Philosophy 101

Philosophy &
Argument (II)

Review

Interpreting
Arguments

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August 28, 2014

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Kinds of Argument

Deductive Argument: the conclusion follows from the premises *necessarily*

Inductive Argument: the conclusion is made *probable* by the premises

Abductive Argument: the conclusion is the best explanation of the truth of the premises

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Characteristics of Deductive Argument

- Validity
- Soundness

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Validity

Valid Argument: An argument whose structure *guarantees* that,
if the premises are true, the conclusion must also
be true

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Form vs. Content

1. All humans are mortal
2. John is human
3. ∴ John is mortal

1. All A is B
2. x is A
3. ∴ x is B

- Whatever the content of this argument form, it will *always* be valid

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Soundness

Sound Argument: An argument which is (i) valid and (ii) has true
premises

- Whether an argument is sound concerns both its *form* and
  its *content*
- Not all valid arguments are sound arguments
- Not all arguments with true premises and a true conclusion
  are sound

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Argument Markers

- Arguments are *constructed* from statements but they typically don't appear as lists of statements
- (Good) Arguments often contain "marker" words, which indicate what is evidence or conclusion

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Argument Markers

Sample Evidence Markers

- as
- because
- for
- from
- since

The streets are wet *because* it is raining

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Argument Markers

Sample Conclusion Markers

- hence
- so
- then
- therefore
- thus

It is raining, *therefore* the streets are wet

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Argument Extraction

- Is there an argument being made?
- What's the conclusion of the argument?
- What support does the conclusion have?
- What material is essential to the argument and what is extraneous?
- Is the argument valid?
- Is the argument sound?

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Argument Extraction

There is no reason to think that there are any absolute moral truths. We can see this when we consider different cultural outlooks concerning what is morally required. For example, indigenous Inuit culture considered infanticide to be morally permissible in some situations. But modern American culture clearly thinks infanticide is always morally wrong. So what's morally right or wrong is just a matter of opinion, which can vary from culture to culture. (James Rachels, The Elements of Moral Theory)

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Argument Extraction

- What's the conclusion?
  - There are no absolute moral truths
- What is the support for the conclusion?

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Argument Extraction

1. If moral truths were absolute then they would not vary from culture to culture
2. What's considered morally right or wrong does vary from culture to culture
3. ∴ There are no absolute moral truths

1. If P, then Q
2. ~ Q
3. ∴ ~ P

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Argument Extraction

There are, moreover, seemingly unanswerable arguments that, if they are correct, demonstrate that the existence of moral responsibility entails the existence of free will, and, therefore, if free will does not exist, moral responsibility does not exist either. It is, however, evident that moral responsibility does exist: if there were no such thing as moral responsibility nothing would be anyone's fault, and it is evident that there are states of affairs to which one can point and say, correctly, to certain people: That's your fault. (van Inwagen "How to Think")

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Argument Extraction

1. If there were no such thing as moral responsibility, then no one would be at fault for anything
2. But people do correctly fault others for performing certain kinds of actions
3. ∴ There must be moral responsibility
4. If there were no free will, then there would be no moral responsibility
5. There is moral responsibility (from 3)
6. ∴ There is free will

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Argument Extraction

1. If A, then B
2. ~A
3. ∴ ~B (by 1, 2, modus tollens)

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Fallacies

Logical fallacy: A defect in the logical form or content of an
argument

- There are some standard pattens of bad argument
- Some bad argument forms nevertheless may initially
  appear to be good arguments

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Common Fallacies

Formal Fallacies:

Denying the Antecedent: denying the consequent of a
hypothetical by denying the antecedent

    1 If P, then Q

    2 ~ P

    3 ∴ ~ Q

1 If the dog is outside, then he is barking

2 The dog is not outside

3 ∴ The dog is not barking

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Common Fallacies

Formal Fallacies:

Affirming the Consequent: Accepting the antecedent of a
hypothetical by accepting the consequent

       1 If P, then Q
       2 Q
       3 ∴ P

1 If the dog is outside, then he is barking
2 The dog is barking
3 ∴ The dog is outside

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Common Fallacies

Informal Fallacies:

Straw Man: Purposely misrepresenting a view so that it can be
more easily attacked or criticized

*Mary: We must not betray the principles of justice and
democracy. Suspected terrorists must be granted basic
rights as well as legal representation and access to a
fair court.*

*Tom: Mary is advocating the release of known
terrorists. We cannot afford to allow our enemies to
move freely in our society.*

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Common Fallacies

Informal Fallacies:

Genetic Fallacy: Accepting or rejecting a statement or
argument on the basis of its source

The US Senate is considering various proposals to reduce social inequality. But anything they come up with will be ridiculous because they are all rich white people.

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Common Fallacies

Informal Fallacies:

Appeal to the Person (*ad hominem*): Rejecting a statement or argument because it comes from a particular person or group, rather than because the statement or argument is false or dubious

President Obama says that the United States health care system is in need of serious reform, and should be changed so that more people can affordably receive adequate coverage. This is ridiculous, and only a socialist like Obama would be silly enough to believe it.

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Common Fallacies

Informal Fallacies:

Begging the Question: Attempting to prove the truth of a
statement by using that very statement as
evidence

*We know that God exists because the bible says so,
and everything the bible says is true because God
wrote it.*