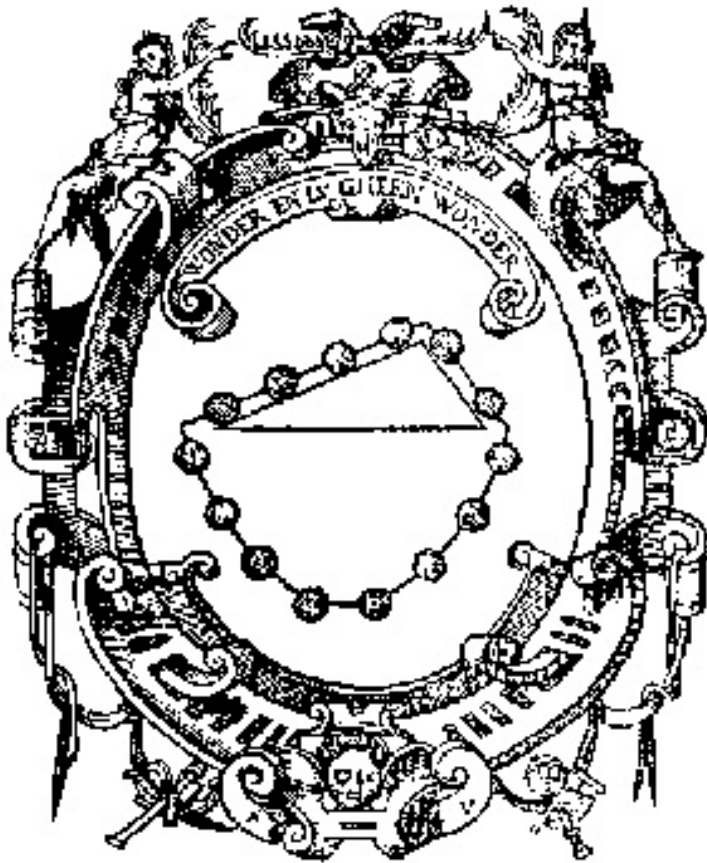
- In science, unlike in philosophy, evidence is supposed to be observational.
- But, where is the evidence in Galileo's experiment?
- “So, you have not made a hundred tests, or even one? And yet you so freely declare it to be certain?... Without experiment, I am sure that the effect will happen as I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

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).

Thought Experiments as Intuition Pumps

- Jackson's Mary
- A blue banana
- Dennett's response: "Color perception is just as I thought it would be!"
- Problem: Our intuitions may conflict.
- Further: Recent work in psychology has undermined faith in intuition.



Methods

- In philosophy, unlike science, our evidence is not even supposed to be observational.
- Traditionally, we rely essentially on intuitions, on the results of thought experiments.
- This method has lately been derided as armchair philosophy.
 - Recent research on cultural and gender differences
- In contrast, experimental philosophy is supposed to avoid some of the pitfalls of traditional methods.
- This is a class in philosophical methods.
- It requires a double level of abstraction
 - Philosophical problems
 - The methods used to approach those problems



**Holbein
The Ambassadors
1533**



Can X-phi Save Epistemology?

- Knobe on Intentions (video)
- Are our intuitions really unreliable?
- Does X-phi substitute intersubjectivity for objectivity?
- Why should we care about what the folk think?

Syllabus

- Précis
- Idiotfest 2011
- Seminar Papers
- Term Paper
 - Course Bibliography
- Final