

Ethics

In the Larger Context




Fundamental Questions

- We're backing up a bit from defining and explaining ethics to get a larger context
- **Ethics** is part of **philosophy**
 - What exactly is **philosophy**?
 - "T" shirt: "Nothing is like philosophy"
 - The question of what is philosophy is itself a philosophical question






Fundamental Questions

- 1st approximation: Philosophy is a **search for wisdom**, concerned with the **most fundamental questions**, characterized by **critical analysis and careful argumentation**
- 



Fundamental Questions

- 1. Search for wisdom
 - Is there any difference between data and understanding?
 - Is there any difference between true belief and knowledge?
 - Is knowledge something more than true belief?
 - What is it?
- 



Fundamental Questions

- Is there any difference between knowledge and wisdom?
 - Scientia/episteme
 - Sophia/nous





Fundamental Questions

- Key aim of philosophy is wisdom—not just knowledge
 - Philo (love) sophia (wisdom)





Fundamental Questions

- This is different from the sciences (at least it is now)
 - Key goal of sciences is increased knowledge—typically in a particular subject or discipline





Fundamental Questions

- New empirical discoveries push old data and theories out
 - Can you give any examples?
 - Ptolemaic view of solar system supplanted by Copernican view






Fundamental Questions

- Wisdom is something different
 - Wise use of knowledge?
 - Circular?
 - Clever use of knowledge?






Fundamental Questions

- While other disciplines typically ask ‘how’ questions (how does the natural order work?), philosophy tends to ask ‘why’ questions (why is there natural order?; why is there something rather than nothing?)
- 




Fundamental Questions

- Seeks to uncover the ultimate bases for the how's
 - What does reality ultimately consist of?
 - What is science? How is it possible?
- 




Fundamental Questions

- Science takes for granted certain particular answers to these questions
 - But they rest on philosophical assumptions—that aren't settled by science
- 



Fundamental Questions

- So everyone is a philosopher as soon as we ask ‘why?’
 - The question is not whether you will do philosophy; **it is whether you will do it well or poorly**
- 



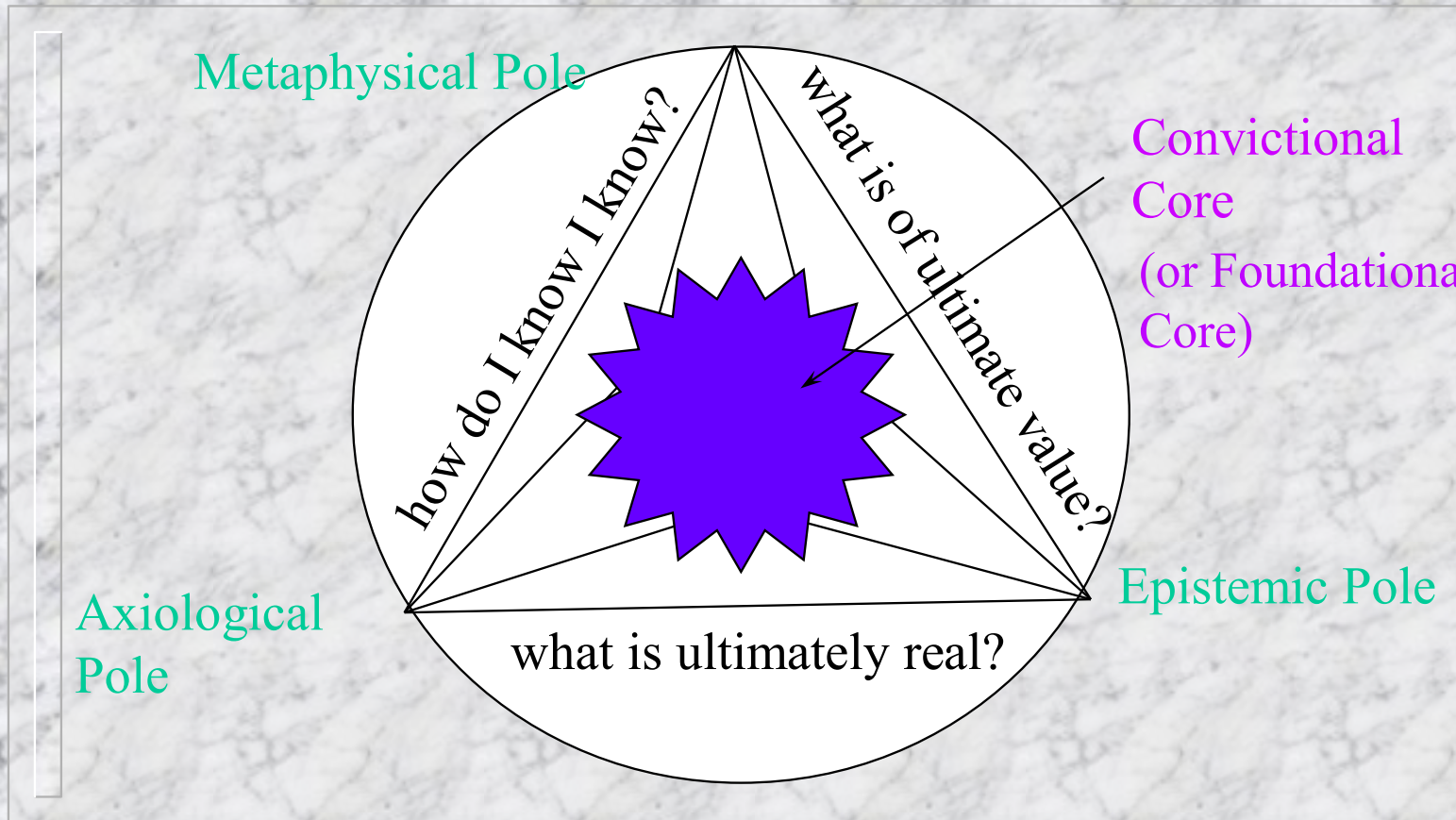
Fundamental Questions

- 2. Concerned with the most fundamental questions
 - We've touched on some of the most fundamental questions
 - Historically divided into several main categories:



Further analysis:

WORLD VIEW: Some Basic Issues





Fundamental Things

- These categories in our world view can be broken down further, but they underlie **virtually all** of our **other** beliefs






Fundamental Questions

- 3. Characterized by critical analysis and careful argumentation





Fundamental Questions

- Two facets
 - **Analysis**—taking apart, breaking things down, looking under lens, asking penetrating questions: are these terms clear? Are these beliefs justified? Is this argument form valid—and are the premises true?
- 




Fundamental Questions

- **Argument**—giving reasons for the position you take; building up; defending view with sound foundation of **good reasons** or evidence





Fundamental Questions

- Does not mean getting into arguments
 - I will look carefully for these two things (analysis and argument) in your quizzes, papers, and exams
- 




Fundamental Questions


- Philosophy involves developing certain **skills** in reasoning
 - One of my goals is to extend your development in these **skills**
 - Critically important **skills** in **life** and will have an impact in your other studies, relationships, conversations, and spiritual life







Fundamental Questions

- Philosophy is often thought of as useless, impractical, but philosophy is largely about clear thinking
 - Extremely useful!
- 




Very short course about 3 elements of reasoning (Aristotle)


- **Terms:** concepts, words
(‘abortion’ ; ‘murder’)
 - **Propositions:** assertion sentences
(“Abortion is murder”)
 - **Arguments:** premises and conclusions
- 




Very short course about 3 elements of reasoning (Aristotle)


● Sample Argument:

- “Murder is any intentional killing of an innocent human being”
 - Abortion involves the intentional killing of an innocent human being
 - Therefore, abortion is murder
- 





Very short course about 3 elements of reasoning (Aristotle)

- Necessary for good, clear reasoning
 - Terms → clear (not ambiguous; consistent meaning used in entire argument)
 - Propositions → true; justified beliefs, good reasons, good evidence
 - Arguments → proper form (valid); conclusions follow if the propositions are true
- 



Very short course about 3 elements of reasoning (Aristotle)


- The general **form** of valid argument
 - If P then R
 - P
 - Then R (*modus ponens*)
 - If not P then not R
 - Not R
 - Then not P (*modus tollens*)
 - But an argument needs more than this!
- 



Very short course about 3 elements of reasoning (Aristotle)


- Very briefly look at sound argument
 - Form of the argument is valid
 - Premises are true
 - Terms used clearly and consistently






Very short course about 3 elements of reasoning (Aristotle)


● Example of valid argument (but not sound):


- All Texans are slimeballs
 - Bill is a Texan
 - Bill is a slimeball
- 



Very short course about 3 elements of reasoning (Aristotle)


● Bad example of form (affirming the consequent)


- All Texans are slimeballs
 - Bill is a slimeball
 - Therefore Bill is a Texan
- 



Very short course about 3 elements of reasoning (Aristotle)


Analysis


- All about checking the meaning of terms in the argument
 - Are the propositions true or well justified?
 - Is the form of the argument sound?
 - Easy to go wrong on all of these
- 



Very short course about 3 elements of reasoning (Aristotle)


● Common problems

- **Terms**: unclear, ambiguous “God”; try to show examples as you go along
 - **Propositions** unjustified: no good reasons or evidence—just assume it to be the case because commonly held
 - **Argument** form is invalid—affirm the consequent
- 




Very short course about 3 elements of reasoning (Aristotle)

● Common mistakes (not comprehensive list)

- **Begging the question:** assuming what you're trying to prove: We found OJ's glove behind his house with blood stains
 - **Genetic fallacy:** You were taught that in Sunday school—why believe it?
- 




Strategies

- Ask good questions—the Socratic method
 - Uncover and evaluate assumptions
 - Look for analogies and counterexamples
- 



Strategies

● Ask good questions

- What do you mean?
 - Abortion is a matter of choice. Which terms could be slippery here? Any with more than one meaning?
 - How do you know?
 - Fetus is not human
 - What is your argument?
 - If you can't trust me with a choice, how can you trust me with a child?
- 




Strategies

- What difference does it make?
 - What are the hidden impacts or possibly the unintentional or unforeseen consequences? Is there a slippery slope here?
- 2. Uncover and evaluate assumptions
 - Much of philosophical analysis occurs at level of assumptions or presuppositions—not the overt claims but the beliefs that underlie them





Strategies

- What needs to be true in order for this to be true? What must one hold in order to hold this? Then ask the critical thinking questions about them
 - Look for analogies and counterexamples
 - Analogy example: abortion and slavery—okay to be pro-choice in both cases?
- 



Strategies

- Counterexamples---key way to isolate a problem in reasoning is to find a counterexample—easy to find when one of the premises is **universal** (or **global** in scope); find a counterexample to it and you've refuted it






Strategies

- Dealing with problems in the Bible
 - Do you trust the Bible because you can answer all the questions or do you believe it because of more extended and complex argument
 - General historical reliability, emerging picture of Jesus, claims force a decision (tri-lemma), conclude Jesus is Lord, what was Jesus' view of Bible? Then how do you handle problems?






Strategies

- Difficulties versus problems; further we need to examine if some form of metaphysical naturalism “taints” the objector’s point of view
 - Continuing with counterexamples: if you can accept all the premises of an argument and still find a valid counterexample to the conclusion, then there’s something wrong with the reasoning
- 




Strategies

- Pro-life movement is populated or mostly populated by men
 - If the pro-life agenda is successful it would keep some women out of “power”
 - Pro-life movement is a movement of men or mostly men to keep women “down” and oppress them; keeping them from reproductive freedom is denying them power
 - Any counterexamples?
- 



Case Study

- Want to help you see philosophical kind of reasoning as distinct from other questions in analyzing particular claims
 - Common view: “I won’t believe anything that can’t be proved scientifically”
 - Science is the paradigm of rationality
- 



Case Study

- **S:** *Only that which can be scientifically verified is rationally acceptable*
 - What exactly do they mean? Is this true? How do we evaluate it?
 - Is there an argument here?
 - There is a very short way to dispose of this claim, but I want to go through several moves in order to illustrate






Case Study

- Terms (what do they mean?)
 - ‘Rationally acceptable’
 - Let’s grant they mean it ‘is okay to believe’ or ‘reliable to believe’
 - Again, let’s accept a rough picture: scientific method of experimentation and verification
 - Bunsen burners with low flame in a lab kind of stuff
 - Repeated observation holding certain factors constant and seeing how a change in one factor affects others
 - Big idea: empirical investigation → generalization






Case Study

- But what's the claim here?
 - Could be broken down into two claims (were still asking the question “what do you mean?”)
 - A: That which is scientifically verified is rationally acceptable—that is reliable, leads to Truth, etc.
 - B: What is rationally acceptable is *limited* to that set of beliefs
- 




Case Study

- One may agree with A but disagree with B
 - Different ways to evaluate this—any ideas?
 - Why think B is true? What kind of argument would show that?
 - You might say: “Well, the scientific method has been very successful, has led to T in the past, give us technology, etc.
 - You might also say: “Lot’ s of non-science claims have been shown to be unreliable or it is unreasonable to think they are reliable”—e.g. magic, astrology
- 



Case Study

- But does it follow that the scientific method is the only way to T?
 - Analogy: farming has been very successful form of making living— longest lasting, consistent, etc. Great source of income. Therefore it' s the only source of income.
 - Does the conclusion follow from the premise?
- 




Case Study

- What are the assumptions of A? What does one implicitly hold to be True if one does science and has confidence in the scientific method?
 - Turns out there are a lot of presuppositions of science:






Case Study

- Existence of a theory-independent external world
 - Orderly nature of the external world
 - Knowability of the external world
 - Laws of logic apply
 - Reliability of our cognitive and sensory faculties to serve as truth gatherers and as a source of justified beliefs
 - Adequacy of language to describe the world
 - Intellectual and moral values used in science (honest, perseverance, cooperation, trust)
 - Uniformity of nature and induction
 - Epistemic values as truth conducive (simplicity, explanatory coherence)
 - Belief that the scientific method is reliable source of justified beliefs or knowledge
- 




Case Study

- What questions do we ask of these assumptions?
 - Are they reasonable?
 - How are they under-girded? Do any beg the question?
 - Are there any defeating counterexamples?
 - Are these assumptions verified by the scientific method?
- 



Case Study

- **Crucial point:** *not* verified by science and *cannot* be—why?
 - First, have scientists shown these under-girding beliefs to be reliable? If any are unproved by science it would be irrational or not rationally acceptable for scientists to accept S—they look like philosophical and not scientific issues
 - Second,
 - You would have to assume the reliability of science to test the reliability of the assumptions that under-gird it.
 - You'd be **assuming the Truth of S to prove S**
 - Then there's no way to know if S is true
- 



Case Study

- Much shorter method: here's a *crucial* counterexample
 - Examine S itself and ask can S be scientifically verified? No—then it is not rationally acceptable; it is self-referentially incoherent

