PHIL 110A

Philosophy: Knowledge & Reality

Paul Thagard

Please turn off and put away all electronics.

What philosophical questions interest you?

Not: unintelligible answers to insoluble problems.

1

What is Philosophy?

Philosophy: The search for answers to fundamental questions about the nature of knowledge, reality, morality, and the meaning of life.

Epistemology: The philosophical study of the nature of knowledge.

Metaphysics: The philosophical study of the fundamental nature of what exists.

Ethics: The philosophical study of the basis of right and wrong.

2

Approaches to Philosophy

1. Religious: what fits with doctrines?
2. Historical: what have philosophers said?
3. Analytical: use language & logic to analyze concepts.
4. Phenomenology: study subjective experience and consciousness.

3

Approaches to Philosophy

5. Natural: use sciences to reach conclusions about knowledge & reality.

But philosophy is not the same as science:

More general: all knowledge, all existence.

More normative: how things *should* be, not just how they *are*.

4

Facts vs. Values

How the world *is*.

Descriptive

Methods:
- Observation
- Experiment
- Theories
- Models
- Reasoning

How the world *ought* to be.

Prescriptive, normative.

Ethics, epistemology.

5

Objective vs. Subjective

Facts

Independent of thinking

True

Opinions

What people think

"True for me"

6

Discussion Question

What philosophical questions are you most interested in?

Can these be approached objectively?

7

Argument & Inference

Belief: something you think is true.

Inference: reaching a conclusion.

Argument:

Premises: statements already believed.

Conclusion: belief inferred.

Examples: what inferences have you made recently? Were they based on arguments?

8

Sources of Belief

Perception

Testimony

Argument

Inference not based on argument:

Coherence, emotion, motivation.

9

Good Arguments

Arguments should:

1. Have true premises.
2. Have a conclusion that follows from the premises.

Kinds of argument: deductive, inductive, abductive.

10

Deductive Arguments

Deductively valid argument: If the premises are true, then the conclusion has to be true.

No uncertainty.

Example:

All dogs have four legs.

Fido is a dog.

Therefore, Fido has four legs.

11

Deductive Arguments

Deductively valid argument: If the premises are true, then the conclusion has to be true.

No uncertainty.

Example:

All dogs have four legs.

Fido is a dog.

Therefore, Fido has four legs.

12

Inductive Argument

Introduces uncertainty: True premises can lead to false conclusion. Inductive generalization.

Example:

All Waterloo students I have seen are under 7 feet tall.

So all Waterloo students are under 7 feet tall.

No validity, but inductive arguments can be strong if they have a large and representative set of examples.

13

Abductive Argument

Inference to the best explanation.

Example:

Prof does not show up for class, why?

14

Abductive Argument

Inference to the best explanation.

Example:

Evidence: Prof does not show up for class, why?

Hypotheses: prof is lost, sick, dead, drunk, abducted by aliens...

No validity, but abductive arguments can be strong if they accept a hypothesis that explains a full range of evidence better than alternative hypotheses, including evidence that would be surprising if the hypothesis were not true.

15

Abductive Argument

Evidence: result of perceptual observation.

Hypothesis: guess (conjecture) that might explain evidence.

Unlike induction generalization, abduction can go beyond what is observed.

16

Abductive Argument

Domains:

- Interpersonal: behavior -> mental state
- Health: symptoms -> diagnosis
- Law: evidence -> suspect
- Machines: problems -> defect
- Science: experiments -> theory

17

Abductive Argument

Philosophical applications:

- External world
- Other minds
- God

18

Discussion Question

What abductive inferences to the best explanation have you made recently?

Were your inferences based on good reasoning that took into account lots of evidence and alternative hypotheses?

19

Fallacies (bad arguments)

Circularity (begging the question): assuming what you're arguing for.

Wishful thinking: believing something because it makes you happy. Positive illusions. Motivated inference. Optimism bias.

False cause: B followed A, so A caused B.

Only game in town: Only consider one hypothesis.

20