Introduction to Philosophy

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Discussion sections ("Labs") meet on Wednesdays, starting next Wednesday, Sept. 5th.

- 10:00-10:50, 1115 Moore Hall, CRN 43298
- 12:00-12:50, G0121 Moore Hall, CRN 43546
What is Philosophy anyway?

What, exactly, does it study?
Think about it!
Philosophy

• Greek: Philos “loving” Sophos “wisdom”

• So,
  to engage in philosophy

  • is to engage in 
    loving wisdom.
Philosophy:

The study of questions that cannot be answered solely by appealing to sense experience or mathematical calculation.
To \textit{Philosophize} is to think reflexively.

You already think philosophically--

--My job is simply to help you get better at it.
Philosophical Questions

• Since they cannot be answered solely by appeal to sense experience (i.e., what we perceive), it is unclear how they can be answered at all.

• So, to “philosophize about x” involves not just thinking about x, but thinking about (how one goes about) thinking about x.
  – This is what it means to “think reflexively.”
Philosophical Questions

Often concern the foundations of other disciplines or the foundations of common sense.

Examples:

What are numbers?
Do they exist only in our minds?
Do we create them or discover them?

What can we really know on the basis of sense experience?

Do human beings really have a free will?
Main divisions within Philosophy:

- **Metaphysics and Ontology** (the study of what is real or what exists)
- **Epistemology** (the study of knowledge)
- **Value Theory** (the study of values)
- **Logic** (the study of reasoning)
Metaphysics and Ontology:

The study of what is ultimately real, of what really exists.

What are numbers?
Is there really a God?
Do minds exist independently of bodies?
Do bodies exist independently of minds?
Is there such a thing as free will?
Epistemology:

The study of knowledge.

What *is* knowledge?
What is the difference between knowledge and (mere) true belief?
What sorts of things can we have knowledge of?
Can we trust the veracity of sense experience?
Value Theory:

1) Ethics
   The study of *moral* values.
   --What makes things morally right or morally wrong?

2) Aesthetics
   The study of *artistic* values.
   --What is beauty?
Tools of Philosophy

• If philosophical questions cannot be answered solely by what we see or perceive, then, unlike scientific questions, they cannot be answered by mere observation or experiment.

• So, philosophers can only look at the reasoning used to defend a claim, and that is the role of Logic.
Logic:

The study of the proper forms of reasoning.

What is the difference between a good argument and a bad argument?
An Argument:

A group of statements
--where one or more of these statements
--(the *premises*)

purport to offer evidence for one particular statement
--(the *conclusion*).
An Argument:

• **Premise 1**: If *yada-yada-yada* is true,
  – then *blah-blah-blah* is also true.

• **Premise 2**: But *Yada-yada-yada* is true.

• **Conclusion**: So, we can conclude. *blah-blah-blah* must also be true.
In an *Inductive Argument*, the premises purport to show that if they are true, then the conclusion is *probably* true.

E.g.,

Most dogs have tails.
Fido is a dog.
So, Fido (probably) has a tail.
In a **Deductive Argument** the premises purport to show that if they are all true, then the conclusion *must* be true (*viz*, it *cannot possibly* be false).

E.g.,

All humans are mortal.
Jones is human.
So, Jones is mortal.
Kinds of Arguments

Inductive:
• Inductive arguments are *probabilistic*. They attempt to show that if the premises are true, then the conclusion is probably true.

Deductive:
• Deductive arguments are *not* probabilistic. They attempt to show that if the premises are true, then the conclusion *must* be true. A successful deductive argument is called a “valid” argument.
Validity

• In a valid argument, the truth of the premises guarantees the truth of the conclusion.
  – I.e., if the premises are all true, then the conclusion must be true.
    • So, an argument can be valid even with false premises and a false conclusion. What it cannot have is all true premises and a false conclusion.
    • Only deductive arguments strive for validity.
Validity is a *formal* property of arguments.

- All humans are mortal.
- Jones is human.
- So, Jones is mortal.
  - All A’s are B’s.
  - $x$ is an A.
  - So, $x$ is a B.
- All pigs can fly.
- Kent Baldner is a pig.
- So, Kent Baldner can fly.
In a *reductio ad absurdum* argument we begin by assuming the opposite of what we are trying to prove.

We then derive a *contradiction* (an “*absurdity*”) from this assumption to show that it cannot be true (and so that what we are trying to prove must be true).
Reductio Ad Absurdum

• To show that P is true.
  – Begin by assuming that P is false.
  – Show that this assumption (that P is false) leads to a contradiction.
    • But anything that leads to a contradiction must be false.
  – So, since the assumption that P is false leads to a contradiction, we can conclude that the assumption that P is false must itself be false.

• In other words, P must be true.
A priori vs. A posteriori

• The “Ontological Argument” (Anselm) is sometimes described as an “A priori” argument.

• The “Cosmological Argument” (Aquinas) is sometimes described as an “A posteriori” argument.

• What is the difference?
Knowledge: *A priori* vs. *A posteriori*

• The distinction concerns how we *justify* our claim to *know* that some statement is true.
  – Not how we came to *believe* it, but the kind of *justification* we provide to establish its truth.

• If we must appeal to sense experience (perception, observation, etc.) to establish truth, this is *a posteriori* knowledge.

• If we can establish truth without sense experience as evidence, this is *a priori* knowledge.
  – Example: $17 + 17 = 34$ (mathematical truths in general)
**A priori vs. A posteriori**

- **Examples:**
  - “All bachelors are male” is an *a priori* truth.
    - Of course, I had to learn the meaning of “bachelor.” But that is not the point. To establish the truth of this statement, I do not need to conduct any experiment or observation to provide evidence.
  - “All the men here today are bachelors” is an *a posteriori* statement.
    - I could not establish its truth or falsity without experiment or observation.
A priori vs. A posteriori Arguments

• An argument is *a priori* if all of its premises are *a priori*, i.e., if their truth can be established without appeal to sense experience.

• An argument is *a posteriori* if at least one of its premises is *a posteriori*, i.e., if the truth of at least one premise can be established only by appeal to sense experience.
A priori vs. A posteriori Arguments

• Who cares?

• Since a priori arguments do not rely on sense experience to establish the truth of any of their premises, they cannot be refuted by any kind of perception or observation.

• A priori arguments are “conceptual” arguments, and so are independent of sense experience.
A priori vs. A posteriori Arguments—Who cares?

• Next time we will look at Anselm’s “Ontological” Argument for the existence of God. This is an *a priori* argument for the existence of God.

• Anselm claims that we can prove the existence of God without any evidence from experience, but simply by understanding the *concept* of “God.”