

Phil. 1000

Notes #1: Course Requirements, What Is Philosophy?

To discuss today:

This course: requirements, subject, guidelines

Philosophy: what it is

An example of philosophy: The Ship of Theseus

The value of philosophy & this course

I. About this Class

Review syllabus. Some highlights:

- Who should take this class?
 - Class will contain:
 - Lots of arguments
 - Theoretical, philosophical questions (see below)
 - Controversial ideas.
 - Will not contain:
 - Directly practical knowledge
- Course requirements. Quizzes, exams.
- Miscellaneous guidelines:
 - Come on time.
 - Come to office hours.
 - Participate.
- What should you do now?
 - Get course readings. <<http://libraries.colorado.edu/search/p?SEARCH=huemer>>
 - Read the syllabus.
 - Read the Clifford and Feynman readings. (Then the Rand selection.)

II. What Is Philosophy?

A. The Subject Matter of Philosophy

- Philosophy studies some general, fundamental questions, about the nature of the world and our place in it.
- Three main branches:
 1. Metaphysics - studies what sorts of things in general exist, and what sort of world this is. (Examples: existence of God, free will vs. determinism, distinction between body and soul, and the Ship of Theseus question)
 2. Epistemology - Studies the nature of knowledge - what is it and how do we know what we know?
 3. Ethics - studies evaluative questions - what is good/bad, what should one do in general, etc.
- Some smaller branches of philosophy:
 4. Political philosophy - studies the source of political authority, the best overall structure for society and/or the state, and related questions. (Can be seen as a branch of ethics.)
 5. Aesthetics - studies the nature of art, beauty, and related questions. (More generally: the nature of aesthetic qualities.)

6. Logic - studies reasoning, esp. the principles of correct reasoning. Closely related to, but not the same as, epistemology.

B. The Methods of Philosophy

Philosophy in the Western tradition mainly relies on logical arguments & common experience.

III. Benefits of Studying Philosophy

A. The importance of philosophical questions

A metaphor: The story of the astronaut (from Ayn Rand). Three questions:

1. Where am I?
2. How do I find out?
3. What should I do?

B. Thinking skills

- Philosophy teaches us to think more clearly, to avoid common confusions.
- Philosophy teaches us to reason more cogently, to avoid common fallacies.
- Philosophy makes us aware of the fundamental questions.

C. Philosophical Attitude

The Cardinal Rule of philosophy: Truth comes first.

When doing philosophy, we are trying to identify what is true. That comes before personalities, feelings, and desires. The following rules are all consequences of this.

Four rules of philosophical comportment:

1. Philosophers question:

- Question the claims of others.
- Question your own beliefs.
- This does not mean refusing to accept anything as true!

2. Philosophy is impersonal:

- The philosopher does not choose beliefs based on his personality or feelings.
- The philosopher does not take intellectual criticism personally. Challenges are to be welcomed.
- The philosopher does not accept or reject philosophical claims based on who says them.
- The philosopher does not go along with ideas because of personal or social consequences of criticizing them.

3. Philosophers are reasonable:

- The philosopher has reasons for his beliefs.
- The philosopher asks for the reasons for others' beliefs.
- The philosopher is moved by good reasons presented to him.

4. Philosophers are open-minded and critical:

- Our ideas and arguments are open to criticism. The philosopher looks for objections to his beliefs.
- The ideas and arguments of others are also open to criticism.

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Notes #2: The Ethic of Rationality

Two problems of irrationality to discuss today:

1. Forming beliefs for no reason.
2. Failure to consider objections/counter-evidence.

I. Evidentialism (Clifford)

This is the view that it is morally wrong to hold unjustified beliefs.

- Justified belief: a belief that it is rational to hold; a belief that is (very) likely to be true, given your evidence.

Argument for this:

1. It is wrong to hold an unjustified belief which causes harm to others.
 - The shipowner in the 1st example is morally blameworthy.
 - Best explanation of this: he is blameworthy for his unjustified belief. (Discuss alternatives.)
2. If so, it is also wrong when the belief does not but could have caused harm.
 - Wrongness must depend on what was true at the time of the action.
 - Related point: moral blame cannot depend on whether the agent got lucky.
3. All unjustified beliefs carry a risk of harm to others.
 - Everyone (not just public figures) influences the beliefs and actions of others. (Examples)
 - [Beliefs interact in unpredictable ways. (My point)]
 - Unjustified beliefs weaken our powers of reasoning, develop bad habits.
 - Your irrationality causes other people to be dishonest with you.
4. Therefore, it is always wrong to have unjustified beliefs.

“To sum up: it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.” (101)

Why people are often irrational:

- We feel happier when we think we know things.
- But this is no justification for adopting unjustified beliefs.
- Exercise: think about what unjustified beliefs you or others around you have.

Objection:

What if we are irrational only about certain things with little practical consequences?

Problem:

- The irrational person is in a poor position to identify these issues.
- Beliefs have many connections with other beliefs, some unanticipated.

II. Rationality & the Scientific Ethic (Feynman)

- Feynman distinguishes two things:
 - a) Not being dishonest: This is merely not lying.
 - b) “Scientific integrity, which is another level” (341): This requires giving all relevant information that you know.

- Scientist should state all the facts that might cast doubt on their theory / experimental results.
 - “For example, if you’re doing an experiment, you should report everything that you think might make it invalid—not only what you think is right about it: other causes that could possibly explain your results; and things you thought of that you’ve eliminated by some other experiment, and how they worked ... Details that could throw doubt on your interpretation must be given, if you know them. You must do the best you can—if you know anything at all wrong, or possibly wrong—to explain it.”
- This applies to non-scientists too (my points):
 - Confirmation Bias: This is a common psychological phenomenon. People are biased towards confirmatory evidence. E.g., when considering a theory,
 - ☞ They look for positive instances, not counter-examples.
 - ☞ They think about arguments for, but not objections.
 - ☞ They remember evidence supporting their beliefs more than evidence against their beliefs.
 - Psychology experiments support this.
 - ☞ Capital punishment experiment
 - ☞ The introversion/extraversion experiment
- The scientific ethic is often disregarded in politics.
 - “On the one hand, as scientists we are ethically bound to the scientific method, in effect promising to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but—which means that we must include all the doubts, the caveats, the ifs, ands, and buts. On the other hand, we are not just scientists but human beings as well. And like most people we’d like to see the world a better place, which in this context translates into our working to reduce the risk of potentially disastrous climatic change. To do that we need to get some broadbased support, to capture the public’s imagination. That, of course, entails getting loads of media coverage. So we have to offer up scary scenarios, make simplified, dramatic statements, and make little mention of any doubts we might have. This ‘double ethical bind’ we frequently find ourselves in cannot be solved by any formula. Each of us has to decide what the right balance is between being effective and being honest. I hope that means being both.”
 - Stephen Schneider, Prof. of Environmental Biology & Global Change, Stanford University (Discover, Oct. 1989, pp. 45-48)

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Notes #3: Political Irrationality

To Discuss today:

Theories to explain political disagreement.

Why people are irrational.

How to avoid irrationality.

I. The problem of political disagreement

- Features of political disagreements:
 - widespread
 - strong
 - persistent
- Harms:
 - Waste of resources
 - Bad policies
 - Conflict, violence
- Theories of political disagreements:
 - a. Miscalculation + inherent difficulty of issues
 - b. Ignorance, we haven't collected enough information to resolve issues
 - c. People disagree because of divergent values
 - d. Irrationality

II. Ignorance & miscalculation theories do not explain:

- Persistence of political disagreements.
- Strength of political beliefs.
- Clustering of logically unrelated beliefs.
- Correlations of political beliefs with race, sex, personality traits, etc.

III. Divergent values theory does not explain:

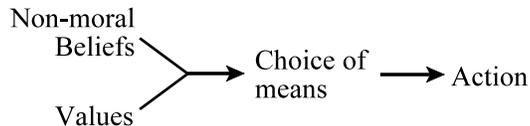
- Why people disagree about values in the first place.
- Clustering of logically unrelated beliefs.
- Factual disputes in politics. Examples:

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Disputes:</u>
Gun Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Do guns cause crime?▪ Are they effective means of self-defense?▪ Is there a risk of developing a tyrannical government?▪ Does private gun ownership reduce this risk?
Capital Punishment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Does capital punishment deter crime?▪ How often are innocent people executed?

- Capitalism vs. Socialism
 - What determines prices in a market economy?
 - What are the effects of socialism?
 - Where do capitalists get their money?

IV. Rational ignorance & rational irrationality

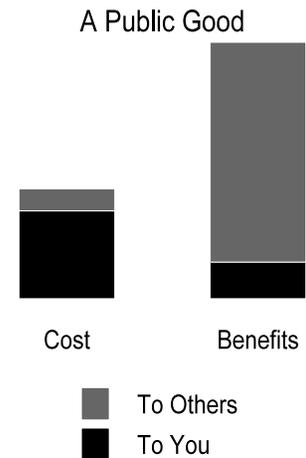
- Two kinds of “rationality”:
 - Instrumental rationality: consists in choosing the correct means for pursuing your existing goals, whatever they are. The explanation of action:



- Epistemic rationality: consists in using correct (logical) reasoning, basing beliefs on evidence, avoiding fallacies, not contradicting oneself, and so on.

- The Theory of Rational Ignorance:

- It is rational to remain ignorant when costs of collecting information exceed expected benefits.
- Example: information about political candidates & issues. Political information is a public good: a good for which the producer bears most of the cost, while others receive most of the benefits.
- People in fact choose to remain ignorant in these cases.



- ☞ 60% think foreign aid is one of the 2 largest items in the federal budget. In fact, it is <1% of the budget.¹
- ☞ “During the 1992 presidential campaign 89 percent of the public knew that Vice President Quayle was feuding with the television character Murphy Brown, but only 19 percent could characterize Bill Clinton’s record on the environment... 86 percent of the public knew that the Bushes’ dog was named Millie, yet only 15 percent knew that both presidential candidates supported the death penalty. Judge Wapner (host of the television series ‘People’s Court’) was identified by more people than were Chief Justices Burger or Rehnquist.”²

- The Theory of Rational Irrationality:

- Assumes:
 - a. People have non-epistemic belief preferences: prefer to believe certain things, for reasons independent of the truth or epistemic rationality of those beliefs.
 - b. People have some control over what they believe.

¹ <www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/BFW/finding1.html>. Respondents were asked to pick the two largest items from the following list: foreign aid, defense, Social Security, food stamps, and Medicare. On average, foreign aid was estimated as 23% of the budget.

² Delli Carpini & Keeter, What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters, 101.

- c. People are generally instrumentally rational.
- Therefore:
 - ☞ People choose to adopt epistemically irrational beliefs, when the “costs” of being rational are greater than the expected benefits.
 - ☞ This includes most political beliefs.

V. Sources of belief preferences

- People are biased by self-interest + interests of the group they prefer to identify with
- People adopt beliefs to accord with the self-image they want to project
- Political beliefs can serve as tools of social bonding.
- People are biased towards other beliefs that cohere with their existing beliefs.

VI. Mechanisms of belief fixation

- a. Biased weighting of evidence: we attribute slightly more weight to each piece of evidence that supports our belief, and slightly less weight to each piece of evidence that undermines our belief, than it merits.
- b. Selective attention and energy: we spend more time/energy thinking about arguments supporting or beliefs than arguments criticizing them. But we spend more time looking for flaws in arguments opposing our beliefs than in arguments supporting them. This leads to:
 - ☞ Prospects for attaining the truth, with different intellectual traits:

	<u>Intelligence</u>	<u>Bias</u>	
1.	+	-	(best)
2.	-	-	
3.	-	+	
4.	+	+	(worst)

- c. Selection of evidence sources: we get political information from sources we already know we agree with.
 - ☞ Contrast this with scientific approach.
- d. We base beliefs on subjective, speculative, and anecdotal claims. These are more subject to bias.

VII. What should we do?

- Avoid using mechanisms in (VI).
- Collect information from variety of sources.
- Look for flaws in your own arguments.
- Be aware of cases where we are likely to be biased.
 - Moral-political issues
 - Emotional issues
 - Clustering of logically independent beliefs
 - Factual beliefs that occur prior to gathering evidence / are unaffected by evidence
- Remember:
 - Irrationality is not fully conscious.
 - Don't assume you are immune.
 - Conscious efforts may reduce it.

- Regard others' political claims with skepticism.
- Identify what sort of evidence is required to scientifically resolve a factual question, or test a factual claim. Ask whether one has such evidence.

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Notes #4: Theories of Truth

To discuss today:

Theories of truth:

Correspondence

Subjective

Deflationary

I. Some Background about 'Truth'

- "True" and "false" apply to: (1) sentences, (2) beliefs, (3) propositions.
- A fundamental fact about truth: The T-schema:
"Snow is white" is true if and only if snow is white.
It is true that Jar Jar Binks is stupid, if and only if Jar Jar Binks is stupid.
Etc.

II. The Correspondence Theory

- Truth = correspondence with reality.
"To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true." (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1011b25)
- What is correspondence?
 - Beliefs/statements have "intentionality": They represent things in the world.
 - A statement "corresponds to reality" when the world is the way the statement represents it.
Typically, this means: (i) the things it represents exist, and (ii) they have the characteristics the sentence represents them to have.
 - The T-schema explains/is explained by this.
- Metaphysical realism:
 - Reality is objective, independent of observers.
 - This is distinct from the Correspondence Theory, but often associated with it.

III. Subjective/Relativist Views

- Relativism: Truth is relative (to an individual / to a society). What does this mean?
 - Truth is/depends on a relationship between the statement and a particular person/group.
 - ☞ Thus: "x is true" is incomplete. Must specify to whom x is true.
 - ☞ Two variants: (i) truth is relative to a society (cultural relativism); (ii) truth is relative to an individual.
 - A statement can be true in relation to ("relative to") one person, but false relative to another.
 - Analogies:
 - ☞ Tastiness is relative: Starbucks coffee is tasty to Sue, but not so tasty to Mary.
 - ☞ Difficulty (of a task) is relative: It is difficult for Sara to reach the top shelf in the supermarket, but easy for Wilt.
 - Question: What does "true for X" mean?
 - ☞ Common answer: "true for X" means "accepted by X".

- Contrast: Absolutism. Denies all of the above.
- Metaphysical anti-realism (a.k.a. “idealism”, a.k.a. “subjectivism”):
 - Reality is subjective, dependent on observers.
 - This view generally goes along with Relativism about truth.

IV. Deflationary View of Truth

- Sometimes seen as a competitor to Correspondence Theory; sometimes seen as a variant of the Correspondence Theory.
- Claims: There is no “substantial” property of truth.
 - T-schema says all there is to say about truth.
 - “True” and “truth” are just convenient tools of shorthand. (You can agree with someone by saying “that’s true,” without having to repeat what they said.)
- Problem: Frege-Geach
 - Account only explains simplest use of “true”: Saying a particular sentence is true. Does not deal with other contexts:
 - “Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?”
 - “Truth is stranger than fiction.”
 - These contexts require the property of truth.

Questions about the Reading:

- What view does the narrator represent?
- What view does Mark represent?
- What view does Autrey represent?
- What are the pebbles in the bucket? What is the “magic”?
- What is this about:

A sheep passes then, leaving through the gate. Autrey sees; he stoops, picks up a pebble, holds it aloft in the air. “Behold!” Autrey proclaims. “A sheep has passed! I must now toss a pebble into this bucket, my dear bucket, and destroy that fond level which has held for so long -” Another sheep passes. Autrey, caught up in his drama, misses it; so I plunk a pebble into the bucket. Autrey is still speaking: “- for that is the supreme test of the shepherd, to throw in the pebble, be it ever so agonizing, be the old level ever so precious. Indeed, only the best of shepherds can meet a requirement so stern -”

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Notes #5: Absolutism vs. Relativism

I. For Relativism

A. The Argument from Disagreement

1. Different people (esp. different societies) have very different beliefs. (Premise.)
2. Therefore, what is true for one person/society may not be true for another. So truth is relative.
(From 1?)

Evaluation:

- Is this argument valid?
- What assumption must be added to (1)?

B. The Appeal to Tolerance

1. Tolerance & openness are good. (Premise.)
2. Absolutism leads to intolerance/lack of openness. (Premise.)
3. So absolutism is bad. (From 1, 2.)

Evaluation:

- Is (1) always true? (Tolerance of infanticide? Openness toward Nazi racial theories? Etc.)
- Is (2) generally true?
 - What about theories of individual rights?
 - Or the value of toleration?
- Does relativism necessarily lead to tolerance/openness?
 - What if your culture supports intolerance?
 - Why listen to reasons & argument, if the truth is whatever you believe?
 - Examples: Nazis, communists
- What if absolutism is bad? Is it still true?

From the reading:

Mark: Once you say that some people's pebbles are magical and some are not, your pride will consume you! You will think yourself superior to all others, and so fall! Many throughout history have tortured and murdered because they thought their own pebbles supreme! ...

Autrey: Someone who believes that possessing absolute pebbles would license torture and murder, is making a mistake that has nothing to do with buckets. You're solving the wrong problem.

...

Mark: I suppose I can't expect any better from mere shepherds. You probably believe that snow is white, don't you.

Autrey: Um... yes?

Mark: It doesn't bother you that Joseph Stalin believed that snow is white?

II. For Absolutism

A. Relativism is self-defeating

1. Relativists believe that relativism is absolutely true.
2. But according to their theory, nothing is absolutely true.

3. So relativism is inconsistent.

Evaluation:

- Is (1) true?

B. Relativism entails subjectivism

1. Relativism implies that everything is in your mind.
2. Everything is not in your mind.
3. So relativism is false.

Justification for (1):

- a. The T-schema: "P" is true iff P. (Premise.)
- b. Assume relativism: truth is relative to an individual (/society).
- c. It follows that: Everything (that we can talk about) is "relative to an individual". (From a, b.)
- d. Assume that "true for x" means "believed by x".
- e. It follows that: reality is completely determined by one's beliefs. (From a, b, d.)

Example:

- a'. "Snow is white" is true iff snow is white.
 - b'. Assume: "snow is white" is true for me iff I believe it.
 - c'. Snow is white (for me?) iff I believe it. (From a', b'.)
- Same applies to any other statement. Hence, everything depends on my beliefs.

Justification for (2):

If you go onto the freeway with your eyes closed, you'll still get hit by the cars.

C. Relativism is a contradiction

1. If Relativism is true, then multiple different beliefs can all be equally correct. (Premise.)
2. Different = conflicting. (Premise.)
3. Conflicting = can't all be true. (Premise.)
4. So, if relativism is true, then multiple beliefs that can't all be true, can all be correct. (From 1, 2, 3.)
5. Beliefs that can't all be true cannot all be correct. (Premise.)
6. Relativism is false. (From 4, 5.)

D. Reality is necessarily objective

1. It is logically impossible to observe something, unless there is first something there to observe. (Premise.)
2. Therefore, the objects we observe exist independent of our observation of them. (From 1.)
3. Therefore, there is an objective reality. (From 2.)

IV. In Defense of the Correspondence Theory of Truth

The theory assumes:

- Things exist.
- Sometimes, we talk about them.
- We say they have characteristics, etc.
- They have those characteristics, or not.

- When they do, we could call that “truth”.
- Is that what “truth” means in English?
 - “truth” in English works the way it would if that’s what it meant.
 - If that’s not what “truth” means, then why would people care about truth?

V. Why Does Anyone Believe Relativism?

- Almost no one in academic philosophy believes it.
- Relativism stems from emotional & ideological motivations
 - Desire to avoid conflict
 - Desire to avoid defending one’s beliefs
 - Political correctness: Desire to avoid hurting people’s feelings, criticizing anyone.
 - ☞ Many people are emotional about their beliefs.
 - ☞ Truth is the key value/aim for beliefs.
 - ☞ Therefore, people will feel good if you say everyone’s beliefs are true.
 - Desire to avoid some abuses of the past: dogmatism, intolerance.

Manifestations of relativism in our society:

- The dichotomy between ‘fact’ and ‘opinion’; the concept ‘matter of opinion’
- The common conception of “objective reporting”
- The relativist approach to education:
 - All sides of a controversial issue must be presented neutrally.
 - Professor catalogs the various opinions. Professor never says what is true about a controversial issue.
 - Classroom discussion: consists of soliciting student opinions without evaluation. Never say anyone is wrong.

VI. Why Is Relativism Bad?

1. The truth matters.
2. Relativism poops on the search for truth.
3. Relativism protects false beliefs.

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Notes #6: Review of Unit 1

Know what these things are:

Philosophy: its method, subject matter, & central aim
Metaphysics
Epistemology
Ethics
Confirmation bias
Instrumental rationality
Epistemic rationality
Public goods
Non-epistemic belief preferences
The T-schema

And these theories:

Evidentialism
Theory of rational ignorance
Theory of rational irrationality
Correspondence theory of truth
Metaphysical realism
Relativism
Subjectivism
Deflationary view of truth

Be familiar with these arguments (what they assume, what they conclude):

Clifford's argument for evidentialism
Why disagreement is not just due to ignorance
Why disagreement is not just due to divergent values
How intelligence might prevent getting to the truth
Frege-Geach objection to deflationary view of truth
Argument from disagreement (& problem with it)
Appeal to tolerance
Self-defeat argument against relativism
How relativism is contradictory
Why reality must be objective

Know these people's general view:

Rand (on philosophy)
Clifford
Feynman
Huemer
Yudkowsky

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Notes #7: The Ontological Argument

To Discuss Today:

- Background points for arguing about God.
- St. Anselm's Ontological Argument.
- Objections to the argument.

Preliminary points about God

Traditional definition of "God": God is traditionally defined as a being who

- i) is all-powerful,
- ii) is all-knowing,
- iii) is wholly good (morally perfect), and
- iv) created the universe (except for himself).

Note, however, that Anselm uses a different definition.

Faith & reason:

Some theists (people who believe in God) advocate blind faith--this means faith in the absence of reasons or evidence. (This position is called "fideism.") We won't be considering this here.

Other theists claim that their belief can be justified (e.g., the Catholic Church). We will examine their arguments.

Burden of proof: (principle of logic)

"The burden of proof is on who asserts the positive." This means that the person who says God exists should provide positive evidence of this.

Hence, our question is: Is there adequate evidence or arguments for believing in an omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent creator of the world (or "O³ world-creator," for short)?

The ontological argument:

Comment: What does "ontological" mean? What is the 'ontological argument'?

St. Anselm:

"We believe that thou art a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. ... [E]ven the fool is convinced that something exists in the understanding, at least, than which nothing greater can be conceived. For, when he hears of this, he understands it. ... And assuredly, that than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding *alone*. For, suppose it exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality, which is greater. Therefore, if that than which nothing greater can be conceived exists in the understanding alone, the very being than which nothing greater can be conceived is one than which a greater *can* be conceived. But obviously this is impossible."

Interpretation of the argument:

1. God = that than which a greater cannot be conceived. (definition)
2. A God that exists in reality can be conceived. (premise)
3. A God that exists in reality is greater than an imaginary God. (premise)

4. Assume God does not exist in reality. Then He is a merely imaginary God. (assumption)
5. Something greater than an imaginary God can be conceived. (from 2, 3)
6. Something greater than God can be conceived. (from 4, 5)
7. Something greater than that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-conceived can be conceived. (from 1, 6) But this is absurd.
8. Therefore, God exists in reality. (from 4-7, by *reductio ad absurdum*)

Alternate argument (Descartes):

1. God = a perfect being. (definition)
2. A perfect being possesses all perfections. (premise)
3. Existence is a perfection. (premise)
4. Therefore, a perfect being possesses existence. (from 2,3)
5. Therefore, God possesses existence. (from 1,4)

Objections:

Objection #1: The Perfect Pizza Objection:

If this argument were sound, then one could prove the existence of a perfect pizza. For:

1. Let 'Spizza' refer to the greatest conceivable pizza. (definition)
2. Spizza can be conceived to exist in reality. (premise)
3. A real pizza is greater than an imaginary one. (premise)
4. Assume spizza does not exist in reality. Then it is a merely imaginary spizza. (assumption)
5. A pizza greater than an imaginary spizza can be conceived. (from 2,3)
6. A pizza greater than Spizza can be conceived (from 4,5)
7. A pizza greater than the greatest conceivable pizza can be conceived. (from 1,6) But this is absurd.
8. Therefore, Spizza exists in reality. (from 4-7, by *reductio ad absurdum*)

Alternate version:

1. A perfect entity possesses all perfections. (premise)
2. Existence is a perfection. (premise)
3. Therefore, a perfect pizza possesses existence. (from 1,2)
4. Therefore, a perfect pizza exists. (from 3)

Objection #2: The Extant Unicorn Objection:

If the argument were sound, then one could prove the existence of a unicorn. For:

1. Let "Blog" mean "a unicorn that exists." (definition)
2. Blog is a unicorn that exists. (from 1)
3. Blog exists. (from 2)

Objection #3: Existence is not a property (nor is non-existence)

Kant: "A hundred possible dollars contain not one penny more or less than a hundred real dollars."

Point: God is not 'greater' if he exists than if he doesn't exist. Premise (3) is false.

Objection #4:

Premises (3) and (4) imply that if God doesn't exist, then there is still a God there to talk about (only it's a peculiar sort of God, an imaginary God). This is incoherent. ("God does not exist" does not mean, "God has the property of non-existence.")

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Notes #8: The First Cause Argument (a.k.a. "Cosmological Argument")

To discuss today:

Clarke's version of the cosmological argument.

Objections to the argument.

Basic idea:

We must posit a God in order to explain why the universe exists / where it came from.

Key claim: something must have caused/created the universe. Why must this be?

Metaphysical background:

Metaphysical concepts assumed by Clarke:

Three ways a thing might exist:

- *'Self-existent' being* (a.k.a. "independent"): A thing that exists necessarily; the explanation for why it exists is contained in the very definition of the thing. (Compare: the ontological argument.)
- *Dependent beings*: their existence is caused/explained by *something else*.
- A being whose existence is caused by *nothing*. (Clarke denies that this last is really possible.)

First cause: A thing that causes other things to happen, or causes other things to exist, but is not itself caused by anything.

Clarke's argument:

1. Everything that is not self-existent (or 'independent') must have a cause (or: an explanation for why it exists).
2. The universe we observe (the physical world, including us) is not self-existent. (Why: because everything we observe is dependent on something else.)
3. Therefore, the universe must have a cause / explanation for its existence.

How to get from (3) to God? Two possibilities: (a) Define "God" as the self-existent thing that created the universe. (b) Argue that a God is the only sort of thing that *could* explain the origin of the universe, or is the best explanation for the origin of the universe.

Objections:

Objection #1:

Why call the first cause "God"? Doesn't that imply that it is a conscious being?

Reply: What else could have created a universe, other than a god?

Objection #2:

Why can there not be an infinite series of causes, stretching back into the past forever?

Reply: Because then *the whole series* would be a thing for which we had no explanation for why it exists.

Objection #3:

Why don't we need an explanation for why God exists?

Reply: Because God is 'self-existent.' However, this depends upon the Ontological Argument being correct.

Objection #4:

What caused God? Or what caused him to create the universe? (Russell)

Reply: Nothing caused either of those. (Perhaps God is 'outside time'?)

Objection #5:

Why must everything have a cause/explanation for its existence? Why can't there be things that just exist, without any further explanation? (Russell)

Reply: ?

Further reading on religion & science:

<http://www.meta-library.net/cqinterv/intro-frame.html>

Phil. 1000
Notes #9: Pascal's Wager

To discuss today:

- How to evaluate bets.
- Pascal's argument: why you should 'bet on' God's existence.
- Objections to Pascal's wager.

What is Pascal's Wager?

It is an argument intended to show that you *should* believe in God. It is referred to as Pascal's "wager" because Pascal compares believing in God to making a 'wager' (a bet) that God exists. Important distinction: 2 kinds of 'reasons for believing' something:
Epistemic reasons: epistemic reasons are reasons that make it at least likely that the belief is true; i.e., an epistemic reason for believing a claim is evidence for the claim.
Prudential reasons: a prudential reason is a reason why something is in your own interests. Pascal proposes that you have a compelling prudential reason to believe in God.

Background: How to evaluate a bet

When offered a bet, you should consider the following factors:

- a) The probability that you will win.
- b) How much you gain if you win.
- c) The probability that you will lose.
- d) How much you will lose if you lose.

Expected value of the bet: This = [(a) × (b)] - [(c) × (d)]. A bet with positive expected value is good; one with negative expected value is bad.

Note: the same basic idea applies not just to betting behavior, but more generally to making any decision when you're uncertain of the outcome.

Example: You want to decide whether you should buy a lottery ticket. Suppose the prize is \$1 million, the probability of winning is 1/5,000,000, and the cost of a ticket is \$3. Then you can view this as a bet:

Probability of wining:	.0000002
Gain if you win:	\$999,997
Probability of losing:	.9999998
Amount of loss:	\$3
<hr/>	
<i>Expected value of bet:</i>	$(.0000002)(999997) - (.9999998)(3) = -2.8$

Hence, the 'bet' is unfavorable.

The 'bet' on whether God exists

You can either 'bet' that He exists (by believing in Him), or 'bet' that he doesn't exist (by not believing in him).

Note: Pascal only compares Christianity versus atheism. (Doesn't consider other religions.)

According to Pascal:

If God exists and you don't believe in him, then you go to Hell forever (very bad).

If God exists and you believe in him, you go to Heaven forever (good).

If God doesn't exist, and you believe in him, nothing much happens.

If God doesn't exist, and you don't believe in him, nothing much happens.

It's about equally likely that God exists as that he doesn't, because there is no good evidence either way.

Thus, we compare the two possible bets you can make:

Betting on God's existence:

Probability of winning: .5

Gain if you win: ∞

Probability of losing: .5

Amount of loss: 0

Expected value of bet: $(.5)(\infty) - (.5)(0) = +\infty$

Betting against God's existence:

Probability of winning: .5

Gain if you win: 0

Probability of losing: .5

Amount of loss: ∞

Expected value of bet: $(.5)(0) - (.5)(\infty) = -\infty$

Obviously, you should choose the former over the latter.

Objections:

Objection #1:

The probability of God existing is not .5. It's much lower.

Reply:

What happens if you substitute a different number for ".5" in the following:

$$(.5)(\infty) - (.5)(0) = +\infty$$

$$(.5)(0) - (.5)(\infty) = -\infty$$

Objection #2:

The loss from believing in God is not 0. Believers waste time going to church, etc., and unbelievers have more fun. Plus, there is the potential disvalue of having a false belief.

Reply:

What happens if you substitute a different number for "0" in the following:

$$(.5)(\infty) - (.5)(0) = +\infty$$

$$(.5)(0) - (.5)(\infty) = -\infty$$

Objection #3:

The argument incorrectly assumes that there are only two possibilities, atheism and Christianity. What about other religions?

Reply:

This must be granted. The argument favors theism over atheism. But it does not favor Christianity over, e.g., Islam or Judaism.

Objection #4:

The argument incorrectly assumes that we can choose what we believe.

Reply:

You can take steps to try to attain belief.

Objection #5:

The argument assumes that God would punish people for not believing in him. But this is incompatible with his being all-good.

Reply:

The argument succeeds if there is any *chance* that this assumption might be true.

Objection #6:

This might be true: "God hates believers. He will send all who believe in him to Hell, and send all atheists to heaven." So you should be an atheist.

Reply:

There is a better chance that God likes believers than that he hates them.

Objection #7:

"Anyone who doesn't give me \$1000 by next week will suffer eternal torment." This could be true, so you should give me \$1000.

Reply:

There is more evidence for the claim that atheists will go to Hell than for the claim that non-donors of \$1000 to you will go to Hell. (Does this work?)

Phil. 1000

Notes #10: The Fine Tuning Argument

To Discuss Today:

The Fine-Tuning Argument

Objections to the fine-tuning argument

The basic idea:

The laws of physics themselves appear to be finely adjusted to make life possible, and this is evidence of a creator.

The Fine Tuning Argument

1. The laws of physics are 'fine-tuned' to allow for the possibility of life. *Examples:*
 - ▶ It has been calculated that if the gravitational constant differed by more than $1/10^{40}$ of its present value, stars would either be too hot or too cool to support life.
 - ▶ If the electromagnetic force were stronger or weaker, complex molecules (of the sort involved in living things) could not form.
 - ▶ If the 'density parameter' of the universe differed by more than $1/10^{60}$, then the universe would either have expanded too quickly to form galaxies, or the universe would have recollapsed before intelligent life evolved.
 - (Note: This is what is asserted by those who give the argument. I do not know first-hand that these figures are accurate.)
2. This is highly improbable if there is no God.
3. It is not improbable if there is a God.
4. If E is much more likely given H than given the denial of H, then E strongly supports H.
5. Therefore, the evidence strongly supports the God hypothesis.

Objections to the Fine-Tuning Argument:

Objection #1:

It isn't surprising that we find the universe 'fine-tuned' for life, since if it weren't, we wouldn't be here to talk about it. Therefore (?), we don't need an explanation for this fact. (Perhaps this depends on objection 2?)

Reply: The Firing Squad example.

You are scheduled to be executed by a firing squad consisting of 50 sharpshooters with loaded rifles. They all carefully take aim and fire. You pass out. Later, you awake, and wonder how it is that they all missed. Then you think: "But if they hadn't all missed, I wouldn't be around to wonder about it, so (?) I shouldn't be surprised."

Objection #2:

The multiple-universes hypothesis: Maybe there exist many parallel universes, with different laws. Some are 'fine-tuned' for life and most aren't, but the ones that aren't don't have anyone there to observe that fact. Of course we would be in one of the ones that is--that shouldn't surprise us.

Alternatively: perhaps the physical constants change in different cycles of the universe.

Reply: The Multiple Coins example.

You flip a coin 50 times, and get heads 50 times in a row. You wonder how such an improbable event could have happened. Then you think: “Well, maybe there are a billion, billion other coins out there somewhere being flipped 50 times each, and so it could be expected that *one* of them would come up heads 50 times in a row.”

Objection #3:

The argument assumes that life would have to be roughly like us (chemically). Maybe there could have been other possible kinds of life. We have no way of calculating the probability of this. Also, if we’re imagining different laws of nature, there could have been different laws regarding what is required for life (e.g., such that life didn’t require a warm sun or complex molecules).

Reply:

- a) If we are considering a universe with laws like ours, the suggestion is extremely implausible. If the universe had collapsed 10 minutes after the Big Bang, there would have been no life.
- b) If we are supposed to consider very different laws of nature: The Fly on the Wall example. There is a fly sitting on a very large wall, in the middle of a 4-ft. radius blank circle. You don’t know what lies outside the circle. You witness a bullet come and hit the fly dead on. You conclude: “Someone must have been aiming at the fly.”

Objection #4:

We can’t assign probabilities to the laws of nature themselves, either (a) because the laws of nature were always what they are and were never created, or (b) because the laws of nature are what determine probabilities, or (c) because we simply have no rational way of assigning such probabilities.

Reply: The “Jesus Loves You” example.

Scientists discover a new type of crystal that, when it forms, the atoms automatically arrange themselves in a repeating pattern that looks just like the English words, “Jesus loves you.” This is somehow built into the laws of chemistry. You think this is evidence for the existence of God. But then you remember: “We can’t assign probabilities to the laws of nature, so this isn’t evidence of anything.”

Objection #5:

Why don’t we need an explanation for why God himself exists?

Reply: Because there are no calculations showing the existence of God to be extremely improbable.

Objection #6:

The God-hypothesis is not a good explanation for fine-tuning, because we don’t understand how God could have created a law of nature.

Reply: This misunderstands the argument. The argument is that the probability of laws that allow for life is much greater given the existence of God than it is given atheism. The argument does not say it “is a good explanation.”

Further reading:

<http://www.messiah.edu/hpages/facstaff/rcollins/finetlay.htm>

http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/theodore_drange/tuning.html

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Notes #11: The Problem of Evil

Basic idea:

The 'problem of evil' is a problem for theists: it is the problem of explaining how an all-good God could allow evil to exist.

Atheists argue that the existence of evil is a reason not to believe in God.

The Nature of Evil:

- In this argument, "evil" will refer to anything that is bad, i.e., anything that it would be better if it didn't exist.
- Two kinds of evils:
 - i) Man-made evils: war, murder, slavery, etc.
 - ii) Natural evils: disease, tornados, some famines, etc.
- Some striking examples of evil:
Adolf Hitler, Josef Stalin, and Mao Tse Tung: These three individuals collectively killed probably over 85 million people (!) by means of executions, extreme conditions in slave labor camps, and man-made famines.

(Source: <<http://www.gmu.edu/departments/economics/bcaplan/museum/faqframe.htm>>)

Animal suffering. Richard Dawkins writes:

"The total amount of suffering per year in the natural world is beyond all decent contemplation. During the minute it takes me to compose this sentence, thousands of animals are being eaten alive; others are running for their lives, whimpering with fear; others are being slowly devoured from within by rasping parasites; thousands of all kinds are dying of starvation, thirst and disease. It must be so. If there is ever a time of plenty, this very fact will automatically lead to an increase in population until the natural state of starvation and misery is restored." (132)

The Argument from Evil

1. There is evil.
2. If there were a God, there would be no evil. For:
 - a. God would be aware of any evil. (For he is all-knowing.)
 - b. God would be able to eliminate it. (For he is all-powerful.)
 - c. God would be willing to eliminate it. (For he is all-good.)
 - d. If a person is aware of an evil, and he is both willing and able to eliminate it, then he eliminates it.
 - e. Hence, God would eliminate (or prevent) all evil.
3. Therefore, there is no God. (from 1, 2)

Alternate version:

1. If God created a world, he would create only the best of all possible worlds.
2. This is not the best of all possible worlds.
3. Therefore, God did not create this world.

Responses to the Argument from Evil

(The first two are common among theologians.)

1. *The Free Will defense:*
Evil is a product of human free will. God gave us free will because free will is a very valuable thing. But he cannot both give us free will and prevent us from doing evil.
2. *The virtuous act response:*
Some amount of suffering is necessary in order for humans to develop important moral virtues. Some moral virtues can only exist in response to suffering or other bad things. Examples: courage, charity, strength of will.

Reply to responses 1 & 2: Is this a good reason for not stopping evil? The murderer example.

(These are common among students.)

3. *Evil is necessary for good:*
Good and evil exist only as contrasts to each other. Therefore, if evil were eliminated, good would automatically be eliminated as well.
4. *Evil is necessary in order for us to understand good:*
Slightly different from #3: If all evil were eliminated, then we wouldn't *know* that everything was good, because we can only perceive things when there is a contrast.
5. *How do we know what good and evil are?*
Perhaps God has a different conception of evil from ours. Thus, maybe he thinks the Holocaust was actually a good thing.
6. *The Lord works in mysterious ways.*
Perhaps there is some underlying purpose served by all the evil in the world, but we humans are not smart enough to comprehend it. Just have faith.
7. *God isn't responsible for the evil. The Devil is.*
8. *Perhaps God is not all-knowing, all-powerful, and/or all-good.*
If we simply weaken the definition of God, then the existence of God may be compatible with the existence of evil. Thus, for example, he might be unable to instantly eliminate all the evil.

Phil. 1000 Review of unit 2

For the test, know these things:

The 'traditional definition' of God
The 'burden of proof' principle
"Theism", "atheism", "agnosticism"

The Ontological Argument:

what it tries to show
St. Anselm's definition of "God"
the main objections to it
the perfect pizza
existence is not a property

The First Cause Argument:

Major premises of it
The conception of "God" used in it
Russell's objections to it
"first cause"
"self-existent being"

Pascal's argument:

The 'expected value' of a bet / how to evaluate a bet
How P. calculates the expected value of believing in God vs. not doing so
What P is assuming.
His conclusion.

Fine Tuning Argument:

"Fine tuning"
The main premises & conclusion
Some objections & replies, including:
The multiple-universes hypothesis
The Firing Squad example

The Problem of Evil:

— "man-made evils", "natural evils"
The main premises & conclusion of the argument from evil
The free will response & what kinds of evils it tries to explain
The virtuous act response

Know what positions/arguments these people defended:

St. Anselm
Samuel Clarke
Gribbin & Rees
Blaise Pascal
Richard Dawkins
Bertrand Russell

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Notes #13: Meta-Ethics, Introduction

I. Basic Concepts

- Two kinds of judgements/propositions:
 - *Evaluative*: Makes a positive or negative evaluation of something; says something is good, bad, right, or wrong.
 - *Descriptive*: Non-evaluative.
- *Ethics*: The branch of philosophy that studies value, or: good & bad, right & wrong. 3 sub-branches of ethics:
 1. *Ethical Theory*: Deals with general theories about what is right/wrong and good/bad. Ethical theories try to state the *general conditions* for an action to be right, for a state of affairs to be good, etc.
 2. *Applied Ethics*: Deals with more concrete issues. Ex.: Abortion, capital punishment, euthanasia.
 3. *Meta-ethics*: Deals with the nature of evaluative judgements/statements. Addresses *non-evaluative questions about values*.

II. Some Questions of Meta-ethics

- What does “good” mean? Can it be defined?
- Is value objective? Are there ‘moral facts’?
- How do we know what is right and wrong?
- Why do people hold the values they hold?
- What motivates people to act morally (or not)?

III. The Question of ‘Objectivity’

- **Objectivity**:
 - *Objective property*: A property which a thing has independent of observers; a property that is “in the object”, or solely dependent on the nature of the object. Examples: Shape, size.
 - *Subjective property*: A property which a thing has or doesn’t have, depending on the attitudes or perceptions of observers; a property that is “in the subject” (“in the eye of the beholder”). Example: Funniness, attractiveness.
 - *Objective truth*: A proposition that is true, and whose truth does not depend upon (beliefs, desires, or other attitudes of) observers. Example: “The Earth is round.”
 - *Subjective truth*: A proposition that is true, but whose truth depends upon (beliefs, desires, or other attitudes of) observers. Example: “*Borat* is funny.”
- **Moral realism** (a.k.a. “objectivism”): The view that there are objective moral truths, or: Some things have objective moral properties.
- **Anti-realism**: The denial of moral realism.

IV. The Five Theories in Meta-ethics

Two forms of realism:

1. *Ethical naturalism* : Holds that (i) moral properties are ‘reducible’ to objective, natural properties. “Good” and other moral terms can be defined/explained in non-moral terms. (ii) Moral knowledge derives from observation.
2. *Ethical intuitionism* : Holds (i) that moral properties (at least one of them) are irreducible, (ii) that moral knowledge derives from ‘intuition.’

Three forms of anti-realism:

3. *Moral relativism / subjectivism* : Moral statements are true or false depending upon attitudes of observers. They report people’s attitudes or practices. Hence, their truth is relative to a person or group. Two common versions:
 - 3a) Individual subjectivism: Moral truths are relative to an individual.
 - 3b) Cultural relativism: Moral truths are relative to a culture.
4. *Moral skepticism / nihilism* : Moral propositions are false (or contain false presuppositions). Nothing is really right or wrong.
5. *Non-cognitive ethics* : Moral statements are neither true nor false; they do not assert genuine propositions. Instead they express feelings, or issue imperatives, or something else like that.

Phil. 1000

Notes #14: Objections to Meta-Ethical Theories

I. What's Wrong with Subjectivism?

The Problem of Horrible Attitudes:

1. In Nazi Germany, the Nazis acted wrongly.
2. If subjectivism is true, then the Nazis acted rightly, not wrongly.
 - a. Cultural relativism says: right = what society approves of.
 - b. Individual subjectivism says: right = what the individual approves of.
3. Relativism is false. (From 1, 2.)

II. What's Wrong with Non-Cognitivism?

The Frege-Geach Problem:

1. Non-cognitivist says “ x is wrong” = something like “Boo on x !” (expresses a negative emotion towards x).
2. If so, then the following sentence would be nonsensical:
“If doing something is wrong, then getting your little brother to do it is also wrong.”
3. That sentence is not nonsensical.
4. Non-cognitivism is false. (From 1, 2, 3.)

III. What's Wrong with Nihilism?

1. A life of constant torture is worse than a life of bliss.
2. Killing people for the fun of it is wrong.
3. Therefore, value and wrongness exist. (From 1, 2.)
4. So nihilism is false. (From 3.)

Commentary on this argument:

- The nihilist presents some argument for his view.
- This argument has some premises. Call them P.
- Which of the following arguments is more persuasive?

Nihilist says:

P.

Therefore, agony isn't worse than bliss.

Realist says:

Agony is worse than bliss.

Therefore, not P.

- Nihilist's argument is better, if and only if P is more clearly correct than “Agony is worse than bliss.”
- Here are some examples of arguments nihilists use:
 - Moral properties are very strange things, utterly different from everything else in the world.
 - There's a lot of disagreement about moral questions.
 - Moral properties, if they existed, would be things that intrinsically move people to act in certain ways. But it's impossible for any property to be intrinsically motivating like that.

IV. Intuitionism

Central theses:

- Some moral propositions are objectively true.
- We know some moral truths because they are self-evident.
 - Examples of self-evident descriptive facts:
 - The shortest path between two points is a straight line.
 - No object can be entirely green and also entirely red.
 - If A is inside B, and B is inside C, then A is inside C.
 - Examples of self-evident evaluative facts:
 - Suffering is bad.
 - Other things being equal, one should bring about good things, rather than bad things.
 - If A is better than B, and B is better than C, then A is better than C.

Objection #1: We need arguments for believing intuition to be reliable, before we may rely on it.

Reply:

- This leads to a **global skeptical argument**: It entails that no one can know *anything* whatsoever.
- Global skepticism not relevant here. Besides its being absurd, we're interested in what might make ethics different from other fields, like science.

Objection #2: Intuitionists cannot explain moral disagreement.

Reply:

a. The prevalence of non-moral disagreements. Examples:

- Who shot JFK?
- The Mead/Freeman controversy
- Sports controversies
- Einstein/Bohr debate

No one thinks that any of these things are "subjective."

b. The fallibility of human beings. Humans have numerous sources of error:

Confusion, ignorance, oversight, misunderstanding/incomplete understanding, bias, miscalculation, etc.

c. Disagreements are especially common in 4 kinds of cases:

- i) When people have strong personal biases, esp. self-interest.
- ii) When people defer to their culture.
- iii) When people defer to religion.
- iv) All philosophical issues.

Objection #3: Intuitionists cannot resolve moral disagreements.

1. If two people have differing intuitions, the intuitionist can give no way to resolve the disagreement.
2. If a meta-ethical theory provides no way of resolving (some?) disagreements, then the theory is false.
3. So intuitionism is false.

Reply:

- a. Some ethical disagreements can be resolved by appeal to ethical arguments.
- b. What's the justification for (2)?
- c. No other theory provides a way of resolving all ethical disagreements either.

Phil. 1000

Notes #15: Obligations to the Poor

I. Basic Issue

Many people are suffering/dying of starvation, disease, and other hardships in the Third World. We have many luxuries. We could assist them by giving up these luxuries, but we choose not to. Q: what is the correct moral assessment of our decision?

II. Singer's Position

- We (each, individually) have a *positive obligation* to give money to help people in the Third World.
- There is no morally significant difference between killing someone and allowing someone to die whom one could easily save.
- How much money should one give away? How much would be required to save everyone one can? (Lots.)
- Singer thinks that *any* reasonable moral theory will have to agree with this.

III. Argument for the Obligation to Assist

1. If we can prevent something very bad without sacrificing anything of comparable significance, we ought to do so.
2. Absolute poverty is very bad.
3. We can prevent some absolute poverty without sacrificing anything of comparable significance.
4. Therefore, we ought to do so.

The Shallow Pond example: (supports (1))

You are walking to class, when you notice a small child drowning in a shallow pond. You could wade in and save the child, but if you did so, you would waste some of your time and get your clothes muddy. What should you do?

Singer thinks this is comparable to the people in the Third World whom you could save from malnutrition & disease.

Possible differences between Shallow Pond & Third World poor:

1. It is uncertain that my money will really save the people in the 3rd world.
 2. There are so many starving people in the 3rd world, and it's impossible to save all of them.
 3. There are many other people who could help.
 4. People in the 3rd world have such bad lives that it's hardly worth preserving them.
 5. Sending food will just cause them to increase the population, until the same level of starvation is restored. (Hardin)
- None of these replies seem good.

Phil. 1000

Notes #16: Animals

I. Background Facts

- Human beings routinely ignore or severely discount the interests of animals. Examples: animal experiments, factory farming, fur/leather.
 - Costs for animals: Enormous suffering and death. *PETA* estimates 8 billion animals in the U.S. are slaughtered for food every year (www.goveg.com/).
 - Benefits for humans: Small amounts of money, temporary pleasure & entertainment. Not necessary to sustain human life or health. May be harmful to human health.
 - Most human beings say they are against animal cruelty, but continue to enjoy animal products.

II. Singer's View

- *The Principle of Equal Consideration of Interests*: Holds that all interests should be counted, regardless of whose interests they are, for moral decision-making; no one's interests should be ignored or discounted, unless there is a reason for doing so. (See "important point" below.)
 - *Note*: Does not mean that any interest is of equal weight to every other interest; some interests are greater than others. E.g., my interest in living > your interest in having a donut.
- This implies that our treatment of animals (see above) is morally wrong. We should:
 - a) Adopt a mostly vegetarian diet (possibly excepting 'free range' animals).
 - b) Stop experimenting for cosmetics, shampoos, food colors, & other frivolous purposes.
- Cruelty to animals is caused by *speciesism*.

Speciesism: The attitude or practice of discounting the interests of other beings *merely* because they belong to a different species from oneself, and not because of any morally significant difference. Similar to racism, sexism.
- *Important point*: The proponent of animal cruelty must find a *morally relevant difference* between humans and animals, that justifies treating them cruelly. I.e., Why should one discount the interests of animals?

III. Objections

Note: With each of these, ask how they might apply to slavery or cannibalism, and then ask whether these arguments are motivated by speciesism.

1. "How do we know that animals can feel pain?"
2. "Animals eat each other, so it's ok for us to eat them."
3. "Humans are superior to other animals, so it's ok to torture them."
 - A) "Humans have souls."
 - B) "Humans have free will."
 - C) "Humans are smarter." Replies:
 - i) Does greater intelligence give one greater rights? Does Einstein have the right to torture you for amusement?
 - ii) Some animals are more intelligent than some humans. Would it be ok to use retarded humans in painful experiments to test new cosmetics? How about infants?
 - iii) Even if greater intelligence gives one more rights, it would be surprising that

- a) The greater intelligence of humans over animals means we may torture & kill thousands of animals in our lifetimes for minor increments of pleasure, but yet
 - b) The greater intelligence of geniuses over retarded people does not mean they have any greater rights *at all*.
4. "I'm not inflicting the pain on the animals directly, so I'm not responsible for it."
 5. "The animals would not exist in the first place if there weren't a market for their meat. So it's good for them that people eat them."
 6. Slippery slope argument: "If we accept this argument, then next we'll have plant rights!"

IV. Why Do We Discount the Interests of Animals?

- Speciesism. Possibly inborn.
- Social conventions.
- Self-interest. It is not in our interests to recognize Singer's argument; we don't want it to be true.

Phil. 1000

Notes #17: Population Ethics

I. Evaluating Worlds: Population & Well-Being

- Is it good to make more people (whose lives are worth living)?
What if doing so lowers the average quality of life?
- Example: Two worlds:
 - A: A world of 1 million people, with a welfare level of 100 (very high).
 - Z: A world of 1 billion people, with a welfare level of 1 (barely worth living).

Which world is better? Most people say A.



Two Principles for Assessing Goodness

The Average Utility Principle: The best world is the world in which the average level of well-being is highest.

The Total Utility Principle: The best world is the world in which the *total* utility is highest.

This principle leads to:

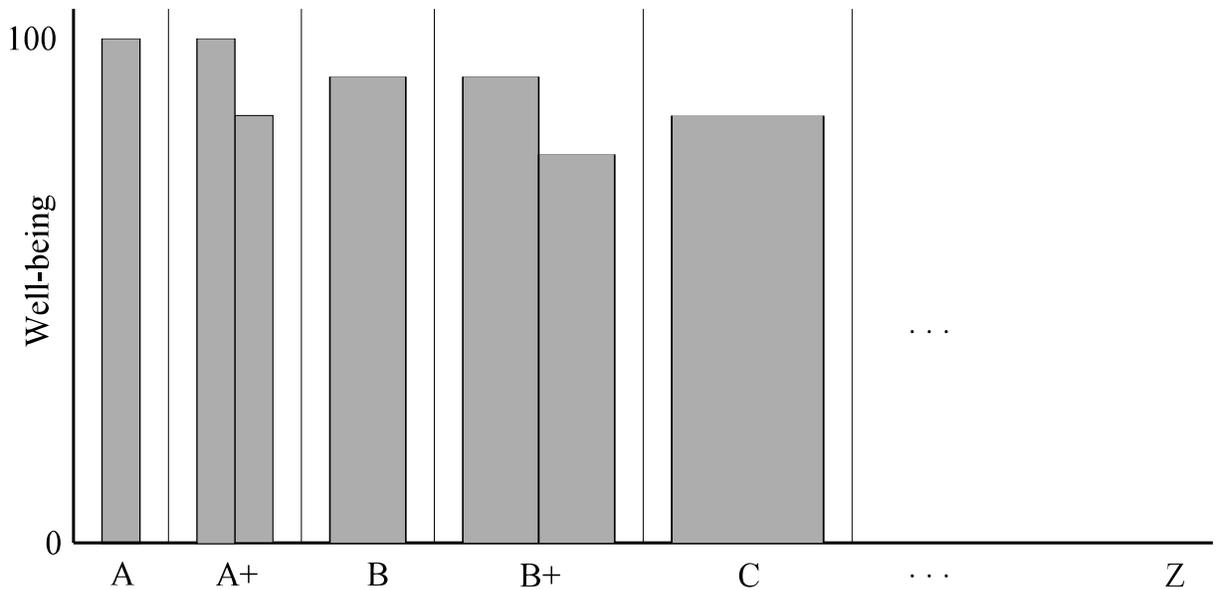
The Repugnant Conclusion

For any population of people with a very high quality of life, there is some much larger imaginable population whose existence would be better, even though its members would have lives barely worth living. (In brief: Z is better than A.)

- Parfit thinks this is “repugnant.”

II. The Mere Addition “Paradox”

1. If a person’s life is worth living (above 0), then it is good. (Premise.)
 2. If one adds a good thing to the world, without taking away anything else or interfering with any other value, and without adding anything bad, the world is thereby better. (Premise.)
 3. If two possible situations have the same total utility, and differ only in that in one situation, the utility is more equally distributed, then the situation with the more equal distribution is not worse. (Premise.)
 4. The “repugnant” conclusion is true. Z is better than A.
- (4) follows from (1)-(3): Imagine the following sequence:



- World A: 1 million people at 100 utils.
- World A+: 1 million people at 100 + 1 million people at 90
- World B: 2 million people at 96 utils.
- World B+: 2 million people at 96 + 2 million people at 86.
- World C: 4 million people at 92.
- ...
- World Z: Very large number of people at 1.

- ☞ A+ is better than A. B is better than A+. B+ is better than B. Etc.
- ☞ Conclusion: Z is better than A.

III. More Support for Making People

Against the average utility principle:

- This implies that the world would have been better if all but the most ecstatically happy people didn't exist. Does this mean that it would be good if everyone else died?
- It implies that you can worsen the world by adding something good to it (and not changing anything else). How can this be?
- Nothing else works like this.
 - Value of an individual life is not determined by the average level of well-being over time. It's not better to have 1 second of ecstasy and then die, than to have 100 years of mere contentment.
 - Value of art is not determined by the average level. It's not better to have 1 masterpiece and destroy everything lesser.

The analogy between time & space:

- We think it would be better if more people (whose lives were worth living) were added *later* in time.
(Analogous to adding more time to an individual life.)
- Analogously, it would be better if more people were added elsewhere in space.

The temporal (a)symmetry:

- You think it is good that you are alive (provided your life is worth living). It would not be better if you hadn't been born.
- Therefore, before you were conceived, it would have been correct for anyone to say that it would be good to create you.
- Therefore, it is now correct to say that it would be good to create another person, provided their life will be worth living.

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Notes #18: The Value of Equality

I. Basic Ideas

- *Egalitarianism*: Equality in the distribution of utility across persons is intrinsically good.
- *Utility*: How much well-being someone has. Happiness, success, whatever gives life value.
 - Total utility of a society: The sum of the utility of every person in that society.
 - Average utility: The total utility divided by the population.
- *Intrinsic value*: The value that something has considered apart from its effects; value something has as an end in itself.

II. The Argument Against Egalitarianism

Premises:

- *The Benign Addition Principle*: Other things being equal, if possible worlds x and y are so related that x would be the result of increasing the utility of everyone in y and adding some number of people all of whom have valuable lives, then x is better than y .
- *The Unrepugnant Premise*: Other things being equal, if possible worlds x and y are both perfectly egalitarian, x has a larger population than y , but x has both a lower average utility and a lower total utility than y .¹
- *Transitivity*: If x is better than y and y is better than z , then x is better than z .

Consider three Possible worlds:

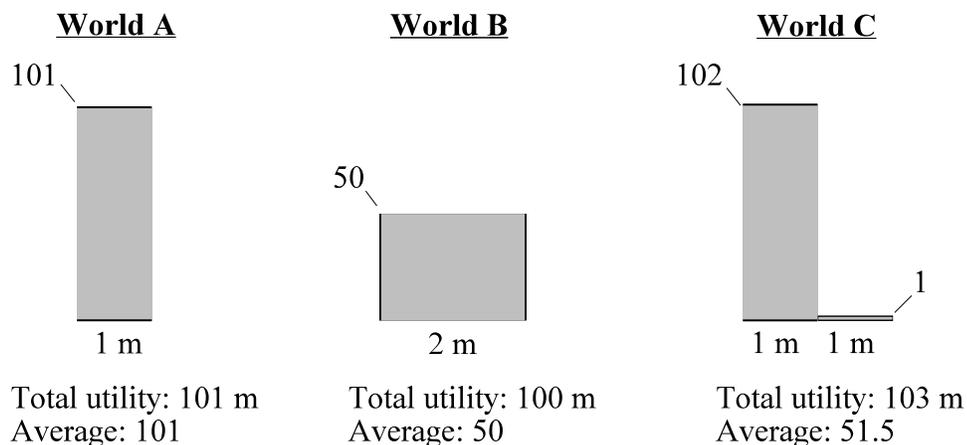


Figure 3. Graphical depiction of worlds A, B, and C. The width of each bar represents a population size; the height represents a level of well-being.

Argument:

1. A is better than B. (From the Unrepugnant Premise.)
2. C is better than A. (From the Benign Addition Principle.)
3. C is better than B. (From 1, 2, and Transitivity.)

¹An “egalitarian” world is a world in which utility is evenly distributed across persons.

Comment:

- This directly shows that the extra 3 points of total utility + 1.5 points of average utility outweighs the inequality in world C.
- This form of argument can be repeated for arbitrarily small increments in utility. Hence, the value of equality is zero.

III. In Defense of the Benign Addition Principle

Benign Addition is supported by:

The Modal Pareto Principle: If one possible world would be preferred over another by everyone existing in either world, then the former world is better than the latter.

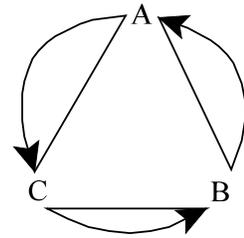
IV. In Defense of the Unrepugnant Premise

- This principle is accepted by everyone in population ethics.
 - Follows from Average Utility Principle.
 - Follows from Total Utility Principle.
 - Follows from any principle anywhere in between.

V. In Defense of Transitivity

The Money Pump:

- Suppose you have intransitive preferences: You prefer A to B, B to C, and C to A.
- You presently have A.
- You would be willing:
 - to pay a small amount of money to trade A for C.
 - to pay a small amount of money to trade C for B.
 - to pay a small amount of money to trade B for A.
 - etc.
- This seems irrational.



The Dominance Argument:

- Suppose A is better than B, which is better than C, which is better than A. Consider the values of the following two combinations:

$$A + B + C$$

$$B + C + A$$

- We can construct an argument that the first combination is better than the second. Why: It is better with respect to each of the three comparisons:

$$A > B$$

$$+ \quad +$$

$$B > C$$

$$+ \quad +$$

$$C > A$$

- This is absurd, because the two combinations are the same.
- Conclusion: The supposition is impossible: A cannot be better than B, B better than C, and yet C better than A.

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Notes #19: Review of Unit 3

Things to know:

These concepts & distinctions:

Evaluative vs. descriptive claims
Objective vs. subjective
Moral realism vs. anti-realism
Global skepticism
Speciesism

These philosophical theories & how they differ:

Subjectivism
Non-cognitivism
Nihilism
Intuitionism

These arguments & what they support or refute:

The problem of horrible attitudes, & the Nazi example
Frege-Geach problem
Main argument against Nihilism
Objections to intuitionism:

- Disagreement problem & response, esp.: How intuitionists could explain disagreement
- Reliability objection & response

The argument that humans are more intelligent than animals, & Singer's response
Parfit's Mere Addition Argument

Examples & Principles:

The Principle of Equal Consideration of Interests
The Shallow Pond example
The Repugnant Conclusion
Average Utility Principle
Total Utility Principle
Egalitarianism
Transitivity
Modal Pareto Principle

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Notes #20: Rawls' Theory of Distributive Justice

I. Important Concepts

- **Distributive Justice:** Justice in the distribution of goods/wealth.
- **End-state conceptions of distributive justice:** Say there is some overall pattern of distribution we should aim at. Justice is a matter of closeness to the desired pattern. Examples:
 - Perfect equality
 - Distribution in accordance with need
 - Distribution in accordance with desert/merit
- **Historical conceptions of distributive justice:** Say that whether a person is entitled to some bit of wealth depends on the process by which he got it. Justice is a matter of following the right rules in acquiring property.

II. Important Ideas in Rawls' Theory

- **The Original Position:** A hypothetical situation in which the future members of a society meet to agree upon the general political principles to govern their society. Features of the OP:
 - The "*Veil of Ignorance*": no one knows what their position in the society will be. In fact, they know no personal information about themselves (including the life plans/values they are going to have).
 - They have access to all relevant information about the society. Also, they are intelligent and make no errors in reasoning.
 - They will choose political principles on the basis of self-interest.
- **Rawls' Two Principles of Justice:**
 - First principle:* "Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others."
 - Second principle (the "Difference Principle"):* Social and economic inequalities are allowed only to the extent that they benefit those who are worst-off.
 - How might that happen? Perhaps if more productive people are rewarded with more wealth, then the society as a whole will be richer, so much so that even the (relatively) poor will be better off.

III. Rawls' Overall Argument

1. What would be chosen in the Original Position is just.
 - Why? Because the OP is set up in such a way as to guarantee a fair outcome. The parties start in a position of equality, and no one can unfairly privilege himself, since no one knows their position in the society.
2. Rawls' Two Principles of justice would be chosen in the Original Position.
3. Therefore, Rawls' Two Principles are just (and so should be adopted).

IV. Why Choose the Two Principles?

- a) The first principle would be chosen because the parties don't know what their plans and values

will be; therefore, it makes sense to secure the most liberty possible, to allow for pursuing whatever goals they will have.

b) Why would the second principle be chosen? Two lines of reasoning:

First:

- First, there would be a natural default assumption of equality. Unless there was some special reason for privileging someone, people would accept an even division of the wealth.
- But obviously, it would be acceptable to allow some inequality *if* doing so benefitted everyone. (It would not be acceptable otherwise, since those *not* benefitted would not agree to the distribution.)
- Inequalities obviously benefit the people who get more. They benefit *everyone* only if they benefit those who get *less*.
- Therefore, the parties would agree to allow economic inequalities (only) to the extent that they benefitted those worst off.

Second:

- For very poor people, money means a lot. Some minimum level of income is necessary for anyone to have a decent life.
- For the wealthy, money has less importance; if they lose some of their money, it won't prevent them from having a good life.
- The parties in the Original Position would be more afraid of winding up poor, than they would be eager to wind up rich. They would want to minimize their risk of winding up very badly off. (Rawls has them put an absolute priority on this, i.e., they *only* look at what the worst possible outcome is, and try to improve that.)
- Therefore, they would choose the system that maximizes the position of the poorest people.

V. Objections

- Is premise (1) true?
 - What if people have rights to their property? The OP gives the 'society' a right to decide how to redistribute people's property.
 - Nozick's example: what if grades in a class were distributed according to a similar procedure? Is there reason to think that the resulting distribution would be correct?
- Is premise (2) true?

Some people say that the parties should choose *utilitarianism*: that everything should be arranged to maximize overall social welfare (no special attention given to the worst off).

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Notes #21: Nozick, the Entitlement Theory

I. The Entitlement Theory of Distributive Justice

The entitlement theory needs three rules (or kinds of rule):

1) *A principle of acquisition.*

One may claim previously-unowned items provided one is using them and there is enough left over for others.

2) *A principle of transfer.*

Property can be transferred from one person to another by mutual consent.

3) *A principle of rectification of injustices.*

What to do when someone violates one of these rules. Generally, the offender has to pay back the victim.

• Entitlement theory is *historical*.

II. Nozick's Arguments Against End-State Theories

A. *The Forced-Labor Argument*

1. Forced labor is wrong.
2. End-state theories sanction forced labor.
 - a. People get money through labor.
 - b. Hence, forcing them to give their money to others is like forcing them to labor for the benefit of those others.
3. So end-state theories are wrong.

B. *The Ownership-of-Persons Argument*

1. No one should be allowed to own another person, even partially.
2. End-state theories institute (partial) ownership of people.
 - a. Ownership of x = the right to decide how x is used.
 - b. End-state theories give you a right to the fruits of others' labor.
 - c. This is a right to decide what use other people are put to.
3. Therefore, we should not adopt an end-state theory.

C. *The Coercion Argument*

1. People have a right to be free from (unprovoked) coercion.
2. End-state theories require violations of this right.
 - a. Redistribution must be imposed forcibly.
 - b. Taxpayers have not violated anyone's rights just by being around and having money.
 - c. So, such redistribution is unprovoked coercion.
3. Therefore, end-state theories are wrong.

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Notes #22: The Social Contract Theory

To Discuss Today:

- The problem of political obligation
- The social contract theory
- Criticisms of the social contract theory

I. Basic Idea of the Social Contract Theory

- A response to the ‘problem of political obligation’
 - Why have a state?
 - Why obey it?
- Problems with the ‘state of nature’.
- Solution: A ‘contract’ between citizens & state. Terms:
 - State: provides protection
 - Citizens: pay taxes, obey laws

II. The Theory of the Declaration of Independence

Important principles:

- “All men are created equal”
- People have natural rights.
- Purpose of government: to protect these rights.
- Source of authority: “consent of the governed.”
- The ‘right of revolution’
- Further reading: Jefferson’s original version:
<http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~dee/AMERICA/DECLAR.HTM>

III. Hobbes’ Theory

A. *On human nature & morality*

- People are selfish
- Selfishness is good, or at least ok
- No natural law. Morality dependent on government

“The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, have there no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law; where no law, no injustice. Force and fraud are in war the two cardinal virtues.”
(Hobbes, 3)

- In the state of nature, “every man has a right to every thing, even to one another’s body.”

B. *The State of Nature (chapter XIII)*

- Three causes of conflict:
 - Competition (over scarce resources)
 - Diffidence (fear of what others may do)
 - Glory (desire for power over others, respect, &c.)
- Result:
 - A war of all against all

“There is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain”, etc.

“And the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

- Empirical evidence:

“The savage people in many places of America ... have no government at all, and live at this day in that brutish manner, as I said before.”

“When taking a journey, [a person] arms himself and seeks to go well accompanied; when going to sleep, he locks his doors; when even in his house he locks his chests; and this when he knows there be laws and public officers, armed, to revenge all injuries shall be done him Does he not there as much accuse mankind by his actions as I do by my words?”

- Rulers are in a ‘state of nature’ with respect to each other, and it is a constant state of war. But this is not as bad as the war of individuals against each other.

C. Of Natural Laws (chapter XIV)

- Laws of self-preservation:

- a) To seek peace. b) To defend ourselves.
- To be willing to lay down our right to all things, to achieve peace

- Origin of ‘injustice’:

People can renounce/transfer a right, by word or deed.

Injustice: One renounces/transfers a right, then goes back on it.

But: there must first be a government to enforce contracts.

- But some rights are inalienable:

All voluntary acts aim at some benefit to self

No one can be understood to voluntarily give up a right, if there is no benefit to him from doing so.

One cannot give up the right of self-defense against those who aim to kill, injure, or imprison oneself.

D. Why you should keep agreements (chapter XV)

- You should keep agreements. Objection:

It is sometimes in your interest to break covenants.

It is rational to do whatever is in your interests.

So, it is irrational (“against reason”) to keep such covenants.

- Response:

It is not in your interests to break covenants: Other people will kick you out of society. Then you will die.

Also, don’t rebel against the king:

(a) you cannot know if you will succeed,

(b) if you do, others may try to overthrow you.

E. The origin of government (chapter XVII)

The ‘sovereign’: Everyone gives up all their rights to one person or group.

Advantages:

Prevents them from fighting among themselves.

Defense against foreign governments.

The government should have absolute power. The state is god:

“This is the generation of that great LEVIATHAN, or rather, to speak more reverently, of that mortal

god to which we owe, under the immortal God, our peace and defence.”

F. Objection: The government could abuse its power (chapter XX)

Replies:

1. Couldn't be as bad as the state of nature.
2. All problems are the subjects' fault:
“There happeneth in no Commonwealth any great inconvenience but what proceeds from the subjects' disobedience and breach of those covenants from which the Commonwealth hath its being.”
3. Can't limit the power of a government, without having some more powerful agency.

My Comments:

- About his replies #1 and #2:
 - More than six times as many people were murdered by *their own* governments in the 20th century than were killed by private murderers. (See <home.sprynet.com/~owl1/statistics.htm>.) That's not even counting governments killing citizens of other governments.
 - If people are inherently warlike and selfish, a person with absolute power is going to be far *more* dangerous than a private citizen.
- About the state of nature (see B above):
 - If people are self-interested, and all of about equal power, why would they attack each other?
 - Pace Hobbes, war is far worse than private murder. Why:
 - Politicians deciding to go to war don't typically have to go to the front lines.
 - Greater killing technology & resources of government.
 - His remark about the American Indians is false.
 - How did human society evolve?
- About his reply #3:
 - Actually a good point. See next lecture.

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Notes #23: Anarchism

To Discuss Today:

- What are “government” and “anarchy”?
- Police, courts, & laws without government?
- Government & the public goods problem

I. ‘Government’ & ‘Anarchy’

Important concepts: (Friedman’s def’s)

- *Coercion:* Violation of what people generally regard as the rights of individuals with respect to other individuals.
- *Legitimized:* Generally accepted as legitimate in a given society.
- *Government:* An agency of legitimized coercion. Examples:

Action	What it’s called if you do it	What it’s called if the state does it
Seizing someone’s property without their permission	Robbery / extortion	Taxation
Forcing people to work for you	Kidnaping / slavery	Conscription, jury duty, national service
Killing lots of people (For a political goal)	Mass murder (Terrorism)	War

- *Anarcho-capitalism:* Society with no government, but with private property; provides ‘governmental’ services by alternative institutions

II. Police, Courts, & Laws under Anarchy

- How would these presently governmental institutions be replaced?
- ‘Police’:
Private security guard companies protect people from criminals. There are multiple competing companies in the same area.
- Courts:
Private arbitration firms are used to resolve disputes. There are multiple competing arbitration companies.
Private contracts specify arbitration agreements.
Protection agencies sign arbitration agreements with each other.
- Law:
Laws are made by judges/arbitrators. *Note:* compare the British common law.

III. Advantages of Anarchy

A. *Non-coercive:*

Governmental system: you are forced to accept a government, and have little control over what

kind of government you have.

Anarcho-capitalism: You choose whether to hire a protection agency, and which one.

B. Less risk of abuse of power:

Governmental system: Government has a monopoly → There is no one to stop the government from abusing its powers.

Anarcho-capitalism: Competition among many protection agencies → Customers can leave a bad agency.

C. More efficient:

Governmental system: Police have no incentive to reduce crime. If crime rates go up, they get more money & more police are hired.

Anarcho-capitalism: Protection agencies have an incentive to reduce crime. If crime goes up, they may be fired.

Empirical observation: The free market is more efficient at producing food, shoes, computers, automobiles, etc., than the government is.

D. Removes public goods problem:

Governmental system: Informed voting is a public good. Laws & protection are public goods.

Anarcho-capitalism: Good laws & protection are private goods.

IV. The Problem of Monopolies

- “*Natural monopoly*”:

Occurs when the optimum size for a firm is so large that there is room for only one such firm on the market.

This situation is very rare.

Even natural monopolies are restrained by “potential competition.”

All products compete with all other products.

- *Artificial monopoly: the strategy of ‘predatory pricing’*:

Problems:

Larger firm loses more total money.

Larger firm may be less efficient.

The monopolist must sell to everyone, at a loss; small firm need not sell anything at a loss.

Also forced to increase production, losing even more money.

- *Cartels*:

Have all the problems of monopolies.

Additional problem: ‘chiseling’

Compare: why don’t all the farmers refuse to feed anyone unless everyone agrees to give them everything?

- *State Monopoly*:

Almost all actual monopolies are government-enforced. Government agencies get taken over by the industry & used to the industry’s advantage. Why:

They are the ones who know most about the industry.

They have the most incentive to try to influence the agency. Influencing policy is costly, time-consuming.

Examples:

The Civil Aeronautics Board

The American Medical Association

Could this problem be solved in a better government?

The pattern is not an accident. It is built into the logic of the system.

V. Further Questions

1. *Wouldn't the security agencies fight with each other?*

- They would take disputes to the arbitration firms, because this is economically rational.
- *Contrast:* what happens when governments decide to fight each other?

2. *Why would agencies obey an arbitrator's decision?*

- Companies abide by arbitrators' decisions; otherwise their reputations would be ruined.
- Violating decision defeats the point of going to arbitration.

3. *How could you know the arbitrator was fair?*

- There is competition among arbitration agencies → you can choose a reputable firm.
- *Contrast:* What do you do when the government's courts are unfair, irrational, inefficient, etc.?

4. *What if one security agency decides to defend murderers, thieves, etc.?*

- Their clients would constantly be costing them money. (Compare: "The Arsonists' Fire Insurance Agency.")
- They fight a constant war against the rest of society.
- They must pay higher wages to their employees.
- The "Thief Protection Agency": They must charge their clients more money than the stolen goods are worth.
- *Contrast:* What happens if you get corrupt people in the government?

5. *Why would security agencies protect the poor?*

- Why would this be different from any other good or service? Why do food companies feed the poor?
- They're already paying for protection (from the state). Private protection would be cheaper and more effective.
- *Contrast:* Why would the government protect the poor? How well do they in fact protect the poor?

6. *Wouldn't other countries attack the anarchists? Possible answers:*

- Ideally, the whole world would be anarchist.
- Almost all wars are due to (i) disagreements between governments, (ii) racial and/or religious hatred, and/or (iii) perceived historical injustices. (Compare: Why don't other countries attack Switzerland?)
- It is harder to take over a territory with no government, than one with a government. Attacking countries use the governmental structure already in place to control the populace.
- The security agencies & the general population would be armed. (Compare: U.S. experience in Vietnam.)

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Notes #24: Review of Unit 4

For the test:

Know these concepts & distinctions:

Distributive justice

End-state vs. historical conceptions

The Original Position

The Problem of Political Obligation

The Social Contract, including:

Terms of the contract

Explicit, Implicit, & Hypothetical theories

Conditions for implicit contracts

The State of Nature

Government, Friedman's definition, including:

Legitimized coercion

Monopoly, including:

"natural," "artificial," and "state monopoly"

Public goods

Know these arguments, what they assume & what they conclude:

Rawls' argument for his Two Principles

Nozick's arguments:

Why taxation is like forced labor

How end-state principles are like ownership of people

How wealth redistribution is coercive

Know these people's theories:

Rawls:

Two Principles of justice, esp. the Difference Principle

Nozick:

The Entitlement Theory

Hobbes:

His view of how people are and should be motivated

The problem with the state of nature

His solution to the problem (social contract)

the terms of the contract, & the powers of the state

What are justice/injustice?

The main objection to his theory

Jefferson:

purpose of government

source of government's authority

the right of revolution

Friedman:

How police services should be provided

How security companies resolve disputes (& why they don't fight each other)

How law should be provided

How monopolies usually get established

How government creates a 'public goods' problem

Why government serves special interests