Introduction to Philosophy

Introduction to Philosophy

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Contents

PART II
UNIT 1: LOGIC

1. Logic - Overview and Coursework

Subject Matter

The academic discipline of Philosophy is concerned with fundamental questions concerning the **nature of reality**, the basis for the **possibility of human knowledge**, and how we make **judgments of value**, especially regarding human conduct. Studying philosophy involves understanding the work of philosophers and examining it critically. Philosophy encourages logical, reflective, and careful thinking skills that are helpful in many corners of life.

Three main areas of philosophy correspond to the fundamental concerns mentioned above:

- **Metaphysics**: What is the nature of reality?
- **Epistemology**: How and what can we know?
- **Ethics**: What is right or wrong, good or bad?

In addition to being branches of philosophy in their own right, these three main areas of philosophy are at the core of other more specialized branches of philosophy.

This course covers eight branches of philosophy at an introductory level. There are numerous connections among branches of philosophy, and there is no single, prescribed right/correct order in which to the address these eight branches of philosophy. The sequence of this course is designed to flow in a manner that encourages application of knowledge gained from one area in pursuing the next, and to use questions or issues considered

in a particular branch of philosophy as a bridge to another branch that adds perspective to that topic.

Each of the eight branches of philosophy will be treated in its own module, or unit, in the following sequence:

1. **Logic** is about the principles of good arguments. Throughout this course, the basics of logic serve as a template for examining arguments of philosophers and for making good, critical arguments against them. Logic is related to epistemology in that it models acquisition of knowledge through reason.

2. **Epistemology** How do we know? What can we know? What justifies believing the truth of knowledge? Asking epistemological questions is difficult to separate from those of Metaphysics. How can we understand what we can know without understanding what exists to be known? Epistemology is also akin to Philosophy of Science in that both seek to understand how we can know the natural world. The principle of cause and effect is interesting to all three branches, Epistemology, Metaphysics, and Philosophy of Science. This course places Metaphysics on hold briefly and considers Philosophy of Science immediately after Epistemology.

3. **Philosophy of Science** concerns the concepts and methods of science, including principles such as causality that are fundamental to science. Our work in Philosophy of Science continues with inquiries from Epistemology on how we know the natural world and on the nature of causality, and then moves to methods used by science and the characterization of scientific progress. Although we do not delve deeply into this aspect, Philosophy of Science asks questions connected to Ethics (moral philosophy); for example, what *should* science pursue, or not pursue?

4. **Metaphysics** is concerned with the nature and existence of reality Metaphysics is an expansive discipline with subbranches of its own, and explores the nature of realities

including minds, physical bodies, space, time, the universe, causality, and more. We will focus on the nature of a person's reality, as a physical body with a mental life. Picking up on the notion of causality from Epistemology and Philosophy of Science, we will examine the possibility that humans can act freely, which in turn invites questions about moral responsibility, or Ethics.

5. **Ethics** or moral philosophy, is concerned with evaluation of human actions as right and wrong. Studying Ethics involves understanding and comparing theories that describe and justify right and wrong actions and ethical claims. Ethics is part of a general philosophical area of study called "axiology," which is concerned with judgments about values. Ethics involves judgments about right and wrong actions of the individual. An individual's actions do not occur in isolation but within a social context. Thus there is a fuzzy boundary between Ethics and Social and Political Philosophy, and a natural transition to the latter.

6. **Social and Political Philosophy** is interested in values related to groups of individuals; from small communities to larger nations. What makes a society good, what makes a government legitimate, what is the relationship between the individual and society/government? Topics addressed in this course include fairness, justice, human rights, and the responsibilities of government.

7. **Philosophy of Religion** examines a wide array of topics related to the meaning and nature of religion. Some historical arguments and contemporary theories make arguments involving morality to justify theories about God 's existence or the nature of religion, but Philosophy of Religion is not centered around the study of Ethics and moral values. Philosophy of Religion has a connection to Ethics, and also to Metaphysics through questions about the existence of God and nature of the universe, and to Epistemology by exploring how we know and understand spiritual matters and beliefs.

8. **Aesthetics** is the branch of philosophy that examines the nature of art and beauty and the character of our experience of them. Aesthetics involves judgments about "beauty," an ideal, or value, on the same level with "truth" or "goodness." So aesthetics, like Ethics, is an axiological pursuit. Aesthetics has a connection to Metaphysics in its deliberation of the questions such as "where" beauty lies/exists, and to Epistemology in considering how we know and recognize beauty.

Structure and Conventions

Course Materials

Purchased textbooks (physical or digital) are not used in this course. All materials are available online. Assigned materials include:

- Text within in the module itself, which may include excerpts from the works of classic philosophers
- Reading at other online locations, accessible from within this course
- Videos accessible from with this course

In addition to assigned materials, some modules may include "supplemental" course resources, for both reading and viewing. **Any subject matter in supplemental resources that is not also covered in assigned materials will not be addressed in course assessments.** In other words, the assigned materials are sufficient for succeeding in this course. The supplemental materials may

enrich your appreciation and/or understanding of certain philosophical ideas.

The actual text/content for every module is the primary assigned reading. All other materials with link are clearly identified as either "assigned" or "supplemental," with links to the supplemental resources located at the end of a content page.

Key Terms

Within the course content for each branch philosophy, key terms appear in **bold type**the first time they are used. These terms are also available for lookup in the course glossary and are listed in the overview section for each module.

Philosophers

This course introduces numerous notable philosophers. The philosophers you will meet in connection with each branch of philosophy are listed in the overview section for the module with a link that takes you to brief biographical material. The first mention of a philosopher's name within the text will also link to the biographical information. The links are provided to lend historical context and enrich the learning experience. Only the philosopher's ideas as presented in course content are addressed in assessments (no details on lives and times.) For more information, visit the Philosophy Pages website.

Coursework

Course assessments include:

- Discussion questions
- Responses to other students' discussion-question submissions
- Short written assignments
- Quizzes
- Unit tests (one for each module/branch of philosophy)

The number and types of assessments vary from module-to-module. Each coursework item appears in the course content as well as in the course table of contents with a link to the location for submitting the work.

2. 1.1 Arguments - The Basics

1.1.1 What Is An Argument?

In philosophy, an **argument** is a connected series of statements, including at least one **premise**, intended to demonstrate that another statement, the **conclusion**, is true. The statements that serve as premises and conclusions are sometimes referred to as "propositions." Statements (or propositions) are declarative sentences.

Arguments offer proof for a claim, or conclusion. A **premise** is a statement that supports, or helps lead to, an argument's conclusion. A **conclusion** is the statement that is inferred (reasoned) from the argument's premises. Arguments are "inferential; they intend to "infer" something. The process by which we reason in order to reach a conclusion is referred to as **inference**.

Quite often the arguments have two or more premises and require multiple inferential steps to reach the conclusion. One type of argument, called an **immediate inference,**has a single premise (a single inferential step) supporting its conclusion. Here's an example:

Premise: No items on this menu are chicken dishes.
Conclusion: Therefore, no chicken dishes are items on this menu.

We will encounter examples of more elaborate arguments in the section 1.3 "Argument Types."

When "doing philosophy," we examine arguments made to support claims, or positions, put forth by philosophers on various questions. If we are not convinced by an argument, our pursuit, as students of philosophy, is to devise an objection (or rebuttal) argument to demonstrate that the original argument is defective. A rebuttal argument, too, is a claim (conclusion) supported by reasons (premises).

1.1.2 Identifying Arguments

When we read or listen (whether it be philosophical writings or news stories or lectures or political speeches or conversation partners), it is important to differentiate between arguments and other language that is not inferential. Non-inferential language does not offer proof for a claim. It may take various forms including (but not limited to) explanations, examples, reports, announcements, and so forth.

"Signal words" in speech or text can serve as alerts that there is an argument afoot.

The word "because" and all of its synonyms may alert a reader (or listener) that a premise, or reason. is being provided to support a claim.

Examples of words and phrases that may signal a premise:

as	due to	on the ground
as indicated by	for	owing to
as a result of	for the reason that	seeing that
because	in as much as	since
being that	in that	thanks to
by reason of	in the view of	through
by virtue of	in inferred from	whereas

The word "therefore" and its synonyms are clues that a conclusion, or claim, is being made.

Examples of words and phrases that may signal a conclusion:

accordingly	[it] follows that	thence
as a result	[it] proves that	**therefore**
consequently	hence	[we] conclude th
for this reason	so	[we] infer that
implies that	thus	whence

Signal words can be helpful in identifying arguments, but keep these caveats in mind:

1. Argument signal words are not always present when an argument is being made.
2. Sometimes words that could function as signal words for an argument are used in other contexts, where there is no argument present.

Coursework

Arguments encountered in philosophy texts and elsewhere are not usually in the neat and convenient forms that will be used in sample arguments. Skill in deciphering arguments made in ordinary-language is highly useful overall, not just in understanding philosophical texts.

This quiz allows you to practice the basic argument-recognition skill of differentiating between premises and conclusions.

3. 1.2 Arguments - Types of Reasoning

The two main types of reasoning involved in the discipline of Logic are **deductive reasoning** and **inductive reasoning**.

- **Deductive reasoning** is an inferential process that supports a conclusion with certainty.
- **Inductive reasoning** is an inferential process providing support strong enough to offer high probability (but not absolute certainty) for the conclusion.

1.2.1 Attributes of Deductive Arguments

Validity

Validity is the attribute of deductive arguments that denotes logical strength. Validity is about the strength of the inference, or reasoning, between the premises and the conclusion. A deductive argument is **valid** when you have the following:

If all its premises were true, then its conclusion must be true, by necessity.

To determine if an argument is valid or invalid (not valid):

1. First assume that the premises are true, even if they are not; pretend that they are true.
2. Then ask yourself whether the conclusion would need to be true, assuming/pretending that the premises are true.

Here is an example:

Premise 1: All dogs are snakes.

Premise 2: All snakes are birds.

Conclusion: All dogs are birds.

This is a **valid** argument because **if** all of the premises were true **then** the conclusion would follow by necessity. The argument has logical strength, or validity. Validity is about the form of the argument, not the truth of its premises.

Valid arguments may have:

- True premises, true conclusion
- False premises, false conclusion
- False premises, true conclusion

Valid arguments can **never** have:

- True premises, false conclusion.

In a valid deductive argument, if the premises are true, it is impossible for the conclusion to be false.

It is important to keep in mind that just because an argument does have a possibly valid combination of premise-conclusion truth values (for example, true premises and true conclusion), it is not necessarily valid. It must also be logically strong. That example with dogs, snakes, and birds is valid, because the reasoning works. If those premises were true, the conclusion would necessarily follow. Even if the premises are true and the conclusion is true, it does not mean that the reasoning is valid.

Here is an example of an argument with true premise and a true conclusion, but the strength of the connection, the reasoning, from the premises to the conclusion is not valid. The conclusion happens to be true but not due to any reason provided by those premises. The argument's form is invalid.

Premise 1: All dogs are mammals.

Premise 2: All collies are mammals.
Conclusion: All collies are dogs.

To summarize, a **valid deductive argument** is one where it would be impossible for the conclusion to be false given that the premises were true. The conclusion follows necessarily from the logical connections or reasoning established by the premises.

Soundness

Soundness is the attribute of a deductive argument that denotes both the truth of its premises and its logical strength. A deductive argument is **sound** when:

1. It is valid, and
2. It has all true premises.

For example:
   Premise 1: All cats are mammals.
Premise 2: All mammals are animals.
Conclusion: All cats are animals.

This argument is sound because (1) it is valid (the premises support the conclusion by necessity) **and** (2) all of the premises are actually true!

On the other hand, the example above used to demonstrate validity (with dogs, snakes and birds) is not sound, because it does not have all (any!) true premises. (But it's form is still valid.)

1.2.2 Attributes of Inductive Arguments

Inductive Strength

Inductive strength is the attribute of inductive arguments that denotes logical strength. An inductive argument is **inductively strong** when you have the following:

If all its premises were true, then it its highly likely or probable that its conclusion would also true.

"Strong" and "weak" are the terms used to describe the possibilities for the logical strength of inductive arguments. To determine if an argument is strong or weak:

1. First assume the premises are true, even if they are not; pretend for now that they are true.
2. Then ask yourself whether it is likely/probable that the conclusion would be true, assuming/pretending that those premises are true.

Here is an example:

Premise 1: Most peacocks eat oatmeal for breakfast.
Premise 2: This bird is a peacock.
Conclusion: Therefore, probably this bird eats oatmeal for breakfast.

This argument is inductively strong because **if** all its premises were true, then it would be highly likely or probable that its conclusion would also true.

Inductively strong arguments may have:

- True premises, true conclusion
- False premises, false conclusion
- False premises, true conclusion

Inductively strong arguments **cannot** have:

- True premises, false conclusion

To summarize, a strong inductive argument is one where it is improbable for the conclusion to be false, given that the premises are true. A weak inductive argument is one where the conclusion probably would not follow from the premises, if they were true.

Cogency

Cogency is the attribute of an inductive arguments that denotes the truth of its premises and its logical strength. An inductive argument is **cogent** when:

1. It is inductively strong, and
2. It has all true premises

Here's an example:
  Premise 1: Europa (a moon of Jupiter) has an atmosphere containing oxygen.
Premise 2: Oxygen is required for life.
Conclusion: Thus, there may be life on Europa.
  This argument is cogent because (1) it is inductively strong (if the premises were true, then the conclusion would probably be true) *and* (2) the premises actually are true.
  On the other hand, the example above concerning peacocks, used to demonstrate inductive strength, is not cogent, because it does not have all true premises.
  In summary, an **inductive argument** is one in which it is improbable that the conclusion is false given that the premises are true.

1.2.3 Good Arguments

The important take-away from the information on the attributes of both deductive and inductive arguments is this:

A **good argument** proves, or establishes, its conclusion and has two key features:

1. It is logically strong.
2. All of its premises are true.

Logical Strength

Logical strength is the degree of support that the premises, if true, confer on the conclusion. This attribute applies to both deductive arguments (by virtue of validity) and inductive arguments (by virtue of inductive strength.)

- A good deductive argument is not only valid, but is also sound.
- A good inductive argument is not only inductively strong, but is also cogent.

4. 1.3 Arguments - A Few Common Types

1.3.1 Deductive Reasoning

Deductive reasoning is characterized by the certainty that can be guaranteed by the conclusion. A few common argument forms typically associated with deductive reasoning are described here.

Categorical Syllogisms

Syllogisms make claims about groups of things, or categories. They use statements that refer to the quantity of members of a category (all, some, or none]) and denote membership or lack thereof of members of one category in another category. These are examples of categorical statements:

- **No** vegetarians are pork-chop lovers.
- **Some** meat eaters are not pork-chop lovers.
- **Some** mosquitoes are disease carriers.
- **All** mice are rodents.

Syllogisms are broadly characterized as arguments with two premises supporting the conclusion. Each premise shares a common term with the conclusion, and the premises share a common term (the middle term) with each other.

Some examples provided for valid deductive arguments in section 1.2.2 Attributes of Deductive Arguments are categorical syllogisms. Recall this one:

Premise 1: All cats are mammals.

Premise 2: All mammals are animals.

Conclusion: Therefore, all cats are animals.

This well-known categorical syllogism refers to a specific member of the class of "men":

Premise 1: All men are mortal.

Premise 2: Socrates is a man.

Conclusion: Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

Disjunctive Syllogisms

This type of syllogism has a "disjunction" as a premise, that is, an "either-or" statement. Here's an example:

Premise 1: Either my pet is a dog, or my pet is a cat.

Premise 2: My pet is not a cat.

Conclusion: Therefore, my pet is a dog.

Hypothetical Syllogisms

A hypothetical statement is an "if-then" statement. Hypothetical statements have two components:

- The "if" portion is referred to as the **antecedent**. It is the precipitating factor.
- The "then" portion is called the **consequent.** It is the resulting condition.

A **pure hypothetical syllogism** has two hypothetical premises. Here's an example:

Premise 1: If it rains on Sunday, then the concert will be canceled.

Premise 2: If the concert is canceled, then the band will go to the

movies.

Conclusion: Thus, If it rains on Sunday, the band will go to the movies.

The next two common argument forms use a hypothetical statement as one of the premises.

Modus Ponens

This argument form has one premise that is a hypothetical (if-then) statement, and another premise that affirms the antecedent of the hypothetical premise. The conclusion then claims the truth of the consequent. In symbolic form, ***modus ponens*** looks like this:

if A then C

A

therefore C

Here's an example:

Premise 1: If we get up before sunrise, then we have time for a run.

Premise 2: We get up before sunrise.

Conclusion: So, we have time for a run.

Modus Tollens

This argument form also has one premise that is a hypothetical (if-then) statement, and the other premise denies (indicates untruth of) the consequent of the hypothetical premise. The conclusion then claims that the antecedent is not the case (that is, denies it.) In symbolic form, ***modus tollens*** looks like this:

if A then C

not C

therefore not A

Here's an example:

Premise 1: If we win today's game, then we qualify for the final match.

Premise 2: We did not qualify for the final match.

Conclusion: We did not win today's game.

Arguments based on Mathematics

Arguments supported by arithmetic or geometry lead to necessary conclusions and thus are deductive: Here's an example:

Premise 1: Twenty-five eggs were left by the Easter bunny in the front yard.

Premise 2: Twenty eggs have been found in the front yard. so far.

Conclusion: Therefore, five eggs remain to be found.

It is important to keep in mind that math-based arguments do not include statistical arguments, because statistics usually suggest probable, not certain, conclusions.

1.3.2 Inductive Reasoning

Inductive reasoning is characterized by the lack of absolute certainty that can be guaranteed by the conclusion. Several of the types of inductive reasoning are described here.

Statistical Reasoning

As we have just pointed out, statistical reasoning, though based on numbers like mathematical reasoning, is not deductive because

it can offer only probability. Statistics suggest likely outcomes or conclusions but cannot guarantee certainty. The larger process of statistical reasoning often includes complex analysis of properties and populations; in the end, the conclusions can be derived with probability but not certainty. Here's an example; it did not involve complex analysis:

Premise 1: Of the Easter eggs hidden in the front yard 95% are chocolate.

Premise 2: This egg was found in the front yard.

Conclusion: So, this egg probably is chocolate.

There is no certainty that the egg just found is a chocolate one; but it is highly likely.

Analogical Reasoning

An analogy involves highlighting perceived similarities between two things as grounds for transferring further attributes or meanings from one (the source analog) to the other (the target analog.) Here's an example:

Premise 1: Bandicoots and opossums are marsupials with extra upper teeth.

Premise 2: Opossums are omnivorous and eat small animals and plant matter.

Conclusion: Therefore, bandicoots probably eat small animals and plant matter.

Analogical reasoning is used extensively in making arguments in philosophy; we will see such arguments in later units involving other branches of philosophy. Analogical reasoning is also the core practice in making legal decisions; cases that have already been decided become precedents (source analogs) for deciding subsequent similar cases (target analogs.)

Generalizations

Arguments that advance from knowledge about a subset of members of a particular group of things to conclusions about all such things make generalizations. Such conclusions use inductive reasoning. They may have high probability of being true, but good generalizations are made cautiously. For example, it may be a well reasoned generalization to infer that because rabbits you have seen have whiskers, that all rabbits whiskers. On the other hand, it may be risky to conclude that every Democrat favors gun control, because the democrats you know do so.

   Sometimes patterns of inductive reasoning overlap. If 100% of the 85 jelly beans removed so far from the 100-count box have been licorice, one might infer that all jelly beans in that box are licorice. This argument might be characterized as a statistical claim or a generalization.

Causal Claims

A causal argument supports a conclusion about a cause-and-effect relationship. Essentially, it asserts a connection between two events. In a particular argument, either the cause or the effect may be known, and the one that is not known is claimed to be the case.

- If I go to the refrigerator and find that my leftover pizza is gone, I conclude that my roommate ate it. This is a move from knowing the effect to inferring the cause.
- If wash my car in the afternoon, and that evening I'm aware of a rain shower, I conclude that my car will be speckled with dirt spots when I go out in the morning. This is a move from knowing the cause to inferring its effect.

Predictions

Arguments that are predictions make claims about the future. No matter how certain a claim about the future seems – that the sun will rise tomorrow – it is still inductive reasoning. If I have seen giraffes at the zoo each time I was there in the past, I might reasonably conclude that I will see giraffes when I go there tomorrow. But it is not a certainty.

Some Comments on Inductive Reasoning

Despite the lack of total certainty that inductive arguments may offer, inductive reasoning is in no way less valuable or useful than deductive logic. Reasoning we in do philosophy involves making arguments that while plausible, do no lead to absolute certainty. The process of science is based on inductive reasoning; it involves formulating hypotheses that infer connections, not yet proven, between events. When we make moral judgment about a particular actions, our conclusions may be based on our regard for comparable (analogical) actions. Weather forecasts, political polls, and legal investigations are further examples of how inductive reasoning abounds in our world.

5. 1.4 Fallacies - The Basics

A fallacy is a defect in an argument that involves mistaken reasoning; sometimes fallacies are committed purposefully, to influence or mislead the reader or listener.

- A **formal fallacy** is one that can be detected by examining the form of an argument.
- An **informal fallacy** is one that can only be detected by examining the content of the argument.

1.4.1 Formal Fallacies

The scope of this course does not encompass details of the many argument structures, or forms. Correspondingly, there will not be extensive consideration of formal fallacies, those committed when form is defective. We will, none-the-less, look briefly at two examples of formal fallacies, each of which can result from invalid (defective!) use of an argument form that we visited briefly in our examination of the deductive argument types *modus ponens* and *modus tollens*:

Affirming the Consequent

This fallacy might be seen as a flawed (invalid!) attempt to use the *modus ponens* argument form. Recall that one of the premises in *modus ponens* affirms the antecedent of the hypothetical premise. In effect, with *modus ponens*, the antecedent necessitates

the consequent. In the fallacious example below, however, the consequent is affirmed instead of the antecedent:

Premise 1: If I'm cleaning the kitchen, then I'm not reading my book.

Premise 2: I'm not reading my book.

Conclusion: Thus, I'm cleaning the kitchen.

This reasoning is defective; think about it. The consequent cannot necessitate the antecedent. Not being engaged in reading the book does not, by necessity, infer that I am cleaning the kitchen. (Maybe I'm sleeping or out for a run.)

Denying the Antecedent

This fallacy can be seen as a defective (invalid!) use of the *modus tollens* argument form. Recall that one of the premises in *modus tollens* denies the consequent of the hypothetical premise. In the fallacious example below, however, the antecedent, is denied instead of the consequent:

Premise 1: If I'm cleaning the kitchen, then I'm not reading my book.

Premise 2: I'm not cleaning the kitchen. (The denial of "cleaning" is "not cleaning.")

Conclusion: Thus, I am reading my book. (The denial of "not reading" is "reading.")

This too is defective reasoning, if you think about it. Not being engaged in kitchen cleaning does not by necessity, infer that I am reading. I could be doing anything besides cleaning the kitchen.

1.4.2 Informal Fallacies

An informal fallacy is one that can be detected by examining the content of the argument rather than the form. While informal fallacies can sometimes be attributed to hasty or negligent reasoning, more often they are committed with the clear intent to mislead the listener or audience, to justify belief in a claim that is not true. Further, these fallacies may arise in an atmosphere charged with emotion.

Informal fallacies are attributed not just to arguments with actual premise-conclusion form, but also to wider use of language that is intended to establish a claim or make a point.

There are many accounts (lists, enumerations) of informal fallacies, not only in logic texts but in materials from other disciplines concerned with communication. Lists of fallacies sometimes use different descriptive names for the same basic fallacy. For example, "Do you still beat your wife?" might be referred to as a "complex question," "compound, question" or "loaded question" fallacy, depending upon where you read about it. Whatever it is called, its intent to mislead through implicitly inserting information that is not overtly stated.

When reviewing the following material on informal fallacies, watch for some that correspond to defective use of argument types (inductive ones especially) that we considered here in the section on "Argument Types."

Reading

Read this **presentation on common informal fallacies**. **[CC-BY-NC-ND]**

Supplemental resources (bottom of the page) provide further insight on and additional examples of informal fallacies.

Coursework

Apply your knowledge of common informal fallacies committed in arguments and in wider use of language. Consider what you read and/or hear on news media, social platforms, or wherever you spend time paying attentions to what others are saying and writing. Look/listen for arguments or language that make claims that seem misleading.

In your Discussion post: (for at least one defective argument or claim:) (1) describe the argument or claim; (2) state where you observed it, and (3) identify the fallacy that characterizes the misguided reasoning.

Note: Post your response in the appropriate Discussion topic.

Complete the Unit Test by the date on the Schedule of Work.

Supplemental Resources

Informal Fallacies – further examples:

inFact: Logical Fallacies 1
inFact: Logical Fallacies 2
inFact: Logical Fallacies 3

6. 1.4 Informal Fallacies Discussion

Discussion

Apply your knowledge of common informal fallacies committed in arguments and in wider use of language. Consider what you read and/or hear on news media, social platforms, or wherever you spend time paying attentions to what others are saying and writing. Look/listen for arguments or language that make claims that seem misleading. In your Discussion post: (for at least one defective argument or claim:) (1) describe the argument or claim; (2) state where you observed it, and (3) identify the fallacy that characterizes the misguided reasoning. Note: Post your response in the appropriate Discussion topic.

UNIT 2: EPISTEMOLOGY

7. Epistemology - Overview

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that seeks answers to questions about the possibility and nature of human knowledge. How do we know? What can we know? What are the grounds (or justification) for believing a given piece of knowledge is true? Considering such questions invites more questions about the nature of reality, questions considered in Metaphysics, another branch of philosophy. What can be known depends on what there is, in reality, to be known. These two branches of philosophy have connections. A particular standpoint in epistemology may commit one to a particular metaphysical position, and *vice versa*. Our focus in this module will be on the main theories of knowledge, rationalism and empiricism. Selected issues about the nature of reality are addressed in the module on Metaphysics.

Objectives

Successful completion of the Epistemology Unit will enable you to understand and discuss:

1. The distinctions between:

    ◦ *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge
    ◦ analytic and synthetic claims
    ◦ how reasoning and experience characterize main schools of epistemology

2. Rationalism, empiricism, and intuitionism.
3. The epistemological positions of specific rationalists including

Rene Descartes and Gottfried Leibniz and empiricists including John Locke and David Hume.

4. Hume's skepticism and how Kant's transcendental idealism attempts to resolve Hume's doubt about the possibility of knowledge.

Coursework

The Course Content for this unit provides the primary reading material, links to any additional assigned reading or viewing resources, and assigned coursework. The unit concludes with a test. Material is presented in these subsections:

2.1 How Do We Know?
2.2 Rationalists and Empiricists
2.3 Rationalists and Empiricists – Continued

Dates for completing all assigned work are in the Schedule of Work.

Philosophers We Will Meet

In our investigation and readings for Epistemology, we will encounter the work of these philosophers. You may select a name here to link to a short biography, or you may link to the same information at your first encounter of the philosopher's name in the Course Content:

Plato
Rene Descartes
John Locke

Gottfried Leibniz
David Hume
Immanuel Kant

Key Terms

It is important to understand the meaning and use of these terms.

a posteriori: Requiring sensory experience of the world. An *a posteriori* proposition can be known only after experience. (Latin "from what comes after")

a priori: Requiring no sensory experience of the world. An *a priori* proposition can be known independently of and prior to experience. (Latin "from what comes before")

Analytic: Refers to a proposition being true based on what its words mean; it is true by definition. No experience of the world is required to justify.

Empiricism: Reliance on experience as the source of ideas and knowledge.

Innate idea: Mental contents that are presumed to exist in the mind prior to and independently of any experience.

Intuitionism: A theory of knowledge that is a variety of rationalism in which knowing relies on non-inferential mental faculties, rather than reasoning, and not on sensory experience. One "just knows."

Rationalism: Reliance on reason as the only reliable source of human knowledge.

Skepticism: The theory that certain knowledge is impossible, or that we must doubt what we think we know.

Synthetic: Refers to a proposition requiring experience of the world to be known. Justification depends on the way the world actually is.

tabula rasa: The idea that the mind of an individual begins without any mental content and all knowledge comes from experience. (Latin for "blank slate.")

Transcendental Idealism: Kant's theory of knowledge that maintains that synthetic *a priori* judgments are possible and provide the basis for truths about the world that are both necessary and universal. Knowledge is acquired by connecting concepts of our understanding to our experiences.

8. 2.1 How Do We Know

2.1.1 Grounds for Knowing

The terms "*a priori*" and "*a posteriori*" (both from Latin) are used in epistemology to differentiate between two ways of knowing – they are epistemological distinctions:

- Propositions known **a priori** require no sensory experience of the world. Such propositions can be known independently of and **prior to** a specific experience . For example:
  - 2 + 4 =6
  - A circle is the set of all points in a plane that are at a given distance from a center point.
  - Blue is a color.
- Propositions known **a posteriori** require sensory experience of the world. Such propositions can be known only **after** experience. For example:
  - There are six puppies in the litter.
  - This picture frame is square.
  - This circle is orange.

The necessary truth of an *a priori* statement can be deduced by reason alone, whereas the truth of an *a posteriori* statement is contingent, requiring experience or factual confirmation.

2.1.2 Grounds for Affirming Knowledge

The terms "analytic" and "synthetic" distinguish between two processes for affirming truth of propositions, or making judgment.

- An **analytic** statement is true based on what its words mean; it is true by definition. The truth of analytic statements depends only on the meaning of the words in the statement. No experience of the world is required. For example:
  - A Billy goat is a male goat.
  - If Oprah Winfrey is single, she is not married.
- A **synthetic** statement requires experience of the world to be known. The truth of synthetic statements depends on the way the world actually is. For example:
  - This Billy goat has an unpleasant odor.
  - Oprah Winfrey is single.

While there is correspondence between these two sets of distinctions, there are subtle differences. It is important to remember that:

"*a priori*" is not the same as "analytic"; the truth of an *a priori* statement involves knowing by means of reason, while the truth of an "analytic" statement comes from the meaning of the words.

"*a posteriori*" is not the same as "synthetic"; while both require experience of the world, the truth of an *a posteriori* claim comes from the fact that it can be known through experience, and the truth of a synthetic claim is about literal verification of the way the world is.

A supplementary reading resource is available (bottom of page) on these sets of distinctions.

2.1.3 Main Epistemological Theories

Establishing a satisfactory theory of knowledge has been a pursuit of philosophers for millennia, since the time of the ancient Greeks. The endeavor has been and remains a dispute between proponents of **rationalism** and **empiricism**, the two main theories of knowledge. The essence of the conflict is about the relative importance and primacy of the *a priori* (our rational way of knowing) and the *a posteriori* (our experiential ways of knowing.)

Keep in mind that the while rationalists and empiricists have held strongly conflicting positions, there are theories of knowledge that take both reason and experience seriously. Still, holding certain beliefs can result in being labeled one, or the other.

Rationalism

For rationalists, the only dependable path to human knowledge is reason. The theories of rationalists may include notions such as: deductive/inferential reasoning, intuition (non-inferential immediate knowledge). and **innate ideas**. The latter is a rationalist proposal that holds that some ideas exist in the mind prior to and independently of experience. This position is sometimes referred to as "nativism." Quite often, some combination of these elements may be involved in a particular rationalist theory. But with all rationalist theories, knowledge is acquired through *a priori* means, and reason prevails as the only dependable source of human knowledge, when compared to experience and empirical processes.

Intuitionism may be regarded as its own theory of knowledge. For the purpose and scope of this course, we will regard intuitionism as a variety of rationalism in which knowing relies on non-inferential mental faculties, not on sensory experience.

Empiricism

Empiricism is the view that all knowledge and ideas come from experience. Experience is essential for knowing matters of fact, and only *a posteriori* means can lead to genuine knowledge. To think something, we must first sense it. Empiricists reject the rationalist view that *a priori* processes can lead to knowledge, and they reject the notion that any ideas or concepts can be innate in the human mind. We begin life with a mind that is a*tabula rasa*, (Latin for "a blank slate,") according to some empiricists.

Rationalism and Empiricism: Some Comparisons

Do we begin life with a mind that is pre-loaded/equipped with **innate ideas**, or do we start with a mind that is a "**blank slate**," acquiring knowledge only as we experience the world.?

Rationalists believe that at least some ideas (maybe all, depending on the philosopher) are inborn, that there is no reliance on outside input or experience to acquire either ideas or knowledge. The very foundation of knowledge exists in our minds. The pursuit of knowledge entails *a priori* reasoning; it involves deduction and can produce necessary truths.

Empiricists reject the possibility that any idea can be innate. Experience, the *a posteriori*world of sensations, is the only source of knowledge. Knowledge is built from experience and involves inductive formulation of probable truths, based on experience of the world.

Given these typical differences, and before going on to look at specific philosophers, it is important to note that there are degrees to which a specific philosopher may conform to the rationalist or empiricist model. For example:

While a **rationalist** subscribes to the supremacy of reason, there

may be possibility of rational involvement in sciences fostered by experience and/or inferior knowledge via experience.

An **empiricist** may not accept the mind as the primary, superior source of knowing, but may still embrace the mechanics of deductive reasoning in a subject such as mathematics

A supplementary video resource is available (bottom of page) on these models.

The next two sections of the Epistemology module will look more closely at rationalism and empiricism. You will meet some of the well-known proponents of each theory and learn about some ages-long disputes between rationalists and empiricists.

Supplemental Resources

a priori and *a posteriori*, analytic and synthetic.

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP) **A Priori and A Posteriori** Read from the beginning of this article, through Section 3.

Rationalism and Empiricism

The following short video provides a review of terms and concepts on this section and may help reinforce your understanding of the main differences between rationalism and empiricism: **Rationalism Vs Empiricism**

9. 2.2 Rationalist and Empiricists

In this section, we will meet several philosophers, some whose theories exemplify what it means to be a rationalist, and a notable one whose work exemplifies the empiricist's position. We will get a sense of the conflicts that have prevailed between the proponents of these two theories on how we acquire knowledge of the world.

2.2.1 Plato: Roots of Rationalism

The precedence of the mind and reason over the material world of experience and impressions was a Western philosophical position well before the time of the"continental rationalists" we will examine in this section. **Plato (427–347 BCE)** was a rationalist. As you will see in the short upcoming videos, for Plato the world of experience held no primacy; what happens in the realm of the sensory and the experiential does not even qualify as "real" much less as a pathway to knowledge. Plato's "forms" are seen as **innate ideas** in that the forms/ideas are inborn, within us to be discovered.

Plato's Forms can be known only through the intellect, and they are the ultimate reality. The world we observe with our senses contains only imperfect copies.

Videos

Plato's theory of Forms is described in the first two minutes of this video. Watch at least that much. **Plato's Best (and Worst) Ideas**. **[CC-BY-NC-ND]**
This video provides a quick look at Plato's cave allegory, which also relates to his theory of Forms. **Plato's Allegory of the Cave**. **[CC-BY-NC-ND]**

2.2.2 Descartes: Continental Rationalism

"Continental rationalism" refers to the work of philosophers on the European continent who, during the 17th and 18th centuries, took exception to the prevailing acceptance of sensory experience as the primary gateway to knowledge. Though some of these rationalists gave sensory experience a place in their theory of knowledge, they regarded reasoning as the only source of dependable knowledge.

Rene Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, and Nicolas Malabranche are among the noted continental rationalists. We will look briefly at Rene Descartes's rationalism, in particular the way in which distrust of sensory perceptions lead him to a position and theory that embraces innate ideas. Later we will meet Gottfried Leibniz.

Rene Descartes (1596-1650) is one of the prominent figures in modern philosophy. His work encompasses not only what we consider philosophical disciplines today, but also the mathematics and science of his times. Such topics were closely aligned with philosophy during his era. His work encompassed methods for seeking knowledge in all disciplines.

Descartes' work, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) details his progression through a first-person epistemological drama of

realization, from doubt to certainty. He starts from scratch, emptying his mind of every preconception. In the *Meditations*, we see his rationalist's confidence in innate ideas.

Note: We will meet Descartes and his *Meditations* again, in our Metaphysics module where we consider his strict mind-body dualism.

Descartes' famous wax thought experiment of the *Second Meditation* describes (among other things) a procedure to "dig out" what is innate. The section of the *Second Meditation*, imbedded below, also demonstrates Descartes' doubt about impressions we gather from our senses; they are untrustworthy measures of the nature of physical bodies.

From the *Second Meditation: The nature of the human mind and how it is better known than the body.* Observe the dramatic first-person style of the *Meditations*.

Let us now accordingly consider the objects that are commonly thought to be the most easily, and likewise the most distinctly known, viz., the bodies we touch and see; not, indeed, bodies in general, for these general notions are usually somewhat more confused, but one body in particular. Take, for example, this piece of wax; it is quite fresh, having been but recently taken from the beehive; it has not yet lost the sweetness of the honey it contained; it still retains somewhat of the odor of the flowers from which it was gathered; its color, figure, size, are apparent (to the sight); it is hard, cold, easily handled; and sounds when struck upon with the finger. In fine, all that contributes to make a body as distinctly known as possible, is found in the one before us. But, while I am speaking, let it be placed near the fire—what remained of the taste exhales, the smell evaporates, the color changes, its figure is destroyed, its size increases, it becomes liquid, it grows hot, it can hardly be handled, and, although struck upon, it emits no sound. Does the same wax still remain after this change? It must be admitted that it does remain; no one doubts it, or judges otherwise. What, then, was it I knew with so much distinctness in the piece of wax? Assuredly, it could be nothing of all that I observed by means of the senses,

since all the things that fell under taste, smell, sight, touch, and hearing are changed, and yet the same wax remains. It was perhaps what I now think, viz., that this wax was neither the sweetness of honey, the pleasant odor of flowers, the whiteness, the figure, nor the sound, but only a body that a little before appeared to me conspicuous under these forms, and which is now perceived under others. But, to speak precisely, what is it that I imagine when I think of it in this way? Let it be attentively considered, and, retrenching all that does not belong to the wax, let us see what remains.

There certainly remains nothing, except something extended, flexible, and movable. But what is meant by flexible and movable? Is it not that I imagine that the piece of wax, being round, is capable of becoming square, or of passing from a square into a triangular figure? Assuredly such is not the case, because I conceive that it admits of an infinity of similar changes; and I am, moreover, unable to compass this infinity by imagination, and consequently this conception which I have of the wax is not the product of the faculty of imagination. **But what now is this extension? Is it not also unknown? for it becomes greater when the wax is melted, greater when it is boiled, and greater still when the heat increases; and I should not conceive clearly and according to truth, the wax as it is, if I did not suppose that the piece we are considering admitted even of a wider variety of extension than I ever imagined. I must, therefore, admit that I cannot even comprehend by imagination what the piece of wax is, and that it is the mind alone which perceives it. I speak of one piece in particular; for as to wax in general, this is still more evident. But what is the piece of wax that can be perceived only by the understanding or mind? It is certainly the same which I see, touch, imagine; and, in fine, it is the same which, from the beginning, I believed it to be. But (and this it is of moment to observe) the perception of it is neither an act of sight, of touch, nor of imagination, and never was either of these, though it might formerly seem so, but is simply an intuition (inspectio) of the mind, which may be imperfect and confused, as it formerly was,**

or very clear and distinct, as it is at present, according as the attention is more or less directed to the elements which it contains, and of which it is composed.

This brief passage demonstrates the inadequacy of both sensory impressions and imagination. Both the ideas we derive from sensory impressions and those we fabricate by imagination figure in Descartes's distinctions among types of ideas. His argument for innate ideas involves his overall classification of ideas as being one of three types: adventitious (derived from the world outside us via sensation), factitious (created by the imagination), and innate (concepts that are clear and distinct truths.) Descartes's argument that clear and distinct truths are innate is arrived at by eliminating the possibility for such ideas being either factitious (mentally fabricated) or adventitious (based on experience.) They are eternal truths.

Descartes Summary

A rationalist, in the Platonic tradition of innate ideas, Descartes believed that knowledge derives from ideas of the intellect, not from the senses. His argument for innate ideas involves his elimination of the possibility that clear and distinct ideas can be gained either through experience or imagination. Innate ideas have universal truth and are the only dependable source of knowledge. Clear and distinct in our minds, innate ideas are universal truths. The idea of a triangle with its requisite properties, for example, can be perceived clearly and distinctly within the mind, without reference to a particular object in the world.

Several supplementary reading resources (bottom of page) provide insight on innate ideas as an element of Descartes' s rationalism.

Coursework

Do you think that innate ideas are possible? Putting it another way, do you think that we have ideas or knowledge not based on experience? Provide your reasons/argument for your position.

Note: Post your response in the appropriate Discussion topic

2.2.3 Locke: British Empiricism

"British empiricism" refers to a philosophical direction during the 17th and 18th centuries, primarily in the British Isles. This movement is characterized by its rejection of and response to tenets of rationalism such as innate ideas and knowledge based on anything *a priori*. Francis Bacon, whose lifetime overlapped with that of Descartes, was an early figure in this movement. In the 18th century, John Locke, George Berkeley and David Hume became the leading figures. We will examine John Locke's statement of the empiricist's position that experience is the only viable basis of knowledge.

John Locke (1632-1704) produced a comprehensive and influential philosophical work with his *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* in 1690. This work sets out to provide a comprehensive account of the mind and how humans acquire knowledge. An important and primary part of his agenda is to dispute the foundations of the rationalist theory of knowledge, including the possibility that there could be innate ideas. Locke's project with the *Essay*, however, is a lot larger than an attack on nativism (innate ideas.) His intention is to thoroughly examine the process of understanding and acquisition of knowledge, to describe exactly how our minds work.

Locke describes two distinct types of experience: (1) outer experience is acquired through our five senses and involves objects

that exist in the world; and (2) inner experience is derived from mental acts such as reflection. The latter are complicated. But all ideas, regardless of their complexity are constructed from combinations of simple ideas, the building blocks for everything we could possibly think. All ideas (and all knowledge) originate from experience. Our minds start off as blank slates.

Part of Locke's argument against innate ideas is that they are not universal – not everyone has them. This excerpt from Book I, Chapter 1 of the *Essay* adds the additional important argument against the possibility of innate ideas, questioning the possibility of having ideas in your mind without knowing they are there.

5. Not on Mind naturally imprinted, because not known to Children, Idiots, etc.

For, first, it is evident, that all children and idiots have not the least apprehension or thought of them. And the want of that is enough to destroy that universal assent which must needs be the necessary concomitant of all innate truths: it seeming to me near a contradiction to say, that there are truths imprinted on the soul, which it perceives or understands not: imprinting, if it signify anything, being nothing else but the making certain truths to be perceived. For to imprint anything on the mind without the mind's perceiving it, seems to me hardly intelligible. If therefore children and idiots have souls, have minds, with those impressions upon them, THEY must unavoidably perceive them, and necessarily know and assent to these truths; which since they do not, it is evident that there are no such impressions. For if they are not notions naturally imprinted, how can they be innate? and if they are notions imprinted, how can they be unknown? To say a notion is imprinted on the mind, and yet at the same time to say, that the mind is ignorant of it, and never yet took notice of it, is to make this impression nothing. No proposition can be said to be in the mind which it never yet knew, which it was never yet conscious of…

Locke Summary

John Locke was an empiricist who believed that the mind is a blank slate (*tabula rasa*) when we are born; the mind contains no innate ideas. He thought that we gain all of our knowledge through our senses. Locke argued against rationalism by attacking the view that we could know something and yet be unaware that we know it. He thought it was contradictory to believe we possess knowledge of which we are unaware. He also maintained that innate ideas would be universal by definition and that there are people who could not have such ideas.

A supplementary reading resource (bottom of page) explores the overall project of Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding*.

2.2.4 Leibniz: A Rationalist Response to Empiricism

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) was a continental rationalist, whose response to Locke's attack on innate ideas, takes exception with Locke's thesis that "nothing can be in the mind which is not in consciousness." Leibniz's reply to Locke is part of his 1704 work, *New Essays on Human Understanding*.

Note: Leibniz's conception of the nature of consciousness is at odds with that of Locke. For Locke, consciousness and the soul are one and the same – immaterial and unobservable, unlike the experiential world. (This is a dualistic viewpoint put forward by Descartes and has been commonly held.) For Leibniz, consciousness is real in the same way the world is, but it is not "mechanical." We will return to the topic of dualism in the module on Metaphysics.

Leibniz's response to Locke is addressed here in a second-source work by American philosopher John Dewey (1859 – 1952). This

excerpt is from the end of Chapter IV of Dewey's book, *Leibniz's New Essays Concerning the Human Understanding*: A *Critical Exposition*, 1888:

He [Locke] founds his denial of innate ideas not only upon a static conception of their ready made existence"in" the soul, but also upon an equally mechanical conception of consciousness."Nothing can be in the mind which is not in consciousness." This statement appears axiomatic to Locke, and by it he would settle the whole discussion. Regarding it, Leibniz remarks that if Locke has such a prejudice as this, it is not surprising that he rejects innate ideas. But consciousness and mental activity are not thus identical. To go no farther, the mere empirical fact of memory is sufficient to show the falsity of such an idea. Memory reveals that we have an indefinite amount of knowledge of which we are not always conscious. Rather than that knowledge and consciousness are one, it is true that actual consciousness only lays hold of an infinitesimal fraction of knowledge. But Leibniz does not rely upon the fact of memory alone. We must constantly keep in mind that to Leibniz the soul is not a form of being wholly separate from nature, but is the culmination of the system of reality.......

....Leibniz not only denies the equivalence of soul and consciousness, but asserts that the fundamental error of the psychology of the Cartesians (and here, at least, Locke is a Cartesian) is in identifying them. He asserts that"unconscious ideas" are of as great importance in psychology as molecules are in physics. They are the link between unconscious nature and the conscious soul. Nothing happens all at once; nature never makes jumps; these facts stated in the law of continuity necessitate the existence of activities, which may be called ideas, since they belong to the soul and yet are not in consciousness.

When, therefore, Locke asks how an innate idea can exist and the soul not be conscious of it, the answer is at hand. The"innate idea" exists as an activity of the soul by which it represents—that is, expresses—some relation of the universe, although we have not yet become conscious of what is contained or enveloped in this activity.

To become conscious of the innate idea is to lift it from the sphere of nature to the conscious life of spirit. And thus it is, again, that Leibniz can assert that all ideas whatever proceed from the depths of the soul……. An innate idea is now seen to be one of the relations by which the soul reproduces some relation which constitutes the universe of reality, and at the same time realizes its own individual nature…..

Leibniz's argument against Locke, as explained by Dewey, has psychological underpinnings; the mere concept of memory implies that we have ideas that are not conscious at a given moment. Leibniz conceived innate ideas as dispositions or tendencies that are necessary truths from which the mind thrives and flourishes.

Leibniz Summary

According to Leibniz, who was a rationalist, we do have innate ideas, which start as tendencies. Initially these innate ideas are unconscious ideas; they represent "some relation of the universe" and become fully formed (conscious) as we experience the world. Leibniz argued that sense experience only gives us examples, contingent truths, but never the necessary principles we attach to those examples.

A supplemental resource is available (bottom of page) on Leibniz conception of innate ideas.

Video

This TED Talk speaker, psychologist Stephen Pinker, argues against the idea that the mind begins as a"blank slate." Viewing it may be

helpful in formulating your response to the **Coursework** question below. **Human Nature and the Blank Slate**. **[CC-BY-NC-ND]**

Coursework

John Dewey tells us that Gottfried Leibniz, in defense of his theory of innate ideas, "asserts that 'unconscious ideas' are of as great importance in psychology as molecules are in physics." And "To become conscious of the innate idea is to lift it from the sphere of nature to the conscious life of spirit."

What do you think of this psychological perspective on innate ideas? Does it seem predictive of modern thinking about the mind, (for example Stephen Pinker)? (100-200 words)

Note: Submit your response to the appropriate Assignments folder.

Supplemental Resources

Plato

This video emphasizes how Plato's Theory of Forms is not just about acquiring knowledge (epistemology) but also about the nature of reality itself (metaphysics.) **PLATO ON: The Forms**

Descartes

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP) **Descartes' Epistemology** Read section 1.5. This brief section explains how Descartes' conception of innate ideas resembles Platonic Forms.

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP) **Continental**

Rationalism Read section 2.a. It is a very brief discussion of Descartes' conception of innate ideas.

Locke

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP) **John Locke (1623-1704)** Read this article's introduction and section 2, a, b, and c for a larger account of the project of Locke's *Essay*.

Leibniz

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP) **Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: Innate Ideas** Read section 6.3 on innate ideas. You will notice that Leibniz theory of knowledge is closely interwoven with his theory on the nature of reality (his metaphysics).

10. 2.3 Rationalist and Empiricists - Continued

In this section, we meet a noted empiricist who casts doubt on the very possibility of acquiring knowledge of the world. This new wrinkle in empiricist speculation inspires a creative rebuttal based on the interactive roles of experience and reason.

2.3.1 Hume: Empiricism and Doubt

David Hume (1711-1776) was a Scottish philosopher whose work was not overwhelmingly well received in his lifetime but had major impact later on empiricism and on philosophy of science. His 1748 work *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* provided a more accessible account of his empiricism as originally published.

Note: Portions of the following material on Hume are adapted from information in The Philosophy Pages by **Garth Kemerling** and which is licensed under a **Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0**

Hume's position is that since human beings do in fact live and function in the world, we should try to observe how they do so. The key principle to be applied to any investigation of our cognitive capacities is an attempt to discover the causes of human belief. This attempt is neither the popular project of noticing and cataloging human beliefs nor the metaphysical effort to provide them with an infallible rational justification. According to Hume, the proper goal of philosophy is simply to explain why we believe what we do.

Ideas

Hume's analysis of human belief begins with a careful distinction between certain mental contents:

- Impressions are the direct, vivid, and forceful products of immediate experience.
- Ideas are merely feeble copies of these original impressions.

From Section II of *An Enquiry*:

Every one will readily allow, that there is a considerable difference between the perceptions of the mind, when a man feels the pain of excessive heat, or the pleasure of moderate warmth, and when he afterwards recalls to his memory this sensation, or anticipates it by his imagination. These faculties may mimic or copy the perceptions of the senses; but they never can entirely reach the force and vivacity of the original sentiment. The utmost we say of them, even when they operate with greatest vigour, is, that they represent their object in so lively a manner, that we could almost say we feel or see it: but, except the mind be disordered by disease or madness, they never can arrive at such a pitch of vivacity, as to render these perceptions altogether undistinguishable. All the colours of poetry, however splendid, can never paint natural objects in such a manner as to make the description be taken for a real landscape. The most lively thought is still inferior to the dullest sensation.

We may observe a like distinction to run through all the other perceptions of the mind. A man in a fit of anger, is actuated in a very different manner from one who only thinks of that emotion. If you tell me, that any person is in love, I easily understand your meaning, and form a just conception of his situation; but never can mistake that conception for the real disorders and agitations of the passion. When we reflect on our past sentiments and affections, our thought is a faithful mirror, and copies its objects truly; but the colours which it employs are faint and dull, in comparison of those in which our original perceptions were clothed. It requires no nice

discernment or metaphysical head to mark the distinction between them.

Here therefore we may divide all the perceptions of the mind into two classes or species, which are distinguished by their different degrees of force and vivacity. The less forcible and lively are commonly denominated Thoughts or Ideas. The other species want a name in our language, and in most others; I suppose, because it was not requisite for any, but philosophical purposes, to rank them under a general term or appellation. Let us, therefore, use a little freedom, and call them Impressions; employing that word in a sense somewhat different from the usual. By the term impression, then, I mean all our more lively perceptions, when we hear, or see, or feel, or love, or hate, or desire, or will. And impressions are distinguished from ideas, which are the less lively perceptions, of which we are conscious, when we reflect on any of those sensations or movements above mentioned.

The background color of the screen at which you are now looking is an impression, while your memory of the color of your first dog (if you've had dogs) is merely an idea. Since every idea must be derived from an antecedent impression, Hume supposed, it always makes sense to inquire into the origins of our ideas by asking from which impressions they are derived.

Add to this that each of our ideas and impressions is entirely separable from every other, in Hume's view. The apparent connection of one idea to another is invariably the result of an association that we manufacture ourselves.

From Section III of *Enquiry*:

Though it be too obvious to escape observation, that different ideas are connected together; I do not find that any philosopher has attempted to enumerate or class all the principles of association; a subject, however, that seems worthy of curiosity. To me, there appear to be only three principles of connexion among ideas, namely, Resemblance, Contiguity in time or place, and Cause or Effect.

That these principles serve to connect ideas will not, I believe,

be much doubted. A picture naturally leads our thoughts to the original: the mention of one apartment in a building naturally introduces an enquiry or discourse concerning the others: and if we think of a wound, we can scarcely forbear reflecting on the pain which follows it. But that this enumeration is complete, and that there are no other principles of association except these, may be difficult to prove to the satisfaction of the reader, or even to a man's own satisfaction. All we can do, in such cases, is to run over several instances, and examine carefully the principle which binds the different thoughts to each other, never stopping till we render the principle as general as possible. The more instances we examine, and the more care we employ, the more assurance shall we acquire, that the enumeration, which we form from the whole, is complete and entire.

Experience provides us with both the ideas themselves and our awareness of their association. All human beliefs (including those we regard as cases of knowledge) result from repeated applications of these simple associations.

In Section IV of *Enquiry*, Hume further distinguished between two sorts of belief:

- **Relations of ideas** are beliefs grounded wholly on associations formed within the mind; they are capable of demonstration because they have no external referent.
- **Matters of fact** are beliefs that claim to report the nature of existing things; they are always contingent.

These distinctions are Hume's version of the *a priori* versus *a posteriori* distinction. Mathematical and logical knowledge relies upon relations of ideas; it is uncontroversial but uninformative with respect to knowledge the world. The interesting but problematic propositions of natural science depend upon matters of fact. Abstract metaphysics mistakenly (and fruitlessly) tries to achieve the certainty of the former with the content of the latter.

Matters of Fact and Skepticism

Since genuine information rests upon our belief in matters of fact, Hume was particularly concerned to explain their origin. Such beliefs can reach beyond the content of present sense-impressions and memory, Hume held, only by appealing to presumed connections of cause and effect. But since each idea is distinct and separable from every other, there is no self-evident relation; these connections can only be derived from our experience of similar cases. So the crucial question in epistemology is to ask exactly how it is possible for us to learn from experience.

From *Enquiry*, Section IV, Part 1:

All reasonings concerning matter of fact seem to be founded on the relation of Cause and Effect. By means of that relation alone we can go beyond the evidence of our memory and senses. If you were to ask a man, why he believes any matter of fact, which is absent; for instance, that his friend is in the country, or in France; he would give you a reason; and this reason would be some other fact; as a letter received from him, or the knowledge of his former resolutions and promises. A man finding a watch or any other machine in a desert island, would conclude that there had once been men in that island. All our reasonings concerning fact are of the same nature. And here it is constantly supposed that there is a connexion between the present fact and that which is inferred from it. Were there nothing to bind them together, the inference would be entirely precarious. The hearing of an articulate voice and rational discourse in the dark assures us of the presence of some person: Why? because these are the effects of the human make and fabric, and closely connected with it. If we anatomize all the other reasonings of this nature, we shall find that they are founded on the relation of cause and effect, and that this relation is either near or remote, direct or collateral. Heat and light are collateral effects of fire, and the one effect may justly be inferred from the other.

If we would satisfy ourselves, therefore, concerning the nature of

that evidence, which assures us of matters of fact, we must enquire how we arrive at the knowledge of cause and effect.

I shall venture to affirm, as a general proposition, which admits of no exception, that the knowledge of this relation is not, in any instance, attained by reasonings a priori; but arises entirely from experience, when we find that any particular objects are constantly conjoined with each other. Let an object be presented to a man of ever so strong natural reason and abilities; if that object be entirely new to him, he will not be able, by the most accurate examination of its sensible qualities, to discover any of its causes or effects. Adam, though his rational faculties be supposed, at the very first, entirely perfect, could not have inferred from the fluidity and transparency of water that it would suffocate him, or from the light and warmth of fire that it would consume him. No object ever discovers, by the qualities which appear to the senses, either the causes which produced it, or the effects which will arise from it; nor can our reason, unassisted by experience, ever draw any inference concerning real existence and matter of fact.

This proposition, that causes and effects are discoverable, not by reason but by experience, will readily be admitted with regard to such objects, as we remember to have once been altogether unknown to us; since we must be conscious of the utter inability, which we then lay under, of foretelling what would arise from them. Present two smooth pieces of marble to a man who has no tincture of natural philosophy; he will never discover that they will adhere together in such a manner as to require great force to separate them in a direct line, while they make so small a resistance to a lateral pressure. Such events, as bear little analogy to the common course of nature, are also readily confessed to be known only by experience; nor does any man imagine that the explosion of gunpowder, or the attraction of a loadstone, could ever be discovered by arguments a priori. In like manner, when an effect is supposed to depend upon an intricate machinery or secret structure of parts, we make no difficulty in attributing all our knowledge of it to experience. Who will assert that he can give the

ultimate reason, why milk or bread is proper nourishment for a man, not for a lion or a tiger?

Here, Hume supposed, the most obvious point is a negative one: causal reasoning can never be justified rationally. In order to learn, we must suppose that our past experiences bear some relevance to present and future cases. But although we do indeed believe that the future will be like the past, the truth of that belief is not self-evident. In fact, it is always possible for nature to change, so inferences from past to future are never rationally certain. Thus, in Hume's view, the principle of induction cannot lead to meaningful conclusions about the world, and all beliefs in matters of fact are fundamentally non-rational.

...we always presume, when we see like sensible qualities, that they have like secret powers, and expect that effects, similar to those which we have experienced, will follow from them. If a body of like colour and consistence with that bread, which we have formerly eat, be presented to us, we make no scruple of repeating the experiment, and foresee, with certainty, like nourishment and support. Now this is a process of the mind or thought, of which I would willingly know the foundation. It is allowed on all hands that there is no known connexion between the sensible qualities and the secret powers; and consequently, that the mind is not led to form such a conclusion concerning their constant and regular conjunction, by anything which it knows of their nature. As to past Experience, it can be allowed to give direct and certain information of those precise objects only, and that precise period of time, which fell under its cognizance: but why this experience should be extended to future times, and to other objects, which for aught we know, may be only in appearance similar; this is the main question on which I would insist. The bread, which I formerly eat, nourished me; that is, a body of such sensible qualities was, at that time, endued with such secret powers: but does it follow, that other bread must also nourish me at another time, and that like sensible qualities must always be attended with like secret powers? The consequence seems nowise necessary. At least, it must be

acknowledged that there is here a consequence drawn by the mind; that there is a certain step taken; a process of thought, and an inference, which wants to be explained. These two propositions are far from being the same. I have found that such an object has always been attended with such an effect, and I foresee, that other objects, which are, in appearance, similar, will be attended with similar effects. I shall allow, if you please, that the one proposition may justly be inferred from the other: I know, in fact, that it always is inferred. But if you insist that the inference is made by a chain of reasoning, I desire you to produce that reasoning. The connexion between these propositions is not intuitive. There is required a medium, which may enable the mind to draw such an inference, if indeed it be drawn by reasoning and argument. What that medium is, I must confess, passes my comprehension; and it is incumbent on those to produce it, who assert that it really exists, and is the origin of all our conclusions concerning matter of fact.

Consider Hume's favorite example: our belief that the sun will rise tomorrow. Clearly, this is a matter of fact; it rests on our conviction that each sunrise is an effect caused by the rotation of the earth. But our belief in that causal relation is based on past observations, and our confidence that it will continue tomorrow cannot be justified inductively by reference to the past. So we have no rational basis for believing that the sun will rise tomorrow. Yet we do believe it!

Mitigated Skepticism

Where does this leave us? Hume believed he was carrying out the empiricist program with rigorous consistency. Locke honestly proposed the possibility of deriving knowledge from experience, but did not carry it far enough. Hume demonstrates that empiricism inevitably leads to an utter and total skepticism.

According to Hume, knowledge of pure mathematics is secure because it rests only on the relations of ideas, without presuming

anything about the world. Experimental observations (conducted without any assumption of the existence of material objects) permit us to use our experience in forming useful habits. Any other epistemological effort, especially if it involves the pretense of achieving useful abstract knowledge, is meaningless and unreliable.

The most reasonable position, Hume held, is a "mitigated" skepticism that humbly accepts the limitations of human knowledge while pursuing the legitimate aims of math and science. In our non-philosophical moments, of course, we will be thrown back upon the natural beliefs of everyday life, no matter how lacking in rational justification we know they are.

Hume Summary

David Hume was an empiricist who doubted the principle of cause and effect, the principle of induction, and the possibility of actually knowing an external world. According to Hume, "...every effect is a distinct event from its cause."

- We cannot know *a priori* that such a connection exists between any two events, because, if we were witnessing a supposed causal connection for the first time, simply using reason could not lead us to know that we were seeing cause and effect. We might have witnessed a random occurrence or correlation.
- We cannot know *a posteriori* that there is a causal connection between any two events, because there is nothing in our direct observation of events that denotes that one is a cause and the other an effect.

Hume maintained that inferences from past to future are never rationally certain, and thus, the principle of induction cannot lead to meaningful conclusions about the world. Neither *a priori* activity of

the mind (ideas and the relations of ideas that we come to believe) nor *a posteriori* experience (impressions and the matters-of-fact that we come to believe) can suggest or validate the existence of the external world.

Supplemental resources are available (bottom of page) on Hume's skepticism.

Coursework

Briefly explain Hume's skepticism. Do you think he makes a good argument for his position of doubt? (100 – 150 words)

Note: Submit your response to the appropriate Assignments folder.

2.3.2 Kant: A Reasoned Response to Skepticism

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), an innovative philosopher born in East Prussia (now Germany), appeared on the scene at a time of disarray in the world of Western epistemological thought. Rationalists and empiricists were at serious odds with each other. Pure rationalism did not offer experience a valued place in acquisition of true knowledge. The possibility of acquiring certain knowledge through experience, as we have just seen in our material on David Hume, was in a crisis of skepticism and doubt.

As mentioned previously, asking epistemological questions can entail additional questions about metaphysics; a theory that explains how we acquire knowledge is deeply intertwined with a theory on what is actually "out there" to be known. Kant creates

a complex but compelling theory of knowledge known as **Transcendental Idealism**, which describes truths about the world as both necessary and universal. Kant first published his vast masterwork of epistemology, the *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781 and revised it in 1787. Between editions of the *Critique*, in 1783 he published the *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysic*, in which he presented topics from the *Critique*in a manner that serves as an introduction to it. The *Critique* is regarded by some, (even by Kant!) as intricate and perplexing. Our examination here of Kant and Transcendental Idealism will refer to both works.

Note: Portions of the following material on Kant are adapted from information in **T**he Philosophy Pages by **Garth Kemerling** and is licensed under a **Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0**

Kant's aim was to move beyond the traditional dichotomy between rationalism and empiricism:

- The rationalists had tried to show that we can understand the world by careful use of reason. This guarantees undoubtable knowledge but leaves serious questions about its practical content.
- The empiricists had argued that all of our knowledge must be firmly grounded in experience. Practical content is thus secured, but it turns out that we can be certain of very little.

Kant surmised that both approaches failed because they are premised on similar mistaken assumptions.

Progress in philosophy, according to Kant, requires that we frame the epistemological problem differently:

- The crucial question is how the world comes to be understood by us, not how we can bring ourselves to understand the world.
- We must allow the structure of our concepts to shape our experience of objects, instead of trying, by reason or experience, to make our concepts match the nature of objects.

- We must see our minds as actively interacting with the products of experience, not as passive receivers of perceptions.

The purpose of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is to show how reason determines the conditions under which experience and knowledge are possible. The *Critique*'s Introduction: begins as follows:

I. Of the difference between Pure and Empirical Knowledge

That all our knowledge begins with experience there can be no doubt. For how is it possible that the faculty of cognition should be awakened into exercise otherwise than by means of objects which affect our senses, and partly of themselves produce representations, partly rouse our powers of understanding into activity, to compare to connect, or to separate these, and so to convert the raw material of our sensuous impressions into a knowledge of objects, which is called experience? In respect of time, therefore, no knowledge of ours is antecedent to experience, but begins with it.

But, though all our knowledge begins with experience, it by no means follows that all arises out of experience. For, on the contrary, it is quite possible that our empirical knowledge is a compound of that which we receive through impressions, and that which the faculty of cognition supplies from itself (sensuous impressions giving merely the occasion), an addition which we cannot distinguish from the original element given by sense, till long practice has made us attentive to, and skillful in separating it. It is, therefore, a question which requires close investigation, and not to be answered at first sight, whether there exists a knowledge altogether independent of experience, and even of all sensuous impressions? Knowledge of this kind is called a priori, in contradistinction to empirical knowledge, which has its sources a posteriori, that is, in experience.

In the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysic* (1783) Kant presented the central themes of the first *Critique* in a slightly different manner, starting from instances in which it appears we

have achieved knowledge, and then asking: under what conditions does each case become possible? He began by carefully drawing a pair of crucial distinctions among the judgments we actually make:

The first distinction separates *a priori* from *a posteriori* judgments by reference to the origin of our knowledge of them.

- A *priori* judgments are based upon reason alone, independently of all sensory experience, and therefore apply with strict universality.
- A *posteriori* judgments must be grounded upon experience and are consequently limited and uncertain in the the scope of their applicability.

This distinction marks the difference between necessary and contingent truths.

Second is the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments, according to the information conveyed as their content.

- Analytic judgments are those whose predicates are wholly contained in their subjects. Such judgments simply explicate the subject, making it plain and clear but adding nothing to its concept.
- Synthetic judgments are those whose predicates are wholly distinct from their subjects. Such a judgment adds a connection external to the subject's concept. Synthetic judgments are genuinely informative but require justification by reference to some outside principle.

Kant supposed that previous philosophers had failed to differentiate properly among the possible options available, given these two sets of distinctions. Both Leibniz and Hume had made a single distinction, between:

- matters-of-fact based on sensory experience, and

- the uninformative necessary truths of pure reason.

Kant thought these inadequate and limiting. All four of the logically possible combinations should be considered:

1. Analytic *a posteriori* judgments cannot arise, since there is never any need to appeal to experience in support of an assertion that simply makes its subject plain and clear.
2. Synthetic *a posteriori* judgments are the relatively uncontroversial matters of fact we come to know by means of our sensory experience.
3. Analytic *a priori judgments*, everyone agrees, include all merely logical truths and straightforward matters of definition; they are necessarily true.
4. **Synthetic *a priori*** judgments are the crucial case, since only they could provide new information that is necessarily true. Neither Leibniz nor Hume considered the possibility of any such case.

Unlike his predecessors, Kant maintained that synthetic *a priori* judgments not only are possible but actually provide the basis for significant portions of human knowledge. In fact, he supposed that arithmetic and geometry comprise such judgments and that natural science depends on them for its power to explain and predict events.

Mathematics

Consider, for example, our knowledge that two plus three equals five or that the interior angles of any triangle add up to a straight line (180 degrees).

- Kant held that these (and other similar) truths of mathematics

and geometry are synthetic judgments, since they significantly contribute (add) to our knowledge of the world. The sum of the interior angles is not contained in the concept of a triangle.

- Yet, clearly, such truths are known *a priori*, since they apply with strict and universal necessity to all of the objects of our experience, without having been derived from that experience itself.

In these instances, Kant supposed, no one will ask whether or not we have synthetic *a priori* knowledge; plainly, we do. The question is, how do we come to have such knowledge? If experience does not supply the required connection between the concepts involved, what does?

Kant's answer is that we do it ourselves!

Conformity with the truths of mathematics is a precondition that we impose upon every possible object of our experience. In order to be perceived by us, any object must be regarded as being uniquely located in space and time, so it is the temporal-spatial framework itself that provides the missing connection between the concept of the triangle and that of the sum of its angles.

Space and time, Kant argued, are the "pure forms of sensible intuition" under which we perceive what we do.

Understanding mathematics in this way makes it possible to rise above an old controversy between rationalists and empiricists regarding the very nature of space and time.

- Leibniz had maintained that space and time are not intrinsic features of the world itself, but merely a product of our minds.
- Newton, on the other hand, had insisted that space and time are absolute, not merely a set of spatial and temporal relations.

Kant now declares that both of them were correct! Space and time are absolute, and they do derive from our minds. As synthetic *a priori* judgments, the truths of mathematics are both informative and necessary.

This is a transcendental deduction, Kant's method of reasoning that *a priori* concepts apply correctly/logically to knowledge of the particular. But there is a price to be paid for the certainty we achieve in this manner. Since mathematics derives from our own sensible intuition, we can be absolutely sure that it must apply to everything we perceive. But for the same reason, that it applies from our own sensible intuition, we can have no assurance that it has anything to do with the way things are apart from our own perception of them.

Note: Kant's use of the term "intuition" refers to a bit of sensory awareness, including any called up by the memory.

Natural Science

No less than in mathematics, in natural science Kant held that synthetic *a priori* judgments provide the necessary foundations for human knowledge. The most general laws of nature, like the truths of mathematics, cannot be justified by experience, yet must apply to it universally.

- Hume's conclusive demonstration — matters-of-fact rest upon an unjustifiable belief about necessary connection between causes and their effects — seems correct.
- But Kant's more constructive approach is to offer a transcendental argument from the fact that we do have knowledge of the natural world to the truth of synthetic *a priori* propositions about the structure of our experience of it.

As we saw with mathematics, applying the concepts of space and time as forms of sensible intuition is a necessary condition for any perception. But the possibility of scientific knowledge requires that our experience of the world be not only perceivable but thinkable as well, and Kant held that the general intelligibility of experience entails the satisfaction of two further conditions:

- First, it must be possible in principle to arrange and organize the chaos of our many individual sensory images by tracing the connections that hold among them. Kant called this the "synthetic unity of the sensory manifold."
- Second, it must be possible in principle for a single subject to perform this organization by discovering the connections among perceived images. This is satisfied by what Kant called the "transcendental unity of apperception."

Experiential knowledge is thinkable only if there is some regularity in what is known and there is some knower in whom that regularity can be represented. Since we do actually have knowledge of the world as we experience it, Kant held, both of these conditions are the case.

Deduction of the Categories

Since individual images are perfectly separable as they occur within the sensory manifold, connections between them can be drawn only by the knowing subject in which the principles of connection are to be found. As in mathematics, so in science, the synthetic *a priori* judgments must derive from the structure of the understanding itself.

Consider the sorts of judgments distinguished by logicians (in Kant's day). Each of these judgments has:

- a quantity: universal, particular, singular
- a quality: affirmative, negative, or infinite
- a relation: categorical, hypothetical, or disjunctive
- a modality: possible, actual, or necessary

Kant supposed that any intelligible thought can be expressed in judgments such as these. It follows that any thinkable experience

must be understood in these ways, and that we are justified in projecting this entire way of thinking outside ourselves, as the inevitable structure of any possible experience.

The result of Kant's "transcendental logic" is his schematized table of Transcendental Concepts of the Understanding. These are the concepts, or categories, of understanding used when thinking about the world. Each category is the subject of a separate section of the *Critique.*

Kant's Transcendental Concepts

Quantity	Quality	Relation	Modality
Unity	Reality	Substance	Possibility
Plurality	Negation	Cause	Existence
Totality	Limitation	Community	Necessity

Our most fundamental convictions about the natural world derive from these concepts, according to Kant. The most general principles of natural science are not empirical generalizations from what we have experienced. Rather they are synthetic *a priori* judgments about what we could experience, judgments in which these concepts provide the crucial connectives.

Kant Summary

Kant believed that the external world exists and that gaining knowledge of it is possible using both information from the senses and rational abilities. He reasoned that our minds actively interact with the products of experience, instead of passively receiving perceptions. The structure of our concepts shapes our experience of objects; we make sense of the perceptions that bombard us. We come to know principles such as cause and effect and induction by making the connections between relevant concepts of our

understanding and our experiences of the world, for example, that a particular effect follows a particular causative event by necessity. Such truths are both necessary and universal; they are synthetic *a priori* judgments that provide new information about the world.

Kant's **transcendental idealism** maintains that synthetic *a priori* judgments are possible and provide the basis for significant portions of human knowledge by connecting categories (concepts) of our understanding to our experiences. Kant is not a traditional empiricist because he rejects the notion of the mind as a blank slate, until inscribed by experience, nor is Kant a traditional rationalist, because he does not accept the possibility of *a priori* ideas that are independent of experience of the world.

Coursework

Explain how an active-versus-passive role of the human mind contributes to Kant's position that the external world is knowable? (100 – 200 words)

Note: Submit your response to the appropriate Assignments folder.

Complete the Unit Test by the date on the Schedule of Work.

Supplemental Resources

Hume

These short videos on Hume's skepticism review material provided in the content. [The second video may a queue up automatically when the first is complete.]

• **PHILOSOPHY: Epistemology: Hume's Skepticism and Induction, Part 1**
• **PHILOSOPHY: Epistemology: Hume's Skepticism and Induction, Part 2**

UNIT 3: PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

11. Philosophy of Science - Overview and Coursework

Broadly speaking, Philosophy of Science is concerned with the concepts and methods of science, including the principles underlying science. Philosophers of science do not do science (that's what scientists do.) Philosophers of science talk about the process and meaning of doing science. This course focuses on scientific theories, models, and methods, concepts that are among the main concerns of Philosophy of Science. This branch of philosophy is wide-ranging, and intersects with various other philosophical concerns, including ethics, logic, and epistemology.

We concluded the Epistemology unit with topics centering around the concept of causality, a topic of strong interest to both Epistemology and Philosophy of Science. Can we acquire knowledge about the world using the principles of cause and effect? Based on event correlations we have seen in the past, can we make inductive claims about what will happen in the future?

- David Hume's answer to this question was "no," that we have no rational basis to suppose any event to be a cause or effect of some other event, and further, that we cannot rely on causal reasoning to gain certainty about the world as it is now or will be in the future.
- In our brief introduction to Immanuel Kant, we met a philosopher who believed that he had successfully proved Hume to be wrong, that causal reasoning is a valid source of

knowledge. For Kant, a principle such as cause and effect is a category of our understanding that we bring to experience, and we can acquire new (synthetic) knowledge of the world that has necessary (*a priori*) truth. Kant's "solution" hardly settled the matter nor has it been well understood in terms of exactly how it succeeds, logically or practically, in removing uncertainty from causal relationships. Still, Kant's recognition of both experience and reason as critical elements for knowledge of the world was a step forward!

Philosophy of Science is concerned with questions similar to those we encountered with Epistemology. Indeed, both are concerned with how we know; the names of both are derived from words that mean "knowledge":

- Epistemology: from Greek, *epistēmē*, knowledge, and *epistasthai*, to know or know how to
- Science: from Latin *scientia*, knowledge, and *scire*, to know.

In fact, "science" as we know it today was formerly "done" within the discipline of philosophy. The following short video explains how use of the term "science" emerged as the descriptor for the former discipline known as "natural philosophy." What philosophers do now is "meta-science;" that is, they speak about science, they do not do science.

Video

The Philosophical Breakfast Club [CC-BY-NC-ND]

Objectives

Successful completion this unit will enable you to understand and discuss:

- Aristotle's use of causes for explaining the natural world
- The development of the scientific method; proceeding from observations to theory, and from theory to observations
- The nature and importance of falsifiability in confirming theories.
- How shifting paradigms relate to scientific revolutions

Coursework

The Course Content for this unit provides the primary reading material, links to any additional assigned reading or viewing resources, and assigned coursework. The unit concludes with a test. Material is presented in these subsections:

3.1 Explaining the Natural World
3.2 Characterizing Scientific Progress

Dates for completing all assigned work are in the Schedule of Work.

Philosophers We Will Meet

In our investigation and readings for Philosophy of Science, we will encounter the work of these philosophers. You may select a name here to link to a short biography, or you may link to the same

information at your first encounter the philosopher's name in the Course Content sections:

Aristotle
Francis Bacon
Karl Popper
Thomas Kuhn

Key Terms

It is important to understand the meaning and use of these terms.

Axiom: A statement held to be self-evidently true and so neither requiring nor capable of proof.

Causation: The relationship between two events such that the first (the cause) brings about the second (the effect.)

Falsifiability: The ability of a hypothesis or theory to be tested and thereby shown to be false by observable means.

Generalization: An argument that proceeds from knowledge about particular/selected members of a group or class to a claim about the entire group or class.

Hypothesis: A general principle, tentatively put forward for the purposes of scientific explanation, and subject to refutation by empirical evidence.

Ockham's Razor: "It is pointless to do with more what can be done with less" – an often quoted statement on the merits of simplicity, by William of Ockham (1285 – 1349), an English philosopher who defended the work of Aristotle.

Paradigm: A central model or template, along with its background assumptions, within which science works.

Scientific Revolution: A period of transition in scientific progress when a new paradigm replaces an old.

12. 3.1 Explaining the Natural World

3.1.1 Aristotle: Searching for Causes

Note: Portions of the following material on Aristotle are adapted from information in The Philosophy Pages by **Garth Kemerling** and is licensed under a **Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0**

Aristotle (384-322 BCE) was the greatest and most influential student of Plato, whom we met in our introduction to rationalism in the Epistemology unit. Aristotle's extensive works are marked by his gradual philosophical departure from Plato's teachings of abstract thought about the realm of forms.

For Aristotle, logic is the means by which we come to know anything. Human knowledge seeks to establish that things have features of a certain kind. In Aristotle's system of thought, propositions in the subject-predicate form are the primary expressions of truth about the world; they convey features or properties inherent in individual substances. He believed his logical scheme to accurately represent the true nature of reality. By beginning with simple descriptions of particular things, he thought it possible to eventually assemble the information needed for a comprehensive view of the world. Aristotle's formal rules for correct reasoning — the basic principles of categorical logic — were universally accepted by Western philosophers until the nineteenth century.

Aristotle believed that universal truths could be known from particular things by way of induction. However, he did not consider knowledge acquired by induction to be scientific knowledge. Nevertheless, induction was a necessary preliminary to the main business of scientific enquiry, providing the primary premises required for scientific demonstrations.

Axioms, the self-evident first principles for which no proof is

required, according to Aristotle, both necessitate and explain the truths of science.

Applying the principles developed in his logical treatises, Aristotle offered a general account of the operation of individual substances in the natural world. He drew a significant distinction between these two sorts of things:

- those that move only when moved by something else, and
- those that are capable of moving themselves.

Aristotle proposed a proper description of things of each sort, and he also attempted to explain why they function as they do. In considering bodies and their externally-produced movement, Aristotle shaped his discussion of physical science with three crucial distinctions:

1. Because of the difference in their origins, different accounts need to be offered for the functions of natural things and those of artifacts.
2. Clear distinction is needed between the basic material and the form, which jointly constitute the nature of any individual thing.
3. Recognition is required of the difference between things as they are and things considered in light of their ends or purposes.

With these distinctions in mind, Aristotle proposed four explanatory factors, or causes, required for having knowledge and understanding of things in the natural world:

The **material cause** is the basic stuff out of which the thing is made. The material cause of a house, for example, would include all the building materials. They are all part of an explanation of the house because it could not exist unless they were present in its composition.

The **formal cause** is the pattern or essence with which these

materials conform when assembled. The formal cause of our exemplary house would be the design and structure that might be called for in its drafted plans. This, too, is part of the explanation since the materials would be only a pile of rubble (or a different house) if they were not specified in this way.

The **efficient cause** is the agent or force immediately responsible for bringing the material and form together to produce the thing. In the case of our house, the efficient cause would include the carpenters, masons, plumbers, and other workers who used these materials to build the house in accordance with the plans for its construction. Clearly the house would not be what it is without their contribution.

The **final cause** is the end or purpose for which a thing exists. For our house, the final cause would be to provide shelter for human beings. This is part of the explanation of the existence of the house, because it would not have been built unless someone needed it as a place to live.

Aristotle's philosophy of the natural world (what we would now refer to as "philosophy of science") claims that the world is explained by searching out the causes of natural phenomena. He believed that all four types of causes are necessary elements in any adequate account of the existence and nature of things. The absence or modification of any one of them would result it the existence of a different sort of thing. An explanation that includes all four causes completely captures the significance and reality of the thing itself.

Causation, the relationship between two events such that the first (the cause) brings about the second (the effect) has been ingrained in common thinking at least since Aristotle, though our modern conception of cause-and-effect is less complicated than Aristotle's. As we have seen, however, the possibility of knowing that causal relationships actually exist was rejected by David Hume.

3.1.2 Bacon: Observation and Induction

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was an Englishman with many intellectual passions: law; politics; literature; history; and philosophy, including topics related to acquiring knowledge of the natural world. Among his other viewpoints that were revolutionary for his times, Bacon took exception to the prevailing Aristotelean preference for deduction over induction as the certain path to knowledge. Further, Bacon rejected the conception of natural philosophy (science!) as an understanding of necessary causes.

Bacon was an empiricist who believed that acquiring knowledge of the natural world must proceed inductively:

- first, making recurring and exhaustive observations, collecting as many facts as possible.
- and then drawing conclusions that generalize the findings from specific observations.

His method — proceeding from copious observation to formulation of a theory — became a predominant method for doing science during Bacon's own time and had influence for centuries that followed.

Objections to Bacon's method for doing science include these criticisms:

- Induction does not bring the level of certainty we seek in science.
- There is no clarity as to when enough observation and investigation has occurred to finally arrive at a generalized conclusion.
- The slow and plodding pace at which the method proceeds does not accommodate the spontaneous and visionary process that often leads to new scientific knowledge.

A supplemental resource is available (bottom of page) on Bacon's use of induction.

The following video reinforces the important role that creative ideas play in furthering scientific knowledge. It also serves as a good transition to the next topic.

Video

How simple ideas lead to scientific discoveries [CC-BY-NC-ND]

3.1.3 Working from Hypotheses

Is moving from observations to formulating a theory the only method for doing science? As demonstrated in Adam Savage's TED-Ed video, scientific progress often starts with imagination and creative ideas (hypotheses) that influence the direction for observations, fact gathering, and testing. The Hypothetico-Deductive (H-D) method (or simply "the hypothetical method") is a different model for the process of scientific discovery.

The process involves formulation of a testable hypothesis that could conceivably be falsified by observable data. If an observation or a test does run contrary to the predictions of the hypothesis, then the hypothesis is falsified; it must be rejected or reformulated.

Recall the valid argument form *modus tollens* from our Logic Unit, letting H=hypothesis, E=expected result:

If H, then E
not E
not H

On the other hand, if a test or observation does meet predicted expectations, this compatible outcome strengthens the hypothesis and lends it credibility, but it does not confirm it. Recall the fallacy of affirming-the-consequent from the Logic Unit; this fallacy is committed when the expected result (consequent) of an implication occurs and the arguer claims the antecedent to be true. The occurrence of the expected result cannot provide logical certainty. Some other hypothesis might be capable of creating the same result:

If H, then E

E

H

But expected results are steps forward. Every new test/observation found to meet expected results adds to the strength of the hypothesis. When no test is found to falsify the hypothesis, it may become accepted, at least tentatively, as a theory.

It's important to point out that observations (empirically acquired facts) are not devalued by this method, they are essential, just a they are with inductive generalizations. Initial (or early) hypotheses (potential theories) may precede and set the direction for observations and experiments. The initial problem or question addressed by the hypothesis was most likely sparked initially by some observations.

In the next section, among other topics, we will look more closely at **falsifiability** and tentative acceptance of hypotheses and theories.

A supplemental resource is available (bottom of page) on the scientific method.

3.1.4 Scientific Methods Summarized

The interplay of hypothesizing, observing and testing, reformulating

hypotheses, and so forth, suggests that there may be no single, universal scientific method, especially one that might fit the multitude of scientific disciplines. Specific disciplines have particular steps and methods for doing science. There may be not be a distinct, universal process. But as philosophers of science we might expect certain basic activities to take place.

Induction and Generalization

1. Accumulation of as many observed facts as possible concerning the topic under investigation.
2. Generalization from the particular observations that infer a general theory from accumulated particular facts.
3. Repeated accumulation of more particular facts to assess if the generalization continues to hold true. The more particular instances, the more confirmation and the higher the probability of the correctness of the generalization-based theory.

Hypothetical Method

1. Recognition/identification of a problem or question requiring investigation. This step probably involved prior empirical observations.
2. Proposal of a hypothesis that explains the problem or answers the question and is capable of being verified by empirical means.
3. Verification of the hypotheses through empirical activities including observations, experiments, or tests.
4. If any verification step falsifies the hypotheses, a return to step 2, a new hypothesis, is required.

5. If verification steps repeatedly support/strengthen the
   hypothesis, it may be accepted, at least tentatively, as a theory.

Coursework

Compare Bacon's method of generalization with the hypothetical
method in terms of their respective emphases on and use of (1)
induction versus deduction (2) reason vs experience. (100-200
words)

   Note: Submit your response to the appropriate Assignments
folder.

Supplemental Resources

Bacon

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP) **Francis Bacon**. Read
section 2.k on Induction, This link should take you to that location.

Scientific Method

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP) **Scientific Method**. Read
the introduction and section 1 and section 6 , through 6.1.

13. 3.2 Characterizing Scientific Progress

3.2.1 Popper: Falsifiability and Science

Karl Popper (1902 – 1994) was an Austrian philosopher of science who maintained that our knowledge of the natural world cannot grow by confirming scientific hypotheses but only by using experience and observation to falsify alternative theories. In the last section we saw the logical-argument model to support this assertion. Requiring **falsifiability** for theories (that a theory must entail the possibility of being empirically disproven), led Popper to distinguish between:

- "science" – where theories can be falsified empirically, and
- "pseudo-science" where theories do not predict any falsifiable results.

A well known example of Popper's reasoning for this distinction is his comparison of Einstein's theory of general relativity with Freud's theory of psychoanalysis. Popper believed general relativity to be scientific and psychoanalysis to be pseudoscience. His interpretation lies in the testability of the two theories. He held that general relativity makes predictions that provide opportunity for falsification through experiments and observation; psychoanalysis, on the other hand, can come up with an explanation for any behavior, and is thereby not falsifiable. The upcoming video explains the concept of falsification in Karl Popper's own words from his work *Conjectures and Refutations*, originally published in 1963.

Video

A supplemental resource is available (bottom of page) on the concept of falsifiability.

Coursework

Suppose a promising theory cannot be tested by current methods of experiment, or even by anticipated methods — for example, particle-physics theories with entities too small to observe, or cosmological theories about space where predicted values are too large to be observed. Do you think such endeavors still count as "science?" Explain your position.

Then, consider the question of the cause of global warming. While rising sea levels seem to confirm that warming is real, some hold that the cause of warming cannot be verified to be human activity. Are such claims legitimate reason to redirect scientific investigations?

Essentially, do you think science requires immediate possibility of falsification?

Note: Submit your response to the appropriate Assignments folder.

3.2.2 Scientific Theories

Given the two version of scientific methods we looked at in the

last sub-unit, how do scientific investigations become "laws" or theories?

Induction and Generalization

The generalization 'All polar bears are white' is arrived at by an inductive argument. The more evidence in support of the conclusion the stronger the argument. Enough evidence in support of a generalization moves it from being a simple correlation of observations, to a law-like regularity, sometimes referred to as "nomic" regularity.

Hypothetical Method

When a hypothesis has gathered strength from repeated confirmation of expected result (through tests, observations) and has failed to be falsified (no findings contrary to expected result), it may become accepted as a theory. Hypothetical reasoning produces logical certainty only in the case of falsification; a form of valid deductive argument falsifies the hypothesis. A hypothesis that is not falsified cannot be validated (proven true) with absolute certainty; its confirmation, through repeated occurrence of expected results, attests to its strength and high probability of certainty, but not logical certainty, or truth by necessity. So confirmation of a theory, too, can be seen as inductive.

Strong hypotheses may receive tentative acceptance, sometimes even before being confirmed or disproved. Tentative acceptance is based on a variety of factors that boost their strength, including these:

- **Adequacy** – The extent to which the scope of a hypothesis fits

the facts it is intended to explain. If one hypothesis accounts for the data with greater accuracy, then that hypothesis is more adequate than another. A hypothesis is inadequate to the extent that facts exist for which the hypothesis cannot account.

- **Internal coherence** – The extent to which the ideas or terms in a hypothesis are rationally interconnected.
- **External consistency** – The extent to which a hypothesis agrees (or does not disagree) with other, well-confirmed hypotheses.
- **Fruitfulness** – The extent to which a hypothesis suggests new ideas for future analysis and confirmation.
- **Simplicity** – The extent to which a hypothesis is easy to understand or explain. **Ockham's Razor** expresses the merit of simplicity. When more than one explanation is available, the simpler one is preferable.

A hypothesis may be accepted as a theory if it is the best explanation currently available for the question/problem at hand. But is it still a "theory" which may be replaced by a better one at some point.

3.2.3 Kuhn: Scientific Revolution

Before we move to the idea of "scientific revolution" from a Philosophy-of-Science perspective, it is important to keep in mind that the designation "The Scientific Revolution" is commonly used in reference to a period in modern Western history – the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries. During that time, many new discoveries occurred and a major shift took place in how knowledge was sought.

Video

A structured 10-minute TED video explains five pivotal events of the scientific revolution: **Scientific Revolution [CC-BY-NC-ND]**

Thomas Kuhn (1922 – 1996) was an American physicist and philosopher of science, He shook up some long-standing conceptions of how science progresses in his work *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* (1962, 1970). Kuhn made the point that scientific progress is characterized by discontinuity. Long periods of "normal research" occur within the structures of the current theoretical **paradigm**. These longer periods of scientific activity are interrupted by brief periods of scientific revolution that shift or change the formerly prevailing paradigm to a new one.

A **paradigm** is a central model or template, along with its background assumptions, within which science works. Procedural paradigms control study of the natural world during periods between scientific revolutions.

Kuhn saw science as a social activity in which a community of scientists accept a paradigm consisting of theories and methods of discovery and proof. When scientific revolutions periodically overturn the current paradigm and establish a new one, older scientists try to hold on to the old theories and resist the new paradigm. Kuhn suggests that the new paradigm is not necessarily more true than the old.

Kuhn disagreed with the view held by both induction-generalization and falsification advocates that science grows at a measured and steady pace. Instead, he believed that science makes big leaps forward during the periods of major revolutions.

A supplemental resource is available (bottom of page) on Kuhn's philosophy.

Kuhn's Sustained Impact

In 2012, the 50th anniversary of *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* brought the publication of a 50th anniversary edition and promoted a flurry of journal articles and other media coverage about Kuhn's influence. These retrospective accounts were essentially tributes to Kuhn's contributions and the revisions he inspired to the thinking of his time; they also pointed out controversies and concerns related to Kuhn's work.

John Naughton's article "Thomas Kuhn: the man who changed the way the world looked at science" in *The Guardian* (August 2012)[1] is an upbeat 50-years-later look at *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* and provides an engaging account of Thomas Kuhn's life, work, and contributions. (The bibliographic footnote at the end of this section includes a link to the article.) Fundamental concepts of paradigm shift and scientific revolution are explained without complicated jargon, along with some of the reactions to and implications of Kuhn's work. Naughton points out that "incommensurability" — the inherent impossibility for accurate comparisons between the old paradigm and the new one — is problematic and creates reservation about the overall rationality of science.

David Kaiser's tribute to Kuhn "In retrospect: The Structure of Scientific Revolutions" in the journal *Nature* (April 2012)[2] expresses deep appreciation of Kuhn's contributions as well as candid evaluation of issues that have prevailed in the past 50 years. Kaiser also cites the matter of incommensurability, and he speaks of the slippery nature of "paradigm" — the concept itself — as a word with too many uses and "saddled with too much baggage." Kaiser says:

Perhaps the most radical thrust of Kuhn's analysis, then, was that science might not be progressing toward a truer representation of the world, but might simply be moving away from previous representations. Knowledge need not be cumulative: when paradigms change, whole sets of questions and answers get

dropped as irrelevant, rather than incorporated into the new era of normal science.

Matthew C. Rees' article "The Structure of Scientific Revolution at Fifty" *New Atlantis* (Fall 2012)[3] also points out that paradigm shifts from one worldview to another (rather than a "progressive accumulation of knowledge") have been seen as "a denial of the existence of absolute truth." Does dropping one set of apparent truths (the old paradigm) to adopt a new set of truths (new paradigm) question the possibility of absolute truth? From an epistemological viewpoint, does Kuhn's overall theory of knowledge become skeptical? These are interesting questions!

However, there is no across-the-board agreement that a new paradigm, by definition, really does discard everything about the one it replaces. In his *Nature* article, David Kaiser comments on this: "The field of science studies has changed markedly since 1962. Few philosophers still subscribe to radical incommensurability…" Rees too points out that *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, while intended by Kuhn as speculative, took up a life of its own life, complete with exaggerated interpretations.

In pointing out another criticism of Kuhn's work, Matthew Rees cites an interesting question about the aim of science that straddles the fields of Philosophy of Science and Ethics:

Kuhn was also criticized for building a wall between basic science (that is, science conducted for its own sake) and applied science (that is, science aimed at achieving specific, often socially important, goals). Against Bacon's dictum that the proper aim of science is "the relief of man's estate," Kuhn argued that scientists in the "normal" stage must ignore "socially important problems" and should instead just focus on solving puzzles within the paradigm.

Coursework

What do you think is the aim of science? Do you think science is about answering questions for their own sake? Or is it the job of science to direct its efforts and resources toward solving society's problems? Using examples may help you argue your point.

Note: Post your response in the appropriate Discussion topic.

Complete the Unit Test by the date on the Schedule of Work.

Supplemental Resources

Falsifiability

The first four-minutes of this video are of particular interest. **Falsifiability: One Key to Critical Thinking**

Kuhn

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP) **Scientific Change** Start with Section 3.a. "Kuhn, Paradigms and Revolutions", continue on thru part **i.**, "Key Concepts in Kuhn's Account of Scientific Change."

Citations

[1]Naughton, John. "Thomas Kuhn: the man who changed the way the world looked at science".*The Guardian*. 18 Aug. 2012. **https://www.theguardian.com/science/2012/aug/19/thomas-kuhn-structure-scientific-revolutions**

[2]Kaiser, David. "In retrospect: The Structure of Scientific Revolutions".*Nature*. Vol. 484 Issue 7393, p164-166. MegaSearch AN74219383

[3]Rees, Matthew C.. "The Structure of Scientific Revolution at

Fifty". *New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology & Society*. Fall 2012, Volume 37, p71-86. MegaSearch AN84015009

UNIT 4: METAPHYSICS

14. Metaphysics - Overview and Coursework

Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy that is concerned with questions about the nature and existence of reality. This is expansive field of inquiry encompassing ideas and questions regarding various aspects of reality, for example: minds, physical bodies, space, time, the universe, and causality, to name just a few.

"Backspace" your thoughts briefly to the unit about Epistemology and recall that we considered questions about what can be known. Such questions invite further inquiry about the nature of reality, or what is actually out there to be known. The overall field of Metaphysics is broad. This course focuses on theories and their implications regarding the nature of a person's reality, as a physical body with a mental life. Topics we will encounter are associated with the sub-branch of Metaphysics, the Philosophy of Mind.

Objectives

Successful completion of our study of this module will enable you to understand and explain:

1. The difference between dualism and materialism.
2. How Descartes's method of doubt leads him to dualism.
3. Your opinion on the relationship between mind and body and how the brain figures in it.
4. The basic problem of free will.
5. Your opinions on determinism, compatibilism, and libertarianism, in terms of their relationship to free will.

Coursework

The Course Content for this unit provides the primary reading material, links to any additional assigned reading or viewing resources, and assigned coursework. The unit concludes with a test. Material is presented in these subsections:

4.1 Mind and Body

4.2 Do We Act Freely?

Dates for completing all assigned work are in the Schedule of Work.

Philosophers We Will Meet

In our investigation and readings for Metaphysics, we will encounter the work of these philosophers. You may select a name here to link to a short biography, or you may link to the same information at your first encounter the philosopher's name in the Course Content sections:

Rene Descartes

Patricia Churchland

Baron D'Holbach

William James

Daniel Dennett

Key Terms

It is important to understand the meaning and use of these terms.

Compatibilism: The view that determinism does not rule out what is meant by free will, even though determinism is real and all events are caused.

Determinism: The view that all things are determined by antecedent (prior) conditions; everything is bound by the laws of cause and effect. Every event, including human actions, is brought about by previous events in accordance with universal causal laws that govern the world.

Dualism: The view that material substance (physical body) and immaterial substance (mind or soul) are two separate aspects of the self.

Eliminative Materialism: The view that people's common-sense understanding of the mind is false and that certain classes of mental states that most people believe in do not exist.

Functionalism: An approach to the philosophy of mind that analyzes mental states in terms of what they do, rather than of what they are.

Identity Theory: The view that mental states are brain states.

Indeterminism: The view that some events, including human actions, are not necessarily determined by previous events in accordance with universal causal laws.

Libertarianism: The view that humans do have free will and make genuinely free choices, and that when humans make a choice, they could have made an alternate one.

Materialism: The view that only physical things truly exist. Materialists claim (or promise to explain) every apparent instance of a mental phenomenon as a feature of something physical.

Physicalism: The view that everything can be wholly explained in terms of physical properties, states, and events.

15. 4.1 Mind and Body

4.1.1 Dualism

The view that material substance, — the physical body — and immaterial substance — the mind or soul — are two separate aspects of the self is referred to as **dualism**. Rene Descartes was by no means the first Western dualist (for example, Plato with his Theory of Forms is regarded by some philosophers as a dualist). However, Descartes's dualism took a far-reaching and consequential hold on Western culture that has persisted for centuries. Descartes's deeply personal reasoning and arguments for dualism provide a good starting point for looking at ourselves as physical bodies with mental lives.

Rene Descartes (1596-1650) is a prominent figure in modern philosophy; we encountered him in the Epistemology unit in connection the case he made for innate ideas. Besides leading him to realizations about what we know, Descartes's first-person narrative of discovery, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) details his journey from doubt to certainty on essential recognition of his dual existence as a mind and a body.

Note: Portions of the following material on Descartes are adapted from information in The Philosophy Pages by Garth Kemerling and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0

The *Second Meditation* begins with a review of the *First Meditation.* Descartes is committed to suspension of judgment about anything he can doubt, and his doubts are extensive. He doubts input from his senses, and the material world may very well be a dream. An omnipotent God might render false any proposition he is inclined to believe. With everything seeming doubtable, does it follow that he can be certain of anything at all?

Yes! Descartes claimed that one thing remains true and

undoubtable, even under the strict conditions he imposes: "I am, I exist" seems necessarily true whenever the thought occurs to him. This truth is not dependent on sensory information nor upon the reality of an external world,. He would have to exist even if he was being systematically deceived. Even an omnipotent God could not cause these two conditions to be true, at one and the same time:

1. that he is deceived, and
2. that he does not exist.

To be deceived, he must exist.

   The meditation of yesterday has filled my mind with so many doubts, that it is no longer in my power to forget them. Nor do I see, meanwhile, any principle on which they can be resolved; and, just as if I had fallen all of a sudden into very deep water, I am so greatly disconcerted as to be unable either to plant my feet firmly on the bottom or sustain myself by swimming on the surface. I will, nevertheless, make an effort, and try anew the same path on which I had entered yesterday, that is, proceed by casting aside all that admits of the slightest doubt, not less than if I had discovered it to be absolutely false; and I will continue always in this track until I shall find something that is certain, or at least, if I can do nothing more, until I shall know with certainty that there is nothing certain. Archimedes, that he might transport the entire globe from the place it occupied to another, demanded only a point that was firm and immovable; so, also, I shall be entitled to entertain the highest expectations, if I am fortunate enough to discover only one thing that is certain and indubitable.

   I suppose, accordingly, that all the things which I see are false (fictitious); I believe that none of those objects which my fallacious memory represents ever existed; I suppose that I possess no senses; I believe that body, figure, extension, motion, and place are merely fictions of my mind. What is there, then, that can be esteemed true? Perhaps this only, that there is absolutely nothing certain.

   But how do I know that there is not something different

altogether from the objects I have now enumerated, of which it is impossible to entertain the slightest doubt? Is there not a God, or some being, by whatever name I may designate him, who causes these thoughts, to arise in my mind? ....

...But there is I know not what being, who is possessed at once of the highest power and the deepest cunning, who is constantly employing all his ingenuity in deceiving me. Doubtless, then, I exist, since I am deceived; and, let him deceive me as he may, he can never bring it about that I am nothing, so long as I shall be conscious that I am something. So that it must, in fine, be maintained, all things being maturely and carefully considered, that this proposition 'I am, I exist', is necessarily true each time it is expressed by me, or conceived in my mind.

Descartes's reasoning here is best known in the Latin translation of its expression — *cogito, ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am") — from his work *Discourse on Method* (1637). The expression is not merely an inference from the activity of thinking to the existence of a thinker; it is intended as an intuition of one's own reality, an expression of first-person experience, that cannot be doubted.

Descartes draws an initial consequence directly from his intuitive certainty of his "I think, therefore I am" argument. If I know that I am, he argued, then I must also know what I am. He believed that an understanding of his true nature must be contained implicitly in the content of his awareness.

He asks what this "I" actually is, the "I" who doubts, who may be deceived, and who thinks. Since he gained certainty of his existence while seriously doubting sensory information and the existence of a material world, he believed that the features of his human body could not have been crucial for understanding his "self." This leaves only his thoughts. Thus Descartes concluded that "I am a thing that thinks" (*res cogitans.*) In Descartes' terms, he is a substance whose essence is thought, in all its modes:

But what, then, am I? A thinking thing, it has been said. But what is a thinking thing? It is a thing that doubts, understands, conceives,

affirms, denies, wills, refuses; that imagines also, and perceives. Assuredly it is not little, if all these properties belong to my nature.

Fast-forwarding to the *Sixth Meditation*, Descartes tried to prove that there is a material world and that bodies do really exist. His argument derived from his supposition that divinely-bestowed human faculties of cognition must be designed for some specific purpose. (The existence of God is an integral aspect of Descartes's reasoning.) Since three of our faculties involve representation of physical things, his argument proceeds in three distinct stages.

- First, since the understanding conceives of extended things through its comprehension of geometrical form, it must at least be possible for such things to exist.
- Second, since the imagination is directed exclusively toward the ideas of bodies and of the ways in which they might be purposefully altered, it is probable that there really are such things.
- Finally, since the faculty of sense perception is an entirely passive ability to receive ideas of physical objects produced in me by some external source outside my control, it is certain that such objects must truly exist.

Among the physical objects Descartes perceived are the organic bodies of animals, other human beings, and himself. Finally he is at the point at which he can consider his entire human nature. Is he a thinking thing, concerned with the organism seen in the mirror? And what is the true relation between between the mind and the body of any human being? For Descartes, the two are altogether distinct.

In the *Sixth Meditation* Descartes provides two arguments for his strict mind-body dualism, famously referred to as "Cartesian dualism.":

- First, since the mind and the body can each be conceived clearly and distinctly apart from each other, it follows that God

could cause either to exist independently of the other, and this satisfies the traditional criteria for a metaphysical distinction.
- Second, the essence of body as a geometrically defined region of space includes the possibility of its infinite divisibility, but the mind, despite the variety of its many faculties and operations, must be conceived as a single, unitary, indivisible being; since incompatible properties cannot inhere in any one substance, the mind and body are perfectly distinct.

In summary, the nonmaterial, thinking (soul) part of the self (*res cogitans*) is separate from the physical body (*res extensa*). The nonmaterial part is independent of the physical laws of nature and the body is subject to the physical laws of nature. The soul cannot be substantially affected by death; death is an alteration of the state of the physical body only. This is Cartesian dualism.

The effects of Cartesian dualism have been far-reaching and consequential. Cartesian dualism is deeply entwined with religious beliefs, for example that there is life for the soul after death of the body. Effects of this picture of mind and body have permeated other areas of our lives; for example, Cartesian dualism profoundly affected the practice of medicine for centuries, separating diseases of the body from diseases of the mind.

Among the significant problems with Descartes's radical separation of mind and body is that it does not account adequately for the apparent interaction between the two. (He did propose that the pineal gland of the brain has a connection to the soul, but this does not go far toward explaining life of the soul after death of the body, for example.) Ordinary experience demonstrates that volitions of my mind cause physical movements in the body and that the physical states of the body produce effects on mental operations. However Descartes's view maintains that the nonmaterial mind/soul is independent of the physical laws of nature while the body is subject to these physical laws.

Coursework

Summarize Descartes's personal journey from doubt to his belief in his existence as a thinking being with a physical body. 150-200 words.

Note: Submit your response to the appropriate Assignments folder.

4.1.2 Materialism

Instead of having two kinds of things, having just one kind of reality, physical reality, addresses the issue of causal interconnection between mental states and physical actions. This view, known as **materialism**, holds that everything real is physical and that all mental properties, states, and events can be wholly explained in terms of physical properties, states, and events. (The term **physicalism**, the view that everything can be wholly explained in terms of physical properties, states, and events, is often used interchangeably with "materialism" and will be here in this course; but it may have different connotations in some philosophical discourse.) While the brain as a physical entity figures in materialist theories, some materialist theories differ in how they explain our mental lives and consciousness in terms of physical reality.

Functionalism

The materialist theory known as **functionalism** analyzes mental states in terms of what they do, rather than of what they are. An example often used to explain the basic concept of functionalism

is the mouse trap; the name of the object describes it's function, what is does – it catches mice. It is not referred to as "a piece of wood with a loaded spring on it" or "a small wire cage with a door that closes abruptly." As for mental states, take as an example the sensation of feeling energized, or even euphoric during or after vigorous exercise; this is a functional account, whereas physically it might be described as elevated secretion of endorphins, norepinephrine, dopamine, and/or serotonin.

The brief supplemental resources (bottom of page) provide further examples and review of functionalism.

Functionalism differs from **identity theory**, a form of materialism, in which mental states are actual biological/physical states of the brain, defined in terms of their reality status, what they are, rather than what they do or how they function. (It is interesting to note also that functionalism differs on this point also from Cartesian dualism, which defines what things are, not what they do.)

Eliminative Materialism

The materialist theory called **eliminative materialism**, holds that people's common-sense understanding of the mind is false and that certain classes of mental states that most people believe in do not, in fact, exist. According to eliminative materialists, as progress continues in neuroscience, we will acquire a new biological vocabulary using brain states to describe mental phenomena like "memory" or "belief."

The following description of eliminative materialism is adapted from information in a Wikipedia.org article found at **Wikipedia: Eliminative Materialism [CC-BY-SA]**

Eliminative materialism (also called eliminativism) is the claim that people's common-sense understanding of the mind (or folk psychology) is false and that certain classes of mental states that

most people believe in do not exist. It is a materialist position in the philosophy of mind.

- Some supporters of eliminativism argue that no coherent neural basis will be found for many everyday psychological concepts such as belief or desire, since they are poorly defined. Rather, they argue that psychological concepts of behavior and experience should be judged by how well they reduce to the biological level.
- Other versions entail the non-existence of conscious mental states such as pain and visual perceptions.

An eliminativist position about a class of entities is the view that the class of entities does not exist. For example:

- materialism is eliminativist about the soul
- modern chemists are eliminativist about phlogiston
- modern physicists are eliminativist about the existence of luminiferous ether.

Eliminative materialism is the relatively new (1960s-1970s) idea that certain classes of mental entities that common sense takes for granted, such as beliefs, desires, and the subjective sensation of pain, do not exist. The most common versions are eliminativism about propositional attitudes, as expressed by Paul and Patricia Churchland.

While there is skepticism that future research will find a neural basis for various mental phenomena, philosophers like the Churchlands argue that eliminativism is necessary to open the minds of thinkers to new evidence and better explanations.

Patricia Churchland (1943 –) and **Paul Churchland (1942-)** are committed to the view that neuroscientists, not philosophers, will solve the mind-body problem. Neuroscience is an emerging field, in its early days. While intriguing discoveries have been made about brain activity that accompanies certain behaviors, the present level

of understanding is meager in comparison to what lies ahead. Indeed, philosophers are becoming aware that understanding the mind means understanding the brain. The brain exists, not the mind.

The Churchlands see what is referred to as "folk psychology" (also known as commonsense psychology) is a set of accumulated assumptions and hypotheses used to explain and predict other people's behavior. Folk psychology is just another theory that will be proven wrong. It will be like other theories based on the best knowledge and assumptions available at the time: for example, the earth is flat, or the sun revolves around the earth. The Churchlands, citing examples such a research around the sensations that amputee patients experience in their missing limbs, believe that progress in the materialist endeavor of neuroscience may someday succeed in creating a map of the function and structures of the human brain that completely eradicates folk psychology. The brain exists, not the mind, and philosophers need to work with neuroscientists and psychologists to replace our current "folk psychology" with more accurate terminology and understanding of concepts like "the self" and "consciousness." Updating the present-day vocabulary of "folk psychology" to the terminology of neuroscience (describing brain states) will be like progressing from Aristotelian to Newtonian physics.

A supplemental resource (bottom of page) provides more information on eliminative materialism.

Coursework

Do you think that if you had deeper technical understanding of the brain states associated with the pleasures of life (whatever they may be) your experience would be diminished (less pleasurable)? Enhanced? Would have no effect at all? Explain your reasons. What

about unpleasant emotions or experiences (fear, anger), would a deeper understanding of your brain states be a help or a hindrance?

Note: Post your response to the appropriate Discussion topic.

Materialism and Causal Connections

A significant problem encountered in Descartes's radical mind and body dualism is that it cannot account for the apparent interaction between the two. Ordinary experience demonstrates that volitions of the mind (the will) cause physical movements in the body and that states of the body produce mental effects (including volitions of the mind.)

In seeing both mind and body as physical, materialism resolves this disconnect; the laws of cause and effect apply to the physical world. Indeed, causality can explain the interactions between our physical bodies and our mental lives. At the same time, causality invites a new question about ourselves. If every action is caused by a previous event, are our choices pre-determined? Are we acting freely when we make choices?

Supplemental Resources

Functionalism

Functionalism in 10 Minutes. This 10-minute video provides a clear presentation of functionalism.

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP) **Functionalism**. Read Section 2, The Core Idea.

Eliminative Materialism

Patricia Churchland on Eliminative Materialism Patricia Churchland explains her theory of eliminative materialism.

16. 4.2 Do We Act Freely?

As we saw in our Mind and Body topic, Descartes's dualism cannot explain interactions between the mind and the body, neither ordinary acts of will that create physical movements of the body, nor states of the body that produce mental effects.

Materialism, on the other hand, considers both mind and body as physical "substance" and can, thereby, account for mind-body interactions. The laws of cause and effect apply to the physical world, and causality explains the interactions between our physical bodies and our mental lives. So, then we must ask:

If, according to the laws of causality, every action is caused by a prior event, does a person exercise free choice, or is every decision the effect of a prior event/cause?

A primary reason for concern over this question relates to moral responsibility. If we cannot make free choices, how can we be held accountable for our actions? We will consider moral actions in depth in the next module, on Ethics. For now, keep in mind that there is a lot stake as we look at the issue of free will.

Determinism is the view that all things are determined by antecedent (prior) conditions. Everything physical is bound by the laws of cause and effect. Every event, **including human actions**, is brought about by previous events in accordance with universal causal laws that govern the world. It is important to keep in mind that determinism is not the same as "predictability." The events of the universe are too vast for rationally predicting a necessary and inevitable future based on past events.

A supplemental resource (bottom of page) explores the distinction between determinism and predictability.

Indeterminism holds that some events, including human actions, are not **necessarily** determined by previous events in accordance with universal causal laws. Some indeterminist theories assert the possibility of free will. There are also indeterminist theories related

to other disciplines with metaphysical import, for example, in physics with regard to the behavior of micro-particles.

Libertarianism is an indeterminist theory about the possibility of free will. Libertarianism is the view that humans do have free will and make genuinely free choices, and that when humans make a choice, they could have chosen alternatively. (If you are a libertarian, then are you are an indeterminist; but if you are an indeterminist, you are not necessarily a libertarian.)

Compatibilism is the view that determinism does not rule out what is meant by free will, even though determinism is real and all events are caused. In general, compatibilists assert that we can consider human actions free in that they are internally and consciously motivated by our desires, rather than caused by external influences or constraints. Individual compatibilist philosophers have distinct expressions of their conceptions of "freely chosen" actions. We will examine one compatibilist philosopher later in this topic.

Supplemental resources (bottom of page) explore the general issue of the possibility of free will's compatibility with causal determinism.

4.2.1 D'Holbach's Case for Determinism

Paul Henri Thiery, **Baron D'Holbach (1723 – 1789)**, a French-German philosopher and encyclopedist, was a prominent figure in the French Enlightenment, noted for his passionate materialism, atheism, and writings critical of religion. The excerpts cited below are from his work ,*The System of Nature* (1770), Volume 1, "CHAP. XI. Of the system of man's free-agency."

D'Holbach, as an empiricist and a materialist, readily acknowledges that events in the physical world, which includes the

biological world, are necessarily governed by the laws of cause and effect.

It has been already sufficiently proved, that the soul is nothing more than the body, considered relatively to some of its functions, more concealed than others: it has been shewn, that this soul, even when it shall be supposed immaterial, is continually modified conjointly with the body; is submitted to all its motion; that without this it would remain inert and dead: that, consequently, it is subjected to the influence of those material, to the operation those physical causes, which give impulse to the body; of which the mode of existence, whether habitual or transitory, depends upon the material elements by which it is surrounded; that form its texture; that constitute its temperament; that enter into it by the means of the aliments; that penetrate it by their subtility; the faculties which are called intellectual, and those qualities which are styled moral, have been explained in a manner purely physical; entirely natural: in the last place, it has been demonstrated, that all the ideas, all the systems, all the affections, all the opinions, whether true or false, which man forms to himself, are to be attributed to his physical powers; are to be ascribed to his material senses.

Humans, as part of the biological world, are subject to the laws of cause and effect.

Thus man is a being purely physical; in whatever manner he is considered, he is connected to universal Nature: submitted to the necessary, to the immutable laws that she imposes on all the beings she contains, according to their peculiar essences; conformable to the respective properties with which, without consulting them, she endows each particular species.

Humans are incapable of acting as free agents, it would be unnatural, and impossible. Humans cannot be both part of nature and outside of nature.

As a part, subordinate to the great whole, man is obliged to experience its influence. To be a free agent it were needful that each individual was of greater strength than the entire of Nature; or, that he was out of this Nature: who, always in action herself,

obliges all the beings she embraces, to act, and to concur to her general motion.... In short, man would be an unnatural being; totally incapable of acting in the manner we behold.

The biological explanation for what we consider to be "the will" is brain activity, reacting to experience. In effect we are products of our experiences, we remember and act accordingly.

The will, as we have elsewhere said, is a modification of the brain, by which it is disposed to action or prepared to give play to the organs. This will is necessarily determined by the qualities, good or bad, agreeable or painful, of the object or the motive that acts upon his senses; or of which the idea remains with him, and is resuscitated by his memory. In consequence, he acts necessarily; his action is the result of the impulse he receives either from the motive, from the object, or from the idea, which has modified his brain, or disposed his will.

Novel (unexpected) "dispositions of the will" should not be mistaken for "free" actions; instead they are explained by new causative experiences. Such experiences include exposure to new ideas. Still it is the brain that is modified which in turn effects the new disposition.

When he does not act according to this impulse, it is because there comes some new cause, some new motive, some new idea, which modifies his brain in a different manner, gives him a new impulse, determines his will in another way; by which the action of the former impulse is suspended: thus, the sight of an agreeable object, or its idea, determines his will to set him in action to procure it; but if a new object or a new idea more powerfully attracts him, it gives a new direction to his will, annihilates the effect of the former, and prevents the action by which it was to be procured.

Deliberation (appearing to be making a considered "free" choice) is merely a case of delayed effect when an experience brings confusion.

Man is said to deliberate when the action of the will is suspended; this happens when two opposite motives act alternately upon him. To deliberate, is to hate and to love in succession; it is to be

alternately attracted and repelled; it is to be moved sometimes by one motive, sometimes by another. Man only deliberates when he does not distinctly understand the quality of the objects from which he receives impulse, or when experience has not sufficiently apprised him of the effects, more or less remote, which his actions will produce....When the soul is assailed by two motives that act alternately upon it, or modify it successively, it deliberates; the brain is in a sort of equilibrium, accompanied with perpetual oscillations, sometimes towards one object, sometimes towards the other, until the most forcible carries the point, and thereby extricates it, from this state of suspense, in which consists the indecision of his will.

Choice is an illusion. Deliberation preceding choice is only delay of a <u>necessary</u> effect, and the <u>necessary</u> choice is one that has "direct advantage."

Choice by no means proves the free-agency of man; he only deliberates when he does not yet know which to choose of the many objects that move him, he is then in an embarrassment, which does not terminate, until his will as decided by the greater advantage he believes be shall find in the object he chooses, or the action he undertakes. From whence it may be seen that choice is necessary, because he would not determine for an object, or for an action, if he did not believe that he should find in it some direct advantage.

Humans may live and act as though they are making free choices, they may think they are "free" because they just don't understand the complexity of the cause-and-effect web of experience that controls them.

It is the great complication of motion in man, it is the variety of his action, it is the multiplicity of causes that move him, whether simultaneously or in continual succession, that persuades him he is a free agent: if all his motions were simple, if the causes that move him did not confound themselves with each other, if they were distinct, if his machine was less complicated, he would perceive that all his actions were necessary, because he would be enabled to recur instantly to the cause that made him act.

The causal web that necessitates human action includes not only experiences but also innate biological nature.

When it is said, that man is not a free agent, it is not pretended to compare him to a body moved by a simple impulsive cause: he contains within himself causes inherent to his existence; he is moved by an interior organ, which has its own peculiar laws; which is itself necessarily determined, in consequence of ideas formed from perceptions, resulting from sensations, which it receives from exterior objects.

D'Holbach Summary

D'Holbach thought humans to be ordinary members of the biological natural world, subject to nature's laws of cause and effect. Even it we act as if we are free and really want it to be true, that does not make it actually true. We are wholly the products of the experiences we encounter and the natural processes of our biological composition.

4.2.2 James's Case for Indeterminism

The American philosopher **William James (1842 – 1910)** had several areas of interest, and expertise. In his work in psychology, he saw the self/person as a continuous "stream of consciousness" capable of exercising free will. As a religious scholar, he thought religious practice to be firmly grounded in rationally chosen beliefs that lie beyond the scope of reason or evidence. In the *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* James presents his position for free will and against determinism.

For James, in matters of choice, the availability of two (or more) options is essential and must have these further qualities:

1. Each option must hold some minimal degree of viability in terms of appealing to your belief system.
2. The choice among them is not avoidable, cannot be circumvented; some course of action is inevitable.
3. The outcome is momentous, not trivial, in the sense that the alternatives have significance for one's life.

James argued that it is appropriate to resolve such cases on non-rational grounds, as a matter of choice, passion, or volition. In the initial essay, "The Will to Believe," he wrote:

The thesis I defend is, briefly stated, this: *Our passional nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds; for to say, under such circumstances, "Do not decide, but leave the question open," is itself a passional decision,—just like deciding yes or no,—and is attended with the same risk of losing the truth.* The thesis thus abstractly expressed will, I trust, soon become quite clear.

He continued in the essay "The Dilemma of Determinism;"

A common opinion prevails that the juice has ages ago been pressed out of the free-will controversy, and that no new champion can do more than warm up stale arguments which every one has heard. This is a radical mistake. I know of no subject less worn out, or in which inventive genius has a better chance of breaking open new ground,—not, perhaps, of forcing a conclusion or of coercing assent, but of deepening our sense of what the issue between the two parties really is, of what the ideas of fate and of free-will imply.....I thus disclaim openly on the threshold all pretension to prove to you that the freedom of the will is true. The most I hope is to induce some of you to follow my own example in assuming it true, and acting as if it were true. If it be true, it seems to me that this is involved in the strict logic of the case. Its truth ought not

to be forced willy-nilly down our indifferent throats. It ought to be freely espoused by men who can equally well turn their backs upon it. In other words, our first act of freedom, if we are free, ought in all inward propriety to be to affirm that we are free.

The initial and foundational choice that one can make is to affirm that we are free! James goes on to make an impassioned argument against determinism. He points out that determinism offers only one possible future, the one determined by the past and present. Given that there are only two possibilities, that the world is determined or that the world is undetermined, we must use the information that we have to decide which to believe. Since we do not have sufficient facts either way, we must chose which theory to believe based on our lived experience. Since we live as if (and feel as if) we are free, James says that an undetermined universe is more rational.

Given that often we do not have sufficient information to know if an action was determined or undetermined, James points out that perspective of determinism leaves unappealing and impractical options for leading a life worth living. He uses the "judgment of regret" ("Hardly an hour passes in which we do not wish that something might be otherwise") to illustrate how a determinist viewpoint minimizes both the significance of evil and our reactions to it. In a determined world, our options are:

- pessimism, by accepting the evil as necessary,
- an irrational optimism that all is for the best, or
- that our perceptions of actions as evil are only subjective assessments.

James argues that to make life worth living, it is more practical as well as more rational to reject determinism.

James Summary

William James was the type of indeterminist referred to as a libertarian; he believed that humans make free choices, that they have free will, and when human beings make a choice they could have done otherwise. In his view, the fact that most people live their lives as if they are making free choices is strong evidence that we do have free will. Faced with the choice between regarding the world as either determined or undetermined, James thought indeterminism a more rational choice, since we live as if this were so.

A supplemental resource (bottom of page) describes James's position on human freedom.

Coursework

Consider the two positions we have studied at this point, D'Holbach's determinism and James' libertarian rejection of determinism. Do you think James's reasons for rejecting determinism are convincing? Explain your response.

Note: Post your response to the appropriate Discussion topic.

4.2.3 Dennett's Case for Compatibilism

Generally speaking, compatibilists acknowledge that determinism and causality are real and that all events are caused, but they do not rule out free will. Compatibilists see freely taken actions as those that are prompted ("caused") from within and represent our desires for what we really want to do. Powers outside our consciousness

do not force choices that are made freely. Individual compatibilist philosophers have particular ways of describing both what they mean by "free will" and what kinds of external and internal factors may inspire or constrain free choices.

Daniel Dennett (1942 –) is an American philosopher and cognitive scientist who focuses on the philosophy of mind, philosophy of science, and philosophy of biology, with special interest in evolutionary biology. As a materialist, he regards the human mind as simply the workings of a complex brain.

Dennett's compatibilism has an evolutionary perspective. In his book *Freedom Evolves*(2003), he argues just as other physical and genetic attributes are products of evolution by natural selection, so are aspects of culture such as freedom and morality. Human free will has advanced as part of the evolution of human consciousness and works the way we want free will to work, by making life worth living.

Dennett, a scientist as well as a philosopher, is committed to determinism and the laws of causality. He agrees that we do not have free will in the metaphysical sense of an immaterial soul that is not subject to causation. Bur that does not mean we have no free will at all. We have evolved to hold each other responsible for actions and choices, without the need for free will in a metaphysical sense. Dennett claims his conception of free will is worthwhile because it functions the way we want free will to function: it provides meaning that makes life worth living and accounts for moral responsibility. (Recall the brief discussion of "functionalism" – defining something in terms of what it "does," rather than what it "is"!)

Supplemental resources (bottom of page) are available in which Dennett explains his version of compatibilism.

Before We Leave....

William James and Daniel Dennett approach the question of free will from very different perspectives. James rejects the idea of a determined world, believes we do make free choices, and he opts for indeterminism. As a scientist, Dennett is committed to a deterministic world and rejects the idea of free will in its metaphysical sense. Yet both argue that a conception of free will is necessary to make life worth living and hold humans accountable for their actions. Accepting this view that there is good reason to believe humans capable of making choices, we move to the next module on Ethics, where a central question concerns theories on how we do, in fact, make moral choices.

Coursework

Do you believe that free will is an illusion (that every choice could not be otherwise), or do you believe humans are capable of choosing freely? Explain your answer. (100-150 words)

Note: Submit your response to the appropriate Assignments folder.

Complete the Unit Test by the date on the Schedule of Work.

Supplemental Resources

Determinism and Predictability

Metaphysics: The Problem of Free Will This video looks at determinism and predictability. At a personal level, predictability

could constrain our freedom. This short (under-8-minutes) video is optional but relevant and absorbing.

Free Will

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP) **Free Will** Read: Sections 3a, "The Thesis of Causal Determinism"; 3b, "Determinism, Science and ""Near Determinism""; and the first two paragraphs of 3c, "Compatibilism, Incompatibilism, and Pessimism"

James

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP) **William James** Read Section 6,a, Human Freedom.

Dennett

Daniel Dennett – What is Free Will? A 6-minute interview discussing Dennett's conception of free will in a deterministic world.

Dennett on free will and determinism A 10-minute interview regarding Dennett's book *Freedom Evolves.*

Daniel Dennett: Stop Telling People They Don't Have Free Will Dennett explains why our conception of free will and believing that we have it are essential for a moral universe.

Overall Consideration: Determinism and Free Will. These videos are informative and humorous.

Determinism vs Free Will: Crash Course Philosophy #24 Determinism and libertarianism explained. (10 minutes)

Compatibilism: Crash Course Philosophy #25 Compatibilism explained. (9 minutes)

17. Metaphysics - Assessments

4.1 Mind and Body Submission

Summarize Descartes's personal journey from doubt to his belief in his existence as a thinking being with a physical body. 150-200 words.

4.1 Mind and Body Discussion

Do you think that if you had deeper technical understanding of the brain states associated with the pleasures of life (whatever they may be) your experience would be diminished (less pleasurable)? Enhanced? Would have no effect at all? Explain your reasons. What about unpleasant emotions or experiences (fear, anger), would a deeper understanding of your brain states be a help or a hindrance?

4.2 Do We Act Freely? Discussion

Consider the two positions we have studied at this point, D'Holbach's determinism and James' libertarian rejection of determinism. Do you think James's reasons for rejecting determinism are convincing? Explain your response.

4.2 Do We Act Freely? Submission

Do you believe that free will is an illusion (that every choice could not be otherwise), or do you believe humans are capable of choosing freely? Explain your answer. (100-150 words)

UNIT 5: ETHICS

18. Ethics - Overview and Coursework

Ethics, or moral philosophy, is the branch of philosophy concerned with the evaluation of human actions. It is the study of morality, or right and wrong. This branch of philosophy is concerned not only with theories for characterizing right and wrong actions but also with understanding and analyzing the meaning of and justification for ethical claims.

Recall that we concluded our work with Metaphysics by acknowledging that a conception of free will is necessary if we are to hold humans accountable for their actions. Most of us do, indeed, see ourselves as moral agents, and furthermore, we often evaluate the behavior of others, especially when we regard behavior as particularly good or bad. It is important to keep in mind, though, that our philosophical study of ethics does not advocate particular theories or standards; it seeks to understand the meaning of ethical concepts and the ethical theories that define right and wrong.

There is a fuzzy line between the discourse surrounding ethical theories and that of the concepts and ideas we will encounter in the module that follows on Social-Political Philosophy. One's actions and behavior, after all, do not occur in isolation but rather in the context of society.

Objectives

Successful completion of our study of this module will enable you to understand and explain:

1. Distinctions between subjectivism and objectivism in Ethics.
2. Arguments for and against ethical relativism.
3. Deontology and Kant's Categorical Imperative.
4. Utilitarian reasoning for moral decisions.
5. Virtue ethics.

Coursework

The Course Content for this unit provides the primary reading material, links to any additional assigned reading or viewing resources, and assigned coursework. The unit concludes with a test. Material is presented in these subsections:

5.1 Moral Philosophy Concepts and Distinctions

5.2 Normative Theories: Kant's Deontology

5.3 Normative Theories: Utilitarianism

5.4 Normative Theories: Virtue Ethics

Dates for completing all coursework are in the Schedule of Work.

Philosophers We Will Meet

In our investigation and readings for Ethics, we will encounter the work of these philosophers. You may select a name here to link to a short biography, or you may link to the same information at your first encounter the philosopher's name in the Course Content sections.

David Hume

Immanuel Kant

John Stuart Mill

Jeremy Bentham
Peter Singer
Aristotle

Key Terms

It is important to understand the meaning and use of these terms.

Altruism: The view that moral decisions should be guided by consideration for the interests and well-being of other people rather than merely by self-interest.

Consequentialism: Any normative theory holding that human actions derive their moral worth solely from the outcomes or results that they produce. Utilitarianism is a consequentialist theory.

Deontology: The ethical theory that sees morality as doing one's duty by following rules, without considering the probable consequences of one's actions.

Descriptive Claim: A claim, or judgment, that affirms what is the case.

Ethical Egoism: The view that moral decisions should be guided by self-interest.

Eudaemonia: Happiness involving human flourishing through intellectual excellence and moral virtue.

Hedonism: The view that pleasure is the highest or only intrinsic good in life.

Instrumental Good: Something that can be used to attain, or that leads to, something else that is good.

Intrinsic Good: Something that is good in and of itself, and not because of something that may result from it.

Meta-ethics: Activities involving discussion "about" ethics, offering an account of moral language and its uses, and discussing the origin and meaning of ethical concepts.

Moral Absolutism: The view that there is one true moral system

with specific moral rules, which may not be overridden for any reason. At least some moral values apply to everyone and every culture at every time.

Moral Objectivism: The view that moral facts exist in the sense that they hold for everyone.

Moral Relativism: The view that there are no universal standards of moral value, that values and beliefs are relative to individuals or societies that hold them. The rightness of an action depends on the attitude taken toward it by the society or culture of the person doing the action.

Moral Subjectivism: The view that moral facts exists only in the sense that those who hold them believe them to exist.

Normative: Establishing, relating to, or deriving from a standard or norm, especially of behavior.

Normative Claim: A claim, or judgment, that affirms what ought to be the case.

Prescriptive Claim: Same as "normative claim." A claim, or judgment, that affirms what ought to be the case.

Utilitarianism: The view that an action is morally right if it produces at least as much good (utility) for all people affected by the action as any alternative action that could be done instead.

Virtue Ethics: Refers to theories that consider moral value of an action by examining the character and virtues of the person who performs an action.

19. 5.1 Moral Philosophy - Concepts and Distinctions

Before examining some standard theories of morality, it is important to understand basic terms and concepts that belong to the specialized language of ethical studies. The concepts and distinctions presented in this section will be useful for characterizing the major theories of right and wrong we will study in subsequent sections of this unit. The general area of concepts and foundations of ethics explained here is referred to as **meta-ethics**.

5.1.1 The Language of Ethics

Ethics is about values, what is right and wrong, or better or worse. Ethics makes claims, or judgments, that establish values. Evaluative claims are referred to as **normative, or prescriptive, claims**. Normative claims tell us, or affirm, what *ought* to be the case. Prescriptive claims need to be seen in contrast with **descriptive claims**, which simply tell us, or affirm, what *is* the case, or at least what is believed to be the case.

For example, this claim is descriptive:, it describes what is the case:

"Low sugar consumption reduces risk of diabetes and heart failure."

On the other hand, this claim is normative:

"Everyone ought to reduce consumption of sugar."

This distinction between descriptive and normative (prescriptive) claims applies in everyday discourse in which we all engage. In ethics, however, normative claims have essential significance. A

normative claim may, depending upon other considerations, be taken to be a "moral fact."

Note: Many philosophers agree that the truth of an "is" statement in itself does not infer an "ought" claim. The fact the low sugar consumption leads to better health does not imply, on its own, that everyone should reduce their sugar intake. A good logical argument would require further reasons (premises) to reach the "ought" conclusion/claim. An "ought" claim inferred directly from an "is" statement is referred to as the *naturalistic fallacy*.

A supplemental resource is available (bottom of page) on the distinction between descriptive and normative claims.

5.1.2 How Are Moral Facts Real?

When we talk about "moral facts" typically we are referring to claims about values, duties, standards for behavior, and other evaluative prescriptions. The following concepts describe the sense in which moral facts are real in terms of:

- the degree of universality, or lack thereof, with which the moral claims are held, and
- the extent to which moral facts stand independently of other considerations.

Moral Objectivism

The view that moral facts exist, in the sense that they hold for everyone, is called moral (or ethical) objectivism. From the viewpoint of objectivism, moral facts do not merely represent the beliefs of the person making the claim, they are facts of the world.

Furthermore, such moral facts/claims have no dependencies on other claims nor do they have any other contingencies.

Moral Subjectivism

Moral (or ethical) subjectivism holds that moral facts are not universal, they exist only in the sense that those who hold them believe them to exist. Such moral facts sometimes serve as useful devices to support practical purposes. According to the viewpoint of subjectivism, moral facts (values, duties, and so forth) are entirely dependent on the beliefs of those who hold them.

Moral Absolutism

Moral absolutism is an objectivist view that there is only one true moral system with specific moral rules (or facts) that always apply, can never be disregarded. At least some rules apply universally, transcending time, culture. and personal belief. Actions of a specific sort are always right (or wrong) independently of any further considerations, including their consequences.

Moral Relativism

Moral relativism is the view that there are no universal standards of moral value, that moral facts, values, and beliefs are relative to individuals or societies that hold them. The rightness of an action depends on the attitude taken toward it by the society or culture of the person doing the action.

- Moral relativism as it relates to an individual is a form of ethical subjectivism.
- As it relates to a society or culture, moral relativism is referred to as "cultural relativism" and is also subjectivist in that moral facts depend entirely on the beliefs of those who hold them, they are not universal.

Note that some accounts of meta-ethical concepts do not use both "objectivism" and "absolutism" or use them interchangeably. The important relationship to keep in mind is that both objectivism and absolutism stand in contrast to relativism and subjectivism.

Here are several arguments in support of moral relativism. The "objection" following each one is an argument against moral relativism and in favor of moral objectivism.

1. Because there are diverse cultural moral values, moral values are not objective and moral diversity is justified.

   ◦ Objection: "Is" does not imply "ought." Further, the fact that there are diverse cultural values does not necessarily imply that there are no objective values.

2. Relativism is justified, because moral objectivists cannot demonstrate the foundation for the truth and universality of objective values.

   ◦ Objection: That we cannot yet justify objective values does not mean that such a foundation could not be developed.

3. Moral relativism fosters tolerance by respecting other cultures' beliefs and practices.

   ◦ Objection: This entails that we tolerate oppressive systems that are intolerant themselves. Further, this argument seems to confer objective value on "tolerance" and further still, "tolerance" is not the same as "respect."

Here are some additional arguments against moral relativism:

1. If values for right and wrong are relative to a specific moral standpoint or culture, anything can be justified, even practices that seem objectively unconscionable.
2. Ethical relativism would diminish our possibility for making moral judgments of others and other societies. However, we do make moral judgments of others and believe we are justified in making these moral judgments.
3. Ethical relativism says that moral values are determined by 'the group', but it is difficult to determine who 'the group' is. Anyone in the "group" who disagrees is immoral.
4. If people were ethical relativists in practice (that is, if everyone was a ethical subjectivist), there would be moral chaos.

A supplemental resource is available (bottom of page) on moral relativism.

Coursework

Do you think that there are objective moral values? Or do you believe that all moral values are relative to either cultures or individuals? Include your reasons.

Note: Submit your response to the appropriate Assignments folder.

5.1.3 How Do We Know What is Right?

The question at hand is about moral epistemology. How do we know what is right or wrong? What prompts our moral sentiments, our values, our actions? Are our moral assessments made on a purely rational basis, or do they stem from our emotional nature? There are contemporary philosophers who support each position, but we will return to some "old" friends we met in our unit on epistemology, Immanuel Kant and David Hume. They were hardly on the "same page" when it came to how and if we can know anything at all, and it's hardly surprising that we find them at odds on what motivates moral choices, how we know what is right.

When we met **Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)** in our study of epistemology, we read passages from his *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysic* (1783). In that work, he applied a slightly less intricate and perplexing presentation of topics from his masterwork on metaphysics and epistemology, the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). His next project involved application of his same rigorous reasoning method to moral philosophy. In 1785, Kant published *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of* Morals; it introduced concepts that he expanded subsequently in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788). The short excerpts that follow are from *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals.*

Recall that Kant's epistemology required both reason and empirical experience, each in its proper role. Kant believed that human action could be evaluated only by the logical distinctions based in synthetic *a priori* judgments.

In the following excerpt, Kant explains that a clear understanding of the moral law is not to be found in the empirical world but is a matter of pure reason.

Everyone must admit that if a law is to have moral force, i.e., to be the basis of an obligation, it must carry with it absolute necessity; that, for example, the precept, "Thou shalt not lie," is not valid for men alone, as if other rational beings had no need to observe it; and

so with all the other moral laws properly so called; that, therefore, the basis of obligation must not be sought in the nature of man, or in the circumstances in the world in which he is placed, but a priori simply in the conception of pure reason; and although any other precept which is founded on principles of mere experience may be in certain respects universal, yet in as far as it rests even in the least degree on an empirical basis, perhaps only as to a motive, such a precept, while it may be a practical rule, can never be called a moral law. Thus not only are moral laws with their principles essentially distinguished from every other kind of practical knowledge in which there is anything empirical, but all moral philosophy rests wholly on its pure part.

However, there is some correspondence between the study of natural world and of ethics. Both have an empirical dimension as well as a rational one. When Kant speaks of "anthropology" he refers to the empirical study of human nature.

...there arises the idea of a twofold metaphysic- a metaphysic of nature and a metaphysic of morals. Physics will thus have an empirical and also a rational part. It is the same with Ethics; but here the empirical part might have the special name of practical anthropology, the name morality being appropriated to the rational part.

So, while the nature of moral duty must be sought *a priori* "in the conception of pure reason," empirical knowledge of human nature has a supporting role in distinguishing how to apply moral laws and in dealing with "so many inclinations" – the confusing array of emotions, impulses, desires that bombard us and contradict the command of reason. Our emotions (inclinations) are hardly the source of moral knowledge; they interfere with the human capability for practical pure reason.

Thus not only are moral laws with their principles essentially distinguished from every other kind of practical knowledge in which there is anything empirical, but all moral philosophy rests wholly on its pure part.When applied to man, it does not borrow the least thing from the knowledge of man himself (anthropology), but gives

laws a priori to him as a rational being. No doubt these laws require a judgment sharpened by experience, in order on the one hand to distinguish in what cases they are applicable, and on the other to procure for them access to the will of the man and effectual influence on conduct; since man is acted on by so many inclinations that, though capable of the idea of a practical pure reason, he is not so easily able to make it effective in concreto in his life.

Kant sees his project on moral law, or "practical reason," to be a less complicated project than *Critique of Pure Reason*, his "critical examination of the pure speculative reason, already published." According to Kant, "moral reasoning can easily be brought to a high degree of correctness and completeness", whereas speculative reason is "dialectical" – laden with opposing forces. Furthermore, a complete "critique" of practical reason entails "a common principle" that can cover any situation – "for it can ultimately be only one and the same reason which has to be distinguished merely in its application."

Intending to publish hereafter a metaphysic of morals, I issue in the first instance these fundamental principles. Indeed there is properly no other foundation for it than the critical examination of a pure practical reason; just as that of metaphysics is the critical examination of the pure speculative reason, already published. But in the first place the former is not so absolutely necessary as the latter, because in moral concerns human reason can easily be brought to a high degree of correctness and completeness, even in the commonest understanding, while on the contrary in its theoretic but pure use it is wholly dialectical; and in the second place if the critique of a pure practical Reason is to be complete, it must be possible at the same time to show its identity with the speculative reason in a common principle, for it can ultimately be only one and the same reason which has to be distinguished merely in its application.

In the next section of this unit, we will see where Kant goes with this project and its "common principle" the applies universally. For now, keep in mind that Kant sees moral judgment as a reason-

based activity, and that emotions/inclinations diminish our moral judgments. Many philosophers agree that making moral judgments and taking moral actions are rationally contemplated undertakings.

David Hume (1711-1776), as we learned in our epistemology unit, doubted that the principles of cause and effect and that induction could lead to truth about the natural world. Recall his picture of reason, his version of the distinction between *a prior* and *a posteriori* knowledge:

- Relations of ideas are beliefs grounded wholly on associations formed within the mind; they are capable of demonstration because they have no external referent.
- Matters of fact are beliefs that claim to report the nature of existing things; they are always contingent.

In both his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) and *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751) relations-of-ideas and matters-of-fact figure in his position that human agency and moral obligation are best considered as functions of human passions rather than as the dictates of reason. The excerpts that follow are from the *Treatise (Book III, Part I, Sections I and II).*

If reason were the source of moral sensibility, then either relations of ideas or matters-of-fact would need to be involved:

As the operations of human understanding divide themselves into two kinds, the comparing of ideas, and the inferring of matter of fact; were virtue discovered by the understanding; it must be an object of one of these operations, nor is there any third operation of the understanding. which can discover it.

Relations of ideas involve precision and certainty (as with geometry or algebra) that arise out of pure conceptual thought and logical operations. A relationship between "vice and virtue" cannot be demonstrated in this way.

There has been an opinion very industriously propagated by certain philosophers, that morality is susceptible of demonstration; and though no one has ever been able to advance a single step in

those demonstrations; yet it is taken for granted, that this science may be brought to an equal certainty with geometry or algebra. Upon this supposition vice and virtue must consist in some relations; since it is allowed on all hands, that no matter of fact is capable of being demonstrated..... For as you make the very essence of morality to lie in the relations, and as there is no one of these relations but what is applicable... RESEMBLANCE, CONTRARIETY, DEGREES IN QUALITY, and PROPORTIONS IN QUANTITY AND NUMBER; all these relations belong as properly to matter, as to our actions, passions, and volitions. It is unquestionable, therefore, that morality lies not in any of these relations, nor the sense of it in their discovery.

Hume goes on to explain how moral distinctions do not arise from of matters of fact:

Take any action allowed to be vicious: Willful murder, for instance. Examine it in all lights, and see if you can find that matter of fact, or real existence, which you call vice. In which-ever way you take it, you find only certain passions, motives, volitions and thoughts. There is no other matter of fact in the case. The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object. You never can find it, till you turn your reflection into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action. Here is a matter of fact; but it is the object of feeling, not of reason. It lies in yourself, not in the object.

And so, Hume concludes that moral distinctions are not derived from reason, rather they come from our feelings, or sentiments.

Thus the course of the argument leads us to conclude, that since vice and virtue are not discoverable merely by reason, or the comparison of ideas, it must be by means of some impression or sentiment they occasion, that we are able to mark the difference betwixt them......Morality, therefore, is more properly felt than judged of"

Hume's view that our moral judgments and actions arise not from our rational capacities but from our emotional nature and sentiments, is contrary to several of the major normative theories

we will explore. However, it is interesting to note that some present-day philosophers regard the domain of emotion as a primary source of moral action, and also that work in neuroscience suggests that Hume may have been on the right track.

Video

Economist Jeremy Rifkin provides an absorbing and fast-moving chalk-talk on human empathy, as demonstrated by neuroscience. (10+ minutes) Note: Cartoon depictions of humans are unclothed **RSA Animate**. **[CC-BY-NC-ND]**

Optional Video

Trust, morality – and oxytocin?. **[CC-BY-NC-ND]** Neuro-economist Paul Zak believe he has identified the "moral molecule" in the brain. (16+ minutes)

An additional supplemental video (bottom of page) explores moral judgments and neuroscience even further.

Coursework

What do you think about the connection between morality and the neurobiology of our brains? Do you think these findings affect arguments for or against ethical relativism?

Note: Post your response in the appropriate Discussion topic.

5.1.4 Psychological Influences

Various psychological characterizations of human nature have had significant influence on views about morality. We will see in this Ethics unit and the next on Social and Political Philosophy that particular conceptions of human nature may be at the center of theories about moral actions of individuals and about ethical interaction among individuals in social communities.

Egoism is the view that by nature we are selfish, that our actions, even our ostensibly generous ones, are motivated by selfish desire. **Ethical egoism** is the belief that pursuing ones own happiness is the highest moral value, that moral decisions should be guided by self-interest.

Another view of human nature holds that the primary motivation for all of our actions is pleasure. **Hedonism** is the view that pleasure is the highest or only good worth seeking, that we should, in fact, seek pleasure.

A different take on human nature is that we have innate capacity for benevolence (empathy) toward other people. (Recall the the mirror neurons in the Jeremy Rifkin video.) **Altruism** is the view that moral decisions should be guided by consideration for the interests and well-being of other people rather than by self-interest.

5.1.5 The Meaning of "Good"

In Ethics, we refer to what is "good" as a general term of approval, for what is of value, for example, a particular action, a quality, a practice, a way of life. Among the aspects of "good" that

philosophers discuss is whether a particular thing is valued because it is good in and of itself, or because it leads to some other "good."

- An **intrinsic good** is something that is good in and of itself, not because of something else that may result from it. In ethics, a "value" possesses intrinsic worth. For example, with hedonism, pleasure is the only intrinsic good, or value. In some normative theories, a particular type of action may possess intrinsic worth, or good.

- An **instrumental good**, on the other hand, is useful for attaining something else that is good. It is instrumental in that it that leads to another good, but it is not good is and of itself. For example, for an egoist, an action such as generosity to others can be seen as an instrumental good if it leads to to self-fulfillment, which is an intrinsic good valued in and of itself by an egoist.

As we look more closely at some major normative theories, the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental good will be among the considerations of interest. Understanding normative theories, also involves these questions:

- How do we determine what the right action is?
- What are the standards that we use to judge if a particular action is good or bad?

The following normative theories will be addressed:

- Deontology (from the Greek for "obligation, or duty") is concerned rules and motives for actions.
- Utilitarianism, a consequentialist theory, is interested in the good outcomes of actions.
- Virtue Ethics values actions in terms of what a person of good character would do.

Supplemental Resources

Descriptive and Normative Claims

Fundamentals: Normative and Descriptive Claims. This 4-minute video is a quick review with examples, on the differences between descriptive and normative claims.

Moral Relativism

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP). **Moral Relativism**. Read section "3. Arguments for Moral Relativism" and section "4. Objections to Moral Relativism."

Moral Judgment and Neuroscience

The Neuroscience behind Moral Judgments. Alan Alda talks with an MIT neuroscientist about neurological connections with moral judgments. (5+ minutes)

20. 5.2 Normative Theories: Kant's Deontology

Deontology is the ethical theory that sees morality as doing one's duty by following rules, without considering the probable consequences of one's actions. The moral philosophy of **Immanuel Kant** exemplifies deontological normative ethics.

Recall where we left off in the prior section where we considered Kant's epistemological position that moral duty must be sought *a priori* "in the conception of pure reason." Further, the foundation of practical reason can be found in a single common moral principle that applies universally. (Passages included from Kant's writing are from *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*.)

...if the critique of a pure practical Reason is to be complete, it must be possible at the same time to show its identity with the speculative reason in a common principle, for it can ultimately be only one and the same reason which has to be distinguished merely in its application.

5.2.1 The Good Will

The Good Will is the only intrinsic good

Before examining Kant's quest for a common universal principle, we first ask about Kant's conception of what is intrinsically good, that is, good in-and-of-itself.

For Kant, the only feature of human nature that benefits a good life and confers value under all conditions is a good will. A good

will is intrinsically good, independently, of external circumstances, whereas other features of human nature may be used for either good or evil.

Nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good, without qualification, except a good will. Intelligence, wit, judgment, and the other talents of the mind, however they may be named, or courage, resolution, perseverance, as qualities of temperament, are undoubtedly good and desirable in many respects; but these gifts of nature may also become extremely bad and mischievous if the will which is to make use of them, and which, therefore, constitutes what is called character, is not good. It is the same with the gifts of fortune. Power, riches, honour, even health, and the general well-being and contentment with one's condition which is called happiness, inspire pride, and often presumption, if there is not a good will to correct the influence of these on the mind, and with this also to rectify the whole principle of acting and adapt it to its end. The sight of a being who is not adorned with a single feature of a pure and good will, enjoying unbroken prosperity, can never give pleasure to an impartial rational spectator. Thus a good will appears to constitute the indispensable condition even of being worthy of happiness.

There are even some qualities which are of service to this good will itself and may facilitate its action, yet which have no intrinsic unconditional value, but always presuppose a good will, and this qualifies the esteem that we justly have for them and does not permit us to regard them as absolutely good. Moderation in the affections and passions, self-control, and calm deliberation are not only good in many respects, but even seem to constitute part of the intrinsic worth of the person; but they are far from deserving to be called good without qualification, although they have been so unconditionally praised by the ancients. For without the principles of a good will, they may become extremely bad, and the coolness of a villain not only makes him far more dangerous, but also directly makes him more abominable in our eyes than he would have been without it.

The value of a good will lies in its volition (motive) not its consequences

A good will has value "simply by virtue of the volition" – it is good in itself regardless of the outcome of actions taken. Even if the action motivated by a good will achieved nothing, "..like a jewel. it would still shine by its own light, as a thing which has its whole value in itself."

  A good will is good not because of what it performs or effects, not by its aptness for the attainment of some proposed end, but simply by virtue of the volition; that is, it is good in itself, and considered by itself is to be esteemed much higher than all that can be brought about by it in favour of any inclination, nay even of the sum total of all inclinations. Even if it should happen that, owing to special disfavour of fortune, or the niggardly provision of a step-motherly nature, this will should wholly lack power to accomplish its purpose, if with its greatest efforts it should yet achieve nothing, and there should remain only the good will (not, to be sure, a mere wish, but the summoning of all means in our power), then, like a jewel, it would still shine by its own light, as a thing which has its whole value in itself.

5.2.2 Duty and Moral Law

Duty requires respect for the law

Duty is what we are morally obliged to do. Morally right actions are those that not only override the lure of inclinations and self-interest, but also are motivated by duty.

Duty is the necessity of acting from respect for the law. I may have inclination for an object as the effect of my proposed action, but I cannot have respect for it, just for this reason, that it is an effect and not an energy of will.....It is only what is connected with my will as a principle, by no means as an effect- what does not subserve my inclination, but overpowers it, or at least in case of choice excludes it from its calculation- in other words, simply the law of itself, which can be an object of respect, and hence a command. Now an action done from duty must wholly exclude the influence of inclination and with it every object of the will, so that nothing remains which can determine the will except objectively the law, , so that nothing remains which can determine the will except objectively the law, and subjectively pure respect for this practical law, and consequently the maxim * that I should follow this law even to the thwarting of all my inclinations.

*A maxim is the subjective principle of volition.

Moral Law is universal, applying at all times to all agents

For Kant, the "law" that guides any action must ultimately be a principle so all-encompassing that it can guide any possible action, under any set of circumstances.

But what sort of law can that be, the conception of which must determine the will, even without paying any regard to the effect expected from it, in order that this will may be called good absolutely and without qualification? As I have deprived the will of every impulse which could arise to it from obedience to any law, there remains nothing but the universal conformity of its actions to law in general, which alone is to serve the will as a principle, i.e., I am never to act otherwise than so that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law. Here, now, it is the simple conformity to law in general, without assuming any particular law

applicable to certain actions, that serves the will as its principle and must so serve it, if duty is not to be a vain delusion and a chimerical notion.

So the only relevant feature of the moral law is its generality, the fact that it has the formal property of universality, by virtue of which it can be applied at all times to every moral agent. From this chain of reasoning about our ordinary moral concepts, Kant derived as a preliminary statement of moral obligation the notion that right actions are those that practical reason would will as universal law.

Obligation to act in a particular way is imperative

For Kant, human agents have a duty to act in accordance with the objective claims of reason, rather than the subjective impulses (desires, inclinations) that contradict reason. The claim of reason is an obligation, a command that we act in a particular way. It is an imperative.

The conception of an objective principle, in so far as it is obligatory for a will, is called a command (of reason), and the formula of the command is called an imperative.

Imperatives , as described by Kant occur in either of two distinct forms, hypothetical or categorical.

Hypothetical imperatives

Recall from our unit on Logic that a hypothetical statement is an "if-then" statement. The "if" portion is the precipitating factor, and the "then" portion is the resulting condition. A moral command in hypothetical form look like this:

Do action A, if you wish to achieve result X"

Such a command demands performance of an action for the sake

of some other end or purpose, not because it is good in itself. For example:

Conserve natural resources if you wish to preserve the planet for your grandchildren.

Categorical imperatives

To unconditionally demand performance of an action for its own sake requires a categorical imperative. Such a command expresses necessary moral obligation, it describes how all rational human beings are expected to act.

Finally, there is an imperative which commands a certain conduct immediately, without having as its condition any other purpose to be attained by it. This imperative is categorical. It concerns not the matter of the action, or its intended result, but its form and the principle of which it is itself a result; and what is essentially good in it consists in the mental disposition, let the consequence be what it may. This imperative may be called that of morality.

The form of such a command is simply: Do A.

5.2.3 The Categorical Imperative

One common principle distinguished merely in its application

The practical problem Kant sets out to settle with his categorical imperative is this: how does a rational being come to understand which actions/commands are necessary and universal? In a particular situation, how does one making subjective judgments

know if a specific action conforms to objective law? Kant resolves this problem by devising a single, general, overriding categorical imperative that embodies the standard for evaluating subjective principles of action.

When I conceive a hypothetical imperative, in general I do not know beforehand what it will contain until I am given the condition. But when I conceive a categorical imperative, I know at once what it contains. For as the imperative contains besides the law only the necessity that the maxims * shall conform to this law, while the law contains no conditions restricting it, there remains nothing but the general statement that the maxim of the action should conform to a universal law, and it is this conformity alone that the imperative properly represents as necessary.

There is therefore but one categorical imperative, namely, this: Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law.

*A maxim is a subjective principle of action, and must be distinguished from the objective principle, namely, practical law. The former contains the practical rule set by reason according to the conditions of the subject (often its ignorance or its inclinations), so that it is the principle on which the subject acts; but the law is the objective principle valid for every rational being, and is the principle on which it ought to act that is an imperative.

This, then, is Kant's first formulation the categorical imperative:

Act only on that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it would become a universal law.

This first formulation of the categorical imperative leads a rational person to understand what could be a universal rule. Such a rule requires logical consistency when everyone follows it. For example, a rational person would not universalize a rule that supported lying by making false promises. If everyone made false promises, then no one would believe promises. As a result, no one could make a promise because part of being able to make a promise is to have it believed. Thus, such a universal moral practice of making false promises could not exist.

Kant offers some specific examples to show what is entailed in applying this overriding moral imperative in several types of situations. His first example demonstrates that it would be contradictory to universalize the maxim for taking ones own life if it offered more despair than satisfaction. Kant argues that we have a perfect duty to ourselves not to commit suicide.

1. A man reduced to despair by a series of misfortunes feels wearied of life, but is still so far in possession of his reason that he can ask himself whether it would not be contrary to his duty to himself to take his own life. His maxim is: "From self-love I adopt it as a principle to shorten my life when its longer duration is likely to bring more evil than satisfaction." It is asked then simply whether this principle founded on self-love can become a universal law of nature.....Now we see at once that a system of nature of which it should be a law to destroy life by means of the very feeling whose special nature it is to impel to the improvement of life would contradict itself and, therefore, could not exist as a system of nature; hence that maxim cannot possibly exist as a universal law of nature and, consequently, would be wholly inconsistent with the supreme principle of all duty.

Another example considers someone in financial crisis considering the possibility of borrowing money, and promising to repay, with no intention to do so. The maxim of this action would be that it is permissible to borrow money under false pretenses if you really need it. As Kant points out, making this maxim into a universal law would be self-defeating. The practice of lending money on promise presupposes honest intention to repay; if this condition were universally ignored, the (universally) false promises would never be effective as methods of borrowing.

2. Another finds himself forced by necessity to borrow money. He knows that he will not be able to repay it, but sees also that nothing will be lent to him unless he promises stoutly to repay it in a definite time. He desires to make this promise, but he has still so much conscience as to ask himself: "Is it not unlawful and inconsistent with duty to get out of a difficulty in this way?" Suppose however

that he resolves to do so: then the maxim of his action would be expressed thus: "When I think myself in want of money, I will borrow money and promise to repay it, although I know that I never can do so." Now this principle of self-love or of one's own advantage may perhaps be consistent with my whole future welfare; but the question now is, "Is it right?" I change then the suggestion of self-love into a universal law, and state the question thus: "How would it be if my maxim were a universal law?" Then I see at once that it could never hold as a universal law of nature, but would necessarily contradict itself. For supposing it to be a universal law that everyone when he thinks himself in a difficulty should be able to promise whatever he pleases, with the purpose of not keeping his promise, the promise itself would become impossible, as well as the end that one might have in view in it, since no one would consider that anything was promised to him, but would ridicule all such statements as vain pretenses.

Kant argues that we have a duty to ourselves not to waste our talents. No one would will a universalized maxim of neglecting to develop the discipline required for fulfilling one's natural abilities.

3. A third finds in himself a talent which with the help of some culture might make him a useful man in many respects. But he finds himself in comfortable circumstances and prefers to indulge in pleasure rather than to take pains in enlarging and improving his happy natural capacities. He asks, however, whether his maxim of neglect of his natural gifts, besides agreeing with his inclination to indulgence, agrees also with what is called duty. He sees then that a system of nature could indeed subsist with such a universal law although men (like the South Sea islanders) should let their talents rest and resolve to devote their lives merely to idleness, amusement, and propagation of their species- in a word, to enjoyment; but he cannot possibly will that this should be a universal law of nature, or be implanted in us as such by a natural instinct. For, as a rational being, he necessarily wills that his faculties be developed, since they serve him and have been given him, for all sorts of possible purposes.

Kant considers the more subtle case of someone who lives comfortably and contemplates denying assistance to people struggling with hardship. The maxim here would be that it is permissible not to help those who are less well-off than ourselves. Kant conceded that no logical contradiction would result from universalizing of such a rule of conduct. But he also argued that no one could consistently will that it be universal law because even the most well off must allow for the future possibility of needing the benevolence of others.

4. A fourth, who is in prosperity, while he sees that others have to contend with great wretchedness and that he could help them, thinks: "What concern is it of mine? Let everyone be as happy as Heaven pleases, or as he can make himself; I will take nothing from him nor even envy him, only I do not wish to contribute anything to his welfare or to his assistance in distress!" Now no doubt if such a mode of thinking were a universal law, the human race might very well subsist and doubtless even better than in a state in which everyone talks of sympathy and good-will, or even takes care occasionally to put it into practice, but, on the other side, also cheats when he can, betrays the rights of men, or otherwise violates them. But although it is possible that a universal law of nature might exist in accordance with that maxim, it is impossible to will that such a principle should have the universal validity of a law of nature. For a will which resolved this would contradict itself, inasmuch as many cases might occur in which one would have need of the love and sympathy of others, and in which, by such a law of nature, sprung from his own will, he would deprive himself of all hope of the aid he desires.

Kant's second and fourth examples demonstrate regard for sympathy and benevolence towards others and the importance of not using others as means to our own ends. Similarly, examples one and three show Kant's support for the same benevolence and moral respect towards ones self. These ideas go hand-in-hand, for if we were to promote uncaring treatment of others, we might expect the same treatment from others if the tables turned.

This regard for the value of human life and the moral respect that it deserves led to Kant's second formulation of his categorical imperative:

Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means.

This formulation proposes a more personal view of morality. In applying it to particular cases, it yields the same results. Violating an obligation by making a false promise (or by killing myself) would be treating another person (or myself) as a means for getting money (or avoiding pain). Breaching a duty by withholding benevolence (or neglecting my own talents) would be failing to treat another person (or myself) as an end in itself.

Coursework

Consider the following scenario: Suppose that instead of doing last evening's homework, your usually compliant 12-year-old stayed up late playing video games. The next morning the child is distraught because the homework is not finished and asks you to call school and report that she (or he) is ill.

Suspend your personal values (how **you** might respond to this request,) and provide a Kantian response. Use the first formulation of the categorical imperative to explain your reasons. (100 – 150 words)

Note: Submit your response to the appropriate Assignments folder.

5.2.4 Kantian Deontology: Objections and

Criticisms

Before leaving this topic on deontology, it is important to understand a few of the criticisms of and objections to Kant's moral theory:

1. If acting on moral principle will lead to knowingly wrongful results, there is inherent moral compromise in not considering consequences. Lying is often used as a example of this problem; for example, lying to the Nazis about hidden Jews would clearly increase the possibility of their survival.

2. The problem with never telling lies suggests another issue which involves the dilemmas that can arise when two principles, or rules, conflict with each other. In the example above, there are two moral principles in conflict: "do not lie" and "do not allow harm to innocent people." Another example: if one's children are starving, which principle has precedence: "do not steal" or "do not allow harm to innocent people"? Kant's theory is not helpful in making such choices.

3. Critical readers of Kant's formulation of the categorical imperative thought it to be nothing more than a restatement of the Golden Rule — "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Kant argued that they were incorrect, because the Golden Rule:

   - includes no duties towards ourselves.
   - does not require us to treat others as ends (rather than means.)
   - is not rationally based, it merely depends on how an individual wants to be treated.

4. Some critics of Kant's moral theory believe that deontology is conceptual, rational-based, and cold, allowing no room for feelings of empathy and "gut" emotion. Deontology is seen to be impractical as a common-sense guide for acting morally.

5. Utilitarians, who we meet in our next section, disagree completely that motives or intentions have any intrinsic moral value: they argue that only consequences of actions can be morally valued.

21. 5.3 Normative Theories: Utilitarianism

Normative theories that hold that the outcomes or results produced by an action determine its moral worth are generally called "consequentialist" theories. **Utilitarianism** is a consequentialist theory; it is the view that an action is morally right if it produces at least as much good (utility) for all people affected by the action as any alternative action that could be done instead.

Recalling what we know about conceptions of "good," we see that for a utilitarian, moral actions have instrumental good. A moral action is not good in and of itself, but is valued because it leads to something else that has intrinsic good. The nature of the "something else" — the intrinsically good consequence of the action — is one of the significant factors that characterize and differentiate the views of particular utilitarian philosophers. A belief that all utilitarian philosophies share is that the action leading to that intrinsic good is not good in itself, it is instrumentally good.

A supplemental reading (bottom of page) describes some complexities that become apparent as we examine some specific utilitarian philosophies.

Note: Portions of the following material on Bentham and Mill are adapted from information in The Philosophy Pages by Garth Kemerling and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0

5.3.1 Bentham: The Value of Happiness

Jeremy Bentham (1748 – 1842) was a British utilitarian philosopher

as well as a social and legal reformer, who proposed a morality of quantification by assigning value to outcomes that maximize good. In his work *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789), Bentham offered this basic description of his utilitarian doctrine:

1. It is the consequences of human actions that count in evaluating their merit.
2. Consequences that matters are those that promote human happiness: namely, achieving pleasure and avoiding pain.

Achieving pleasure and avoiding pain are intrinsically good. Recall our look at psychological characterizations of human nature in the section on "Concepts and Distinctions." Hedonism is the view that pleasure is the highest or only good worth seeking; Bentham's philosophy exemplifies this view.

In the opening paragraphs of *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, Bentham* introduces his principle of utility.

1.Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*. They alone point out what we ought to do and determine what we shall do; the standard of right and wrong, and the chain of causes and effects, are both fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, all we say, all we think; every effort we can make to throw off our subjection ·to pain and pleasure· will only serve to demonstrate and confirm it. A man may claim to reject their rule but in reality he will remain subject to it....

2. The principle of utility is the foundation of the present work, so I should start by giving an explicit and determinate account of what it is. By the principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the part whose interest is in question: or was it the same thing in other words, to promote or oppose that happiness.

As originally articulated by Bentham, the **principle of utility** (a term borrowed from David Hume) held that the morally better

alternative is that which produces the greater net utility, where utility is defined in terms of pleasure/happiness. Because the word "utility" does not sufficiently emphasize the notion of pleasure and pain, Bentham, in 1822, revised and renamed his central principle , calling it the **greatest happiness principle**, that actions are right only insofar as they tend to produce the greatest balance of pleasure over pain for the largest number of people.

In the following excerpt from *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Bentham presents his method for calculating the value of the pleasure (or pain) to be avoided.

1. Pleasures, then and the avoidance of pains, are the *ends* which the legislator has in view: it behoves him therefore to understand their *value*. Pleasures and pains are the *instruments* he has to work with: it behoves him therefore to understand their force, which is again, in other words, their value.

2. To a person considered *by himself*, the value of a pleasure or pain *considered by itself*, will be greater or less according to the four following circumstances:

(1) Its *intensity*.

(2) Its *duration*.

(3) Its *certainty* or *uncertainty*.

(4) Its *propinquity* or *remoteness*.

3. These are the circumstances which are to be considered in estimating a pleasure or a pain considered each of them by itself.. But when the value of any pleasure or pain is considered for the purpose of estimating the tendency of any *act* by which it is produced, there are two other circumstances to be taken into the account; these are.

(5) Its *fecundity*, or the chance it has of being followed by sensations of the same kind: that is, pleasures if it be pleasure: pains if it be pain by pain.

(6) Its *purity*, or the chance it has of *not* being followed by sensations of the opposite kind: that is, pains, if it be a pleasure: pleasures, if it be a pain.

These last two, however, are in strictness scarcely to be deemed

properties of the pleasure or the pain itself; they are not, therefore, in strictness to be taken into the account of the value of that pleasure or pain. They are in strictness to be deemed properties only of the act, or other event, by which such pleasure or pain has been produced; and accordingly are only to be taken into the account of the tendency of such act or such event.

4. To a *number* of persons, with reference to each of whom the value of a pleasure or a pain is considered, it will be greater or less according to seven circumstances: to wit, the six preceding one....And one other, to wit:—

(7) Its *extent*; that is, .the number of persons to whom it *extends* or (in other words) who are affected by it.

Taking such matters into account, one arrives at a net value of each action for any human being affected by it. To critics who found application of this calculus overly complicated, Bentham replied that we need not actually carry out this process of measuring pain versus pleasure; we need only to keep it in mind as a guideline, and consider everyone effected by an action. To his critics who believed that other factors besides the consequences should be considered in determining moral rightness, Bentham remained firmly consequentialist and replied that we only care about motives and intentions because of their consequences.

An additional and notable feature of Bentham's utilitarianism sets him apart from other later utilitarians. He believed there to be no hierarchy of pleasures, no qualitative differences among them. In *The Rationale of Reward* (1830), Jeremy Bentham wrote :

Prejudice apart, the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry. If the game of push-pin furnish more pleasure, it is more valuable than either.

5.3.2 Mill: Some Kinds of Happiness Are Better

John Stuart Mill (1806 – 1873) was British a utilitarian philosopher and advocate of social ideals. His father, also a philosopher, was an ardent believer in Jeremy Bentham's principles, to which John was introduced at an early age. (John Stuart Mill was a child prodigy who took charge of his siblings' education at age eight!) A generation after Bentham, Mill became an influential and committed champion of Bentham's utilitarian principles.

Mill's work *Utilitarianism* (1861) is an extended explanation of utilitarian moral theory. In responding to criticisms of the doctrine, Mill argued in favor of the basic principles of Jeremy Bentham, and he also offered several significant improvements to its structure, meaning, and application.

Despite endless and longstanding disputes within moral philosophy over the reality and nature of intrinsic good, Mill believed that everyone could at least agree that consequences of human actions contribute importantly to moral value as instrumental goods. Instrumental good can be demonstrated and understood, but intrinsic good is mystifying. From *Utilitarianism*, chapter 1:

Whatever can be proved to be good, must be so by being shown to be a means to something admitted to be good without proof. The medical art is proved to be good, by its conducing to health; but how is it possible to prove that health is good? The art of music is good, for the reason, among others, that it produces pleasure; but what proof is it possible to give that pleasure is good?

Mill fully accepted Bentham's devotion to the greatest happiness principle as the basic statement of utilitarian value. From *Utilitarianism*, chapter 2:

...actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure.

The Relative Quality of Pleasures

Mill did not agree that all kinds of pleasure experienced by human beings are qualitatively equal. (Recall Bentham's pronouncement that "the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry.") This is one area in which Mill refined Bentham's utilitarianism.

With regard to qualitative differentiation among pleasures, Mill believed that:

- Different sorts of pleasure differ from each other in qualitative ways.
- Only those who have experienced pleasure of both sorts are competent judges of the relative qualities of two pleasures.
- The "competent judges test" establishes higher moral worth of largely intellectual pleasures among sentient beings, even when their momentary intensity may be less than that of alternative lower (largely bodily) pleasures.

From *Utilitarianism*, chapter 2:

Now it is an unquestionable fact that those who are equally acquainted with, and equally capable of appreciating and enjoying, both, do give a most marked preference to the manner of existence which employs their higher faculties. Few human creatures would consent to be changed into any of the lower animals, for a promise of the fullest allowance of a beast's pleasures; no intelligent human being would consent to be a fool, no instructed person would be an ignoramus, no person of feeling and conscience would be selfish and base, even though they should be persuaded that the fool, the dunce, or the rascal is better satisfied with his lot than they are with theirs.

Mill granted that the positive achievement of happiness is often difficult. Thus we are often justified morally in seeking primarily to reduce the total amount of pain experienced by those beings affected by our actions. Pain—or even the sacrifice of pleasure—is

warranted in Mill's view only when it results directly in the greater good of all.

Rules to Ease the Quantification Task

A primary argument against utilitarian theory is that it unreasonably demands that individuals devote primary energy to cold-hearted and tedious calculation of the anticipated effects of their actions. A significant qualification offered by Mill is that precisely because we do not have the time to calculate accurately in every instance, most of the time, we allow our everyday actions to be guided by moral rules (presumably rules valued by the worth of their demonstrated consequences.) Perhaps anticipating the later distinction between act and rule utilitarianism, Mill pointed out that secondary moral principles, at the very least, perform an important service by providing ample guidance for every-day moral life. However, he emphasized that the value of each action — especially in difficult or controversial cases — is to be determined by reference to the principle of utility itself.

Motives for Moral Actions

What inspires people to do the right thing? Mill believed there was universal agreement on the role of moral sanctions in eliciting proper conduct. Unlike Bentham, however, he did not restrict motives for doing the right thing to socially-imposed external sanctions like punishment and blame, which make the consequences of improper action more obviously painful. In Mill's view of human nature, moral agents are also motivated by internal sanctions such as self-esteem, guilt, and conscience. Because we all have social feelings on behalf of others, the unselfish wish for

the good of all is often enough to move us to act morally. From *Utilitarianism*, chapter 3

The ultimate sanction, therefore, of all morality (external motives apart) being a subjective feeling in our own minds, I see nothing embarrassing to those whose standard is utility, in the question, what is the sanction of that particular standard? We may answer, the same as of all other moral standards—the conscientious feelings of mankind.

Even if others do not blame or punish them for doing wrong, humans can be guided by natural moral sentiment for the well being of all concerned. In other words, I am likely to blame myself, if I do not chose the best action for all concerned, and the discomfort of self blame is another of the consequent pains to consider when deciding what to do.

Besides self-interested internal sanctions (living with the pain of guilty conscience, for example), empathy is another aspect of human nature entailed in Mill's utilitarianism:

But there is this basis of powerful natural sentiment; and this it is which, when once the general happiness is recognized as the ethical standard, will constitute the strength of the utilitarian morality. This firm foundation is that of the social feelings of mankind; the desire to be in unity with our fellow creatures, which is already a powerful principle in human nature....

5.3.3 Singer: Altruism and the Greatest Happiness

The last point considered about John Stuart Mill, his depiction of the human desire "to be in unity with our fellow creatures, " is a fitting context for introducing **Peter Singer (1946 –)**. a contemporary Australian utilitarian philosopher and bioethicist.

Whose well-being or best interests should be considered? While utilitarian reasoning is often used to serve self-interest or the best

interests of a particular group, utilitarian moral principles demand that when we tally the utility for possible actions, we consider the interests of all parties affected. The utilitarian moral philosophy of both Bentham and Mill express this sentiment — that the interests of everyone affected be considered. Bentham described ethics as "the art of directing men's actions to the production of the greatest possible quantity of happiness for those whose interests are in view."

In the two centuries that have elapsed between the time of Jeremy Bentham and that of Peter Singer, technological progress has significantly expanded the breadth of who and what is 'in view." Indeed, the scope of Peter Singer's utilitarian reasoning, includes all those we know to be in need. In his 1971 essay "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" (published in 1972 in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*) Singer argues that affluent people have a greater moral obligation to donate resources to humanitarian causes than we typically consider to be the norm in Western cultural practices. The article was prompted by the starvation of refugees during the Bangladesh Liberation War; that specific situation provides an example for applying Singer's wider view that moral obligations require us to "look beyond the interests of our own society."

...if it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally to do it.

Singer views our acting in the interests of others as a moral obligation, and "others" include those outside our own society. Expanding the answer to the question of "whose well-being?" even further, Singer makes no moral distinction among species of sentient beings. In his book *Animal Liberation* (1975), Singer argued that because non-human animals experience pleasure and pain and can suffer, it is wrong to mistreat them. It follows that animal experimentation and the eating of animal flesh are morally indefensible.

Singer supports what is known as "effective altruism." In his book *The Most Good You Can Do: How Effective Altruism Is Changing Ideas About Living Ethically* (2015), Singer explains effective altruism

as not just a set of ideas but also as an emerging movement. Leading a life that is wholly ethical entails doing as much as we possibly can. To discover what will do the most good (for example, helping others, or contributing to organizations that help others), we need to use reason and find supporting evidence that the actions we take are the best possible actions we can afford. People motivated by images that play on their emotions often do not really understand how and if their contributions will be used effectively. Effective altruism works toward maximizing the total good that can come from an action. Peter Singer explains effective altruism in the the following TED talk:

Video

The why and how of effective altruism. **[CC-BY-NC-ND]**

In additional supplemental resources (bottom of page) Peter Singer explains his position on animals rights and other issues.

Coursework

Reconsider this scenario: Suppose that instead of doing last evening's homework, your usually compliant 12-year-old stayed up late playing video games. The next morning the child is distraught because the homework is not finished and asks you to call school and report that she (or he) is ill.

Suspend your personal values (how **you** might respond to this request,) and provide a utilitarian response to the child's request,

explaining why your action provides a greater amount of good than other possible actions. (100-150 words)

Note: Submit your response to the appropriate Assignments folder.

5.3.4 Utilitarianism: Objections and Criticisms

Before leaving the topic of utilitarianism, it is important to understand some of the objections from its critics:

1. It can be difficult and time-consuming to calculate the net benefits prior to deciding on the most moral (utility-yielding) action. Bentham did respond to this by saying his hedonist calculation factors are just a guideline, and Mill replied by suggesting that utility-based rules serve as shortcuts (except for difficult or controversial cases.)
2. Since it can be difficult to predict an outcome in advance, consequences are uncertain grounds for conferring moral value on an action. (This was among Kant's objections to utilitarianism.)
3. Another argument against utilitarianism from the Kantian perspective is that utilitarianism lacks serious respect for individuals.
4. Utilitarianism conflicts with principles of justice. This criticism usually refers to inflicting undue punishment in order to discourage future "crimes" of a similar nature. For example, a whistleblower may be fired in order to discourage future occurrences of such actions by other employees.
5. If one values only consequences. it is not possible to rule out an activity that is inhumane. For example, water-boarding and other forms of torture might be inflicted on prisoners for the purpose of acquiring useful information. This expected end

may not may result. (The utilitarian argument for such action might entail that useful information, if gained, could preserve lives.)

Supplemental Resources

Utilitarianism

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP) **Act and Rule Utilitarianism**. Read section 1, Utilitarianism – Overall View., parts a, b, and c.

Act vs Rule Utilitarianism

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP) **Act and Rule Utilitarianism**. Read section 2. How Act Utilitarianism and Rule Utilitarianism Differ

More Peter Singer in-person

Peter Singer: Animal Equality. (3 minutes) Singer's brief explanation of animal equality

Let's Talk About Your Hedonism. (2 minutes) On the hedonistic paradox

Peter Singer '07: Animal Rights. (28 minutes) Singer explains some of his views to an interviewer.

22. 5.4 Normative Theories: Virtue Ethics

Both deontology and utilitarianism provide a reasoning process to evaluate an action for moral worth; deontology evaluates motives or intents of actions, and utilitarianism considers consequences/ outcomes. **Virtue ethics** is an overall term that refers normative theories interested in the character and virtues of the person performing actions. An action is good if it is what a virtuous person would do. Moral actions are not measured by reference to normative standards such as rules and motives or outcomes and consequences.

Moral action is about character, what a person of virtuous character would do in a particular situation. Virtues are acquired character traits; they are not inborn or learned through reason. Unlike intellectual or physical characteristics, moral virtues are habits we acquire by practicing them and emulating exceptionally virtuous people or especially virtuous actions. Through practice we may acquire virtuous character.

5.4.1 Aristotle: Ethics as Virtuous Character

In a major work, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, **Aristotle (384 – 322 BCE)** describes the role of ethics as the cultivation of virtuous character. This work is believed to have been named after Aristotle's son Nicomachus; if so, it is a fitting tribute to Aristotle's idea that how we are raised makes all the difference. *The Nicomachean Ethics* is an expansive work about the pursuit of "the good life," and understanding the good life is essential for achieving happiness.

Note that the type of happiness being sought is not the subjective experience of pleasure; this type of happiness, **eudaemonia**, involves flourishing through intellectual excellence and moral virtue. For Aristotle, the development of a virtuous character takes place in the context of social relationships with others. Developing virtuous character is important because society becomes stronger; we will return to this idea in the unit on Social and Political Philosophy. The brief commentary and passages that follow serve to introduce Aristotle's conception of virtue ethics.

While intellectual excellence is taught, moral virtue is habituated; we do not come by moral virtue naturally, it must be practiced and perfected. For example, one becomes a just person by performing just acts, a brave person through performing brave actions. Moral virtues acquired through persistent practice of good habits become inclinations and part of the virtuous person's character. From Book II.1:

Human Excellence is of two kinds, Intellectual and Moral: now the Intellectual springs originally, and is increased subsequently, from teaching (for the most part that is), and needs therefore experience and time; whereas the Moral comes from custom, and so the Greek term denoting it is but a slight deflection from the term denoting custom in that language.

From this fact it is plain that not one of the Moral Virtues comes to be in us merely by nature: because of such things as exist by nature, none can be changed by custom: a stone, for instance, by nature gravitating downwards, could never by custom be brought to ascend, not even if one were to try and accustom it by throwing it up ten thousand times; nor could file again be brought to descend, nor in fact could anything whose nature is in one way be brought by custom to be in another. The Virtues then come to be in us neither by nature, nor in despite of nature, but we are furnished by nature with a capacity for receiving them and are perfected in them through custom.

Again, in whatever cases we get things by nature, we get the faculties first and perform the acts of working afterwards; an

illustration of which is afforded by the case of our bodily senses, for it was not from having often seen or heard that we got these senses, but just the reverse: we had them and so exercised them, but did not have them because we had exercised them. But the Virtues we get by first performing single acts of working, which, again, is the case of other things, as the arts for instance; for what we have to make when we have learned how, these we learn how to make by making: men come to be builders, for instance, by building; harp-players, by playing on the harp: exactly so, by doing just actions we come to be just; by doing the actions of self-mastery we come to be perfected in self-mastery; and by doing brave actions brave.

Acquiring virtuous character entails practice and habituation, but even when one acquires virtuous inclinations, virtuous moral action is not an automatic response. A virtuous act must be appropriate for the specific situation or conditions.

But let this point be first thoroughly understood between us, that all which can be said on moral action must be said in outline, as it were, and not exactly: for as we remarked at the commencement, such reasoning only must be required as the nature of the subject-matter admits of, and matters of moral action and expediency have no fixedness any more than matters of health. And if the subject in its general maxims is such, still less in its application to particular cases is exactness attainable: because these fall not under any art or system of rules, but it must be left in each instance to the individual agents to look to the exigencies of the particular case, as it is in the art of healing, or that of navigating a ship. Still, though the present subject is confessedly such, we must try and do what we can for it.

Essential to virtuous actions is the concept of middle ground, or the mean. The actions of a virtuous position fall between two extremes, between excess and deficiency. The extremes are vices, and the middle ground is a virtue. For example, in the face of fear, the virtuous action is one of bravery; the vice of excess is rashness, the vice of deficiency is cowardice. Similarly, with respect to relationships with others, being friendly is the virtuous mean between the excess vice of being ingratiating and the deficient vice

of being surly. A person of virtuous character performs the right action, at the right time, for the right reason; in all respects, there is never too much or too little.

In like manner too with respect to the actions, there may be excess and defect and the mean. Now Virtue is concerned with feelings and actions, in which the excess is wrong and the defect is blamed but the mean is praised and goes right; and both these circumstances belong to Virtue. Virtue then is in a sense a mean state, since it certainly has an aptitude for aiming at the mean.

Again, one may go wrong in many different ways (because, as the Pythagoreans expressed it, evil is of the class of the infinite, good of the finite), but right only in one; and so the former is easy, the latter difficult; easy to miss the mark, but hard to hit it: and for these reasons, therefore, both the excess and defect belong to Vice, and the mean state to Virtue...

It [Virtue] is a middle state between too faulty ones, in the way of excess on one side and of defect on the other: and it is so moreover, because the faulty states on one side fall short of, and those on the other exceed, what is right, both in the case of the feelings and the actions; but Virtue finds, and when found adopts, the mean. And so, viewing it in respect of its essence and definition, Virtue is a mean state; but in reference to the chief good and to excellence it is the highest state possible.

Video

This 9+-minute video is a general introduction to virtue ethics; it reviews material on Aristotle's ethics and introduces some modern virtue-ethicists. **Introducing Virtue Ethics** [CC-BY-NC-ND]

A supplemental resource (bottom of page) provides further information on Aristotle's "good life."

5.4.2 Modern-Day Virtue Ethics

The three philosophers presented here are a sample of those who regard the standard normative theories, deontology and utilitarianism, to be inadequate and ineffective for understanding the complexities of ethical life in modern societies. Each has adopted a view compatible with virtue ethics.

Elizabeth Anscombe (1919 – 2001) was a British analytic philosopher. Among her notable contributions was her article "Modern Moral Philosophy," published in 1958. The article was a trailblazing contribution to modern virtue ethics. She argued that neither Kantian ethics nor utilitarianism provides ethical concepts can work in our secular culture. She believed that the standard ethical theories to be ineffective because they were based on religion. Instead, she thought morality should be based on what is "good" about human nature, a view compatible with Aristotle's virtue ethics. Rather than describing and action as "right" or "wrong," it seems more meaningful and illuminating to describe the "actor" as "just" or "unjust," for example, or "honest" or "dishonest."

Bernard Williams (1929 – 2003) was a British moral philosopher who regarded ethical life as too disorderly to be understood within the structures of normative theories. Like Anscombe, Williams was critical of both deontology and utilitarianism. He argued that both theories have a conception of the person that is highly theoretical; there is no regard for the deep-seated commitments at the root of human character, and impartial principles provide little useful guidance or reason for actions. Williams regarded the discipline of moral philosophy as ineffective, with abstract and impartial principles attempting to offer tidy, general answers, when in fact, moral problems are untidy, complicated, and highly unique.

Alasdair MacIntyre (1929 –) is a Scottish philosopher. In his famous work *After Virtue*(1981), he describes the forms of moral

reasoning produced by Enlightenment thinkers as a failure in their effort to provide a universal and rational account of moral reasoning. No calculation or formula settles moral disputes. The moral language that prevails in the wake of misguided moral philosophy serves mainly as a theatrical tool to manipulate public attitudes and decisions. MacIntyre believes that Aristotle's conception of virtue ethics offers a more rational alternative to modern moral and political discourse because it is teleological, it has a purpose. The ultimate goal for acting as a virtuous person is to contribute to human goodness achieved as a community or society.

Supplemental resources (bottom of page) provide further information on the three modern virtue ethicists introduced here.

Coursework

Let's consider this scenario one last time: Suppose that instead of doing last evening's homework, your usually compliant 12-year-old stayed up late playing video games. The next morning the child is distraught because the homework is not finished and asks you to call school and report that she (or he) is ill.

Suspend your personal values (how **you** might respond to this request,) and describe how a virtuous person would respond to this request. Which kinds of virtues would be practiced, which avoided? (100 – 150 words)

Note: Submit your response to the appropriate Assignments folder.

5.4.3 Virtue Ethics: Objections and Criticisms

Virtue ethics, like other moral theories, has critics. Here are some of the objections raised:

1. Virtue ethics is too vague. The approach does not offer specific advice on what action should be taken. How does one know what a virtuous person would do?
2. Virtue ethics is relativistic. There are no absolute values that apply across time and across cultures.

Coursework

Given the knowledge you have gained about these three moral theories — deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics — which do you find yourself more drawn to? Explain your reasons.

Note: Post your response in the appropriate Discussion topic. Complete the Unit Test by the date on the Schedule of Work.

Supplemental Resources

Aristotle and The Good Life

The Good Life: Aristotle. This video provides a summary of Aristotle's virtue ethics.

Anscombe

Rebirth of Virtue Ethics: Elizabeth Anscombe and Philippa Foot. A brief introductory lecture on Anscombe's role in the reawakening of virtue ethics

Williams

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP) **Bernard Williams**. A comprehensive account of Williams' work.

MacIntyre

An Introduction to Alasdair MacIntyre's After Virtue- A Macat Philosophy Analysis. A very brief analysis of MacIntyre's book *After Virtue*

23. Ethics - Assessments

5.1 Moral Philosophy – Concepts and Distinctions Submission

Do you think that there are objective moral values? Or do you believe that all moral values are relative to either cultures or individuals? Include your reasons.

5.1 Moral Philosophy – Concepts and Distinctions Discussion

What do you think about the connection between morality and the neurobiology of our brains? Do you think these findings affect arguments for or against ethical relativism?

5.2 Normative Theories: Kant's Deontology Submission

Consider the following scenario: Suppose that instead of doing last evening's homework, your usually compliant 12-year-old stayed up late playing video games. The next morning the child is distraught because the homework is not finished and asks you to call school and report that she (or he) is ill. Suspend your personal values (how you might respond to this request,) and provide a Kantian response. Use the first formulation of the categorical imperative to explain your reasons. (100 – 150 words)

5.3 Normative Theories: Utilitarianism Submission

Reconsider this scenario: Suppose that instead of doing last evening's homework, your usually compliant 12-year-old stayed up late playing video games. The next morning the child is distraught because the homework is not finished and asks you to call school and report that she (or he) is ill. Suspend your personal values (how you might respond to this request,) and provide a utilitarian response to the child's request, explaining why your action provides a greater amount of good than other possible actions. (100-150 words)

5.4 Normative Theories: Virtue Ethics Submission

Let's consider this scenario one last time: Suppose that instead of doing last evening's homework, your usually compliant 12-year-old stayed up late playing video games. The next morning the child is distraught because the homework is not finished and asks you to call school and report that she (or he) is ill. Suspend your personal values (how you might respond to this request,) and describe how a virtuous person would respond to this request. Which kinds of virtues would be practiced, which avoided? (100 – 150 words)

5.4 Normative Theories: Virtue Ethics Discussion

Given the knowledge you have gained about these three moral theories — deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics — which do you find yourself more drawn to? Explain your reasons.

UNIT 6: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

24. Social and Political Philosophy - Overview and Coursework

Social and Political Philosophy is a normative pursuit, related to Ethics. Where Ethics focuses on moral value of an individual's actions, Social and Political Philosophy is interested in values related to groups of individuals,— a community, society, or nation. This branch of philosophy asks questions such as: "What makes a good society?" and "What makes a government legitimate?" The theories of social and political philosophers provide understanding and justification for considerations such as: the relationship between an individual and the government; the just distribution of resources among individuals; the merit of various forms of political structure and government. Issues such as fairness, justice, human rights, and the responsibilities of government arise in the theories advocated by social and political philosophers.

Objectives

Successful completion of our study of this unit will enable you to:

1. Recognize the impact of the philosopher's view of human nature on proposals made about social order.
2. Understand and explain the concept of "social contract theory" from diverging points of view, including those of Thomas Hobbes and John Rawls.
3. Explain and contrast the values underlying Liberalism and

Socialism.

4. Describe the impact of theories put forth by John Locke and John Stuart Mill on present-day democracy.

Coursework

The Course Content for this unit provides the primary reading material, links to any additional assigned reading or viewing resources, and assigned coursework. The unit concludes with a test. Material is presented in these subsections:

6.1 The Individual and Society

6.2 Philosophical Roots of Modern Government

Dates for completing all assigned work are in the Schedule of Work.

Philosophers We Will Meet

In our investigation and readings for Social and Political Philosophy, we will encounter the work of these philosophers. You may select a name here to link to a short biography, or you may link to the same information at your first encounter the philosopher's name in the Course Content sections

Aristotle

Thomas Hobbes

John Locke

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

John Rawls

John Stuart Mill
Karl Marx

Key Terms

It is important to understand the meaning and use of these terms.

Absolutism: The political doctrine and practice of unlimited, centralized authority with absolute sovereignty vested in a monarch or dictator.

Anarchism: The belief that an ideal human society should have no organized government and entails no regard for the authority of existing governments.

Capitalism: Both an ideology and politico-economic system where production is controlled privately and for profit.

Communism: An expression of socialism where capitalism is replaced with publicly owned means of production and communal control of the society's natural resources.

Democracy: The form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation, usually involving periodically held free elections.

Fascism: An authoritarian system of government and social organization characterized by belief in the supremacy of one national or ethnic group, dictatorial power, forcible suppression of opposition, and control of industry and commerce.

Liberalism: A political philosophy based on ideas of personal liberty, rights and responsibilities of individuals, equality of individuals, and the obligations of the state to protect freedom and rights.

Libertarianism (political): A political theory that takes individual liberty as the primary political value.

Original Position: John Rawls' conception of a hypothetical position, or standpoint, in which the nature of justice can be

discovered from behind s "veil of ignorance," where rational persons have no knowledge of their particular circumstances and are disinterested in one another's well-being.

Social Contract Theory: The view that political structure and legitimacy of the state stem from explicit or implicit agreement by individuals to surrender specified rights in exchange for the stability of social order and protection by the government.

Socialism: A sociopolitical theory which values the welfare of the community and advocates that a society's resources belong to all of its members and should be shared with everyone.

Theocracy: A form of government in which God or a deity is recognized as the source of control, as interpreted by the divine authorities.

25. 6.1 The Individual and Society

What does it mean to be a member of a community, to "belong" to the society in which you live? In response to such questions, philosophers propose theories about what ought to be the case; in contrast, social scientists describe what *is* the case. Social and political philosophy, like Ethics, is a normative pursuit, and a conception of what constitutes moral actions for individuals is integral to how they relate to the community (the larger social group) to which they belongs. A conception of "the good" is central to understanding what makes a society just, or fair, for its members. As we look at how specific philosophers view the relationship of the individual to society, and what makes a society good, notice that a particular conception of human nature will underly theories on the relationship between individuals and their society, be it a local community or a nation.

6.1.1 Aristotle and "The Good Life"

Man Is Social by Nature

In his work *Politics*, **Aristotle (384 – 322 BCE)** explained how virtuous lives of individual citizens are supported by the political community itself. He believed that achieving virtue and acquiring a sense of self-identity require social interaction and working with others. Being a member of society (using his term,"the city") is the natural state of man. Humans are, by nature, social creatures who

live in groups, and life in a community (the city) is necessary for a complete human life. Note that for Aristotle, "the city" represents the pinnacle of societal structure; it starts with families, families form villages, and villages grow to become cities, the centers of culture.

The interest of the city is more important than that of an individual. Public interests take precedence over individual ones. From *Politics*, *Book I*, *Chapter II*:

Besides, the notion of a city naturally precedes that of a family or an individual, for the whole must necessarily be prior to the parts, for if you take away the whole man, you cannot say a foot or a hand remains, unless by equivocation, as supposing a hand of stone to be made, but that would only be a dead one; but everything is understood to be this or that by its energic qualities and powers, so that when these no longer remain, neither can that be said to be the same, but something of the same name. That a city then precedes an individual is plain, for if an individual is not in himself sufficient to compose a perfect government, he is to a city as other parts are to a whole; but he that is incapable of society, or so complete in himself as not to want it, makes no part of a city, as a beast or a god. There is then in all persons a natural impetus to associate with each other in this manner, and he who first founded civil society was the cause of the greatest good; for as by the completion of it man is the most excellent of all living beings, so without law and justice he would be the worst of all, for nothing is so difficult to subdue as injustice in arms: but these arms man is born with, namely, prudence and valour, which he may apply to the most opposite purposes, for he who abuses them will be the most wicked, the most cruel, the most lustful, and most gluttonous being imaginable; for justice is a political virtue, by the rules of it the state is regulated, and these rules are the criterion of what is right.

A precise explanation of Aristotle's conception of a "just state" is elusive. Recall, from the Ethics unit topic of Virtue Ethics, Aristotle's concept of virtuous actions and acquiring virtuous character. An individual with a well-developed virtuous character understands if a

particular situation is just or not. The just society has no fixed rules, but the virtuous person chooses just actions and understands why such actions are just.

Aristotle Summary

Aristotle's view and his picture of human nature is that humans are social, political creatures in their natural state of nature. Capabilities for speech (communication) and reason foster a cooperative life with others. There is no "pre-social" state of nature; humans by nature are social and expand their social organization beyond the family. Together, individuals build cities, and the best interest of the city (or society) is more important than the interests of individuals.

A supplemental resource is available (bottom of page) on Aristotle's politics.

Aristotle's view that humans are social by nature stands in contrast to that of other philosophers who see human nature (often articulated as the "state of nature") as less than social, possibly even chaotic. The agenda of each philosopher we will meet next is to justify the government bodies and/or social principles essential for members of a society to enjoy a good, or just, life.

6.1.2 Social Contract Theory in the Age of Reason

What Is Social Contract Theory?

Social contract theory is the view that political structure and legitimacy of the state stem from explicit or implicit agreement

by individuals to surrender specified rights in exchange for the stability of social order and/or for the protection of government. Social contract theory is "theoretical." The "idea" of a contract is offered as an explanation or justification of a relationship between the individual and the larger society or government. Social contract theories demonstrate why members of a society would rationally find it in their best interests to comply with and uphold the principles and regulations of their society. A social contract theory attempts to justify a particular political system (a currently existing one or an ideal one) by showing why members of society would consent to it. Members of society freely relinquish something they value (for example, aspects of their freedom) in exchange for something else they also value (for example, a sense of security.)

Human reason is a key element in social contract theories. First, the underlying view of human nature includes that we are rational beings and therefore can understand why and how regulations and principles make life better. Further, given that humans are rational, the contract itself needs to express what a rational person would agree to.

Social contract theories put forth by philosophers typically refer to contracts between a nation and its citizens. Consent to such contracts is meant to occur tacitly, or implicitly, by virtue of being a citizen of the state. (An exception to this might be the case of an immigrant becoming a naturalized citizen, and here, there would be an actual oath of compliance, or consent.) The social principles and political structure of a society that are established by its members' consent come to represent that society's standard for what is good, or just.

Several philosophers proposed social contract theories during the period in European history known as the Age of Enlightenment, or the Age of Reason, the late 1600s through early 1800s. As we look at three of these philosophers, keep in mind that: (1) each has a specific view of man's "state of nature" (human nature prior to socialization), and (2) each argues for a social contract that assumes his view of human nature.

Thomas Hobbes: Man is Self-Centered and Mean

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) was a British philosopher who lived during the English Civil War (1642-1648). The work that expresses his political thought most completely is*Leviathan* (1651). Hobbes' underlying epistemological and metaphysical beliefs contribute to his socio-political views; he was a materialist and committed to laws of causality and the motion of bodies. He held vividly pessimistic views of humans in their state of nature and of the social contract that is required for living in a relatively untroubled society.

The following excerpt from Chapter XIII of *Leviathan* demonstrates Hobbes' picture of man in his naturally combative state.

From Equality Proceeds Diffidence

From this equality of ability, ariseth equality of hope in the attaining of our Ends. And therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which neverthelesse they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their End, (which is principally their owne conservation, and sometimes their delectation only,) endeavour to destroy, or subdue one an other. And from hence it comes to passe, that where an Invader hath no more to feare, than an other mans single power; if one plant, sow, build, or possesse a convenient Seat, others may probably be expected to come prepared with forces united, to dispossesse, and deprive him, not only of the fruit of his labour, but also of his life, or liberty. And the Invader again is in the like danger of another.

From Diffidence Warre

And from this diffidence of one another, there is no way for any man to secure himselfe, so reasonable, as Anticipation; that is, by force, or wiles, to master the persons of all men he can, so long, till he see no other power great enough to endanger him: And this is no more than his own conservation requireth, and is generally allowed. Also because there be some, that taking pleasure in contemplating their own power in the acts of conquest, which they pursue farther than

their security requires; if others, that otherwise would be glad to be at ease within modest bounds, should not by invasion increase their power, they would not be able, long time, by standing only on their defence, to subsist. And by consequence, such augmentation of dominion over men, being necessary to a mans conservation, it ought to be allowed him.

Againe, men have no pleasure, (but on the contrary a great deale of griefe) in keeping company, where there is no power able to over-awe them all. For every man looketh that his companion should value him, at the same rate he sets upon himselfe: And upon all signes of contempt, or undervaluing, naturally endeavours, as far as he dares (which amongst them that have no common power, to keep them in quiet, is far enough to make them destroy each other,) to extort a greater value from his contemners, by dommage; and from others, by the example.

So that in the nature of man, we find three principall causes of quarrel. First, Competition; Secondly, Diffidence; Thirdly, Glory.

The first, maketh men invade for Gain; the second, for Safety; and the third, for Reputation. The first use Violence, to make themselves Masters of other mens persons, wives, children, and cattell; the second, to defend them; the third, for trifles, as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other signe of undervalue, either direct in their Persons, or by reflexion in their Kindred, their Friends, their Nation, their Profession, or their Name.

This very brief passage from Chapter XIV provides a glimpse of Hobbes reasoning toward a contract among men to relinquish some rights in return for safety.

What it is to lay down a Right?

To Lay Downe a mans Right to any thing, is to Devest himselfe of the Liberty, of hindring another of the benefit of his own Right to the same. For he that renounceth, or passeth away his Right, giveth not to any other man a Right which he had not before; because there is nothing to which every man had not Right by Nature: but onely standeth out of his way, that he may enjoy his own originall Right, without hindrance from him; not without hindrance from another.

So that the effect which redoundeth to one man, by another mans defect of Right, is but so much diminution of impediments to the use of his own Right originall.

Hobbes Summary

In Hobbes view, in the state of nature humans are selfish, destructive, unprincipled, and at war with each other. But because humans are also rational, they realize that their lives will be better if they cooperate with others and live under the protection of a Sovereign authority, namely the British monarchy. This social contract, according to Hobbes, is about giving up some freedom in exchange for safety. Political structure is required if there is to be peace and cooperation.

John Locke: Man Has Natural Rights

John Locke (1632-1704), a British empiricist philosopher we met first in the unit on Epistemology, had a more upbeat view of human nature than that of Hobbes. In their natural state, according to Locke, men are notably rational and possess inalienable rights to pursue life as they choose. In his work, *Second Treatise on Government* (1690) Locke details his views of the social contract, the purpose and structure of government, and his picture of the ideal relationship between an individual and the government.

The following brief excerpts from Locke's *Second Treatise on Government* exemplify Locke's view that humans, by nature, possess rights, which entail the responsibility to not invade the rights of another:

Sect. 4. TO understand political power right, and derive it from its original, we must consider, what state all men are naturally in, and that is, a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, and

dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man.

A state also of equality, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another; there being nothing more evident, than that creatures of the same species and rank, promiscuously born to all the same advantages of nature, and the use of the same faculties, should also be equal one amongst another without subordination or subjection, unless the lord and master of them all should, by any manifest declaration of his will, set one above another, and confer on him, by an evident and clear appointment, an undoubted right to dominion and sovereignty

Sect. 7. And that all men may be restrained from invading others rights, and from doing hurt to one another, and the law of nature be observed, which willeth the peace and preservation of all mankind, the execution of the law of nature is, in that state, put into every man's hands, whereby every one has a right to punish the transgressors of that law to such a degree, as may hinder its violation: for the law of nature would, as all other laws that concern men in this world 'be in vain, if there were no body that in the state of nature had a power to execute that law, and thereby preserve the innocent and restrain offenders. And if any one in the state of nature may punish another for any evil he has done, every one may do so: for in that state of perfect equality, where naturally there is no superiority or jurisdiction of one over another, what any may do in prosecution of that law, every one must needs have a right to do.

Locke Summary

John Locke used the social contract to justify the authority of the state. However, he thought that the role of the government was to be the 'servant' of its citizens and protect peoples' natural rights. The right to private property, among those natural rights, is central to Locke's case for civil government; property ownership is subject

to contention, and the contract expects civil authority to protect property and other rights of the individual. Locke believed that all people have **natural rights** no matter what the culture or circumstances. Natural rights constitute a basic moral law; moral requirements are imbedded in his conception of human nature; every person has these rights, simply by virtue of being human. In Locke's view, the right to life, liberty, health, and property are inalienable. His ideas were instrumental in forming the basis of America's Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Man is Compassionate (but Corruptible)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was a Swiss philosopher who wrote at the height of the Enlightenment period. He saw humans in the state of nature as compassionate and essentially moral beings. However. when removed from this literally "natural" state into urban chaos, humans are subject to corruption and loss of their natural compassion; having private property, for example, encourages less admirable characteristics such as greed and self interest. Rousseau moved from a social contract position that aligned with his picture of humans in their original compassionate state of nature to a new normative theory for social contract meant to improve the state of mankind in the wake of accelerating social change.

Rousseau Summary

Rousseau thought society ought to be ordered such that people give up some individual freedom and rights for collective liberty. His view of social contract involved uniting together to express a single collective will. In this way, the state (or society) acts as a moral

person, rather than just a collection of individuals. The general will is the will of a politically unified group of people that defines the common good, determines right and wrong, and is established by passing laws. Majority vote democratically confirms general will.

Supplemental resources are available (bottom of page) on the social contract theories of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau.

Coursework

The Enlightenment-era philosophers we have met claim to imagine humans in a "state of nature" that is prior to socialization. Do you think a pre-social conception of human nature is possible? Why or why not? And if this is possible, would it be a useful starting position for understanding the individuals' best interests in defining a relationship with a governing body? Why or why not?

Note: Submit your response to the appropriate Assignments folder.

6.1.3 Rawls: Social Contract in the Just Society

John Rawls (1921-2002) was an American political philosopher whose work, A *Theory of Justice* (1971), proposes a hypothetical variation on the social contract theory. Unlike prior social contract theorists, Rawls made use of neither a specific historical context in need of reform nor an original "state of nature" from which people emerge to enter a social contract. Rawls regards the principles of justice that structure the society as what requires agreement. Though Rawls describes no pre-social "state of nature," he relies on

a view of human nature, a Kantian view that humans are rational and can reason from a universal point of view. The essential feature of this capability for Rawls is that a rational person is able, from an impartial perspective, to judge and accept principles of society that would treat everyone with equality and fairness.

The following concepts from A *Theory of Justice* are central to Rawls hypothetical conception of social contract theory:

Original Position: From this perspective, persons have no knowledge of their particular circumstances, are rational, and are disinterested in one another's well-being. This is the hypothetical position, or standpoint, from which the nature of justice can be discovered.

Veil of Ignorance: Rawls uses this term to characterize the epistemological status of one in the Original Position: no knowledge of personal situation.

Justice as Fairness: Rawls' characterization of his theory that principles of justice are agreed to from an original-bargaining position that is fair.

The Two Principle of Justice: These are the basic, most fundamental principles that would be chosen from the Original Position (from behind the Veil of Ignorance) to regulate a just society:

Note: Treatment of Rawls's principles of justice includes material adapted from information in a Wikipedia.org article found at **Wikipedia: John Rawls. [CC-BY-SA]**

1. All persons in a society should have as much basic liberty (rights and duties) as possible, provided that everyone has equal (the same) liberties.

   ◦ This principle is known as the **Liberty Principle**. For Rawls, basic liberty includes freedoms of conscience, association and expression, as well as democratic rights. Rawls defends a personal property right that is about moral capacity and self-respect, rather than the natural

right of self-ownership advocated by John Locke.

2. Social and economic inequality should be permitted only if such an arrangement makes everyone better off.

    ◦ Rawls refers to this second principle as the **Difference Principle.** Any principle devised and accepted behind a veil of ignorance will provide equal advantage for everyone, including for those who turn out to be the least advantaged members of society. The aim is to guarantee liberties that represent meaningful options for everyone and ensure distributive justice. Certain freedoms such as political voice or freedom of assembly have little value to those who are desperately poor and marginalized. While it is impossible to demand the exact same effective opportunities of everyone while maintaining basic liberties for all, at the very least we should ensure that those least well off have enough freedom to pursue personal goals and a life worth living.

Supplemental resources (bottom of page) explore Rawls's concepts and provide a lively discussion of his theory of justice.

Coursework

Why, according to Rawls, should talented and hard-working poor children have the same chances of success as rich children? Do you agree with him?

Do you believe that taxing the rich to pay what it costs to provide equal educational opportunity for all is required as a matter of justice?

Note: Post your response in the appropriate Discussion topic.

Supplemental Resources

Aristotle

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP). **Aristotle: Politic**s. Read section 7c.

Hobbes

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP). **Social Contract Theory**. Read section 2a on Hobbes.

Thomas Hobbes. This video on Hobbes (6+ minutes) includes relevant details of Hobbes' personal background as well as the historical context of Hobbes version of the social contract.

Locke

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP). **Social Contract Theory**. Read section 2b on Locke.

John Locke. In addition to providing context for Locke his political philosophy, this video describes Locke's use of Hobbes' idea of "state of nature" which diverges from Hobbes' picture of it; his view entails a form of government different from Hobbes' Sovereign. The last 2 minutes of this 9-minute video are interesting, though not pertinent to Locke's political philosophy.

Social Contract Theory Lecture Final. This video, which runs for 20 minutes, is a slower and more detailed lecture/presentation on Locke's social contract theory. The lecturer points out the intentional parallels between the TV show "Lost" and Locke's conception of social contract.

Rousseau

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP). Social Contract Theory. Read section 2c on Rousseau.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau. This 7+ minute video helps to get inside

Rousseau to understand the culture and times contributing to his political thought.

Enlightenment Contract Theories Compared

Social contract theories. This video (8+ minutes) summarizes and compares the social contract theories of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau.

Rawls

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP). Social Contract Theory. Read section 3a on Rawls.

The video selections that follow are lectures from Michael Sandel's Harvard University course called "Justice." The videos include interactions between Sandel and his students and between students whose opinions on these issues differ.

Lecture 14: A Deal is a Deal. This lecture introduces and explains Rawls' A *Theory of Justice*, as a development of Kantian ethical philosophy.

Lecture 15: What's a Fair Start?. This lecture provides deeper investigation of the meaning of fairness and equality.

26. 6.2 Philosophical Roots of Modern Government

Philosophers have advocated a wide spectrum of political ideologies. We we will take a closer look at two, Liberalism and Socialism, which despite their somewhat antithetical values, influence our modern political philosophies and forms of government.

6.2.1 Liberalism

Liberalism is a socio-political theory centered on: personal liberty; the rights and responsibilities of individuals (including the right to own property); the equality of individuals; and obligation on the part of government to protect individual rights and freedom. Liberalism in its broad sense, accommodates a spectrum of interpretations for the role of the state with respect to individuals. In looking more closely at the philosophical roots of liberalism, we will revisit the political philosophy of John Locke and look into John Stuart Mill's views on politics.

From the topic earlier in this unit, recall **John Locke** and his view that natural possession of rights by humans (their state of nature) constitutes a basic moral law which applies to all people. The purpose of government is to ensure the protection of these natural rights to life, liberty, health, and property. These rights are inalienable. Recall that Locke's conception of rights regarded property ownership as a focal point for social contract with government. He also was a strong advocate of religious tolerance.

After the publication of John Locke's *Two Treatises of*

Government (1689), establishment of governments based on theories like Locke's and others (for example, **Montesquieu (1689 – 1755)** began to take place.

Another ardent defender of individual liberty, **John Stuart Mill,** whom we last encountered in our study of utilitarianism, published his highly influential work *On Liberty* in 1859, nearly two centuries after Locke's *Two Treatises.* It is no surprise that Mill relied on his utilitarian principles to justify and support his views on the role of the state with regard to the freedom of individuals. A just society is created when freedom, in particular, the freedom to become the best possible version of oneself, is maximized, and harm to individuals is minimized. Social utility is created.

Mill believed "social tyranny" to be a greater danger than political tyranny. In his view, when a majority of the members of society subscribe to group mentality, constantly agree with each other, and stop thinking for themselves, individual freedom is diminished. Mill was especially concerned with intellectual and moral freedom, the right to think and do as one wishes, as long as no harm is done to others. Legislators must walk a fine line in enacting only the minimally necessary regulations to prevent harm, while still allowing the maximum freedom possible. This tricky and loosely defined criterion is referred to as the "harm principle."

Supplemental resources (bottom of page) provide further details on liberalism.

Coursework

Recall the concept of "free will" and the corresponding idea of determinism from the Metaphysics unit. Given the principle of causality, do you think that personal liberty is possible? If so, in what way?

Note: Post your response in the appropriate Discussion topic.

6.2.2 Socialism

Socialism is a sociopolitical theory which states that a society's resources belong to all of its members and should be shared with everyone. The main value is welfare of the community. Socialism is often studied and understood in contrast to **capitalism**, which is both an ideology and politico-economic system where production is controlled privately and for profit. Built on principles of liberalism, capitalism is characterized by private property, accumulation of capital/wealth, wage labor, voluntary exchange, a price system, and competitive markets.

Karl Marx (1818 – 1883) was a German philosopher who whose work was a foundational aspect of socialism. Marx was influenced by George Hegel, another German philosopher, whose dialectical theory of history asserted that as history develops, the current state of affairs creates and is replaced by the opposite state, until a synthesis of the opposing elements/trends is reached.

Marx's *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848) was co-authored with Friedrich Engels, the German philosopher who wrote about the horrors of factory working conditions in England. With the goal of precipitating social revolution, this work describes the class struggle between proletariat (the oppressed) and bourgeoisie (the oppressors) and urges all workers to revolt against existing regimes. In addition, the *Manifesto* differentiates between communism and other socialist movements, and it includes a list of social reforms. Marx's communism is a refinement of the larger ideology of socialism; not all socialists are communists. Think of socialism as a theory, and communism as a fine-tuned expression of it. The goal of communism is to replace capitalism with a publicly owned means of production and communal control of the society's natural resources.

Marx and Engel argue that economic history is an ongoing

struggle between oppressors and oppressed. Applying Hegel's theory to the struggle between social classes, they argued that a proletarian revolt against their bourgeoisie oppressors was inevitable, and then a new socio-economic order would arise. In the resulting synthesis, the proletariat (the workers) would direct production methods, and they would have equal share in the products of their efforts.

Marx and Engel portrayed a scenario in which capitalism:

- alienates workers from the products of their labor,
- allows the upper class to exploit the working class,
- leaves the working class at the mercy of market forces, and
- relegates workers to mindless tasks that diminish self-esteem and self worth.

Further, they believed that because capitalism leads to overproduction, that in turn it creates an army of workers who will be subject to layoff or dismissal. Capitalism plants the seeds of its own self-destruction, the inevitable proletarian revolt will proceed in this way:

1. Members of the proletariat are exploited and alienated from the products of their labor.
2. High numbers of proletariat direct their rage at imported products.
3. Proletariat get stronger, unionize, organize and confront bourgeoisie.
4. Open revolution takes place, with the overthrow of bourgeoisie and capitalism.

The predicted downfall of capitalism never took place. Instead, the status of workers in democratic systems increased as their numbers grew. More workers cast votes, and legislation was established to protect them — for example, a minimum wage, workers' compensation, and safety regulations. Some argue that revolt didn't

happen for a different reason, that the contemporary upper class is better at social engineering, manipulation, and enforcement than Marx had imagined.

Supplemental resources (bottom of page) provide further information on socialism.

Coursework

Describe an aspect of our socio-economic environment that is based on an ideal of liberalism and explain your reasons. Then describe another aspect that corresponds with a value of socialism, and explain your reasoning. (100-150 words)

Note: Submit your response to the appropriate Assignments folder.

Complete the Unit Test by the date on the Schedule of Work.

6.2.3 Political Theories and Forms of Government

Of the various political theories, or ideologies, of interest to philosophers, we examined two, Liberalism and Socialism. It is important now to (1) clarify some terminology related to the theory of liberalism that sometimes creates confusion, and (2) briefly describe some other political theories and forms of government.

Liberalism and Terminology

In contemporary politics, not just in this country, the terms "liberal" and "conservative" both describe viewpoints that embody the ideology of "liberalism." While certain priorities and opinions of the "politically liberal" and "politically conservative" differ, both claim the view that the central concern of politics is protecting the freedom of individuals. These are examples of how they differ, sometimes:

- With respect to the role of government in securing individual freedom: liberals tend to favor more government involvement, conservatives less.
- In terms of social values, or what we might refer to as "the good:" liberals tend to favor innovation and ideals, while conservative prefer customary, historically established traditions.

Libertarianism, also a form of liberalism, is a political theory that takes individual liberty as the primary political value, above and beyond other considerations. (Recall that the term "libertarianism" is used in a different sense in connection with the metaphysical issue of free will.)

  Democracy is the form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation, usually involving periodically held free elections. Democracy is compatible with liberalism's values of personal liberty, rights, and equality of individuals. Yet, for a liberal like John Stuart Mill, democracy's rule by the will of the people could lead to a "tyranny of the majority" that diminishes the strength of the individual. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's vision of the social contract resembles democracy; majority vote expresses a single, collective will of the people.

Other Political Theories and Forms of Government

In addition to the political theories we have focused on (liberalism and socialism), social and political philosophy spans a wide array of political theories and forms of government, including, but not limited to these:

Absolutism is the political doctrine and practice of unlimited, centralized authority with absolute sovereignty vested in a monarch or dictator, with no challenge or check by any other governmental or societal body (judicial, legislative, or religious, for example.) The monarchy as depicted by Hobbes was an absolutist authority, though Hobbes believed it possible, through social contract, to negotiate certain rights and freedoms for individuals.

Anarchism is the view that an ideal human society should have no organized government; there should be no regard for the authority of existing governments. Anarchist theories attempt to justify that individuals are not obliged to obey the state, but typically fail to propose a plan or model for how an ungoverned society would operate.

Fascism is an authoritarian system of government and social organization characterized by belief in the supremacy of one national or ethnic group, dictatorial power, forcible suppression of opposition, and central control of industry and commerce. While this form of government aligns with the communist variety of socialism in its elimination of private production and profit, it is far harsher and extreme in its centralized dictatorial control and embodies no regard for community welfare.

Theocracy is a form of government in which God or a deity is recognized as the source of control, as interpreted by the divine authorities. Typically, power in theocratic nations is held by a small group of it citizens. Modern-day theocracies include the Vatican, Iran, and Saudi Arabia.

Supplemental Resources

Liberalism

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP). **John Locke**. Read all of section 4, parts a, b, and c on Locke's political philosophy.

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP). **John Stuart Mill**. Read the short section, item e, on Mill's *On Liberty*.

Mill "On Liberty" – Freedom & Empire. This 12.5-minute video takes a closer look at the Mill's "harm principle" and then looks critically at other aspects of Mill's liberalism, including his advocacy of colonialism, which seems to conflict with certain liberal values.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP). **Positive and Negative Liberty**. Read section 1 on the two concepts of liberty.

Socialism

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP). **Socialism**. Read section 1 on the on the basic contrasts between capitalism and socialism.

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP). **Socialism**. Returning to this IEP article, read section 4 where democratic principles are considered in the context of both socialism and capitalism.

27. Social and Political Philosophy - Assessments

6.1 The Individual and Society Submission

The Enlightenment-era philosophers we have met claim to imagine humans in a "state of nature" that is prior to socialization. Do you think a pre-social conception of human nature is possible? Why or why not? And if this is possible, would it be a useful starting position for understanding the individuals' best interests in defining a relationship with a governing body? Why or why not?

6.1 The Individual and Society Discussion

Why, according to Rawls, should talented and hard-working poor children have the same chances of success as rich children? Do you agree with him? Do you believe that taxing the rich to pay what it costs to provide equal educational opportunity for all is required as a matter of justice?

6.2 Philosophical Roots of Modern Government Discussion

Recall the concept of "free will" and the corresponding idea of determinism from the Metaphysics unit. Given the principle of causality, do you think that personal liberty is possible? If so, in what way?

6.2 Philosophical Roots of Modern Government Submission

Describe an aspect of our socio-economic environment that is based on an ideal of liberalism and explain your reasons. Then describe another aspect that corresponds with a value of socialism, and explain your reasoning. (100-150 words)

UNIT 7: PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

28. Philosophy of Religion - Overview and Coursework

Philosophy of Religion examines a wide array of topics related to the meaning and nature of religion. This philosophical study delves into arguments and concepts related to religious beliefs and practices. It intersects with metaphysics by asking questions about the existence of God and nature of the universe, with epistemology by exploring how we know and understand spiritual matters and beliefs, and with ethics by considering to what extent religion and morality may be connected. Philosophy of Religion is a vast discipline. Our introduction to this area of philosophy will look first at views on the nature of religion held by both late 19th-century and contemporary philosophers, and then will examine historical arguments about the existence of God and the problem of evil.

Objectives

Successful completion of our study of this unit will enable you to:

1. Describe perspectives for understanding religion in terms of the experiences of individuals as well as activities practiced by groups or communities.
2. Understand the explanations of religion held by several mainstream philosophers.
3. Explain historical arguments related to the existence of God and the problem of evil.

Coursework

The Course Content for this unit provides the primary reading material, links to any additional assigned reading or viewing resources, and assigned coursework. The unit concludes with a test. Material is presented in these subsections:

7.1 What is Religion?

7.2 Does God Exist?

Dates for completing all assigned work are in the Schedule of Work.

Philosophers We Will Meet

In our investigation and readings for Philosophy of Religion, we will encounter the work of these philosophers. You may select a name here to link to a short biography, or you may link to the same information at your first encounter the philosopher's name in the Course Content sections:

William James (1842-1910)

Karen Armstrong (1944-)

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)

Mircea Eliade (1907-1986)

Kwame Anthony Appiah (1954-)

Saint Anselm (1033-1109)

Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225 -1274)

William Paley (1743-1805)

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

John Hick (1922-2012)

Key Terms

It is important to understand the meaning and use of these terms.

Agnosticism: The view that whether or not God exists is unknown or unknowable, that sufficient or persuasive evidence has not been given either way.

Atheism: The view that God does not exist.

Cosmological: Relating to theories about the origin and development of the universe.

Defense (theology): See "theodicy."

Monotheism: The view that there is one and only one deity.

Ontological: Relating to the branch of metaphysics dealing with the nature of being.

Pluralism: In philosophy of religion, the view that a diversity of religious belief systems can co-exist and make claims that are equally valid.

Pragmatism: The view that meaning and truth of ideas and beliefs are explained in terms of observable practical outcomes.

Sacred Object: For Durkheim, whatever becomes the focal point of religious belief and practice.

Teleological: Relating to design or purpose.

Theism: The view that God exists.

Theodicy: A justification for the possible co-existence of God and evil that includes a plausible justification for God's permitting evil. Contrast with a "defense," which is a logical rebuttal of the argument that God and evil cannot co-exist.

29. 7.1 What is Religion?

It is not a simple matter to define religion; conceptions and opinions regarding the character of religion are diverse. Even among scholars who spend a lifetime studying expressions of religion, views vary on its essential nature. Does "religion" refer to the established organized religions of the world? Is religion a personal spiritual journey? Is it an expression of cultural practices? Does religion have an essential connection to morality? Of course, it is possible to view religion as more than just one of such possibilities. Still, most points of view regard a particular characteristic of religion to be a common, essential feature of all religious expression.

There are many perspectives from which we could examine views of the nature of religions. We will approach the question from two of them. We will look first at religion from the viewpoint of the individual's inner experience; what does it mean to be "religious", how do individuals express themselves "religiously"? Then we will look at religious practices in terms of a collective activity involving a group or community. Such viewpoints may not necessarily exclude each other, but they offer different vantage points for seeing religion as an aspect of being human.

7.1.1 Religion as Individual and Personal

James: Religion Is a Private Experience

We met **William James (1842 – 1910)**, the philosopher and psychologist, in the unit on Metaphysics. His essay "The Will to Believe" supported his argument for a libertarian version of

indeterminism, or free will. This same essay also contributes to James's philosophy of religion — individuals have a choice to believe in ideas that are not objectively substantiated by science. Religion, for James, involves the experiences of individuals, specifically those experiences relating to an individual's conception of what is divine, or beyond the usual scope of reason and empirical evidence. James was an empiricist who believed that individuals willfully engage in private/internal experiences, some of which are religious, and involve neither reason nor evidence. James was also a **pragmatist**, one who considers practical effects or usefulness — "Ideas become true just so far as they help us get into satisfactory relations with other parts of our experience." (from his lectures *Pragmatism* (1907). And for James, religious experience can have practical, beneficial effects.

James's classic work in Philosophy of Religion is *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, a set of lectures originally published in 1902. (The subtitle is: "A Study in Human Nature.") He begins by pointing out that there is no single specific definition of religion, and that definitions "are so many and so different from one another is enough to prove that the word 'religion' cannot stand for any single principle or essence, but is rather a collective name." He points out that philosophers of religion have focused on either the institutional aspects (theological disciplines and ecclesiastic organization, for example) or on specific religious emotions. His interest is not in institutional aspects of religion; it is about emotion, but not a specific emotion — "there is no ground for assuming a simple abstract 'religious emotion' to exist as a distinct elementary mental affection by itself, present in every religious experience without exception." For practical purposes, James arrives at this working definition of religion:

Religion, therefore, as I now ask you arbitrarily to take it, shall mean for us the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine. Since the relation may be either moral, physical, or ritual, it is evident that out of

religion in the sense in which we take it, theologies, philosophies, and ecclesiastical organizations may secondarily grow.

What we consider to be "organized religion" is, by James's definition, a secondary outgrowth of primary, internal experiences of humans.

His lectures proceed to cover this internal, individual experience from both philosophical and psychological perspectives. From his philosophical vantage point, he explains that what the individual relates to as "divine" is grounded on belief in an idea that is abstract, and not empirically or rationally validated. The possibilities are wide open in terms of what the abstract idea is, whether it be the monotheistic God of Western organized religions or some other god or primary truth. From a more psychological perspective, he regards some individual religious believers as having "healthy mindedness" and others as having "sick souls." The former have a positive attitudes and upbeat views of the world, the latter are pessimistic and depressed.

James believes that there is value in religious experience; it can put a life that is not going well on a positive course. His view on the benefits of positive thinking, as exemplified by "healthy mindedness" foreshadowed self-help books that followed decades later. Among the useful effects of religious experience are enthusiasm, emotional security, and a warm-hearted attitude toward others.

James concludes his *Varieties* lectures with a reminder that in his first lecture, he forewarned that any conclusions would necessarily be based, not on empirical justifications, but "by spiritual judgements only, appreciations of the significance for life of religion, taken 'on the whole.'" From his conclusion:

Summing up in the broadest possible way the characteristics of the religious life, as we have found them, it includes the following beliefs:—

1. That the visible world is part of a more spiritual universe from which it draws its chief significance;

2. That union or harmonious relation with that higher universe is

our true end;

3. That prayer or inner communion with the spirit thereof—be that spirit "God" or "law"—is a process wherein work is really done, and spiritual energy flows in and produces effects, psychological or material, within the phenomenal world.

Religion includes also the following psychological characteristics:—

4. A new zest which adds itself like a gift to life, and takes the form either of lyrical enchantment or of appeal to earnestness and heroism.

5. An assurance of safety and a temper of peace, and, in relation to others, a preponderance of loving affections.

A supplemental resource (bottom of page) provides further insight on James's philosophy of religion.

Armstrong: Religion Is Personal Regard for Others

Needless to say, personal, or private. religious experience as described by William James, does not exclude religion as a ground for our relationships with others. While James saw the private, experiential aspect of religions as its essential feature, he does, in fact, grant the such experience can produce "in relation to others, a preponderance of loving affections." The next philosopher we will meet views behavior of the individual toward others as the primary characteristic of religion. **Karen Armstrong (1944 –)**, a contemporary scholar of organized religions, sees the common thread among the doctrines of all religions as a "summons to action" for behaving a, certain way, rather than "believing things." Armstrong thought she had left religion by the wayside when she abandoned her life as a Catholic nun. However, the twists and turns of her early career led to serious scholarship regarding the world's primary religions.

Armstrong believes that practices within religion as well as

perceptions of religion are misguided. In terms of religious practice, she thinks that focus on "believing abstruse doctrines" is where religion misses its purpose; instead, religious teaching should provoke compassionate thinking and actions. Further, Armstrong takes exception to critical perceptions of religion as a force for violence. To those who cite carnage and violence performed in the name of a religion, Armstrong responds that religion historically has been hijacked by the process of state building. Before modern times, religious ideology formed a basis for state-building, and religious ideology became a part of politics. In Armstrong's view, violence is a dimension of human nature, not of religions; it is the ego at work. The core of religion is compassion and peace.

Video

My wish: The Charter for Compassion. [CC-BY-NC-ND]

7.1.2 Religion as Socio-Cultural Practice

Durkheim: Religion Is a Group Experience

A contrast to viewing the essential nature of religion as deeply personal and private experience, whether it be about a relationship to the divine or our attitudes toward others, is the idea that religion is a collective experience, involving a society or social group. **Emile Durkheim (1858 – 1917)** was a French sociologist, a founding father of the discipline of sociology, who has contributed significantly to

the study and understanding of religion as a socio-cultural practice. Though some regard his work as "sociology of religion," others in the philosophy and comparative-religion disciplines regard Durkheim's contributions as insightful and substantial in their continuing influence on understanding religion. Instead of characterizing religion as the individual's innermost beliefs, religion, from Durkheim's perspective, is about beliefs shared by a connected group, as a societal practice. Religious beliefs belong to the group and unite its members.

In his influential work on religion *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915) Durkheim's aim was to come up with a generalized theory on religions that fits all societies, from the most primitive to the most modern and complex. He provided this definition of religion, and emphasizes that the "collective" aspect of religion is as important as the essential activities, beliefs and practices:

A *religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.* The second element which thus finds a place in our definition is no less essential than the first; for by showing that the idea of religion is inseparable from that of the Church, it makes it clear that religion should be an eminently collective thing.

This definition establishes these central aspects of Durkheim's view of religion.

- That religion is a communal activity.
- That members of a religious community share two activities: their beliefs and the practices they perform together.
- That beliefs and practices (the rites and rituals) relate to **sacred objects**.

The notion of "the sacred" is a key idea in Durkheim's account of religion, and by definition, it posits the concept of everything that is

not sacred — "the profane". These two categories, the scared and the profane, according to Durkheim, form our experience of the world.

All known religious beliefs, whether simple or complex, present one common characteristic: they presuppose a classification of all the things, real and ideal, of which men think, into two classes or opposed groups, generally designated by two distinct terms which are translated well enough by the words profane and sacred. This division of the world into two domains, the one containing all that is sacred, the other all that is profane, is the distinctive trait of religious thought; the beliefs, myths, dogmas and legends are either representations or systems of representations which express the nature of sacred things, the virtues and powers which are attributed to them, or their relations with each other and with profane things.

To understand religion we need to understand that "the sacred" can include a wide array of gods, objects, rituals, whatever becomes the focal point of belief and practice:

But by sacred things one must not understand simply those personal beings which are called gods or spirits; a rock, a tree, a spring, a pebble, a piece of wood, a house, in a word, anything can be sacred. A rite can have this character; in fact, the rite does not exist which does not have it to a certain degree. There are words, expressions and formulæ which can be pronounced only by the mouths of consecrated persons; there are gestures and movements which everybody cannot perform….The circle of sacred objects cannot be determined, then, once for all. Its extent varies infinitely, according to the different religions.

Durkheim's project illustrates the idea of the sacred through his examination of both primitive and more modern practices — totemic principles, mythical ancestors, animal-protectors, "civilizing heroes" and "gods of every kind and degree" who offer protection and security. Nevertheless, Durkheim does not provide philosophically satisfying insight about the essence of "the sacred". Other scholars, however, who have followed, for example, the French phenomenologist **Mircea Eliade (1907 – 1986)**, have continued in this study of the sacred. Eliade developed detailed

understanding, comparisons, and histories of religions in terms of the sacred and the profane. Unlike Durkheim, however, Eliade saw religion as a phenomenon in its own right, rather than a group or societal expression to be examined through the lens of sociology. While, Eliade does not truly belong in this ideological niche for understanding religion first and foremost as a socio-cultural practice, like Durkheim, he does regard "the sacred" and its "otherness" as the essential feature of religion that sets it apart from the natural world of the profane.

Durkheim's legacy surrounding group or societal rituals and regard for sacred objects not only influences the scholarly pursuits of philosophy and comparative religion; it also characterizes popular analyses of modern practices, both religious and secular. A frequently cited secular example is the passionate regard for and rituals surrounding national symbols and flags; there is energized zeal and respectful support of such objects, while their desecration invokes fervent anger and rage.

A supplemental resource (bottom of page) provides further insight on Durkheim's view of religion.

Coursework

Briefly explain the difference between James's and Armstrong's views on the primary nature of the individuals's religious experience. Do you find one or the other more compatible with your own views? Explain your opinion.

Explain the main differences between James's and Durkheim's conceptions of religion. Do they share any common features? (100-150 words)

Note: Submit your response to the appropriate Assignments folder.

7.1.3 Appiah: Is a General Definition Possible?

Kwame Anthony Appiah (1954 –) is a British-born contemporary American philosopher of African origin, whose wide areas of scholarship and interest include moral and political philosophy and philosophy of culture. In the upcoming short talk, Appiah cautions us that "maybe there isn't such a thing as a religion" or at the very least, that vast generalizations about religion are risky.

Video

Is religion good or bad? [CC-BY-NC-ND]

Appiah describes the epistemological "deal" that was struck in the late 19th century between science and religion, with science gaining freedom to pursue knowledge without the constraint for consistency with religious doctrine. (Note that this picture of the boundary between science and religion is consistent with the projects of both William James and Emile Durkheim.) We "visit" Appiah's native Asante society, which today "is not a world in which the separation between religion and science has occurred. Religion is not being separated from any other areas of life." and he reminds us that millions of people such as the Asante society "are fellow citizens of the world with you, but they come from a place in which religion is occupying a very different role." We should proceed carefully, therefore, with specific definitions of religion and sweeping generalizations about it.

Coursework

Do you think religion is essentially about personal practice or more about group practice? Do you think generalizations about religion should be made cautiously, as suggested by Appiah? Why, or why not?

Note: Post your response in the appropriate Discussion topic.

Supplemental Resources

James

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP). **William James**. Read section 4.

Durkheim

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP). **Emile Durkheim**. Read section 4 on Durkheim's philosophy of Religion.

30. 7.2 Does God Exist?

As we have seen, "religion" has numerous interpretations, and it does not necessarily entail belief in a deity. The following terms for categorizing belief about the existence of God, or a deity, do not pertain to one's identity as "religious"; they speak only to the attitude one holds toward the actuality of a deity:

Theism Is the view that God exists.

Atheism is the view that God does not exist.

Agnosticism is the view that whether or not God exists is unknown or unknowable, that sufficient or persuasive evidence has not been given either way.

It's possible to have not given the issue of the existence of God any consideration. So not everyone may identify with one of these positions. Note also that these categorizations are rooted in **monotheism** — the view that there is only one deity.

7.2.1 Classical Arguments for the Existence of God

Historically, scholarly Christian believers have sought to justify and strengthen their positions, as theists, through arguments for the existence of God. Three such arguments are considered here, along with objections to each; in addition, a brief account is provided of historical justifications for God's existence on the basis of moral considerations.

The Ontological Argument

This argument is attributed to the Christian theologian **Saint Anselm (1033 – 1109)**. In simplified form, it proceeds as follows:

- Because we have a concept of God as a perfect being (something than which nothing greater can be conceived), God at least exists in our minds.
- Either God exists in the mind alone, or God exists both in the mind and as an external reality.
- If God existed in the mind alone we would be able to conceive of a being greater than that than which nothing greater can be conceived, namely, one that also existed in external reality.
- Since the concept of a being greater than that than which nothing greater can be conceived is incoherent, God cannot exist in the mind alone.
- Therefore, God exists both in the mind and in external reality.

These are some main objections to the ontological argument:

1. As the monk Guanilo, a contemporary of Anselm, points out, the argument could be used to prove the existence of anything one imagined to be the best there can be – a perfect island is used as his example.
2. The argument itself commits the informal fallacy of Begging the Question. Essentially, it argues in a circle; a premise presumes what is to be arrived at as the conclusion.
3. As Kant points out (hundreds of years later), "existence" is not a proper logical predicate; it is not a property that adds meaning in a proposition.

Supplemental resources (bottom of page) provide further details of the ontological argument.

The Cosmological Argument

Medieval Christian theologian, **Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274)**, created the cosmological arguments. There are four related arguments based on the perceived order of the cosmos and the dependability of the natural laws and logic. We look at three here; the fourth will be considered later as a moral argument.

- The first argument refers to the law of motion and can be summarized in this way: Any movement is caused by prior movement which in turn is caused by movement prior to that, and so on. This series of moving movers cannot be infinite, for then their motion would have no origin. The origin of their motion cannot be moving, for then it would have to be moved by something else. The unmoving origin of motion is God.
- His second argument is similar, and refers simply to causality; every event is caused, and there must have been a first cause: God.
- A third argument uses the logical distinctions between "necessity" and "contingency:" everything and everyone we can observe is not in the universe by necessity and therefore could potentially not be here. But something must be here by necessity to prevent the possibility of nothingness. That something is God.

Objections to Aquinas's cosmological arguments include these:

1. This God who is the first mover or first cause is a very impersonal force that does not resemble the benevolent, caring God that conceived by religious believers.
2. The arguments don't require that there be a single God. They create the possibility for polytheism (multiple Gods.)
3. It is arguable that infinitely regressing causes or motions are impossible. Why does there need to be a starting point?
4. The arguments prove themselves wrong logically; given the

premise, for example, that everything is caused by a prior cause, why is God not subject to the requirement of this strong categorical proposition?

Supplemental resources (bottom of the page) provide further details on the cosmological argument.

The Teleological Argument

The teleological argument, also known as the "argument from design" or the "intelligent design argument" is based on the apparent order and purpose manifest in the universe. ("Teleology" is from the Greek word *telos* which means "end" in the sense of a purpose.) Saint Thomas Aquinas, known for his cosmological arguments, proposed a teleological argument.

Hundreds of years later in the eighteenth century, support for the teleological argument was renewed by the Christian theologian **William Paley (1743 – 1805)**. Using an argument from analogy, Paley compared the complexity and working parts of the universe to the complicated design of an ingeniously crafted watch, created to achieve a specific purpose. We can conclude that the creation of both the watch and the universe required an intelligent being: In the case of the watch, a watchmaker; in the case of the universe, God.

Objections to this argument include:

1. Flaws with the analogy itself make the inductive argument weak:

- There are many dissimilarities between the universe as a whole and objects to which it is likened.
- Many aspects of the universe have no apparent purpose.
- Mistakes such as natural disasters were made in the design of

the universe; it is not perfect.

2. Evolution provides an alternative explanation for purposefulness of nature.
3. Modern and fine-tuned versions of this argument are not inductively strong:

- Claims that have certainty do not follow from arguments based on probability.
- Probabilistic inductive arguments are not convincing without other observable universes as points of comparison.

Supplemental resources (bottom of page) provide further details of the teleological argument.

Moral Arguments for God's Existence

While the three argument types above, ontological, cosmological, and teleological, are regarded as the main classical types of arguments for the existence of God, some philosophers have used moral grounds to argue that God must exist.

- Saint Thomas Aquinas fourth argument is based on the idea of comparative degrees of perfection and measuring/comparing degrees of goodness. Aquinas believes there are degrees of being in everything we encounter, including goodness. Further, he maintains that there must be such a standard, against which to measure. That standard is the greatest goodness, a most perfect being — God. In effect he argues from the fact that we understand degrees of goodness, or morality, to the existence of God as the ultimate standard of goodness.

- **Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)**, believed that humans possess a deeply ingrained sense of morality and that this moral sense

must be derived from the supremely moral mind of God. Our ability to reason leads us to believe that there must be a God who will help us meet the imperatives of morality and that righteous people should be rewarded and immoral people punished. Since this does not always happen on earth, Kant believes that reason allows us to conclude that this will be corrected in the afterlife.

Moral arguments for the existence of God suggest that religion and morality are necessarily interdependent; you cannot have one with the other. God's existence is required for there to be moral order in the world, and moral order cannot occur without God. Such arguments remain popular today among some theologians.

Among the objections to moral arguments for God's existence are those from atheists who believe themselves to be exemplars of moral behavior and sentiment, without divine guidance.

Note: In the prior section, we met Karen Armstrong, who believes that world religions have a moral characteristic or purpose. This is not the same as the view that there is a moral argument for the existence of an omni-benevolent God. Even a religion that is not theistic has an essential moral component, according to Armstrong.

Coursework

Is any one of these classic arguments more compelling to you than the others? If so, explain why. If you find none of these arguments convincing, are you persuaded by the objections to them? Were your beliefs settled before reading this material? (100-150 words)

Note: Submit your response to the appropriate Assignments folder.

7.2.2 The Nature of God and the Problem of Evil

Within the Western monotheistic tradition we are exploring, God is the morally perfect loving being, the creator and sustainer of the universe, who has unlimited capacity for knowledge, and power. One of the most gripping arguments against the existence of this omni-benevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent God's existence is the problem of evil. Why is there evil in a world made by an all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful God?

The problem of evil in very simple logical terms might look like this:

1. God is good.
2. God is all-knowing.
3. God is all-powerful.
4. Evil exists.

If 1 is true, then God would want no evil. If 2 is true, God would know how to prevent it. If 3 is true, then God would prevent it. So, if 1, 2 and 3 are true then 4 should be false, but it is not. Therefore, any or all of 1, 2, or 3 must be false. Arguments such as this one are intended to demonstrate that it is logically impossible for God to exist in a world that includes evil.

Some other arguments claim only that given evidence of evil in the world that it is unlikely that there is a good, all-knowing, all-powerful God. These inductive arguments are referred to as *evidential*, in contrast to "logical."

It is not surprising that theologians are sincerely dedicated to responding to these arguments that challenge the existence of God on the basis of evil.

- A **defense** is a response (or rebuttal) that attempts to demonstrate that such an argument (for example, the one above) does not succeed logically; there is a flaw in the logic.

- A **theodicy** attempts to justify the possibility of the co-existence of God and evil, and it includes a plausible justification for God to permit evil.

Supplemental resources (bottom of the page) provide further insight on the problem of evil.

John Hick (1922 – 2012) was a Kantian-influenced British philosopher and theologian. Among his various significant contributions is his theory on religious **pluralism**; though an ardent Christian himself, he argued that Christianity and Jesus Christ did not offer an exclusive path to goodness, truth and salvation. In the context of their own histories and cultures, the world religions define their own experience of God and ultimate reality.

With regard to Christian theology, Hick is known for his version of the Ireanaean theodicy for explaining the presence of evil in God's world. (The name Ireanaean refers to a theodicy proposed by a second-century Christian philosopher and theologian Irenaeus, who believed the purpose of evil is to allow humans to fully develop.) Hick's theodicy is about "soul-making." Humans are still in the process of spiritual development; with the pain, sadness, loss, — all of the suffering that enters our lives, — we have an opportunity to become more perfect beings. The moral effort has a value in the eyes of the Creator.

A supplemental resource (bottom of the page) provides further details on John Hick's theodicy.

Coursework

Do you find Hick's theodicy a satisfying explanation for the existence of God, given the presence of evil? Explain why or why not. Do you think the existence of God is necessary for exerting the moral effort to become a more better person?

Note: Post your response in the appropriate Discussion topic. Complete the Unit Test by the date on the Schedule of Work.

Supplemental Resources

Ontological Argument

Anselm and the Argument for God: Crash Course Philosophy #9. This 9-minute video explains the ontological argument.

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP). **Anselm: Ontological Argument for God's Existence**. Read from the beginning through section 2. Besides covering the information provided in the video assignment, this article goes on to provide a second articulation by Saint Anselm of the argument and further logical analysis of its lack of soundness.

Cosmological Argument

Aquinas and the Cosmological Arguments: Crash Course Philosophy #10. This 10-minute video explains Aquinas's cosmological arguments. Aquinas's fourth argument is included here as the "argument from degrees;" We cover this argument with moral arguments for God's existence.

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP). **Aquinas: Philosophical Theology**. Section 2b explains the second argument based on causality, in detail, as an example of how these arguments are structured.

Teleological Argument

Intelligent Design: Crash Course Philosophy #11. This 9-minute video explains the teleological argument, including modern versions of it.

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP). **Design Arguments for the Existence of God**. The article provides comprehensive accounts of both classical and modern expressions of the argument from design. This article is worthwhile, especially if you are intrigued by modern versions of the argument and their potential compatibility (or lack thereof) with science.

Nature of God and Problem of Evil

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP). **Philosophy of Religion**. Read part 5, sections a, b, c.

The Problem of Evil: Crash Course Philosophy #13. This 10-minute video covers similar material to that in the IEP article, at a summary level.

Hick's Theodicy

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP). **John Hick**. Read section 3a on Hick's theodicy.

31. Philosophy of Religion - Assessments

7.1 What is Religion? Submission

Briefly explain the difference between James's and Armstrong's views on the primary nature of the individuals's religious experience. Do you find one or the other more compatible with your own views? Explain your opinion. Explain the main differences between James's and Durkheim's conceptions of religion. Do they share any common features? (100-150 words)

7.1 What is Religion? Discussion

Do you think religion is essentially about personal practice or more about group practice? Do you think generalizations about religion should be made cautiously, as suggested by Appiah? Why, or why not?

7.2 Does God Exist? Submission

Is any one of these classic arguments more compelling to you than the others? If so, explain why. If you find none of these arguments convincing, are you persuaded by the objections to them? Were your beliefs settled before reading this material? (100-150 words)

7.2 Does God Exist? Discussion

Do you find Hick's theodicy a satisfying explanation for the existence of God, given the presence of evil? Explain why or why not. Do you think the existence of God is necessary for exerting the moral effort to become a more better person?

UNIT 8: AESTHETICS

32. Aesthetics - Overview and Coursework

Aesthetics is the branch of philosophy that examines the nature of art and beauty and the character of our experience of them. Understanding beauty and art is an expansive area of study, with theories and opinions spanning the history of Western philosophy, from ancient Greece to the present day. A philosopher with special interest in aesthetics is referred to as an "aesthetician." In aesthetics, judgements are made about "beauty" — an ideal, or value, like "truth" or "goodness." So aesthetics, like ethics, is a normative pursuit. In considering the nature of beauty, aesthetics intersects with metaphysics; and questions asked about how we know and recognize beauty are epistemological. In this introductory study of aesthetics, we will sample some of the dominant theories on: the nature of beauty and art, the character of the aesthetic experience, and aesthetic judgement in art criticism.

Objectives

Successful completion of our study of this unit will enable you to:

1. Describe and contrast subjectivism and objectivism in theories of beauty.
2. Understand and compare fundamental theories for the definition of art.
3. Explain theories on the nature of aesthetic experience, including the concept of disinterested interest.
4. Describe judgement theories for art criticism including those involving functionalism and emotionalism.

Coursework

The Course Content for this unit provides the primary reading material, links to any additional assigned reading or viewing resources, and assigned coursework. The unit concludes with a test. Material is presented in these subsections:

8.1 What Is Beauty, What Is Art?

8.2 Aesthetic Experience and Judgement

Dates for completing all assigned work are in the Schedule of Work.

Philosophers We Will Meet

In our investigation and readings for Aesthetics, we will encounter the work of these philosophers. You may select a name here to link to a short biography, or you may link to the same information at your first encounter the philosopher's name in the Course Content sections:

Plato (427-347 BCE)

Aristotle (384-322 BCE)

David Hume (1711-1776)

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

Denis Dutton (1944-2010)

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951)

Key Terms

It is important to understand the meaning and use of these terms.

Aesthetic Attitude: A disinterested attitude. (See "disinterested attitude.")

Aesthetic Experience: A particularly satisfying or pleasurable experience of a work of art that accompanies a disinterested attitude.

Cluster Theory of Art: Similar to family resemblance, the view that there is a non-specific set of characteristics that may apply to the concept of artwork.

Disinterested Attitude: Perceiving a work of art in its own right, with no purposeful intent, idle curiosity, or bias from personal experience and emotion.

Emotionalism (aesthetic): The view that art must effectively arouse feelings or understanding in the perceiver.

Family Resemblance Concept (art): The view that there is no single common property among art objects. Works of art have only overlapping similarities.

Formalism (aesthetic): The view that art is defined in terms of its compositional elements.

Functionalism (aesthetic): The view that art serves a practical purpose.

Objectivism (aesthetic): The view that beauty is an intrinsic feature of a piece of art or natural phenomenon.

Representationalism (art): The view that art is a representation, or imitation, of something else that is real.

Subjectivism (aesthetic): The view that beauty occurs in the mind of the subject who perceives it.

33. 8.1 What Is Beauty, What Is Art?

8.1.1 What Is Beauty?

The term "beauty" is customarily associated with aesthetic experience and typically refers to an essential quality of something that arouses some type of reaction in the human observer — for example, pleasure, calm, elevation, or delight. Beauty is attributed to both natural phenomena (such as sunsets or mountains) as well as to human-made artifacts (such as paintings or symphonies). There have been numerous theories over the millennia of Western philosophical thought that attempt to define "beauty," by either:

1. attributing it to "essential qualities" within the natural phenomenon or artifact, or
2. regarding it purely in terms of the experience of beauty by the human subject.

The former approach considers beauty objectively, as something that exists in its own right, intrinsically, in the "something" or art object, independently of being experienced. The latter strategy regards beauty subjectively, as something that occurs in the mind of the subject who perceives beauty — *beauty is in the eyes of the beholder*. In Aesthetics, objectivity versus subjectivity has been a matter of serious philosophical dispute not only with regard to the nature of beauty but it also comes up in connection with judging the relative merits of pieces of art, as we will see in the the topic on aesthetic judgement. Here we ask whether beauty itself exists in the object (the natural phenomenon or the artifact) or purely within the subjective experience of the object.

Objectivist Views

Some examples:

- In the view of **Plato (427–347 BCE)**, beauty resides in his domain of the Forms. Beauty is objective, it is not about the experience of the observer. Plato's conception of "objectivity" is atypical. The world of Forms is "ideal" rather than material; Forms, and beauty, are non-physical ideas for Plato. Yet beauty is objective in that it is not a feature of the observer's experience.
- **Aristotle (384–322 BCE)** too held an objective view of beauty, but one vastly different from Plato's. Beauty resides in what is being observed and is defined by characteristics of the art object, such as symmetry, order, balance, and proportion. Such criteria hold, whether the object is natural or man-made.

While they hold differing conceptions of what "beauty" is, Plato and Aristotle do agree that it is a feature of the "object," and not something in the mind of the beholder.

Subjectivist Views

Some examples:

- **David Hume (1711-1776)** argued that beauty does not lie in "things" but is entirely subjective, a matter of feelings and emotion. Beauty is in the mind of of the person beholding the object, and what is beautiful to one observer may not be so to another.
- **Immanuel Kant (1724–1804)** believed that aesthetic judgement is based on feelings, in particular, the feeling of pleasure. What brings pleasure is a matter of personal taste. Such judgements involve neither cognition nor logic, and are therefore

subjective. Beauty is defined by judgement processes of the mind, it is not a feature of the thing judged to be beautiful.

A complication emerges with a purely subjective account of beauty, because the idea of beauty becomes meaningless if everything is merely a matter of taste or personal preference. If beauty is purely in the eye of the beholder, the idea of beauty has no value as an ideal comparable to truth or goodness. Controversies arise over matters of taste; people can have strong opinions regarding whether or not beauty is present, suggesting that perhaps there are some standards. Both Hume and Kant were aware of this problem. Each, in his own way, attempted to diminish it by lending a tone of objectivity to the idea of beauty.

- Hume proposed that great examples of good taste emerge, as do respected authorities. Such experts tend to have wide experience and knowledge, and subjective opinions among them tend to agree.
- Kant too was aware that subjective judgments of taste in art engender debates that do actually lead to agreement on questions of beauty. This is possible if aesthetic experience occurs with a disinterested attitude, unobstructed by personal feelings and preferences. We will return to Kant's notion of "disinterest" in the section on "Aesthetic Experience and Judgement."

A supplemental resource (bottom of page) provides further details on the subjectivity and objectivity of beauty.

The following TED talk by philosopher **Denis Dutton (1944-2010)** offers an unusual account of beauty, based on evolution. He argues that the concept of beauty evolved deep within our psyches for reasons related to survival.

Video

A Darwinian theory of beauty. **[CC-BY-NC-ND]** Enjoy this 15-minute video!

Coursework

Denis Dutton's lecture ends with these words:

"Is beauty in the eye of the beholder? No, it's deep in our minds. It's a gift handed down from the intelligent skills and rich emotional lives of our most ancient ancestors. Our powerful reaction to images, to the expression of emotion in art, to the beauty of music, to the night sky, will be with us and our descendants for as long as the human race exists."

Do you think a case can be made, based on Dutton's Darwinian perspective, that the nature of beauty is objective? or subjective? Explain your position based on points made in the lecture, in 100-150 words.

Note: Submit your response to the appropriate Assignments folder.

8.1.2 Is "This" Art?

The question "what is art?" has engendered a myriad of diverse responses. At one end of the spectrum, aestheticians propose theories that demarcate the realm of art by excluding pieces that do not meet certain criteria; for example, some views stipulate a particular characteristic to be an essential element of anything

considered to be art, or that conventions of art-world society apply to what can be considered art. On the other hand, there are views on aesthetics that claim that art cannot be defined, it defies definition — we just know it when we see it.

Do works of art have an essential characteristic?

Some main theories of art claim that works of art possess a defining and essential characteristic. As we will see in the section on aesthetic judgement, these same defining characteristics serve also as a *critical* factor for evaluating the merit of art objects. These are some examples of theories that define art in terms of an essential characteristic:

Representationalism: A work of art presents a reproduction, or imitation of something else that is real. (With Plato's theory of Forms, art is representational; it is an approximation, though, and never a perfect one, of an ideal.) Representationalism is also referred to as "imitation."

Formalism: Art is defined by exemplary arrangement of its elements. In the case of paintings, for example, this would involves effective use of components such as lines, shapes, perspective, light, colors, and symmetry. For music, a comparable but different set of elements would create form.

Functionalism: Art must serve a purpose. While functionalism is often taken to refer to practical purposes, some functionalist theories maintain that experiential purposes, such as conveying feeling, fulfill the requirement of functionality.

Emotionalism: Art must effectively evoke feeling or understanding in the subject viewing the art. (Some theorists regard the criterion of evoking emotion as a form a functionalism – it is art's purpose.)

An objection to "essentialist" definitions of art is that not everything that embodies one of these characteristics is art. Seeing

the essential characteristic as "necessary" rather than "sufficient," helps to a certain extent. For example:

"*If this evokes emotion, then it is art*" denotes sufficiency – a child's tantrum might be art.

whereas

"*If this is art, then it is evokes emotion.*" denotes necessity – emotion is a necessary component but not sufficient to make something "art."

This reasoning helps resolve one objection to essentialist theories, but there is another flavor of objection to essentialism. Something besides *one* essential feature seems to be required to define art; it is not a simple matter. The fact that essential criteria do not necessarily exclude one another helps; some art embodies several of the features. However, the true usefulness of these essential features may be as judgment criteria, rather than defining factors.

Does art defy definition?

The **family-resemblance, or cluster theory of art** is a reaction to perceived failures of theories of art that attempt to define art by a common property. According to the family-resemblance view, an object may be designated as "art" if it has at least some of the features or properties typically ascribed to art. There is no single common property among art objects. Works of art have a family resemblance, overlapping similarities. The family resemblance concept was originally suggested by Austrian philosopher **Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951)** in his work *Philosophical Investigations* (1953, 1958) where he addressed the problem of attributing a common characteristic to all things that go by one name. His examples included games. There are many types of games — board games, ball games, card games, etc. "...look and see whether there is anything common to all.—For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities,

relationships, and a whole series of them at that." (66) Given the widely diverse array of objects accepted as works of art, it followed that merging their nature under a common definition was inadequate.

Morris Weitz (1916-1981) was an American philosopher of aesthetics. He was critical of the many theories of art that attempt to define art by finding an essential feature possessed by all works of art. Wittgenstein's family resemblance theory supported his view regarding anti-essentialism in art. In his view, "artwork" is an open concept, and there is a non-specific set, or "cluster," of characteristics that may apply to the concept of artwork.

Compared to theories on the nature of art that designate an essential criterion, the family-resemblance (or cluster) theory offers the possibility of being more inclusive; work rejected by other theories can be considered art by family resemblance. A criticism to the cluster or family resemblance theory is that it is ahistorical; that is, the cluster of concepts used to define art does not hold over time. In addition to discussing this criticism of cluster theory, the following journal article provides an example of present-day scholarship on aesthetics.

Reading

Contemporary Aesthetics "The Cluster Account of Art: A Historical Dilemma": **The Cluster Account of Art: A Historical Dilemma. [CC-BY-NC-ND]**

Should art meet conventional standards?

Conventionalist theories of art are grounded in fundamental principles or agreements, explicit or implicit, of the art-world society. These theories for defining art set boundaries for what should and should not be included in the realm of art. Their effect is to exclude certain kinds of work, especially those that are progressive or experimental. Conventionalist theories include:

Historical Theories of Art: In order to be considered art, a work must bear some connection to existing works of art. At any given time, the art world includes work created up to that point, and new works must be similar or related to existing work. These theories invite an objection related to how the first art work became accepted. Proponents of these theories would respond that the definition also includes the "first" art.

Institutional theories of art: Art is whatever people in the 'art world' say it is. Those who have spent years in professional careers studying and savoring art and its history have an eye for fine distinction (or an "ear" perhaps if we are considering music.) Such theories are regarded as arbitrary or capricious by those who view beauty as purely subjective.

Conventionalist views define explicit boundaries for art. Such theories may exclude anything not intentionally created by a human "agent." For example, natural phenomena are not art, nor are items such as paintings created by animals. (Search online for "paintings by elephants." for example, if you are curious; this is not a course requirement.)

A supplemental resource (bottom of page) provides further investigation of definitions of art.

Supplemental Resources

Nature of Beauty
  Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP). **Beauty**. Read Section 1 on Objectivity and Subjectivity.
  Art Definition
  Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP). **The Definition of Art**.

34. 8.2 Aesthetic Experience and Judgement

8.2.1 Aesthetic Experience and Attitude

Aesthetic experience happens when we are able to experience works of art in a particularly satisfying or pleasurable way. This can occur when we have a **disinterested attitude** toward a work of art. The thing of beauty is experienced in its own right, not for any useful purpose and not out of simple curiosity.

Immanuel Kant's account of the idea of disinterested interest stands as a central principle of contemporary aesthetics. Recall from the material on the nature of beauty that Kant believed judgments about beauty to be based on our feeling of pleasure (or displeasure) and are a matter of taste, not of reason. While he regarded aesthetic judgement as subjective, he still believed that aesthetic judgements, in order to have meaning, must be made from a disinterested attitude, that is without our personal, emotional baggage. Pleasure or satisfaction is derived from the judgement of beauty. It is not the other way around: the pleasure or satisfaction does not produce the judgement of beauty, because such a judgment could not be disinterested; it would be derived from and clouded by other feelings and emotions. <u>Disinterested</u> judgements are impartial and pure; <u>interested</u> ones are biased and tainted with our personal experience and emotions.

Kant published his account of aesthetics in a third major critique — *The Critique of Judgement* (1892). In the following short passage from Book I of this *Critique*, he explains the idea of disinterested interest by comparing it to ordinary interest.

The satisfaction which we combine with the representation of the existence of an object is called interest. Such satisfaction always

has reference to the faculty of desire, either as its determining ground or as necessarily connected with its determining ground. Now when the question is if a thing is beautiful, we do not want to know whether anything depends or can depend on the existence of the thing either for myself or for any one else, but how we judge it by mere observation (intuition or reflection). If any one asks me if I find that palace beautiful which I see before me, I may answer: I do not like things of that kind which are made merely to be stared at. Or I can answer like that Iroquois sachem who was pleased in Paris by nothing more than by the cook-shops. Or again after the manner of Rousseau I may rebuke the vanity of the great who waste the sweat of the people on such superfluous things. In fine I could easily convince myself that if I found myself on an uninhabited island without the hope of ever again coming among men, and could conjure up just such a splendid building by my mere wish, I should not even give myself the trouble if I had a sufficiently comfortable hut. This may all be admitted and approved; but we are not now talking of this. We wish only to know if this mere representation of the object is accompanied in me with satisfaction, however indifferent I may be as regards the existence of the object of this representation. We easily see that in saying it is beautiful and in showing that I have taste, I am concerned, not with that in which I depend on the existence of the object, but with that which I make out of this representation in myself. Every one must admit that a judgement about beauty, in which the least interest mingles, is very partial and is not a pure judgement of taste. We must not be in the least prejudiced in favour of the existence of the things, but be quite indifferent in this respect, in order to play the judge in things of taste.

   We cannot, however, better elucidate this proposition, which is of capital importance, than by contrasting the pure disinterested satisfaction in judgements of taste, with that which is bound up with an interest, especially if we can at the same time be certain that there are no other kinds of interest than those which are now to be specified.

Several sections later, after comparing the satisfaction of "the Beautiful" to that of "the Pleasant" and "the Good," Kant declares that only taste in the beautiful can be disinterested and free from the dictates of sense and reason. Taste, or disinterested judgement, that brings satisfaction derives from beauty; this is Kant's nutshell summary:

Taste is the faculty of judging of an object or a method of representing it by an *entirely disinterested* satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The object of such satisfaction is called *beautiful.*

An **aesthetic attitude** is a disinterested attitude. With a disinterested attitude, personal biases and irrelevant emotions are set aside. Aesthetic judgements of taste are made as if we expect that others would agree with us. Though reached on an individual's level, judgements of taste do not imply that beauty is in the eye of the beholder; disinterested judgement is about the beautiful thing, not about the beholder. An aesthetic attitude is disinterested; there is distance from ordinary cares and concerns. An aesthetic attitude involves being interested in something for no practical reason, but merely for its own sake.

Supplemental resources (bottom of page) provide additional perspectives on aesthetic experience.

8.2.2 Aesthetic Judgement and Art Criticism

Theories we have already encountered for defining art are vantage points for making aesthetic judgements about particular pieces of art. Our initial question was: "What is art? " Now we ask: "What is good art?" Before looking at aesthetic judgement through the lenses of different theories, it is helpful to revisit the distinction between subjectivism and objectivism we considered with regard to the nature of beauty.

Subjectivism: If we believe that beauty is purely subjective, that

it is in the mind of the beholder, then we are committed to a subjectivist position on aesthetic judgement. There is no fact-of-the-matter about what is good art or about which art we should like or appreciate. All is a matter of individual preference. In this view, no one can be wrong in his/her opinions about the aesthetic experience. Aesthetic judgements and art criticism can have no point.

Objectivism: If we view beauty as objective, as something that exists in its own right within the "something" or art object, then we can hold that there is a fact-of-the-matter about what is beautiful and what is good art, and about which art we should like or appreciate. Objectivism means that aesthetic evaluations or preferences can be wrong or misguided.

Aesthetic theories guide judgements and provide the context for **art criticism**, which evaluates art and provides direction for how art should be interpreted, appreciated, and understood. Art criticism is a wide-ranging discipline. There are numerous other aesthetic theories, besides fundamentals addressed in this introduction to aesthetics. For example, some theories are interested in the intentions of the artist. Should a work of art be understood in terms of the artist's personal knowledge, skills, and intentions? Or should the meaning of a work be established by social conventions and practices of the artist's time that may not even be known or understood by the artist?

Each of the theories we examined for defining art is described here in terms of its capacity for judging art. Keep in mind that using the perspective of one theory for judging art does not exclude using the perspective of other theories alongside. One might judge a painting, for example, both in terms of its form and its expressive/emotive qualities. And also remember that aesthetics is an expansive field of study and there are other theories besides those treated here.

Representationalism

A representational theory for defining art requires it to be an imitation of something real. Though representation, or imitation, is no longer considered by most people to be a determining factor of what makes something art, representational art still remains well accepted and popular. A representational theory for judging art is concerned with the aesthetic interest of the representation, which does not necessarily entail the accuracy or precision of the representation. Some people are comfortable with art that portrays something they recognize; it can elevate an aesthetic experience more effectively than art that is completely abstract.

Formalism

The aesthetic form of a work of art is everything that is not the subject matter of that artwork. Form includes the way that the parts and materials are put together and organized. The parts of the work of art must be arranged in a way that will stir our aesthetic sentiment. Aesthetic judgments about form apply to both representational and abstract visual art; lines, shapes, perspective, light, colors, symmetry — all of these elements contribute to the aesthetic experience. Other forms of art (for example, music) have their own sets of formal attributes.

Kant was an early advocate of formalism. Such formal elements of an object as shape, arrangement, and lines, he argued, contribute in an important way to aesthetic judgements. However, he believed elements like color or tone to be more connected to our sense of what is agreeable rather than beautiful; they relate to "interest" rather than "disinterest." Still, Kant's overall high regard for the significance formal aspects of art is foundational in contemporary aesthetics.

Functionalism

Functionalist theories expect a work of art to serve a purpose, and the value of a work of art is determined by how well it satisfies its purpose. In order to explain or understand the meaning of a work of art we must know what it is for or what it is supposed to do. Functionalist theories are usually, but not always, concerned with art that has a practical purpose. Functional excellence of a practical object is often looked at together with form. That good form follows from good functionality became a 20th-century principle for industrial design and modernist architecture.

There are functionalist theories that look beyond practical purposes. A rewarding aesthetic experience might to be a legitimate purpose or function in its own right. The following reading assignment develops the idea that having purely practical function is not in and of itself an adequate measure aesthetic value.

Reading

Contemporary Aesthetics: "Aesthetic Functionalism." **Aesthetic Functionalism**. **[CC-BY-NC-ND]**

Emotionalism

Recall that emotionalism requires that works of art effectively express feelings or ideas. Russian writer Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) wrote in his 1898 work *What is Art?* (page 51 of the 1904 translation):

Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man

consciously, by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings that he has lived through, and that other people are infected by these feelings and also experience them.

An aesthetic judgement made from the point of view of emotionalism must consider how successful a work of art is in expressing and "infecting" others with feelings and emotion. (Perhaps aesthetic judgement from a purely disinterested attitude requires discipline when experiencing highly expressive art.) There may be something counter-intuitive afoot if the feeling conveyed is not pleasant. Is it still art? Humans, in fact, are drawn to art that conveys feelings such as sadness or terror, for example, in movies, fiction, and even certain music or paintings. It may be argued that such "aesthetic experiences" bring emotional relief and release, effects not exactly synonymous with pleasure. But, if intense emotion, even if not joyful, is satisfying, the beauty may be there even from Kant's perspective. And any release or therapeutic effect might be seen as having value, or serving a purpose, from the functionalist's viewpoint.

The following TED talk by designer Richard Seymour refers to some of the judgement theories we have covered in making his interesting case for the importance of beauty in product design.

Video

How beauty feels. Enjoys this 17-minute video. **[CC-BY-NC-ND]**

Coursework

Richard Seymour believes that we "feel" beauty, rather than "think" beauty. (Kant and Hume would agree!) He also describes how designers intentionally instill their creations with features intended to arouse feelings, what he calls a limbic response. Do you think that the responses he describes involve a disinterested attitude? Are they aesthetic experiences? Use examples from his talk to explain your answer.

   Note: Post your response in the appropriate Discussion Topic.

This assignment involves applying what you have learned about aesthetic judgement.

   Please pay close attention to these instructions:

1. Do some browsing on the internet and choose an art image, preferably a fine-art painting.
2. Save the painting and artist name, and internet location where you found it.
3. Provide an art critique of this work of art from a disinterested viewpoint, making use of one or more of these theories: formalism, representationalism, emotionalism, and/or functionalism.
4. Your submission should be a well written essay, 150-250 word.
5. Include the artist's name and the name of the work of art. I need to be able to find this image online in order to evaluate your submission.
6. **Do not include the image itself in your submission.**
   Note: Submit your response to the appropriate Assignments folder.

Complete the Unit Test by the date on the Schedule of Work.

Supplemental Resources

Aesthetic Experience

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP). **Immanuel Kant: Aesthetics**. Section 2 on Kant's Aesthetics.

Smithsonian Magazine "Tactile Portraits for the Blind." **Please Touch the Art**. An interesting variation of aesthetic experience.

35. Aesthetics - Assessments

8.1 What Is Beauty, What Is Art? Submission

Denis Dutton's lecture ends with these words: "Is beauty in the eye of the beholder? No, it's deep in our minds. It's a gift handed down from the intelligent skills and rich emotional lives of our most ancient ancestors. Our powerful reaction to images, to the expression of emotion in art, to the beauty of music, to the night sky, will be with us and our descendants for as long as the human race exists." Do you think a case can be made, based on Dutton's Darwinian perspective, that the nature of beauty is objective? or subjective? Explain your position based on points made in the lecture, in 100-150 words.

8.2 Aesthetic Experience and Judgement Discussion

Richard Seymour believes that we "feel" beauty, rather than "think" beauty. (Kant and Hume would agree!) He also describes how designers intentionally instill their creations with features intended to arouse feelings, what he calls a limbic response. Do you think that the responses he describes involve a disinterested attitude? Are they aesthetic experiences? Use examples from his talk to explain your answer.

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This assignment involves applying what you have learned about aesthetic judgement. Please pay close attention to these instructions: Do some browsing on the internet and choose an art image, preferably a fine-art painting. Save the painting and artist name, and internet location where you found it. Provide an art critique of this work of art from a disinterested viewpoint, making use of one or more of these theories: formalism, representationalism, emotionalism, and/or functionalism. Your submission should be a well written essay, 150-250 word. Include the artist's name and the name of the work of art. I need to be able to find this image online in order to evaluate your submission. Do not include the image itself in your submission.