

Philosophy 101

Introduction

January 14, 2014

What is Philosophy?

The Core Areas of Philosophy

- ① Epistemology
- ② Logic
- ③ Metaphysics
- ④ Value Theory

The Core Areas of Philosophy

① Epistemology

- what is knowledge?
- how do we know anything?
- are there beliefs which we're justified in holding even if we can't prove them to be true?

The Core Areas of Philosophy

① Epistemology

② Logic

- what is an argument?
- what are the rules for arguing correctly?
- what inferences are good or bad?

The Core Areas of Philosophy

① Epistemology

② Logic

③ Metaphysics

- what is real?
- what kinds of things exist?
- what things are fundamental?

The Core Areas of Philosophy

- ① Epistemology
- ② Logic
- ③ Metaphysics

- ④ Value Theory
 - what makes an action right or wrong?
 - what makes for a good life?
 - what is beauty?

Philosophical Method

Argument



Argument

- Philosophical argument is not a contest
- Does not involve, shouting, name calling, or physical violence

Argument: an inference from one or more starting points (truth claims called a 'premise' or 'premises') to an end point (a truth claim called a 'conclusion').

Parts of an Argument

- Evidence (“premises”)
- What follows from the premises (“conclusion”)

Parts of an Argument

Both premises and conclusion must consist of statements—i.e. sentences that can be true or false

- Declarative statements: "The table is brown"
- Hypothetical statements: "If the table is brown then the table is colored"
- False statements: "The moon is made of cheese"
- Questions: "What's your favorite color?"
- Commands: "Open the door!"

Kinds of Argument

Deductive Argument: the conclusion follows from the premises
necessarily

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

A Simple Argument

- ① All humans are mortal
- ② John is human
- ③ \therefore John is mortal

Is this a good argument?

- assuming that the premises are true, could the conclusion be false?
- does the conclusion follow from the premises?

Validity

- Philosophers understand the notion of “following from” in terms of the *structure* of the argument
- Arguments with the right structure are *valid* arguments

Validity

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

Validity

- ① All humans are mortal
- ② John is human
- ③ \therefore John is mortal

- ① All A are B
- ② x is A
- ③ \therefore x is B

Soundness

- Good arguments are about more than form
- If the argument is to be fully convincing, the premises have to be *true*

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

Interpreting Arguments

Argument Extraction

- 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?

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.

Argument Extraction

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

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 \therefore There are no absolute moral truths

For Next Class

- ① Read the course syllabus
- ② Review the definition and parts of an argument
- ③ Go to the course website at <http://colinmclear.net/phil101>
- ④ Read the assignments posted there