PHIL 110A

Week 7: Truth & Wagers

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Coherence

Truth

Betting on God

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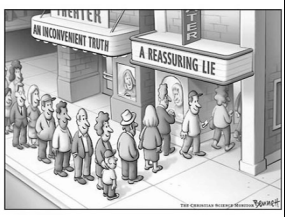

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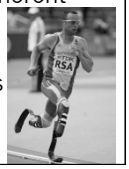
Explanatory Coherence

1. Explanation. Hypotheses cohere with what they explain. Oscar Pistorius.
2. Data priority. Observed evidence has a degree of coherence (reliable).
3. Contradiction. Contradictory and competing hypotheses are incoherent with each other.
4. Acceptance. Propositions are accepted if doing so maximizes coherence.



Hegel

Aristotle

What is Truth?

1. Truth is coherence (Hegel). Problem: many coherent systems, but not all can be true.
2. Truth is correspondence to reality (Aristotle). Coherence is a criterion of truth, not truth. Problem: how can you know reality independent of the representation of it?
3. Truth is an illusion, relative to particular individuals ("true for me") or societies ("social construction"). Problem: individuals and societies cannot construct the reality they want.

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Scientific Realism

1. Scientific realism is the view that science aims for the truth and to some extent succeeds.
2. Alternatives:
   a) Instrumentalism: science is just a tool.
   b) Empiricism: science only knows truths about what is observable.
   c) Social construction: science is a social process and has no access to truth, which is also social.

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Scientific Realism: Argument For

1. Scientific realism is the best explanation for:
   a) Technological success of science.
   b) Cumulative nature of science.
   c) Intersubjectivity of science.
   d) Resistance of evidence to theoretical manipulation.
2. Therefore, science achieves (approximate) knowledge of the truth.

Reply: science makes mistakes.

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Discussion Question

Does science achieve truth? What are the alternatives?

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Pascal's Wager

1. Decisions should be made on the basis of what choice provides the greatest expected utility, i.e. the biggest payoff.
2. Believing in God has more expected utility than not believing in God, because of the prospect of eternal reward.
3. Therefore, we should decide to believe in God.

Immediate payoff: religious people are happier.

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Pascal's Payoffs

	God Exists	**No God**
Believe in God	Infinite gain (reward)	Small loss
Don't believe in God	Infinite loss (punishment)	Small gain

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Problems with Pascal's Wager

1. You can't choose what to believe.
2. You might choose the wrong religion out of dozens available, so your chances of choosing the right god are slim.
3. Atheist's wager: rather than worrying about what religion is right, enjoy this life.
4. Beliefs ought to be formed by evidence and reason, not by wishful thinking.

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Discussion Question

Is it practically useful to believe in God? If so, is that enough to justify believing in God?

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Argument from Evil

1. God is supposed to be all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good (PKG).
2. If God were PKG, there would be no evil.
3. There is evil.
4. Therefore, there is no PKG God.

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Replies to Argument from Evil

1. There is no evil – this is the best of all possible worlds (Leibniz).
2. Evils are soul-building – make people stronger.
3. Human evil is the result of free will.

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