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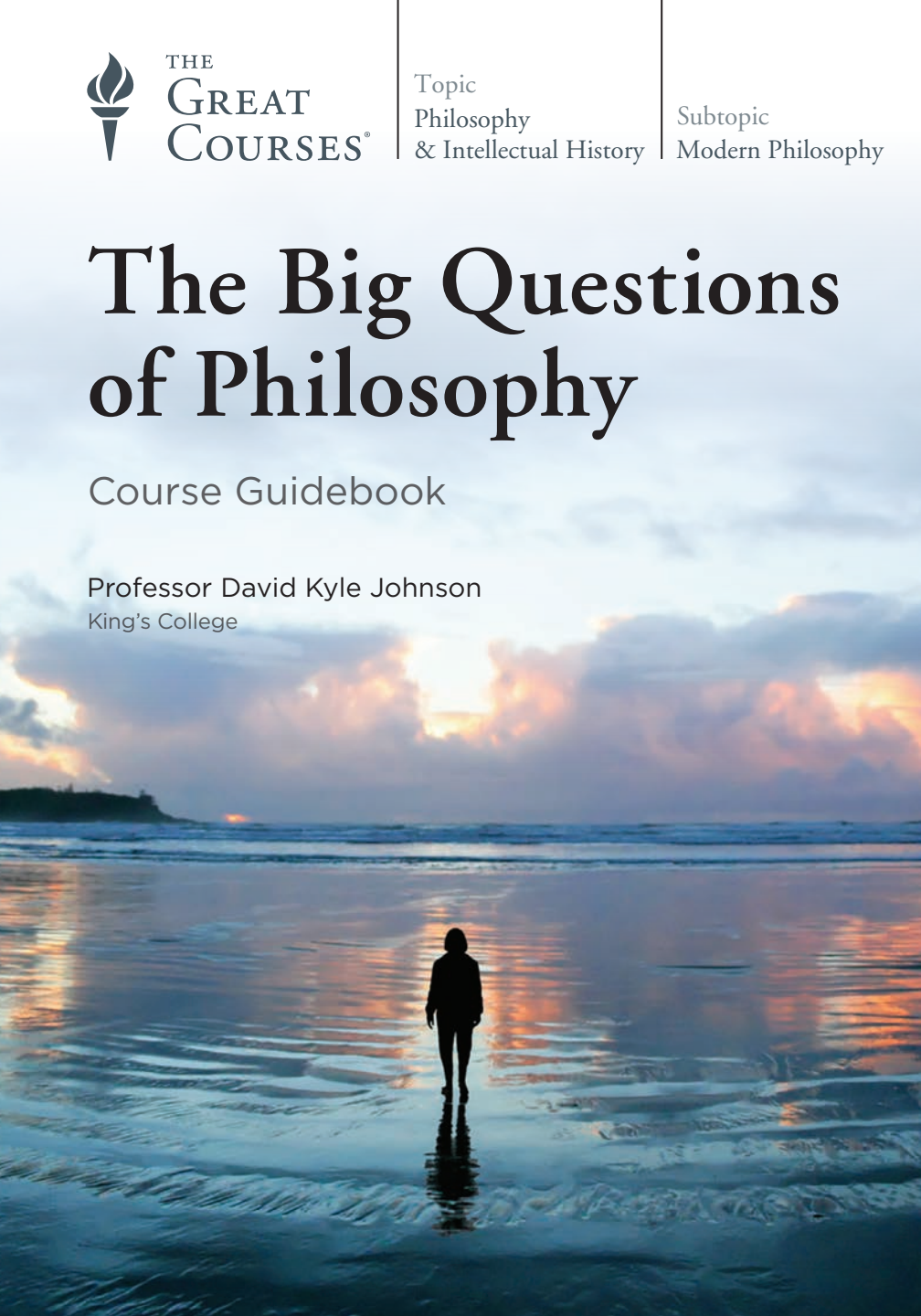
The Big Questions of Philosophy

Course Guidebook

Professor David Kyle Johnson
King's College



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Dr. David Kyle Johnson is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at King's College in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. After receiving his bachelor's degree in Religion and Philosophy at Southern Nazarene University in 2000, he completed his master's and doctor of philosophy degrees at The University of Oklahoma.

Dr. Johnson regularly teaches classes on metaphysics, philosophy of religion, philosophy of mind, and logic, as well as courses on critical thinking and scientific reasoning. He has published papers on free will, the rationality of theistic belief, the problem of natural evil, the multiverse and the simulation hypothesis, the existence of souls and demons, and many related topics. His articles have appeared in such journals as *Religious Studies*, *Sophia*, *Philo*, *Philosophy and Literature*, *Think*, and *Science, Religion and Culture*. He also lectures regularly outside the classroom, both on and off campus, and maintains two blogs for *Psychology Today.* In 2015, he published the controversial book *The Myths That Stole Christmas: Seven Misconceptions That Hijacked the Holiday (and How We Can Take It Back)*.

At Oklahoma, Dr. Johnson won the coveted Kenneth R. Merrill Graduate Teaching Award. In 2011, the American Philosophical Association's Committee on Public Philosophy gave him an award for his ability to make philosophy accessible to the general public. He is also well known for integrating popular culture into his courses as a way to raise and explain philosophical problems and arguments. Consequently, Dr. Johnson publishes prolifically on the intersection of pop culture and philosophy. He has written numerous articles that explore the relationship between philosophical questions and such pop cultural phenomena as *The Hobbit*,

Doctor Who, Batman, *South Park*, *Star Trek*, Johnny Cash, and Quentin Tarantino. One of his books, *Inception and Philosophy: Because It's Never Just a Dream*, inspired an Authors@Google talk with more than half a million YouTube views.

Dr. Johnson's other Great Course is *Exploring Metaphysics*. ■

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LECTURE GUIDES

WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

WHAT IS KNOWLEDGE?

The Big Questions of Philosophy

Scope

Philosophy means "love of wisdom," and the philosopher is concerned with seeking the truth. In this course, we'll consider several of the most important questions philosophers confront—some of which have settled answers, but many of which do not … yet.

We'll begin with questions about what philosophy is and how to do it. Plato's Allegory of the Cave will teach us intellectual virtue, and Steven Colbert will help us avoid fallacious reasoning. We'll learn that through deduction, induction, and abduction, we can answer many seemingly unanswerable questions.

Next, we'll turn to questions about the goal of philosophy: knowledge. What is it? Can we acquire it? If so, how? Descartes, Locke, Hume, and Kant dispute our ability to have it, and Gettier challenges its traditional definition: "justified true belief." But after considering skepticism, empiricism, pragmatism, and the difference between the noumenal and phenomenal, we'll see that we do have effective methods for discovering the truth about (and even knowledge of) the world and that we should develop intellectual virtues to attain it.

This will lead to questions about religious knowledge and whether testimony, mystical experience, and faith can justify beliefs. We'll discover that if we want religious knowledge, we must develop arguments for it. This generates questions about why there's something rather than nothing and what exactly the nature of God is. After considering arguments inspired by Aquinas, Anselm, Kant, Plantinga, Calvin, Swinburne, Hick, Rowe, and a few others, we will see that belief in God must likely remain a matter of faith.

Considering God's existence raises another classic philosophical question: Is God's foreknowledge compatible with human free will? That will force us to wonder what it means to say that humans are free. Does it require having a soul? Does freedom require alternatives, as libertarianism suggests? Is

there another way to be free, as Frankfurt and the compatibilists propose? Given what we've learned about the brain and the nature of the universe, it seems almost impossible to give human free will a philosophic defense, but is it possible to believe that we are not free?

If we are free and there's an afterlife, we may be held responsible for our choices. But is an afterlife really possible? This question will lead us to examine the nature of persons and what it could mean for your eight-year-old self, your current self, and your self in the afterlife to be the same person. Is personhood preserved by memory, as per Locke; psychology, as per Hick; bodily continuity, as per Unger and van Inwagen—or, as David Lewis suggests, might we need to rethink altogether what it means to be a person? Contemplating *Star Trek*–style teleportation will help us make sense of it all.

Then, we'll question the nature of the mind. Does the mind consist of a separable immaterial substance, or is it dependent upon the brain? Are they one and the same, as Papineau suggests, or does the brain produce the mind? And if the latter, how does it do so? (This is the hard problem of consciousness.) Is the mind a property of the brain, and if so, what kind of property? A nonreductive emergent property, as property dualists argue? A property without causal powers, as epiphenomenalism suggests? And if our neurons produce our minds by sending signals to one another, might we one day create minds by constructing collections of microchips that do the same thing? The debate between Copeland and Searle will force us to ask: Is artificial intelligence really possible?

Questions about how we should treat artificial intelligence will lead us to further ethical considerations. What are right and wrong? Do God's commands define morality, or does God recognize the moral and command it? Most philosophers, including Plato, reject divine command theory, but then what does define morality? Is an action right because it produces happiness in us or others, as Epicurus, Bentham, and Mill suggest? Or is it because it's our duty, as Kant argues? If so, what makes something our duty? And if we can't answer these questions, can we still be good, as the virtue ethicist contends? Is it even worth being good when immorality so often brings more external rewards?

The latter is a question answered in Plato's *Republic*, and that will lead us to inquire about government and how society should be organized. Is government morally unjustified, as Bakunin, Chomsky, Wolff, and Skoble reason, or justified by a social contract, as Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau suggest? Should it guarantee only the liberty to do anything but harm others, as Mill proposes, or ensure basic necessities and equal division of resources for all, as Marx insists? And is John Rawls right about what it takes to make society fair and just?

In the end, we'll have answered more questions than expected. But given that we'll have seen good reasons to doubt the existence of the soul, God, free will, and the afterlife—along with morality, persons, and even minds—we'll be forced to wonder: Can life have meaning if such things are mere illusions? This is the final big question we shall consider, with the help of Thomas Nagel, Albert Camus, Julian Baggini, and Douglas Adams. And we'll see that, indeed, life can still have meaning; in fact, taking this course may even have made our own lives just a little more meaningful. ■

Lecture 1

How Do We Do Philosophy?

Philosophy is the love of wisdom and the pursuit of truth. In this course, we will consider many of the most significant questions in philosophy: What is the nature of truth and knowledge? Does God exist? What is morally right and wrong? What is the meaning of life? In this first lecture, we provide some guidelines for "doing" philosophy, including these: Question everything and admit when you're wrong; don't assume that truth is a matter of opinion or gut feeling; and don't hide behind a right to your opinion. Instead, seek effective arguments and evidence and proportion your beliefs accordingly.

A Study of All Things

- In Greek, *philosophy* means "love of wisdom." And although the etymology of a word is not always indicative of its meaning, in this case, it's accurate. Philosophy is the pursuit of wisdom in all things; the philosopher is ultimately concerned with acquiring as many true beliefs and rejecting as many false beliefs as possible.

- The philosopher also wants to be a certain kind of person—one who wants and is able to find the truth about all things. The philosopher is open to anything being subjected to rational inquiry and thinks nothing should be believed if it does not survive that process. It's no surprise, then, that philosophy is widely considered to be the mother of all disciplines.

- We could say that philosophy is the study of all things. What we'd now classify as questions of physics, chemistry, biology, math, medicine, economics, ethics, religion, language, politics, or business were once the purview of the philosopher. As philosophers discovered the truths they were looking for, their discoveries spawned new disciplines.

- For example, as philosophers began to discover the truths about the natural world, those truths laid the foundation for a new discipline

called *science*, aimed at discovering, describing, understanding, predicting, and controlling the natural world. Indeed, science was first called *natural philosophy*. All the most important early mathematicians were also philosophers, as was Hippocrates, the father of medicine.

Relativism

- Philosophy is not just a matter of opinion. If something is logically incoherent, inconsistent with known facts, or conflicts with well-established intuitions, it's probably wrong. But the fact that the right answer is difficult to find doesn't mean it doesn't exist. There really are right and wrong answers to the questions philosophers consider.

- A common misunderstanding of philosophy is the mistaken notion that truth is relative. The notion that something can be true for one person but not for another reflects an idea called *individual relativism*. Generally stated, a belief is true if it matches up to the way the world is. And if two people disagree about something, it can't be that both their beliefs about it match up to the way the world is. It cannot be the case that what each believes is "true for them."

- Some relativists don't think that all truth is relative—just certain kinds of truth, such as moral truths. However, the fact that a truth is difficult to discover doesn't mean that it can't be found—or that it doesn't exist. What's more, moral relativism is clearly false.

- Other relativists admit that truth is not relative to individuals but maintain, instead, that truth is relative to entire cultures. This is called *cultural relativism*. The Nazis thought that Jews were less than human and that it was perfectly acceptable to exterminate them—but that didn't make it true.

A Right to an Opinion

- The notion of a "right" to one's opinion brings us to another misunderstanding of philosophy. Commonly, people think that we all have a right to believe whatever we want.

- Of course, in a legal sense, this is correct; everyone has a legal right to an opinion. But to successfully end a debate in philosophy, it must be the case that you have an epistemic right to your opinion—that is, it must be the case that your opinion isn't merely an opinion.

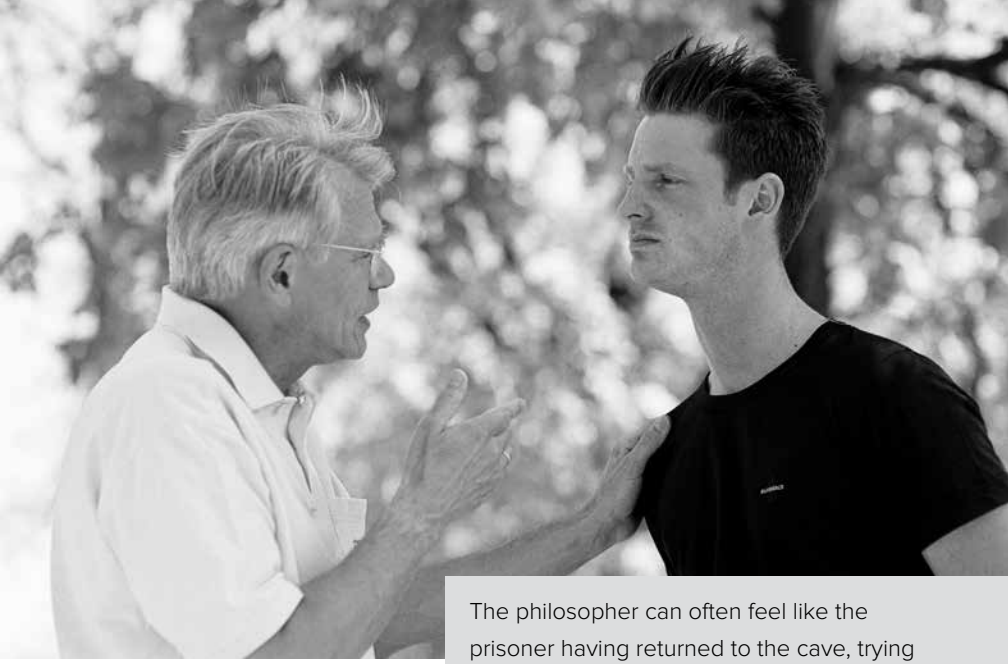
- To end a debate successfully, your opinion must be a judgment, informed by the relevant facts and based in sound reasoning. Others aren't obligated to agree with your opinion just because it's yours; they aren't even obligated to give it deference. Unless it's backed by rational argument, they shouldn't even respect it.

- People who say they have a right to their opinion may believe they have a moral right to their opinion—that others have a moral duty to let them keep their opinion. However, we are not morally bound to protect someone else's ignorance.

The Allegory of the Cave

- As the ancient philosopher Socrates told us (through his student Plato), the unexamined life is not worth living. By not thinking about the hard questions, we're not living a full life. Indeed, our rationality and ability to think about philosophical questions set us apart from other animals; refusing to engage in philosophy robs us of our humanity.

- But Socrates went further. Not only does seeking the truth lead to a more fulfilling life, but true belief is good in and of itself. To establish this, Socrates gives us the Allegory of the Cave.
    - In this early thought experiment, several people have been imprisoned in a dark cave since birth. Bound by chains and unable to see the light of day, they can only stare at the wall in front of them. Behind the prisoners, there is a raised walkway, and behind the walkway, a fire burns. Along the walkway, people carry statues and figures of animals. The fire casts shadows of these figures on the wall in front of the prisoners, who are unaware of what is happening behind them. Because the prisoners have seen nothing beyond the cave and the shadows it has to offer, they perceive those shadows to be reality.



The philosopher can often feel like the prisoner having returned to the cave, trying to convince people of the truth when they would rather wallow in their ignorance.

- When one of the prisoners finally frees himself from his bonds, he realizes that the things he thought were real—the shadows—were not. Then, he stumbles out of the cave and discovers the real world. He considers the life he once lived as a prisoner and pities those he left behind. The lesson here is that knowing the truth about the world, and not being duped, is valuable in and of itself.

Intellectual Honesty

- In order to engage in productive philosophical inquiry, the philosopher must value intellectual honesty. To seek the truth, we must be willing to admit when we do not have knowledge.

- Socrates famously professed not to know anything really worth knowing—such knowledge was what he claimed he was seeking. In the same way, we must be open to the possibility that we have no knowledge. We might be wrong about everything we think is true.

For the philosopher, no belief is immune from criticism or scrutiny, no matter how cherished or fundamental.

- As philosophers, we must also be intellectually courageous. In the end, Socrates was willing to die for his pursuit of truth. Such a fate is less likely to befall philosophers today, but seeking the truth still requires a great deal of hard work and perseverance. Let's face it: It takes courage to admit when you're wrong.

Gut Thinking and Intuition

- The philosopher values sound arguments and evidence more than opinion—expert or otherwise. We can't believe something simply because it feels right in our "gut."

- The philosopher John Locke called gut thinkers "enthusiastic" and said of them "[T]hey are sure because they are sure, and their persuasions are right only because they are strong in them."

- In other words, gut thinking is circular. Gut thinkers believe something because their gut tells them it's true, but their gut tells them it's true because they believe it. A belief, however, can't be its own justification. Besides, gut feelings are a dime a dozen—everyone has one, but not everyone's can be right. To figure out who is right, we must look at the arguments and evidence.

- It's important not to confuse gut thinking with appealing to intuition—which can be useful in philosophy. By identifying that a philosophical theory conflicts with an intuition, we're able to identify what we may have to give up if we are to accept that philosophical theory. We'll know that we'll be forced to decide which is more important—the intuition or the philosophical theory.

Neglecting Philosophy

- In his article "Stop Making Fun of Philosophy and Read Some Philosophy," Pascal-Emmanuel Gobry argues that by neglecting philosophy, we've forgotten that which laid the foundation for our entire society; further.

  - Although we gladly use science, we don't understand the philosophical underpinnings that led to the scientific revolution. Although we relish the liberty ensured by a representative democracy, we have no understanding of the political philosophy that justified it.

  - Because of the knowledge that philosophy has granted us, we have more power to do evil and good to more people than ever before in human history—yet no one sees the value in studying philosophy in an attempt to discover what evil and good truly are.

- Gobry argues that we're "like people in a *Star Trek* episode whose planet is ruled by a benevolent artificial intelligence, and who live such charmed lives as a result that, over generations, they have forgotten how the computer works. … Our entire civilization is built on technology called 'philosophy' that, in many ways, we are losing a basic understanding of." In this course, we'll try to remedy that lack of understanding.

- The philosopher seeks and values truth, even when it's elusive. Our main instrument in this journey will be reason. We will use reason to propose and evaluate answers to the big questions of philosophy. Thus, our first question might be: Why should we trust reason? We'll turn to that question in the next lecture.

Suggested Sources

Blackburn, *Truth*.

Colbert, *I Am America (And So Can You)*.

Kreeft, *A Refutation of Moral Relativism*.

Reitsma, "Is There a Moral Right to Beliefs?"

Questions to Consider

1. As mentioned in the lecture, intuition can sometimes be useful in philosophy. For example, if an ethical theory entails that something is morally acceptable, but your intuition tells you it is not, that will be a good reason to reject that theory. But it this kind of intuition really different than a "gut feeling"? Why or why not?
2. Sometimes the truth is hard to discover, and we simply do not have all the time necessary to fully research a question. Is it acceptable to rely on a gut feeling then? What would be the benefits of simply remaining agnostic in that situation and saying, "I don't know"?

Lecture 2

Why Should We Trust Reason?

Philosophy is only as good as the reasoning behind it. In fact, few are as ruthless as philosophers in demanding that others present reasons for their beliefs. That's the only way to get to the truth, which is what philosophers seek above all else. But there are legitimate concerns regarding how much we should trust reason. After all, when we present reasons for a position, we are just presenting an argument—a collection of statements or premises intended to support a conclusion. What's more, the arguments we present can reflect our biases. In this lecture, we'll learn how to recognize and avoid flaws in reason—logical fallacies.

Confirmation Bias

- We love to listen to people who agree with us. We like it even more when people present arguments that confirm what we already believe, and that make people who disagree with us look like fools. Living in an echo chamber, where people repeat back what we already believe, can be comforting.

- The tendency to interpret information in a way that confirms our preconceptions is known as confirmation bias. We are all subject to it. This is why, even when presented with irrefutable evidence, people will often further entrench themselves in their original views, rather than change their minds.

Appeal to Ignorance

- During the Red Scare of the 1950s, fear of communism was at its height. Senator Joseph McCarthy held his famous hearings and accused many of being communist sympathizers. Dozens of politicians lost their credibility, and more than 2,000 government employees lost their jobs.

- McCarthy's argument was simple: If you can't prove you're not a communist, then you are. If you even questioned the senator's tactics, motivation, or reasoning, you came under suspicion. Maybe the

accused was a churchgoer, voted Republican, and had signed an anticommunist oath—but aren't those the activities a secret communist would engage in to throw everyone off the track?

- This fallacious line of reasoning is called the appeal to ignorance. Because complete proof that something is false is usually impossible, a lack of proof against something is not a good reason to conclude that it's true.

- Perhaps the fallaciousness of such reasoning is most obvious when we realize that, if it were valid, we'd be justified in believing anything. As we shall soon see, it's nearly impossible to prove anything definitively; appealing to ignorance could make believing that the earth is flat rational, simply because it can't be 100 percent disproved. The same holds true for the concept of sufficient evidence. The mere fact that we don't have sufficient evidence against something is not a good reason to think it is true—or vice versa.

"Mystery, Therefore Magic"

- A very common form of the appeal to ignorance fallacy is the "mystery, therefore magic" fallacy. It arises when people think that their inability to prove that something has a natural explanation is a good reason to invoke a supernatural explanation—because, after all, "How else do you explain it?"

- Interestingly, we don't always make this mistake. We avoid it every time we see a magician perform a trick that we can't explain. Yet, when considering the supernatural phenomena of their choice, people often adopt this line of reasoning without question. In other words, if you can't explain it must be a UFO. If you can't explain what I saw in the dark, mysterious house, it must be a ghost. If you can't explain why my disease went into remission, it must be a miracle.

- Countless people invoke such reasoning every day, yet it is no more reasonable than believing that magicians have magic powers.

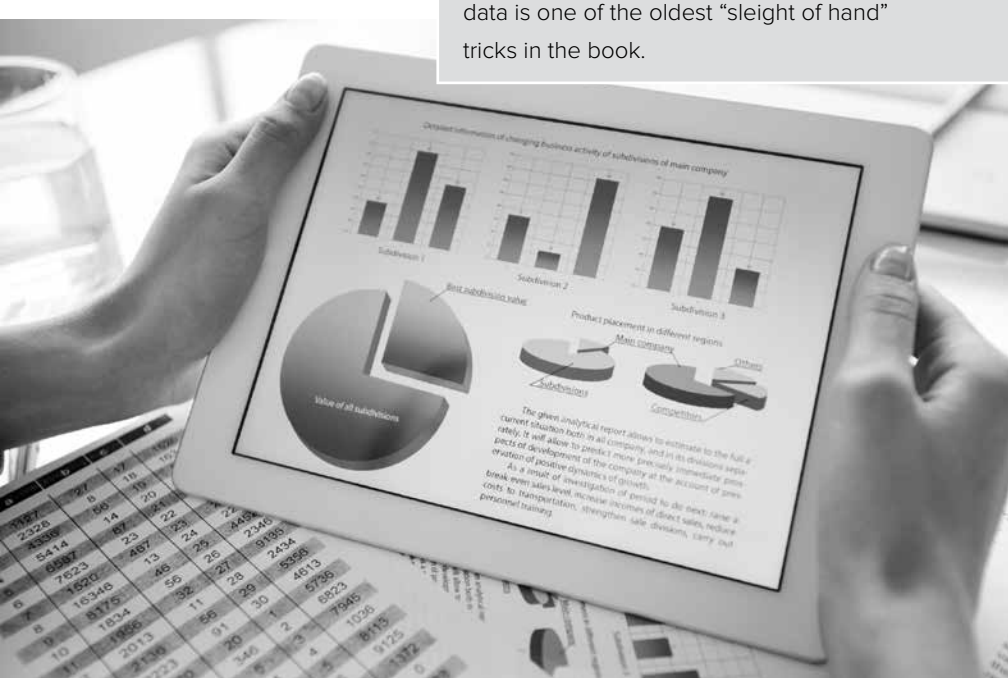
Correlation Is Not Causation

- Consider a situation in which two actions are correlated—they happen at the same time or occur one before the other. We often conclude that one causes the other; however, such reasoning is often fallacious. Correlation does not entail causation.

- For example, the rate of violent crime always increases when ice cream sales increase, but ice cream does not induce violence. The correlation is simply due to a common third factor: Both rates spike in the summer.

- Such reasoning can even be dangerous. For example, autism has been diagnosed in some children shortly after they received the measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine. However, that doesn't mean that vaccines cause autism. It's simply the case that the age at which children's immune system is developed enough to receive the

Using graphs and charts to misrepresent data is one of the oldest "sleight of hand" tricks in the book.



vaccine is around the same time that diagnosable signs of autism begin to appear. Yet people have still concluded that the vaccines are to blame and have stopped vaccinating their children. Consequently, many preventable diseases that were once all but eradicated are on the rise again.

Begging the Question

- Sometimes people argue in a circle—that is, they assume the truth of what they are trying to prove. The conclusion of their argument is simply stated or assumed by one of the premises of their argument. But we can't establish something by assuming it. This is called begging the question.

- For example, consider this argument: We know that everything the Koran says is true because it says it right there in the Koran: "Everything written in the Koran is true."

Equivocation

- We often let our emotions or preconceptions tell us whether an argument is bad; we let them do our reasoning for us. Consider these two arguments:
    - Argument 1
      Every life is sacred.
      A fetus is alive.
      Therefore, a fetus is sacred.

    - Argument 2
      Everyone has a moral right to choose.
      A woman can choose to have an abortion.
      Thus, a woman has the moral right to choose abortion.

- Chances are, you thought one of these arguments was rock solid and the other was lacking in foundation. But the truth is, they both make the same mistake. And it's the same one made in Argument 3:
    - Argument 3
      Bologna is better than nothing.
      Nothing is better than prime rib.
      Therefore, bologna is better than prime rib.

- The logical fallacy here is called equivocation; it involves switching the meanings of terms from one premise to the next so that it looks like the premises are true and the conclusion follows when, in fact, it does not. If you don't like the conclusion, you turn a critical eye to the argument. If you like the conclusion, you assume that it is based on sound logic. Nevertheless, both Argument 1 and Argument 2 make the same mistake.

Slippery-Slope Fallacy

- Another common logical fallacy is the slippery-slope fallacy. Consider these two examples: (1) "We can't legalize gay marriage; it's a slippery slope. Pretty soon polygamy will be legal." (2) "We can't allow the Ten Commandments to be displayed at the courthouse; it's a slippery slope. Pretty soon, the laws of Leviticus will be the laws of the land."

- The mere fact that one step will put you closer to some outcome doesn't mean that the outcome will be reached. Each step should be evaluated on its own merits, not on other steps that might—hypothetically—be taken later.

- Simply stating an action's possible consequence doesn't mean it will have that consequence. You must provide evidence of the results. What's more, it's important to note that the fallaciousness of these arguments doesn't tell us about the truth of their conclusions.

Inductive and Conscious Reasoning

- Regardless of whether we should trust reason, we can't do without it. We reason about everything, both consciously and unconsciously. Although "having a reason" and reason itself are not the same thing, any time you do something for a reason, you are using reasoning—you draw the conclusion that you should take some action for that reason. In fact, it is reason itself that has led us to question whether or not we should trust reason.

- There are two different kinds of reasoning.
    - Instinctive reasoning is the kind we use when we look at an argument and let our feelings dictate its worth. This kind of reasoning is not reliable.

- Conscious or careful reasoning is what we use when we learn the rules of logic, acquaint ourselves with common mistakes of instinctive reasoning, and then carefully construct or evaluate arguments, doing our best to guard against the mistakes we are prone to make. This kind of reasoning is very reliable. It lies at the heart of philosophy and science, and it is responsible for every bit of progress we have made as a species.

Automatic Responses

- Instinctive reasoning processes are not reliable because they're automatic responses we have developed through evolution, and evolution selects only what makes us better able to survive and reproduce.

- Following is a classic example to illustrate the point: Suppose one of our primate ancestors hears a rustle in the bushes, and he runs away, thinking it's a predator. This may be an unjustified conclusion, but it preserves his life on the off chance that it's a tiger. The primate who rationally concludes that he does not have enough information to know what caused the noise remains agnostic and won't run away. This is actually the justified conclusion, but on the off chance it is a tiger, his reasoning will not preserve his life.

- Back when we had to struggle to survive, we didn't have time to reason carefully—we had to jump to conclusions. Fortunately, however, evolution also gave us something else: large brains. And our large brains are capable of careful reasoning. They can learn logic and recognize and avoid the mistakes of instinctive reasoning. They can examine evidence, find the best explanation, and come to justified conclusions.

Checking Our Reasoning

- Even the most careful reasoning can get things wrong. This is why we should always check our reasoning carefully for flaws. Make sure that no fallacious instinctive reasoning slipped has in. Try to find errors. Even look for evidence that you're wrong. To be even more assured, invite others to prove you wrong.

- To fully understand how to reason carefully, we have to learn the rules of logic—the science of reasoning itself. Fortunately, we can stand on the shoulders of giants in this regard. Careful reasoning has been coveted by philosophers for centuries, and the rules of logic and reasoning are very well defined. In the next lecture, we will learn those rules.

Suggested Sources

Bennett, *Logically Fallacious*.

Russell, "Is There a God?"

Williamson, *Master List of Logical Fallacies*.

Questions to Consider

1. Can you think of other ways that statistics and graphs are used to mislead people?
2. List some real-world examples of the fallacies we discussed in this lecture. Can you think of other informal fallacies not mentioned in the lecture? Look up other informal fallacies and find examples.
3. Why have you been guilty of committing logical fallacies?

Lecture 3

How Do We Reason Carefully?

In order to reason carefully, we must understand the rules of logic—the science of reasoning—and how to apply them. In this lecture, we describe Aristotle's three axioms of logic and explore the differences between inductive and deductive arguments. We explain how to determine whether a deductive argument is valid and sound, outline symbolic logic, and define two of the three kinds of inductive logic.

Aristotle's Axioms

- The three axioms of logic put forward by Aristotle are still accepted today. Called the *laws of thought*, they are what we must assume before making any argument.
    - Law of noncontradiction: No proposition is both true and false.
    - Law of excluded middle: Every proposition is either true or false.
    - Law of identity: Everything is identical to itself.
- Once understood, the laws are so obviously true that they need no argument. And because the laws underlie all arguments, we cannot present an argument for these laws without arguing in a circle.
- Aristotle divided all arguments into two kinds: deductive and inductive—a division that still holds today. He suggested that deduction reasoned from the universal to the particular and that induction reasoned from the particular to the universal.

Deductive Logic

- The rules Aristotle developed for deduction mainly concern the so-called *categorical arguments*. Here's a classic example of an Aristotelian categorical deduction:

  All men are mortal.
  Socrates is a man.

Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

- Notice that this argument moves from the general to the specific. We begin with a general statement about all men and end up with a conclusion regarding a specific person. But not all categorical arguments have specific conclusions. For example:
  All dogs are mammals,
  All mammals are animals.
  Therefore, all dogs are animals.

- This is a deductive categorical argument, but its conclusion is no more specific than either of its premises.

- One thing these arguments have in common is that the truth of their conclusion is guaranteed by the truth of their premises. If those premises were true, it would not be possible for the conclusion to be false. A deductive argument is an argument with a conclusion that follows necessarily from the premises.

Symbolic Logic

- All deductive arguments can be broken down into specific statements and the logical relationships that are said to be true of them or hold between them. Here are the five most basic, with the corresponding symbols given in parentheses.
  - Affirmation: A statement (P) is true. As a shortcut, we say "P."
  - Conditional: One statement entails another: If P, then Q ($P \rightarrow Q$).
  - Disjunction: Either one statement is true or another one is: P or Q ($P \vee Q$).
  - Conjunction: Two statements are true together: P and Q ($P \& Q$).
  - Negation: A statement is false: Not P ($\sim P$).

- For most arguments, we can break down the relationships between its statements using these concepts. For ease of reference, logicians

represent these relationships by placing symbols between the letters that represent the statements. In this way, we can "symbolize" arguments.

Modus Ponens* and *Modus Tollens

- Certain rules govern what can be derived from arguments. For example, if we know that some statement P is true, but we also know that P entails some other statement Q, then we can derive that Q is true. This line of reasoning is called *modus ponens*, which gets its name from the Latin for "mood that affirms." By affirming the antecedent of the conditional (first part), we affirm the consequent (second part).

  Modus ponens: If P, then Q. P; therefore, Q. ($P \rightarrow Q$; $P \therefore Q$)

- *Modus tollens* is Latin for "mood that denies." Denying the consequent of the conditional allows us to deny the antecedent.

  Modus tollens: If P, then Q. Not Q; therefore, not P. ($P \rightarrow Q$, $\sim Q \therefore \sim P$)

Validity

- According to Aristotle, to be deductive, an argument's conclusion must follow necessarily from its premises. Aristotle was able to be restrictive because he was dealing only with three-line categorical arguments, and there are only a finite number of ways to combine two categorical premises so that they guarantee their conclusion.

- Modern logicians, however, do not have that luxury since—in reality—there are an infinite number of ways for a set of premises to guarantee a conclusion (and infinite ways for them to fail to do so). Therefore, modern logicians consider an argument deductive when the person presenting the argument merely intends for the conclusion to be guaranteed by its premises; it is then the logician's task to discover which arguments successfully do so and which ones do not.

- In a valid argument, whenever the premises are true, the conclusion must be true, because of the form of the argument. When testing an argument for validity, we don't care whether or not the premises are true. We care only about what would follow if its premises were true. If we assume that

the premises are true, then realize that the argument's conclusion would necessarily follow, then we know the argument is valid.

Affirming the Consequent, Denying the Antecedent

- Not all deductive arguments are valid. If a person intends for the premises to guarantee the conclusion, then the argument is deductive, but sometimes, people are mistaken. They think that a conclusion would be guaranteed by the premises when in fact it would not. This happens so often that some such mistakes have names.

- Affirming the consequent gets its name from its second premise, where the consequent of the conditional is affirmed.

  Affirming the consequent: If P, then Q. Q; therefore P. ($P \rightarrow Q, Q \therefore P$)

- Denying the antecedent gets its name because the second premise denies the antecedent of the conditional.

  Denying the antecedent: If P, then Q. Not P; therefore, not Q. ($P \rightarrow Q, \sim P \therefore \sim Q$)

Sound Arguments

- If the truth of an argument's premises would guarantee its conclusion, and that argument's premises are actually true, then its conclusion must be true. Arguments that are valid and have true premises are said to be sound arguments.

- Sound arguments are the holy grail of philosophy. They guarantee that you are on the side of truth. However, they are very hard to come by—or, at least, very difficult to verify. Every deductive argument is either valid or it's not. Whether it is valid or not is mathematically provable. But it's difficult to establish that an argument is sound.

Inductive Logic

- Aristotle compared inductive arguments to what he called scientific reasoning—reasoning "about causes." And, indeed, such reasoning often does go from the particular to the universal.

- Today, logicians contrast inductive arguments with deductive ones based on the intended relationship between their premises and conclusion. The premises of an inductive argument aren't supposed to guarantee its conclusion, as they do in deduction. They are merely supposed to provide good support. If their truth would provide good support, we say the argument is strong. And if the premises are actually true, then the argument is cogent.

- Because the conclusions of inductive arguments are not guaranteed, you might think that inductive reasoning is inferior to deduction. But in many ways, induction is more powerful. For one, it is much easier to show that a conclusion is likely true than it is to prove it's true. More important, inductive arguments can generate such a high degree of probability to their conclusion that the fact that they are not "100 percent proven" is irrelevant.

- For example, all scientific arguments are inductive; thus, technically, no scientific conclusion is guaranteed. But that fact alone does not mean that it is rational to doubt scientific conclusions.

Enumerative Induction

- There are three kinds of inductive logic: enumerative induction**,** argument from analogy**,** and abduction (or inference to the best explanation).

- Enumerative induction is the kind of inductive argument that results from opinion polls. We find out what a sample of a population believes about a topic, then draw a conclusion about what the population as a whole believes about that topic.

- Such reasoning assumes many things. One is that the future will resemble the past—that people will believe tomorrow what they believed yesterday. It also assumes that small portions of a larger population are representative of the whole. Because these are fairly safe assumptions, opinion polls are generally reliable—unless, of course, they are not done correctly.

Enumerative induction happens any time a representative sample is taken and a conclusion about the whole is drawn, as when a doctor assumes that a blood sample is representative of the patient's entire bloodstream.

- Part of learning to reason carefully is learning to spot logical errors. If, for example, a poll is reported without its margin of error, we don't know how large the sample was. If the poll comes from the Internet, it may represent only users who cared enough to weigh in, not a randomly selected portion of the population. Leading questions can also skew polls, as well as questions that people won't answer honestly.

Argument from Analogy

- Another type of induction is argument from analogy. Here, we take two or more objects, note their similarities, and conclude that they must have an additional similarity. Although the conclusion is not guaranteed, an argument from analogy can be powerful in establishing the likelihood of its conclusion.

- Arguments from analogy are common in the legal world. Similarities between cases are used as precedents to establish that a similar

conclusion should be reached in another case. Medical research also uses analogy. Because mice possess a genome similar to our own, if a medicine affects mice in a certain way, it will likely affect humans in that way, as well.

- Notice, again, that we're assuming the future will resemble the past: If a medication has affected humans in a certain way in the past, it will do the same in the future. At some level, when it comes to induction, that assumption is always in play.

- There is one method of induction we have yet to discuss: abduction, or inference to the best explanation. It is crucial to scientific reasoning and, in fact, is so significant that we will dedicate the entire next lecture to it.

Suggested Sources

King, and Shapiro, "The History of Logic."

Questions to Consider

1. How mays ways can you think of to provide valid arguments with the rules mentioned in this lecture? How often do you see deductive arguments? How often do people think that a conclusion follows necessarily from their premises when it does not?

2. The lecture mentioned that enumerative induction (statistical reasoning) assumes that the future will resemble the past by assuming that what people believed yesterday they will still believe tomorrow. Are there other ways that enumerative induction assumes the future will resemble the past? What about analogy? How does it make this assumption?

3. Can you think of ways that statistics are used to mislead people and how an understanding of induction can help guard against such things? What kind of motivations do people have for using such tactics? Which do you see most often?

4. Inductive arguments from analogy are common in courtroom settings, but you may have also used these arguments in your day-to-day life. For instance, have you ever assumed that a product would be good because it was similar to one that you (or someone you knew) already had? Have you ever concluded that someone was good and trustworthy because he or she resembled someone you know who has those qualities? Can you think of other instances where you've used the similarities between two things to help you make a decision?

5. Can you can think of other situations in which enumerative induction is used? What kinds of questions could you ask a pollster to make sure a sample is random?

6. Can you think of other situations in which arguments from analogy are used? What kind of information might you add to an analogy to make it stronger? What kind of information might make an analogy weaker?

Lecture 4

How Do We Find the Best Explanation?

Many philosophers consider abduction, or "inference to the best explanation," our most reliable guide to truth. Although Sir Arthur Conan Doyle called it deduction, abduction was actually Sherlock Holmes's method of choice when it came to solving crimes. Abduction is also common in the medical field; every medical diagnosis is an inference to the best explanation. Most notably, however, it is through abduction that major advances in scientific knowledge are made. In this lecture, we explore the scientific process and define the five criteria of abduction: testability, fruitfulness, scope, simplicity, and conservatism.

Abductive Reasoning

- Major advances in scientific knowledge are made through abductive reasoning. We accept a new theory when we realize that it's a better explanation for the known facts. And nothing has expanded our knowledge of the world more than science. This is why so many think that abduction is our most reliable guide to truth.

- Thomas Huxley said, "Science is simply common sense at its best." And in a sense, he was right. Abductive reasoning is, in many ways, just common sense. To modify one of Huxley's own examples: If you came downstairs to find your window open and your silverware missing, you'd conclude that you were robbed and call the police; that's obviously the best explanation. You wouldn't think that a ghost was the culprit and hold a silverware recovery séance.

- But contrary to Huxley's suggestion, abduction actually goes against "common sense" in many ways. As we've seen, the commonsense reasoning we apply instinctively is often wrong. If you take an experimental medication, feel better, common sense would tell you that the medication works. In reality, however, that's only one data point—an anecdote—and it doesn't prove anything. Correlation doesn't imply causation.

- In fact, science was developed as a method for circumventing the ways common sense can lead us astray, and it doesn't do so only through instinctive reasoning. We commonly think that what we experience and remember is true. But our senses and memory lead us astray more often than intuitive reasoning does. Our experience of the world often fails to reflect the way it actually is.
    - Consider our sense of sight. Outside conditions, illness, and injuries can make us see what's not there. In fact, even healthy people, in normal circumstances, can hallucinate. We see optical illusions, and our depth perception is notoriously unreliable. Worse still, we often simply see what we expect. Studies have demonstrated that people can be made to see a certain stimulus, such as a flashing light, if they're simply told to expect it. Although confirmation bias affects how we "see" arguments, what philosophers call *expectation bias* affects how we see the world.

    - Another common effect of expectation bias is *pareidolia*—that is, imposing a pattern on vague stimuli, leading us to see something that is not really present. A large portion of our brains is predisposed to see faces; thus, we tend to see faces everywhere—even where they are not. Interestingly, pareidolia is not only a visual phenomenon; we also hear words and phrases simply because we expect to hear them.

    - Further, as many of us know, our memories are not particularly reliable. Not only do our expectations determine what we remember—for example, we remember evidence that confirms what we believe and we forget what doesn't—but certain kinds of things are simply more memorable than others.

    - When we experience something, we don't record it like a video camera. We store the basics and disregard the details. When we think about the experience later, we recall the basics but confabulate the details. Over time, a memory can become completely inaccurate.

The unreliable nature of our memory and senses is one reason that eyewitness testimony is often not trusted in court.

The Scientific Process

- Science is designed to guard against the many ways our intuitive reasoning, memory, and senses lead us astray. For example, when we're sick but feel better after taking a new pill, we use the correlation fallacy to conclude that the medicine worked. In reality, it could have been a placebo effect—we just felt better because we expected the pill to work. Or maybe we were already on the mend.

- An effective way to guard against these mistakes in logic—and determine which medicines actually work—is through blind placebo-controlled studies. In such studies, a pill may be given to a large group, called the *experimental group*. To guard against the placebo effect, another group, the *control group*, receives a sugar pill but is told that it's the real medication. Then, researchers determine whether more people in the experimental group than in the control group got better. If they did, the medication works.

- To guard against expectation bias, the person looking at the results can't know which participants were in which group. This is called *double-blinding* the study. It's also necessary to repeat the same study and get the same results to make sure no mistakes or other variables slipped in. This is called *replication*.

- These steps are a major strength of the scientific process. Conclusions that can rightfully be said to be supported by science are not derived from one person's (unreliable) experience. They are derived from the work of an entire community—a community that is aware of the kinds of errors we're apt to commit and that makes specific and careful efforts to guard against them.

Five Criteria of Abduction

- Scientific knowledge has consistently improved over time and continues to progress toward an accurate understanding of the world. It does so by using abduction to find better explanations. The most straightforward articulation of abduction comes from the textbook *How to Think about Weird Things*, by Theodore Schick and Lewis Vaughn.

- According to Schick and Vaughn, abduction uses five criteria: testability, fruitfulness, scope, simplicity, and conservatism. When figuring out the best explanation, we consider two or more hypotheses, then compare them based on these criteria. Whichever one fits best overall is the best explanation.

Testability

- To test a hypothesis, you predict what you would expect to observe if that hypothesis were true in certain conditions, then see if that prediction comes true in those conditions. Testability can be tricky, however. In order for a hypothesis to be truly testable in a way that will advance our knowledge, it must predict something currently unknown.

- Changing a hypothesis after it gets predictions wrong to align it with the evidence in a way that itself cannot be tested is called making ad hoc (improvised) excuses. It is obviously irrational and makes the hypothesis worthless. Those making ad hoc excuses simply reveal that

they're desperate to save their hypothesis from the evidence and are not interested in the truth.

- But the possibility of ad hoc excuses means that it's almost impossible to 100 percent disprove most hypotheses. People determined to protect their beliefs can always make excuses, although that doesn't make their beliefs rational.

Fruitfulness

- When a hypothesis is testable, it makes observable, novel predictions. But when a hypothesis is fruitful, it gets those predictions right. When we look out the window and see the trees swaying, our hypothesis that it's windy is both testable and fruitful.

- But simply getting one prediction right is not enough to confirm the truth of a hypothesis. After all, other factors may need to be taken into account. For example, the hypothesis that water always boils at 100° C might prove fruitful under certain experimental conditions. But if you varied the conditions of the experiment, such as the atmospheric pressure, you find that the boiling point of water varies wildly.

- There could also be other hypotheses that predict the same observations. For example, a stomachache is predicted by the hypothesis that you have stomach cancer, but it's also predicted by ulcers, gallstones, pancreatitis, and the flu. To confirm a diagnosis of stomach cancer would require further successful predictions. The more successful predictions a hypothesis makes, the greater its confirmation.

Scope

- The scope of a hypothesis is its explanatory power—that is, how many diverse phenomena the hypothesis explains and how much it unifies our knowledge. The more a hypothesis explains, the more reason we have to think it's true. Giving a full philosophical definition of what it means to explain something is difficult. But in general, it's easy to tell when a hypothesis explains something and when it doesn't.

- One important thing to keep in mind, when it comes to scope, is that a hypothesis does not explain anything if it raises more questions than it answers, especially if those questions are unanswerable.

Simplicity

- The criterion of simplicity is perhaps the most poorly named; it is also known as parsimony. A simple explanation, in the scientific sense, does not mean that it is easy to understand. It means that the hypothesis does not invoke more assumptions, entities, or forces than necessary.

- Consider Occam's razor—named after the 14th-century philosopher and Franciscan friar William of Ockham. Ockham expressed the process in *Summa totius logicae*: "It is futile to do with more things that which can be done with fewer." The classic articulation "entities must not be multiplied beyond necessity" never appeared in Ockham's work, but it expresses the same basic idea: The explanation that makes the fewest assumptions should be preferred.

- Simplicity plays an important role when abduction is used in the medical field. When a set of symptoms is expressed in a patient, it could be that each of those symptoms is associated with a separate disease, but the simpler explanation would be that one disease was causing all the symptoms. All other things being equal, the simplest explanation is the best.

Conservatism

- The last criterion of abduction is conservatism. In science, when something is conservative, it simply coheres with what we already know; it doesn't contradict already established knowledge.

- That is not to say that we should always disregard a hypothesis if it contradicts what we already know. If we always did that, knowledge could never progress. However, if a hypothesis does contradict already established knowledge, that is a strike against it. Unless it can overcome this handicap by being the most fruitful, wide-scoping, and simple hypothesis when compared to the conservative alternatives, it likely should be disregarded.

- Einstein's theory of relativity proved itself in this way. It was not conservative when it was first proposed because it contradicted Newton's theories. Newton had suggested that light always travels in straight lines and does not bend around massive objects. By correctly predicting that light does actually bend around massive objects (thus, by being both testable and fruitful), by further explaining the perihelion of Mercury (when Newton's theory could not, thus giving Einstein's theory wider scope), and by not invoking the force of gravity (thus being simpler), Einstein's theory became the accepted one.

- Now that we are armed with the tools of careful reasoning, we can start digging into even bigger philosophical questions. In the next lecture, we'll ask one of the most significant and fundamental questions of all—one that lies at the center of what all philosophers are seeking: What is truth?

Suggested Sources

Buchen, "May 29, 1919: A Major Eclipse, Relatively Speaking."

Irwin and Jacoby, *House and Philosophy*.

Schick and Vaughn, *How to Think about Weird Things*.

Questions to Consider

1. Think of a recent conspiracy theory you've heard—perhaps "9/11 was an inside job," "JFK was assassinated by the FBI," or "The moon landing was a hoax." How could you use the five criteria of abduction to argue for a more reasonable explanation?

2. Television is filled with shows claiming remarkable things: *Ghost Hunters*, *Ancient Aliens*, *Finding Bigfoot*, *Dr. Oz* (who often promotes "alternative medicine"). How might abduction clear up the muddy waters of confusion and shed light on whether ghosts and Bigfoot are real, whether aliens have visited our planet, and whether alternative medicine works?

Lecture 5

What Is Truth?

Philosophers are ultimately after truth—specifically, knowledge of the truth. We don't just want true beliefs; we want to know what's true. To determine that, we ask two critical questions: What is knowledge? What is truth? The former is the topic of this entire section. The latter is the topic of this lecture. Here, we will examine three theories of truth—pragmatism, coherence theory, and correspondence theory—and conclude with working definitions of *knowledge* (justified true belief) and *truth* (correspondence to the way the world is).

Justified True Belief

- Simply stated, knowledge is a true belief that is justified. The justified true belief (JTB) definition of knowledge has been a standard since Plato expressed it as "true judgment [with] an account" in the *Theaetetus*. Ironically, Plato actually rejected this definition in favor of one that grounded knowledge in what he called the Forms.

- In the 20th century, an American philosopher named Edmund Gettier caused tremendous problems for the JTB definition by demonstrating that one can have justified true belief but still lack knowledge. However, philosophers agree that justification at least is required for knowledge; that's why we spent so much time talking about argument and evidence in the first few lectures.

- Philosophers also agree that you can't know something unless it is true. In our quest to find knowledge, we must seek true belief. Thus, we need to understand what truth is. We need to know not only what it takes for a belief to be true but what it means for a belief to be true. To get to the bottom of this, we'll look at three theories: pragmatism, coherence theory, and correspondence theory.

Pragmatism

- The classic pragmatists include Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. The term *pragmatism* comes from the Greek *pragma*, meaning "act," "deed," or "practice." Pragmatists seek to take ideas and theories "out of our minds," so to speak, and connect them to what we would do or how we behave in the world.

- Pragmatists solved many philosophical problems practically. They held that many philosophical problems can be solved by simply being clear about what your words practically mean.

- The American philosopher and scientist Charles Sanders Peirce had a pragmatic view of meaning; he wanted to get ideas out of heads and tie words to the world. Peirce was particularly interested in scientific truth, and he observed that we gain such knowledge by making successful predictions about what will happen in experimental conditions.
    - But that's not the whole story; after all, a belief or theory can make successful predictions, yet the propositions it entails can still be false. Consider, for example, Newton's theory about the nature of the universe and the force of gravity. With it, he was able to develop laws that made successful predictions about planetary motion. But as it turned out, Newton's theory was false; Einstein's theory of relativity overturned it.

    - Notice how this happened, however. Scientists discovered that Newton was incorrect because his laws occasionally got the predictions wrong. Science is self-correcting; when it gets something wrong, science ensures that other scientists will eventually identify the mistake and correct it. In fact, science (at least according to Peirce) is the only discipline or method that has this noble quality.

    - For Peirce, that which is true is that which is the ultimate result of our scientific investigations—what is fated to be agreed upon by all those who investigate. It's the consensus at which we would eventually arrive through this process. What it means for something to be true is for it to be something that lies at the end of scientific inquiry.

- Another pragmatist, the American philosopher and psychologist William James, tried to expand pragmatism to include moral and ethical truth, aesthetic truth, and religious truth. James suggested that if a belief has the power to help you organize all your experience into a harmonious, satisfactory whole, then it's true. As James said in his book *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*, "Ideas … become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience."
    - This is somewhat related to Peirce's notion of truth, for anything that helps us make successful predictions helps us organize our experience into a harmonious whole. It's also similar to the theory of truth of the American philosopher and educator John Dewey.

    - But the fact that a belief can help organize our experience into a harmonious whole doesn't mean that it's true. Clearly, false beliefs can accomplish this, too. Bertrand Russell famously tried to make this point by suggesting that, according to James's theory of truth, a belief in Santa Claus could be true.

    - James himself may have recognized the shortcoming in his theory when he said, "Any idea upon which we can ride…; any idea that will carry us prosperously from any one part of our experience to any other part, linking things satisfactorily, working securely, simplifying, saving labor; is true for just so much, true in so far forth, true instrumentally." That last word is important. If it's true instrumentally, then it's useful. But usefulness is not the same thing as truth.

Coherence Theory Models

- According to the coherence theory of truth, to be true is to be entailed by a set of beliefs that are all coherent—logically consistent, able to be true together.

- There are two ways of describing how the beliefs we hold are structured. One model is called *foundationalism*. According to foundationalism, certain beliefs that we hold are so obviously true that they cannot be doubted; they serve as the foundation for our belief system.

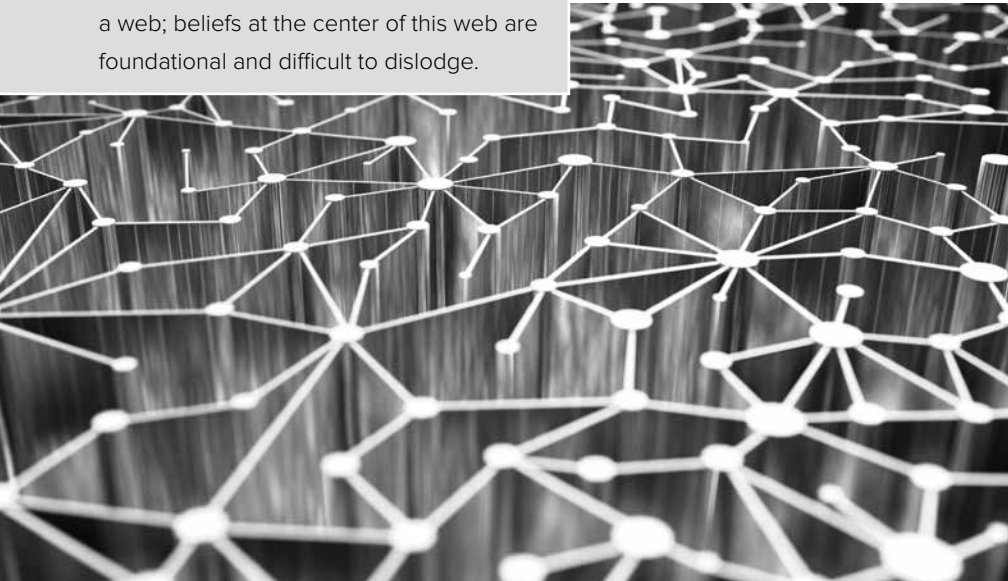
- Another model is proposed by the American philosopher Willard Van Orman Quine, who described what he called a "web of belief." All our beliefs, he suggested, are related to each other in some way. What's more, certain foundational beliefs are more significant in that they inform a great many other beliefs.

Shortcomings of Coherence Theory

- Coherence theory suggests that a belief is true if it is entailed by a coherent set of beliefs that someone actually holds. But this leads to another problem, which was observed by Bertrand Russell. Undeniably, some people believe the story of Christianity; others believe the story of Islam. Yet, the former entails that Jesus is God, and the latter entails that Jesus is not God. Both suggestions can't be true, yet they are both entailed by coherent sets of beliefs.

- Proponents of coherence theory respond by refining what is meant by a coherent set of beliefs—not identifying it with a set of beliefs of any one person. Harvard philosopher Hilary Putnam suggests that the set

Willard Van Orman Quine suggested that all our beliefs are related to one another in a web; beliefs at the center of this web are foundational and difficult to dislodge.



in question would be all the propositions that would be believed by people like us—people with imperfect cognitive capabilities—after we have reached some kind of limit of inquiry or learned all we can know.

- Others, such as philosophy professor J. O. Young at the University of Victoria, have suggested that we think of a coherent set of beliefs as the largest consistent set of propositions believed by all people. The goal is to reduce the probability of the set being wrong by combining the cognitive powers of all humanity. However, humans are still creatures with imperfect cognitive capacities; the mere fact that something is entailed by what humans have learned at their limit does not mean that it's true.

Correspondence Theory

- According to correspondence theory, a belief is true if it accurately describes, or corresponds to, the way the world is. The proposition "the bottle is on the table" is true in virtue of the fact that the bottle is on the table. It's simple and obvious.

- The correspondence theory of truth is one of the most well-grounded philosophical theories in existence; when surveyed, half of all philosophers said that they accepted this theory. Most certainly, the general public thinks things are true when they correspond to the way the world is, and if we want our quest for truth to be useful for others outside of philosophy, we need to conceive of truth as they do.

- According to correspondence theory, if a proposition does not accurately describe the way the world is, then it can't be true. Such a statement as "the bottle is on the table" has what is called a *truthmaker*. But it is often difficult to find the truthmaker for moral propositions, such as "murder is wrong." What's more, it can be challenging to find truthmakers for counterfactual statements.

Possible Worlds

- To solve this problem, philosophers appeal to something that will be important in later lectures: possible worlds. Possible worlds are

complete descriptions of another way the world could have turned out. To really be possible, the world must be a logically consistent description; it can't contain logical contradictions. There are many possible worlds, because there are many possible ways the world could have turned out.

- Some philosophers actually believe in possible worlds. Their view is called *modal realism* and is most famously defended by the American philosopher David Lewis. Lewis thinks the ontological status—whether or not they exist—of all worlds is equal. For us, our world is actual and other worlds are merely possible. To people that exist in other worlds, their world is actual and ours is merely possible. But they all exist.

- Other philosophers think that possible worlds can be conceptual tools—in other words, they don't really exist apart from our conception of them but can still serve as truthmakers for counterfactual propositions.

- Now, with our working definitions of *truth* and *knowledge*, we are prepared to ask one of the most significant questions in all of philosophy: Is knowledge possible? It may seem that the obvious answer is yes, but as we will see in the next lecture—and as is often the case in philosophy—things are not as obvious as they seem.

Suggested Sources

Bourget and Chalmers, "What Do Philosophers Believe?"

James, "Lecture II: What Pragmatism Means."

Johnson, "Does Santa Exist? A Review."

Questions to Consider

1. Knowledge is classically defined as justified true belief. Is this definition definitely right? Can you think of a situation in which someone could have justified true belief but not actually have knowledge?
2. Can you think of other philosophical questions that can be solved in the pragmatist way—by simply defining terms?
3. We ended the lecture by trying to find truthmakers in other "possible worlds." What does it mean to suggest that something is true in "all possible worlds"? What does it mean to suggest that something is true in "at least one possible world"?

Lecture 6

Is Knowledge Possible?

In this lecture, we explore how philosophers address the possibility of knowledge. Socrates was considered the wisest man because he was the only one to profess to know nothing. According to Meno's paradox, as described by Plato in the dialogue *Meno*, gaining knowledge is impossible. Plato, however, suggests an interesting solution to the paradox; that is, all our knowledge consists of the recollection of a Form, an ideal. We conclude with a discussion of René Descartes, who is associated with the noted phrase *Cogito ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am"). Descartes thought he had found the unshakable foundation of his belief system in his own thinking and existence.

Socrates and Plato

- Plato and Socrates both lived in Athens around the same time. Socrates taught in the agora, or marketplace, and Plato was one of his students. It is mostly through Plato that we know about Socrates and his teachings; Socrates never wrote anything down.

- In his defense before the court in Athens, Socrates refers to the possibility of knowledge. He tells the story of how the oracle at Delphi said that no one was wiser than Socrates. Socrates found this puzzling, given that he actively professed to know nothing—at least, not anything worth knowing, such as the nature of piety, justice, or virtue.

- Thus, Socrates set out to prove the oracle wrong by finding someone who did know the nature of such things. But after questioning persons who professed knowledge, Socrates discovered that they only thought they knew; in reality, they didn't know either. And this, it turns out, is why Socrates was the wisest. He was the only one who owned up to his ignorance. Knowledge may really be impossible, but Socrates was the only one to admit it.

Meno's Paradox

- Socrates addresses the possibility of knowledge in a dialogue called *Meno*. In it, a man named Meno and Socrates—or Plato's version of Socrates—are trying to discover the nature of virtue. Meno offers up a few ideas, but all of them fall short. He can give examples of virtuous behavior but not a definition.

- Eventually, Socrates and Meno settle on a vague answer—that virtue is a certain kind of knowledge. But they are still unclear about exactly what knowledge virtue requires. Meno presents what's now known as *Meno's paradox*—a paradox that seems to suggest that gaining knowledge is impossible.

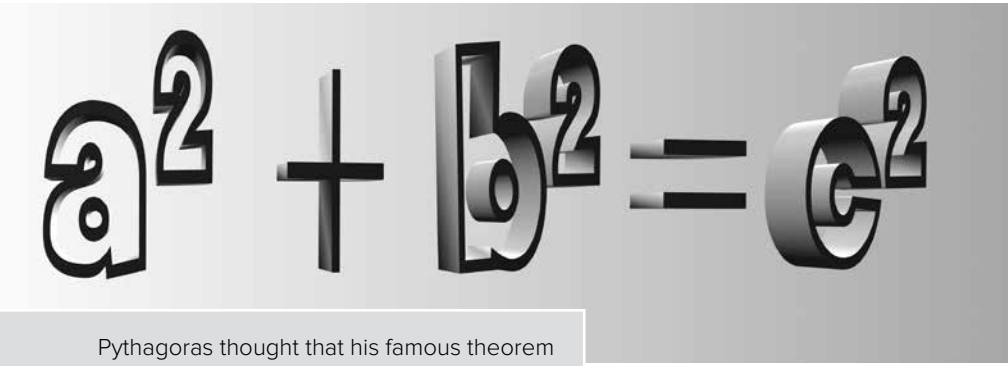
- For example, suppose you don't know what something is. It seems impossible to start your search for knowledge of that thing, because you wouldn't know where to start. And you certainly can't complete your search; given that you don't know what it is, you wouldn't know that you had found it even if you did. And if you can neither start nor finish your search for knowledge, your search can never be successful. If you don't already know what something is, you never will: Gaining knowledge is impossible.

Platonic Forms

- Socrates suggests an interesting solution to Meno's paradox: the theory of recollection. According to the ancient philosophers, to seek knowledge of something, such as virtue, is to seek knowledge of what an abstract object is like—what Plato called a Form. For the ancients, everything is what it is because it resembles some Form.

- For example, think about all the different kinds of chairs that exist in the world—office chairs, chairs in the classroom, recliners, kitchen chairs. We might say that they all are chairs because they resemble the Form of a chair—the abstract ideal of chair.

- Socrates suggests that we could learn what virtue is by recalling the nature of the Form of virtue. We can accomplish that, he says, because our soul was once acquainted with the Form of virtue. According to



Pythagoras thought that his famous theorem was correct because all right triangles resemble "the perfect right triangle"—the Form or idea of a right triangle.

Socrates, there is a realm in which all these Forms exists, and our soul existed in that realm, as well, before we were born. In the *Meno*, Socrates tells us that the soul must simply recall what it once knew.

René Descartes

- The possibility of knowledge faced a much more severe threat at the hands of the 17th-century French philosopher and mathematician René Descartes. In his famous *Meditations*, Descartes declared that he desired knowledge—certain, unshakable knowledge. He subscribed to the foundational view of knowledge, which stipulates that our common beliefs are based on other beliefs, which are based on others—in a process that eventually bottoms out in foundational beliefs.

- Descartes started evaluating all his beliefs. He found that most were easy to doubt, but then he found one that most would consider so obviously true that it could not be doubted—that the world around us exists. For Descartes, at the time, it was the belief that he was sitting in his chair in front of the fire.

- But, as Descartes realized, even this is doubtable. After all, he could be dreaming. Descartes took the idea even further, saying, "I can't be

absolutely certain that the world I am experiencing right now actually exists. I might be fooled into thinking so by a dream or a demon. And there's no way to know that I'm not." This is called the *skeptical problem*.

- As an example of the skeptical problem, compare the "I'm awake" hypothesis to the "I'm being fooled" hypothesis. One of the characteristics of vivid dreams is that they come with an experience of certainty. You might pinch yourself to see if you're dreaming, but of course, you could always dream the experience of pinching yourself and not waking up. Any test that you tried to expose the fact that you were dreaming you could fail by simply dreaming that you passed the test.

- And if you "wake up," you still could have just awoken into another dream—as in the 2010 film *Inception*, which explores the boundaries between dream and reality. Indeed, as one of the most important arguments in all of philosophy, the skeptical problem has inspired many of the greatest works of fiction. Perhaps most notable is the film *The Matrix*, in which the protagonist, Neo, discovers that the world we live in is all a computer simulation.

- The question is: How can we prove we are not in the Matrix right now? Everything we are experiencing is consistent with the hypothesis that we are in it—including, by the way, the certainty we feel that we are not. The computer program could even make us think it's useless to consider the possibility that we are not in the Matrix—just to make sure we never catch on. This is a troubling problem indeed.

Cogito, ergo sum

- In an attempt to solve the skeptical problem, Descartes kept trying to find something that was indubitable. What he eventually thought he found was his own existence. As Descartes noted, "I must finally conclude that this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind."

- In fact, we associate Descartes with the famous Latin phrase *Cogito ergo sum*—"I think, therefore I am." Although that exact phrase doesn't appear in the *Meditations*, the basic notion is clear. Descartes thought that he had found the unshakable foundation of his belief system: his own thinking and existence.

- Descartes's argument goes something like this: By the mere act of thinking, I prove that I am thinking. And I can't be thinking unless I exist. Thus, the fact that I'm thinking proves that I exist. I may not know if my experiences are accurate, but I do know that I am having them. I know the content of my own mind. And I know that content includes the concept or idea of God—a perfect being.

- His argument continues: I also know that something less perfect cannot create something more perfect; thus, I could not have created this idea I have of a perfect being. In fact, the only thing perfect enough to create this idea would be God himself. For this reason, I can know that God exists. And if God exists, seeing that he is perfect and that deception is an imperfection, God would not deceive me into believing the world is real when it is not—nor would he allow me to be deceived into believing the world was real when it was not. Therefore, the world is real and my experiences of it are reliable.

- Descartes's argument is flawed in many ways; he is equating knowledge with certainty. He wants an unshakable foundation for his knowledge so that the set of beliefs he derives from it can be indubitable. That's a fine goal to have (although it may be an impossible one), but it's not the goal that concerns us here. Our question is not whether certainty is possible but whether knowledge is possible. And knowledge does not require certainty.

- Recall that our definition of knowledge is justified true belief. We can be justified in believing something is true without being certain that it is true. For example, if something is beyond a reasonable doubt, then we are justified in believing that it is true. If something is the best explanation for some phenomenon, then it is beyond a reasonable doubt.

Using the Abduction Criteria

- The "I'm being fooled" hypothesis and the "I'm awake" hypothesis both make the same prediction; thus, they are both equally testable and fruitful. But we should also consider whether one of the hypotheses has wider scope, is simpler, and is more conservative.

- The "I'm awake" hypothesis is certainly more conservative; it aligns more directly with things I think I know. It's also more explanatory; it explains the experiences I'm having without raising unanswered questions. The "I'm being fooled" hypothesis raises all kinds of questions about who's fooling me, what methods they're using to fool me, and why they're fooling me. The "I'm awake" hypothesis also seems to be simpler in that it hypothesizes fewer entities.

- Although we can't be certain, it seems reasonable to conclude that our experiences actually are of an existing world; thus, we can use them to gain knowledge of that world. But what is the best way to gain knowledge? We'll turn to that question in the next lecture.

Suggested Sources

Briesen, "Skepticism, Externalism and Inference to the Best Explanation."

Nolan, *Inception* (film).

Sweetman, "The Pseudo-Problem of Skepticism."

Wachowski and Wachowski, *The Matrix* (film).

Questions to Consider

1. In the slave boy example, Socrates guides the slave boy to the right answer because he already knows the answer. Would it be possible for someone to discover the kind of knowledge Plato is looking for by simply asking questions if no one involved knew the answer already?
2. When considering the Descartes dream problem, David Hume realized that the angst or worry that it raised in him simply went away once he was attending to his daily activities. For Hume, these included playing a game of backgammon, having a conversation, and being "merry" with his friends. He forgot all about his skeptical worries, and when he returned to those worries, they seemed so cold, strained, and ridiculous that his angst was gone. Would you consider this a solution to the skeptical problem?

Lecture 7

What Is the Best Way to Gain Knowledge?

While Descartes was a rationalist—in that he thought some beliefs can be justified without sense experience—the empiricist maintains that we cannot know anything without sense experience. To answer the question about the best way to gain knowledge, we'll explore the philosophy of empiricism, as represented by John Locke and David Hume. We'll conclude by addressing the problems posed by empiricism with an examination of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.

John Locke's Empiricism

- The first major empiricist was the British philosopher John Locke. In his 1689 book, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke suggested that we are born *tabula rasa*—as a "blank slate." When we are born, our minds contain no ideas; we start to form ideas only once we have sense experience. Note that for Locke, an idea is anything in the mind: beliefs, sensations, private thoughts, and so on.

- According to Locke, we obtain ideas in two different ways: through sensation (observing the world) and reflection (observing our own mental operations). Sensation generates simple ideas, such as heat, solidity, shape, and taste. Reflection generates the ideas of perception, doubting, and reasoning.

- Everything in our minds traces back to something we learned through our senses. If we want to know how accurate our knowledge is, we need to know whether the ideas in our minds resemble the qualities in objects that produce those ideas.

Primary and Secondary Qualities

- Consider the idea of solidity, which is produced by the first solid object we see. The object and our idea share the same property. Locke called such properties *primary qualities* and included among them solidity, extension, figure, motion, rest, and number. These are all qualities that

objects have regardless of whether they're being perceived—or even whether any minds exist to perceive them.

- But many qualities are *secondary qualities*. The ideas they produce are not like the quality itself. Consider, for example, the idea of heat. Scientifically speaking, an object is hot when its molecules have high energy. But our sensation of heat does not feel like molecular movement. The only thing that is really "hot" is our sensation—our idea.

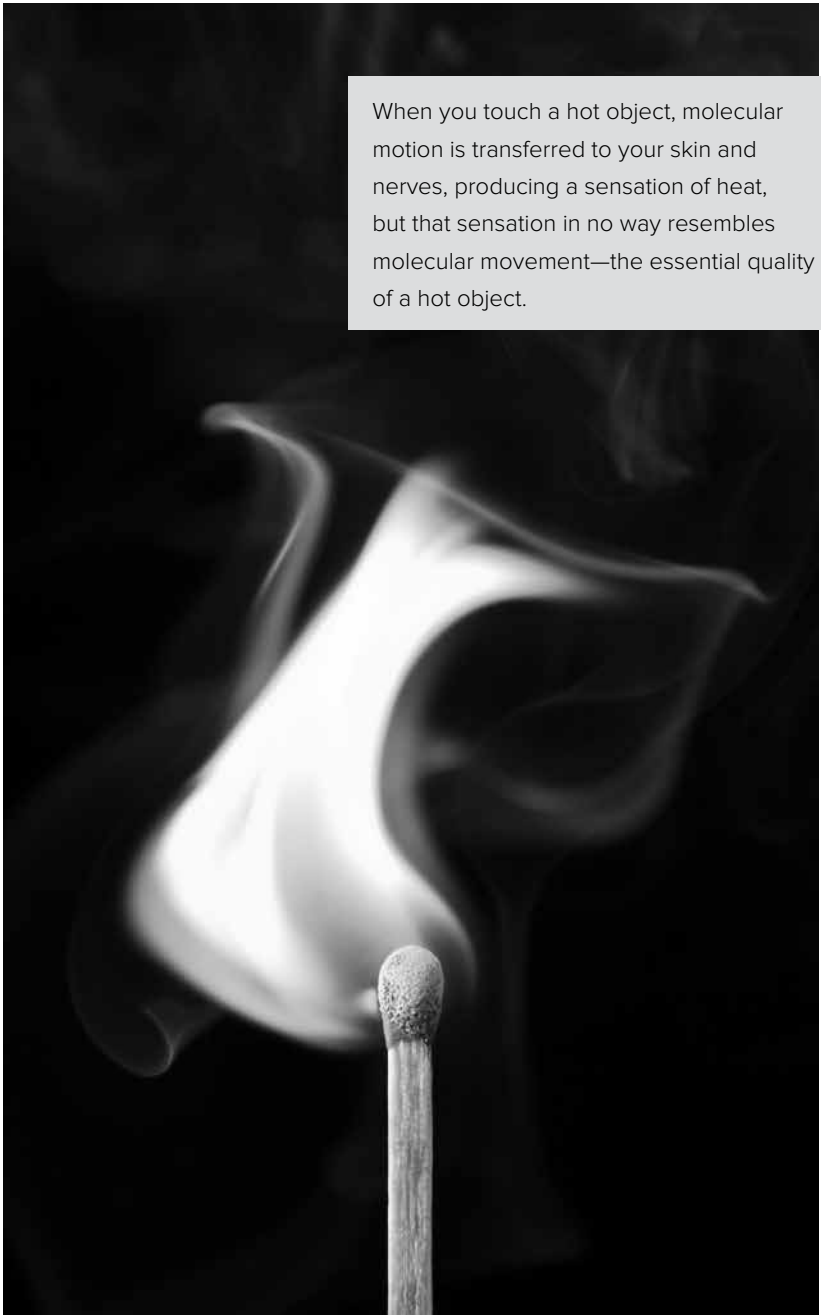
- We might also consider color. We see an object as a color because certain wavelengths of light reflect off it. But when we look at a red apple, the only thing that actually has the property of "redness" is our sensation, or idea, of red. Color exists only in the mind. We could say the same about tastes, smells, and sounds—none is a quality an object has when it's not being perceived.

- Locke notes that our knowledge regarding the primary qualities of the world is quite accurate; however, our knowledge regarding the secondary qualities of objects is not.

David Hume

- Another empiricist, the Scottish philosopher David Hume, raised even deeper questions about the accuracy of our knowledge of the world in his book *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–1740). Hume divides the content of our minds into impressions and thoughts. An impression, which is vivid, is a sensation that someone has in the current moment. A thought is less vivid—like a memory of an impression.

- Hume observes that our ideas are related in three ways: resemblance, contiguity (closely located in time and space), and cause and effect. If our ideas about two objects in the world resemble each other, then we think the objects in the world resemble each other. If the ideas in our minds are contiguous, then we think the objects that produce those ideas are contiguous. And if we think our ideas are causally related, then we think the objects in the world that produce those ideas also share a causal relation.



When you touch a hot object, molecular motion is transferred to your skin and nerves, producing a sensation of heat, but that sensation in no way resembles molecular movement—the essential quality of a hot object.

- Although Hume thinks that our knowledge about the relationship between ideas can be quite accurate, our knowledge of the outside world ("matters of fact") is subject to doubt. Our reasoning regarding matters of fact is founded largely on conclusions that we have drawn about the causal relationship between things in the world.

The Problem of Induction

- Hume argues, however, that our knowledge of causation and causal relationships between objects is on very shaky ground, because we aren't born with it. As an empiricist, Hume doesn't think we're born with any knowledge. He suggests we infer a causal relationship when we observe events sharing the following properties:
    - Continuity (uninterrupted connection, succession, or union)
    - Priority in time (one happens right before the other)
    - Constant conjunction (the events always happen together).

- But we infer causal relationships only because of habit or custom, not because of reason, Hume argues. Recall the causation fallacy mentioned in a previous lecture: Correlation does not entail causation. It seems that all our reasoning regarding causation is fallacious.

- Simply put, to have knowledge of causation, we would have to have knowledge of the future—to know that every time—past, present, and future—when alpha occurs, beta will occur. To solve this problem, we might be tempted to employ some basic inductive reasoning: If we've always seen beta following alpha in the past, we can simply infer that it always will in the future.

- But Hume points out that while it's true you could use induction to derive a conclusion, to trust that conclusion, you would have to show that induction is reliable—that the conclusions of strong inductive arguments are usually true. But there is no way to prove that induction is reliable. This is known as Hume's *problem of induction*, and it is still considered unsolved by many philosophers.

George Berkeley and Idealism

- There are several ways of responding to the challenge to our knowledge that empiricism poses. One such response lies in idealism, as evidenced in the thinking of the Irish philosopher and scientist George Berkeley in his book *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710).

- In response to the suggestion that our ideas of objects do not match up to their subjects, Berkeley proposed that our ideas are the subjects. All that really exists are ideas; Berkeley believed that to be is to be perceived. As you can imagine, Berkeley's idealism was considered a hard philosophical pill to swallow.

- To clarify his theory, Berkeley interjected God as a necessary component. All things exist at all times because they're being perceived by God, and we have the ideas we do because God produces them in us. But knowledge of God's existence is much harder to establish than the knowledge of the world. If a theory is in trouble, and the best that can be said to save it is "God did it," then that seems an admission that the theory is flawed.

Immanuel Kant

- Another approach to resolving the problems posed by empiricism was that of the 18th-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant tried to find the middle ground between the rationalism of such philosophers as Descartes and the empiricism of such philosophers as Hume and Locke. His is a kind of synthesis of the two theories that recognizes the strengths and weaknesses of both.

- For Hume, there is knowledge of relationships between ideas and knowledge of matters of fact. Relationships between ideas that are necessarily true are called *analytic*. In contrast, matters of fact are things we learn by experience, which Hume called *synthetic*.

- Kant, however, argues that Hume failed to recognize the possibility of *synthetic a priori* truths. Unlike analytic a priori truths, synthetic a priori truths actually tell us something useful about the way the world

is. Kant thought that mathematical and geometric truths fit into this category.

- Kant believed that we can solve the problems involving causation and induction that Hume raised by realizing that the statement "All events have a cause" is also a synthetic a priori truth. If so, knowledge of causation would seem to be possible after all; thus, we can avoid Hume's skeptical problem and, in fact, find a ground for all scientific knowledge.

Phenomena and Noumena

- But Kant raised his own skeptical problem when he recognized a distinction between phenomena and noumena. The noumenal world is the world as it actually is, independent of our perception of it. The phenomenal world is the world as it is perceived by our senses. We can know phenomena quite well, Kant says, but we can never know noumena. We can never know the way the world actually is independent of our senses.

- Kant observed that categories of perception are built into our senses and the way our brain processes them. Everything we experience is in one of these categories of perception:
    - Quantity (unity, plurality, totality)
    - Quality (reality, negation, limitation)
    - Relation (inherence, subsistence, cause and effect, community)
    - Modality (possibility and impossibility, existence and nonexistence, necessity and contingence).

- Our perception of the world, through these categories, makes the world seem a certain way to us—but actually, the world is not this way. According to Kant, how the world really is will be forever beyond our grasp.

Natural Philosophy

- One thing agreed upon by rationalists, empiricists, and Kantians alike is this: Our experiences are inaccurate, can easily lead us astray, and by themselves can generate erroneous conclusions. They can make the world appear in a way different than it actually is.

- But the method of science itself is structured to guard against this shortcoming. In order for a theory about the way the world is to be acceptable, it not only has to make correct observable predictions, but it also has to provide the most wide-scoping, simple, conservative explanation. By taking this approach, science can tell us the way the world actually is.

- If we're simply looking for knowledge of the phenomenal world—the world of our experience—then most of the time, our experience will do. And that is useful knowledge to have, given that we primarily live in the phenomenal world. But we still need to realize that our perceptions can lead us astray, and we never want to fool ourselves into thinking that experience represents the way the world actually is. For the most accurate knowledge of the way the world is, we need to rely on science (that is, natural philosophy).

Suggested Sources

Johnson, "The Blue/Black White/Gold Dress Controversy."

Kemerling, "Kant, Immanuel. Synthetic A Priori Judgments."

Questions to Consider

1. Is the fact that we can't argue to the reliability of induction—we just have to assume it—troublesome to you? If it is reasonable to assume, without argument, that induction is reliable, what else might it be reasonable to assume?
2. Science has discovered that even atoms are ultimately "probabilistic quantum wave functions." If that is what the world is really like, are any of the ideas in our minds "primary" in Locke's sense of the word? Do any of the ideas in our minds resemble the way the world is? Keep in mind to avoid the fallacies of division and composition in your answer; a whole can have a property that its parts lack, and vice versa.
3. Can you think of any other synthetic a priori truths—things that we know, though experience—that are necessarily true?

Lecture 8

Do We Know What Knowledge Is?

There is widespread agreement among philosophers that the definition of knowledge as justified true belief is inadequate. Justified true belief is certainly necessary for knowledge, but it is not sufficient. In this lecture, we will consider a number of thought experiments that are intended to reveal our intuitions about what is required for knowledge.

Edmund Gettier

- The claim that justified true belief was necessary but not sufficient for knowledge was famously argued by Edmund Gettier in a paper titled "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" Although the paper was only three pages long, it revolutionized epistemology—the study of knowledge. Gettier made his case by providing counterexamples in which individuals have justified true belief but clearly lack knowledge.

- Ever since Gettier's paper was published in 1963, epistemology has been concerned with trying to solve the problem he raised; in fact, the history of epistemological research in the last half of the 20th century is dominated by this issue. We can get a general sense of what knowledge is—and perhaps what it isn't—by looking at some other philosophers' responses to Gettier's problem.

False Belief

- One response to Gettier's problem is that the reason knowledge is missing from Gettier cases is that the justification on which the cases are based includes false belief. In other words, knowledge is true belief with justification not based on false evidence. This suggestion seems promising, but it falls apart once we realize that, in some Gettier cases, no false beliefs are involved in justifying a true belief, yet knowledge is still not present.

- Following is a scenario from American philosopher Linda Zagzebski, the Kingfisher College Chair of the Philosophy of Religion and Ethics at the University of Oklahoma and author of *On Epistemology*:
    - An intelligent doctor notices that a patient has all the classic symptoms of virus V1 and, thus, justifiably concludes that the patient has V1. The doctor has made similar diagnoses before and has always been right. Now, it turns out that the symptoms are actually due to the patient's having virus V2—a currently unknown virus that presents like V1.

    - As it happens, the patient was exposed to and contracted V1 just before entering the office—not soon enough for it to be responsible for the symptoms but soon enough to make it true that the patient had virus V1 at the time of diagnosis. Clearly, the doctor's conclusion that the patient has V1 is a justified true belief based on no false beliefs, yet it doesn't count as knowledge.

- In fact, it seems that a false belief could even play a central role in justifying a belief, and it could still count as knowledge. For example, astronomers before Einstein had false beliefs about gravity—beliefs based on Newtonian notions of physics, which Einstein later proved false. Yet the predictions they made based on those beliefs about planetary motion were usually accurate, and we would count them as knowledge.

Undefeated Justified True Belief

- The people involved in the Gettier cases are missing a vital piece of information or evidence—something that, if they knew it to be true, would cause them to relinquish their belief. Perhaps we could understand knowledge this way: We know something when we have a justified true belief and there is nothing we can learn that would defeat the justification.

- We can see why this is problematic with another thought experiment, which comes from a 1969 paper called "Knowledge: Undefeated Justified True Belief" by Keith Lehrer and Thomas Paxson, Jr.

- Suppose you're in the library, quietly reading a book, and you look up to see one of your colleagues—Tom Grabit—grab a book off the shelf and stuff it into his sweater. You justifiably form the belief that Tom Grabit stole a library book.

- But suppose, unbeknownst to you, that Tom's mother has publicly announced that Tom is actually overseas in Europe and his twin brother—John Grabit—visited the library today. The fact that she said this is something you could learn that would defeat your justification. But then let's suppose that she made up the story about Tom being Europe, and it really was Tom you saw stealing the book.

- It seems it is possible to have knowledge even when there are facts that would undo your justification.

Causal Theory of Knowledge

- Another reply to Gettier has to do with causation: Knowledge is justified true belief where the belief in question is caused or brought about by the subject of the belief. Consider the following counterexample, however, which demonstrates that the definition is false.
  - Suppose Bob is driving through Barn County and notices a red barn on the side of the road. He forms the belief about the existence of a barn in that particular location—something like "There is a barn in location X." Now, as it happens, that is true; there is a barn in that location. And clearly, Bob is justified in believing so because seeing things in broad daylight usually provides adequate justification for believing they exist. His belief that there is a barn is even caused by that very barn.

  - But unbeknownst to Bob, the reason Barn County got its name is that the residents have erected a number of barn façades—structures that look like barns but are not. They look indistinguishable from real barns from the road, but if you saw them from behind, it would be obvious that they're fake. In fact, the red barn that Bob saw is the only actual barn in Barn County.

- Given this fact, it seems quite clear that seeing something that looks like a barn while in Barn County is not enough to give us knowledge that a barn actually exists in that location. Thus, despite the fact that Bob has a justified true belief that is caused by the object of his belief—the barn in location X—he does not have knowledge.

A Matter of Luck

- It's just not possible to avoid Gettier cases by simply taking the traditional justified true belief definition of knowledge and adding a criterion to it. We might call this the "true belief + *x*" method, or TB + *x*. In fact, any account of knowledge that suggests knowledge is TB + *x* will be subject to Gettier counterexamples.

- The reason for this, Zagzebski says, is that no matter what you add to true belief, you can always produce a Gettier counterexample where that condition for knowledge is met, yet you still do not have knowledge. To do so, you only have to imagine a situation in which someone has a belief that fits the criteria but that is actually false—and then, just slightly tweak the example so that the belief turns out to be true by chance. We can repeat this process ad infinitum for any TB + *x* definition of knowledge.

- It seems that what's involved in each Gettier counterexample is some kind of epistemic luck. Your belief is justified, but what justifies the belief isn't what makes it true—it's only true by happenstance.

- Consider this definition: Knowledge is unlucky justified true belief—justified true belief that we do not get by luck. Such a definition would avoid Gettier counterexamples generated by Zagzebski's TB + *x* method. However, Zagzebski argues, such a definition still falls short because it tells us only what knowledge is not; it doesn't tell us what knowledge is.

Credit Theory of Knowledge

- Our response to the Gettier problem has been flawed. Instead of defining knowledge as TB + *x*, we should be looking to close the gap between true belief and *x*, so that they are not distinct components; in other words, what makes a belief knowledge is tied up with what makes that belief true.

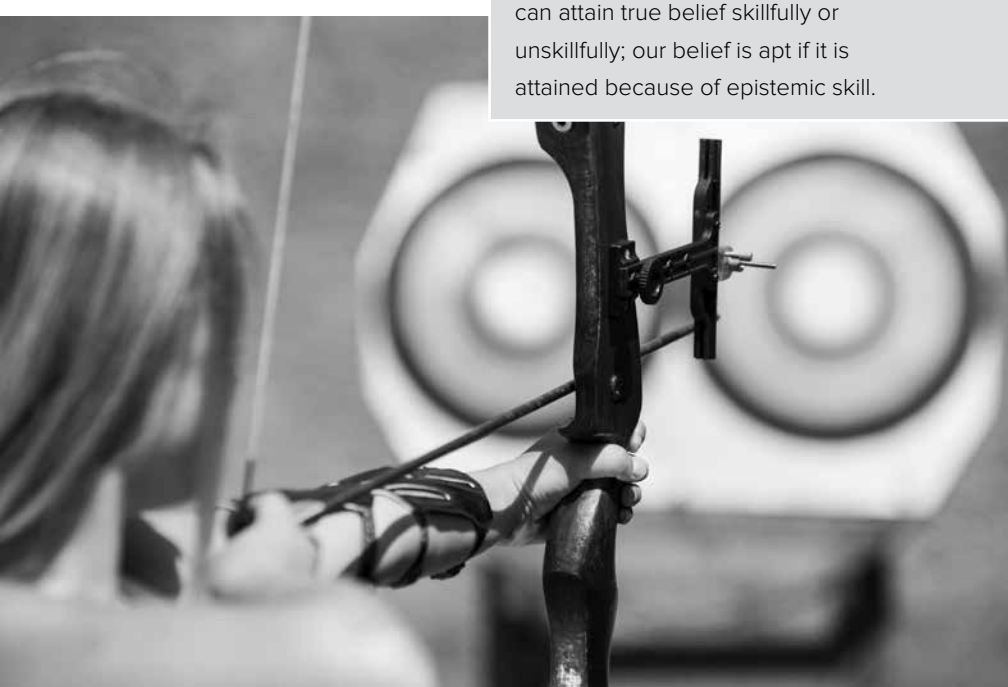
- To this end, Zagzebski suggests a credit theory of knowledge: "Knowledge is belief that gets to the truth rather than falsehood because of the intellectually virtuous motives and behavior of the believer."

- Zagzebski suggests that you possess knowledge when the explanation for how you possess a belief that is true is rooted in your own virtuous epistemic practices. The intellectual virtues and virtuous epistemic practices were discussed in earlier lectures: Proportion your beliefs to the evidence, be intellectually courageous and humble, avoid logically fallacious thinking, favor the most adequate explanation, and so on.

Virtue Epistemology

- In his book *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge*, Ernest Sosa compares our skill in forming beliefs with the skill of an archer. An archer's shot is accurate if it hits the target. But we might also ask if the shot was accurate because of the archer's

Like an archer hitting a target, we can attain true belief skillfully or unskillfully; our belief is apt if it is attained because of epistemic skill.



skill or some other random occurrence, such as a gust of wind. If the shot was accurate solely because of the archer's skill, Sosa would call the shot "apt."

- We can think of knowledge in a similar way. A belief is accurate if it is true. And belief can be produced skillfully or unskillfully. But a belief is apt, Sosa says, if it is true and was produced in a skillful way—if the agent successfully attained true belief because of epistemic skill. According to Sosa, knowledge is apt belief.

- Although the archer analogy can give us a deeper understanding of what knowledge is, where the analogy between archery and knowledge seems to break down is when we realize that an archer's shots can be more or less accurate. The truth of a belief does not admit of different degrees, however; either a belief is true, or it's not. And so, it seems, with knowledge.

Degrees of Knowledge

- But perhaps knowledge does come in different degrees. After all, even though truth does not come in degrees, justification does; you can have more or less evidence for something.

- Similarly, maybe knowledge comes in different types. Maybe there is certain knowledge, such as the knowledge that 1 +1 = 2, and grounded knowledge, such as the knowledge of scientific truth. Maybe there is moral knowledge—knowledge of right and wrong—that itself may come in varying degrees. And maybe there is lucky knowledge.

- Indeed, studies have been done on whether the average person—the non-philosopher—thinks there is knowledge in Gettier cases, and a surprising number of people do. Maybe the reason for this is that the average person doesn't consider knowledge to be an all-or-nothing affair.

Suggested Sources

Galef, "Using Thought Experiments to Investigate Your Reactions and Motivations."

Questions to Consider

1. We could avoid Gettier counterexamples altogether by strengthening the conditions for knowledge so that it is impossible for a belief that meets those conditions to be false. For example, you might say that knowledge is true belief that is warranted, where warrant involves perfectly functioning faculty in perfect conditions. It would impossible for a belief so warranted to be a false belief; "warranted true belief" would be redundant. We might as well just say that knowledge is just warranted belief. Would such a definition be accurate? Would it disqualify states of belief that we would usually count as knowledge?
2. Can you come up with your own Gettier counterexample? Try using Zagzebski's method.
3. Do the non-philosophers who think there is knowledge in Gettier cases have a different but valid concept of knowledge, or are they just confusing knowledge with "true belief." (Might they just think that the person in the Gettier examples "knows" because "if you asked her, she would give the right answer"?)

Lecture 9

When Can We Trust Testimony?

In this lecture, we will practice "applied epistemology" and put what we've learned to work to determine whether certain methods of generating beliefs can generate knowledge and whether certain beliefs count as knowledge. Those most interested in these issues are philosophers of religion, and one of their main concerns is whether or not religious beliefs can be justified.

Expert Testimony

- Science can help us see over the fence, as it were, into Kant's noumenal world. By using abduction, we can come to justified conclusions about the way the world really is. Although we've read about scientific discoveries and the evidence for them, most of us did not acquire this knowledge directly; we haven't measured how light bends around stars or performed an autopsy.

- In fact, much of our knowledge of the world comes through testimony, and it is crucial to know when and whether we can trust that testimony. The answer to this question is complicated and context-dependent, but there are a few important considerations to remember.

- First of all, we need to consider the reliability of the testifier. If the person is a compulsive liar, then we should be skeptical about his or her testimony. What's more, we shouldn't believe what people say about a topic unless they are qualified to speak on it. If it's an academic subject, they need to be experts. You might think that everyone knows and follows this rule, but if that were true, celebrity endorsements wouldn't be used in advertisements.

- It's also important to remember that being an expert on one topic doesn't make someone an expert on others. For example, a meteorologist—one who studies and predicts the weather—is not qualified speak on the topic of climate change. The weather is not the

climate. What's more, some issues cannot be settled by expert opinion at all, such as ethical questions.

Russell's Rules of Expert Testimony

- In his book *The Will to Doubt*, British logician and philosopher Bertrand Russell suggests that there are three commonsense rules relating to expert testimony. Russell notes that following these rules regularly would "absolutely revolutionize human life":
  - When the experts are agreed, the opposite opinion cannot be held to be certain.
  - When they are not agreed, no opinion can be regarded as certain by a non-expert.
  - When they all hold that no sufficient grounds for a positive opinion exist, the ordinary man would do well to suspend his judgment.

- However, even expert testimony cannot unsettle some issues. Consider the following example: Suppose you turn on the nightly news one evening and hear a medical expert saying that Diana, the princess of Wales, is back from the dead. Of course, you wouldn't believe him. Although he's a credible expert—he has no history of medical fraud—the notion that dead people stay dead is simply too well established. Even though we may not know why he is lying or mistaken, the hypothesis that he is wrong is clearly the better explanation.

- Think back to the lecture on abduction, and consider what is the simpler, more wide-scoping, and more conservative hypothesis. The "Diana rose from the dead" hypothesis would raise other seemingly unanswerable questions. Invoking a supernatural agency would not only replace the unexplained with the inexplicable, but it would make the hypothesis less simple by introducing the existence of a new entity. What's more, such a hypothesis would not be conservative; it would contradict what we have good reason to believe—that dead people stay dead.

Hume's "Of Miracles"

- This example leads to the question of whether anything can justify that an established rule, such as "the dead stay dead," has been broken. To address this issue, we'll examine "Of Miracles," a section of Hume's *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. In it, Hume argues that testimony could never justify a belief that a miracle has occurred.

- To believe that a miracle has occurred, we would have to be justified in believing that a natural law has been violated. And to believe that a natural law has been violated, we would have to be justified in believing that a particular regularity established by experience—such as dead people staying dead—had been violated. But testimony will never justify such a belief.

- By definition, Hume argues, miracles happen only occasionally, and testimony is always indirect evidence. You didn't see it; someone

Even when we can't explain a magic trick, we're still not justified in believing in magic; the same holds true for miracles.

else did. And you can never have as much justification for thinking something occurred as those who saw it for themselves. However, you've experienced the regularities of nature for yourself; all the dead people you've seen stayed dead. You have direct, repeated inductive evidence that such laws hold.

- At best, then, any miracle attested to you has only indirect, nonrepeatable evidence. But the evidence that the laws always hold (and, thus, that the miracle didn't occur) is direct and repeated. For this reason, it seems, testimony can never put us in an epistemic position to doubt the regularities of our experience and justify a belief that a miracle has occurred.

- Hume's main concern was to establish that we can take the biblical miracles only on faith—that the testimony of the biblical writers is not enough, epistemically, to justify the belief that the miracles of the Bible actually occurred. He was likely right about that.

Story of the Indian Prince

- Hume suggests that we would be justified in believing that a natural law has been violated if a regularity established by our experience had been violated. If we've seen something happen, over and over, we come to think that there is a natural law regarding that regularity. If we come to be justified in believing that regularity was broken, then we could justifiably believe that a law had been violated and, thus, that a miracle had occurred.

- The reason Hume thinks that testimony could never justify a belief in the miraculous is that he thinks that it could never establish that an experienced regularity has been violated. But, it seems, he was wrong about that.

- In opposition to Hume's argument, critics use the famous story of the Indian prince. The prince had spent his entire life in India and had never experienced frozen water. When travelers from northern Europe visited India and told him about lakes that freeze in the winter, he initially refused to believe them. But after enough travelers gave

him independent testimony of this, he became justified in believing — contrary to his experience—that indeed water can freeze solid.

- Even though this is not an example of someone coming to believe in a miracle through testimony, it does suggest that Hume was wrong; testimony can establish that an experienced regularity has been broken. The prince's experience seems to have been overruled by the testimony of the travelers.

Contradicting Direct Experience

- In a second edition of his work, Hume responded to this objection by suggesting that because the prince never had direct experience with northern lakes during the winter, the idea that they freeze is not really contrary to his experience. However, if we limit what counts as "our experience" in this strict way—that is, nothing that you don't experience for yourself can really be said to be "contrary to your experience"—then almost nothing is contrary to your experience.

- With this strict understanding, technically, Hume's thesis would still follow. Testimony tells us only about things outside our experience. If there is no such thing as "contrary to my experience," then no such thing could justifiably be believed to be a violation of natural law, and thus, no such thing could be justifiably believed to be a miracle. Therefore, testimony still couldn't justify belief in the miraculous. Nevertheless, this line of reasoning doesn't square with the whole of Hume's argument.

- Initially, Hume wanted to say that we are not justified in believing in any miraculous event through testimony because testimony is not reliable enough to establish that such an event occurred. But now, on this strict understanding of *experience*, if someone reliable tells you that some seemingly inexplicable event happened, you can justifiably believe that it occurred; given that it's not contrary to your direct experience (because it lies outside of it), you have no reason to doubt the testimony.

Miracles as a Matter of Faith

- By pushing our criticism of Hume this far, we come full circle and realize that Hume was actually right in the first place, but not for the reasons he put forth. If a violation of an experienced regularity is not enough to justify the conclusion that a law has been broken, then even when testimony does justify a belief that an experienced regularity has been violated, it will still not justify the belief that a miracle has occurred.

- When testimony establishes that an experienced regularity has been violated, it's not because any natural laws were broken; it's because our experience was never that reliable to begin with. We must have been wrong about what the laws were. In the story of the Indian prince, the prince's previous experience suggested that it was a natural law that water never becomes solid. The testimony of the travelers didn't cause him to believe that a natural law had been broken; it caused him to believe that he was mistaken about the laws.

- Although Hume's argument was a bit off, Hume's conclusion was correct. Not only can't testimony justify belief that a miracle occurred, but not even seeing such an event for yourself would justify belief that a miracle occurred. It would still be more likely that your senses had led you astray.

- And even if you could confirm your observation with well-controlled experiments successfully repeated by the scientific community, it would be more likely that you were mistaken about what the laws were. Belief in miracles, it seems, will always be a matter of faith.

Suggested Sources

Berkes, "Who Is the Liar Now?"

Johnson, "The Super Bowl, Atheists, and Divine Intervention in Sports."

Neighmond, "The Vitamin C Myth."

Pappas, "Faster-Than-Light Discovery Raises Prospect of Time Travel."

Russell, *The Will to Doubt*.

Questions to Consider

1. Suppose God's existence were established as a fact. Could you then be warranted in explaining an "unusual" event as miraculous? What would this entail about the ability of miracles to justify religious belief?
2. What is the difference between saying "miracles never occur" and "belief that a miracle has occurred can never be justified"? Why is this difference important?
3. In 1807, two Yale professors reported that they saw rocks falling from the sky that glowed in the atmosphere before falling to the ground. The professors claimed to have collected the rocks. It is widely believed that in response to their report, Thomas Jefferson (who was famous for being skeptically minded) said, "that it was easier to believe that two Yankee Professors could lie than to admit that stones could fall from heaven." Of course, the rocks were meteorites, but Jefferson had never seen such a thing and this was before such things were understood, explained, and known to exist. Given what Jefferson knew at the time—his own scientific knowledge and experience—was that statement rational, or should Jefferson have believed the professors? What was the more adequate explanation at the time: that the professors were lying or that Jefferson's experience was limited?

4. In reality, the Jefferson quote in the last question is most likely apocryphal. It was attributed to Jefferson in 1874, without evidence, by Ben Silliman, Jr. (a son of one of the original Yale professors). What Jefferson actually said in response to the report can be found in his 1808 letter to Daniel Salmon:

   > We certainly are not to deny whatever we cannot account for. A thousand phenomena present themselves daily which we cannot explain, but where facts are suggested, bearing no analogy with the laws of nature as yet known to us, their verity needs proofs proportioned to their difficulty. A cautious mind will weigh well the opposition of the phenomenon to everything hitherto observed, the strength of the testimony by which it is supported, and the errors and misconceptions to which even our senses are liable. It may be very difficult to explain how the stone you possess came into the position in which it was found. But is it easier to explain how it got into the clouds from whence it is supposed to have fallen? The actual fact however is the thing to be established, and this I hope will be done by those whose situations and qualifications enable them to do it. I salute you with respect.

   Is Jefferson's actual statement in line with Hume's argument? Is it in line with what Russell says about expert opinion? Is it in line with what we have learned about how we should treat testimony?

Lecture 10

Can Mystical Experience Justify Belief?

In our discussion of Hume's "Of Miracles" in the previous lecture, we examined convincing reasons to conclude that experiencing a miracle could not justify belief in the miraculous. But in this lecture, we will consider another kind of evidence: religious experience.

Types of Religious Experience

- A religious experience is an encounter with, or an experience directly caused by, "the divine." In his book *The Existence of God*, British philosopher Richard Swinburne divides religious experiences into five different types:
    - Religious reaction to an ordinary event
    - Religious reaction to an unusual or unlikely event
    - Ongoing religious impression
    - Extrasensory sensations of a religious nature
    - Mystical experiences.

- According to the American philosopher Alvin Plantinga, a good example of a religious reaction to an ordinary event is in witnessing a sunset. Although some simply see pretty colors, others may experience a sense of God's presence. Perhaps you feel as if God is speaking to you while you're reading the Torah or you experience the presence of the divine while singing a hymn or reading about the resurrection of Jesus in the Bible.

- The second category involves witnessing an unusual, unlikely, or seemingly impossible event and interpreting it in a religious way—people believing an event was miraculous because of the way they felt when they saw it.

- A third kind of religious experience is an ongoing impression that the divine is pressing you in a certain direction. For example, in 2005, George W. Bush reportedly said that he felt God had told him to fight the terrorists in Afghanistan and Iraq. He didn't actually hear a voice, but he felt that was what God wanted.

- The fourth category involves nonverifiable sensory experiences—for example, visual and auditory sensations not actually caused by the five senses. Examples of this include people actually hearing the voice of God or seeing Jesus.

- The fifth kind of religious experience is also not verifiable, but neither is it describable. Mystical experiences are those that involve experiences of a deeper truth. Those who seek these experiences are often called mystics, and such experiences don't always involve religious concepts.

Mystical Experiences

- Probably the most famous articulation of a mystical experience comes from American pragmatist philosopher William James. Brother of the novelist Henry James, he was also known as the father of American psychology. In Lecture XVI of his 1902 collection called *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James observes that religious experiences in this fifth category, mystical experiences, have the following properties:
    - Ineffable: They cannot be accurately described.
    - Noetic: They convey a deep sense of truth or knowledge.
    - Transitive: They can occur only for a short time.
    - Passive: They cannot be willed to occur.

- Although he thought they cannot be willed to occur, James experimented with drugs as a way to bring about such experiences. Indeed, having mystical experiences was often the goal of those who used illicit drugs in the 1960s. But such experiences can also be brought on by fasting or meditation. Buddhists are perhaps the best

example; they believe they can—after intense meditation—reach nirvana and come to fully appreciate a state in which there is no self.

Religious Experiences in Scripture

- Religious experiences play a significant role in scripture. For example, in the Old Testament, Moses hears Yahweh tell him, through a burning bush, that he is supposed to lead the Israelites from Egypt. This would be a religious experience of the first and fourth kind.

- In the New Testament, the apostle Paul had a religious experience of the fourth kind—a private sensory experience. On his way to Damascus to persecute Christians, he saw a bright light, fell off his horse, and heard a voice ask, "Why are you persecuting me?" Paul came to believe it was the voice of Jesus, he converted to Christianity, and he later wrote a large portion of the New Testament.

- Religious experience can even play a role in the production of scripture. According to some, the entire Bible was written as a result of a collection of inspirational religious experiences by different authors at different times. According to Muslims, the Qur'an is the product of a series of religious experiences of the prophet Muhammad.

Problem of Religious Diversity

- Many philosophers, however, do not think that religious experiences justify the beliefs they generate. First of all, the religious experiences of one religion often contradict the religious experiences of another. We could call this a problem of religious diversity.

- The philosopher David Silver suggested that learning of the religious experience of others can undo the justification that your religious experience initially gave you. William James argued that the justification a religious experience provides to a person cannot be transferred to someone else. A religious experience is authoritative only for the person who has it.

- Realizing that others have religious experiences that teach the opposite of what your religious experience teaches you doesn't simply counteract

The fact that there at least 10 major religious groups in the world, each teaching that it is right, means that religious experience produces true belief only about 10 percent of the time and is, thus, not reliable.

the evidence you initially had for your belief. It makes you think your religious experience never justified your belief in the first place. It makes you doubt the reliability of religious experience entirely by making you think religious experience generates false beliefs much of the time.

- In an attempt to avoid the problem of religious diversity and defend the ability of religious experience to justify belief, we might try to find a common core or thread in religious experience. For example, we might admit that religious experience cannot justify certain beliefs, such as "Jesus is God," because some religious experiences teach that belief as true and others teach that it is false. But perhaps all religious experiences agree on something more fundamental, and thus, they justify belief in that fundamental truth.

"The Real"

- The notion that there is a common core of religious experience has been defended by a number of scholars and philosophers. Advocates for religious experience often suggest that the ineffable mystical experiences had by people in every religion actually teach the same thing. Simply put, it's thought that these experiences leave people with the general impression that there is an indescribable transcendental reality—a reality that exists beyond this world. Many call it "the Real."

- Advocates of the Real suggest that all religions are simply an attempt to describe it, but because the Real is beyond our ability to understand, all such descriptions are inaccurate. In actuality, no human concept that we understand can apply to the Real. As Peter Byrne, a lecturer in the philosophy of religion, suggests, the Real can be described only by what it is not.

- In defense of religious experience in general, Richard Swinburne argues that if something seems to exist, then we are justified in believing that it exists, unless there is reason to think otherwise. We could, it seems, apply this principle to vindicate experiences of the Real.

- But it's not clear that this principle is true; think of what we've learned about how unreliable our senses and memory are. If our five sense aren't reliable, we should question our "sixth sense," as well.

Religious Experience and Neuroscience

- Even if we grant Swinburne's thesis for the sake of argument, religious experience still cannot justify religious belief. There is still the simple fact that all such experiences can be explained naturally. In fact, religious experiences may be the result of certain kinds of brain activity.

- Consider Paul, a store clerk described in the book *Phantoms in the Brain* by neuroscientist V. S. Ramachandran. Paul has religious experiences in which he falls to the ground, sees bright lights, and hears voices. "In the rapture was a clarity," Ramachandran explains, "an apprehension of the divine—no categories, no boundaries, just a Oneness with the Creator."

- The insights provided by these experiences are the basis of Paul's religious beliefs. He collects them into a book that "set[s] out his views on philosophy, mysticism and religion." But it's difficult to embrace the notion that these insights constitute genuine religious knowledge because, as Ramachandran reveals, Paul has temporal lobe epilepsy.

- Paul's "religious experiences" are caused by temporal lobe seizures. And if his religious experiences are caused by seizures—not by God or the Real—then they cannot generate reliable beliefs about such things.

- Philosopher Robert Ellwood has argued that finding the neural correlates of religious experiences doesn't defeat their ability to justify the religious beliefs they produce. After all, our visual experiences have neural correlates, too; they are produced by activity in our brain.

- The situation changes drastically when we realize that Paul's experiences are almost exactly the same as the apostle Paul's. Think of the apostle Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus, where he saw a bright light, fell to the ground, and heard a voice. Consider the consequences of proving that the apostle Paul, who wrote most of the New Testament, simply had temporal lobe epilepsy.

- Interestingly, similar worries arise about the prophet Muhammad, who dictated the Qur'an after having numerous religious experiences. But descriptions of these events seem to depict the symptoms of temporal lobe epilepsy. Muslim apologists have argued that an epileptic couldn't have had the mental clarity and ability to lead the military campaigns that Muhammad did. But according to physician and historian Frank Freemon, such apologists don't understand the varieties of epilepsy.

Using the Abduction Criteria

- We might try to rescue the justificatory power of religious experience by suggesting that God causes the seizures. Compare these two hypotheses:
    - Hypothesis 1: Religious experiences are caused by brain events.

- Hypothesis 2: Religious experiences are caused by brain events, and the brain events are caused by God.

- Hypothesis 1 is simpler because it interjects fewer entities. Hypothesis 2 requires a significant additional ontological assumption: God's existence.

- Hypothesis 1 has wider scope and more explanatory power because it can explain every religious experience. Hypothesis 2 explains the unexplained with the inexplicable and, thus, raises more questions than it answers.

- Hypothesis 1 is more conservative because it coheres with our medical knowledge. Hypothesis 2 conflicts with the laws of conservation.

- Simply put, it is not rationally preferable to interject an extra subject—that is, to add God to the brain-event explanation of religious experiences—to account for what is already adequately explained.

Suggested Sources

Freeman, "A Differential Diagnosis of the Inspirational Spells of Muhammad the Prophet of Islam."

Ramachandran and Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain*.

Tarantino, *Pulp Fiction* (film).

Questions to Consider

1. How else might the problem of religious diversity threaten the ability of religious experience to justify religious belief?
2. Have you ever had a religious or mystical experience? Did you consider the possible natural explanations for such an experience? Are those natural explanations better, according to the criteria of adequacy, than potential supernatural explanations?
3. Can you think of other examples where mystical experience played an important role in (supposedly) justifying religious belief?
4. Are there positive or negative consequences to using religious experience to justify one's religious belief? What might the effects be on whether one has faith? How might it be dangerous or helpful in real life?

Lecture 11

Is Faith Ever Rational?

In philosophy, faith is a certain kind of belief—belief without sufficient reason or justification. It is not, however, belief without certainty. If it were, we would have to believe everything by faith. However, as we've seen, certainty is difficult to achieve. In this lecture, we explore the nature of sufficient reason, blind faith, agnosticism, fideism, and the rationality and morality of religious faith.

Sufficient Reason

- Since faith, by definition, is belief without sufficient reason or justification, faith cannot justify religious belief. Faith might generate belief; but it cannot provide justification for what you believe. Consequently, faith cannot generate knowledge either—because knowledge is justified true belief. Although something you believe by faith may in fact be true, "I know it by faith" is an oxymoron—a contradiction in terms.

- What counts as sufficient reason is a difficult question to answer. Even if we could clearly determine a percentage to represent the amount of reason we have, we would still be left with the question of what percentage is the cutoff mark for "sufficient." Clearly, if the evidence suggests there's a 95 percent probability that something is true, that's sufficient. If it's only 35 percent likely, it clearly isn't sufficient.

- "Sufficient" is a vague concept; we can't always put a number on it. Thus, it won't always be clear whether belief in something requires faith. If there clearly isn't sufficient reason, then belief will require faith. If there clearly is sufficient reason, then it won't require faith. And if it's unclear, then it will be unclear whether or not faith is required.

Blind Faith

- Suppose that we have little to no reason for thinking something's true, and even sufficient reason to think that it's false. Undeniably, to believe that it's true anyway would require faith. In fact, we might even give it

a special name: blind faith. Despite sufficient evidence to the contrary, people turn a blind eye to the evidence. In this case, people are more interested in protecting their belief than in believing the truth. Clearly, blind faith is not rational.

- Non–blind faith is a condition where there is not sufficient evidence that you're wrong, but there's still more reason to think you're wrong than right. If there is more reason to believe something is false, it isn't rational to believe it's true. Rationality demands that we proportion our belief to the evidence. In some cases, agnosticism—not believing anything at all and simply admitting that you don't know—is rationally preferable.

Agnosticism

- In many circumstances, agnosticism is the most rational approach. However, there are some exceptions. Consider Bertrand Russell's example: If you want to believe that there is an asteroid the size and shape of a teapot, the burden is on you to provide the evidence. Even if the evidence is a wash—because the teapot is so small we could never acquire evidence for or against its existence—believing the teapot doesn't exist is still more rational. And this is true even if such a belief would qualify as faith—belief without justification.

- Perhaps this is rational faith. But then again, when it comes to something's existence, perhaps a lack of evidence itself is evidence. An absence of evidence is sufficient evidence of absence. If so, disbelief in the teapot isn't really faith.

- Let's consider Hume's problem of induction. You can't argue for the reliability of induction without already assuming that induction works. Any argument you presented would itself be an inductive argument. Also, consider Aristotle's laws of thought. You can't present an argument for the laws of thought without arguing in a circle because these laws underlie all arguments. You can't present an argument for the reliability of arguments. You can't provide evidence for trusting evidence. You can't present justification for trusting justification.

- Therefore, belief that such things are reliable is something we just have to take on faith. Any argument or evidence we presented for them would be fallacious. Yet such belief is clearly not irrational.

- Thus, inspired by Descartes, we might affirm that it's rational to believe something by faith if the act of trying to refute it would refute itself. And because belief in careful reasoning (and all its tenets) clearly qualifies, trusting in careful reasoning by faith is rational.

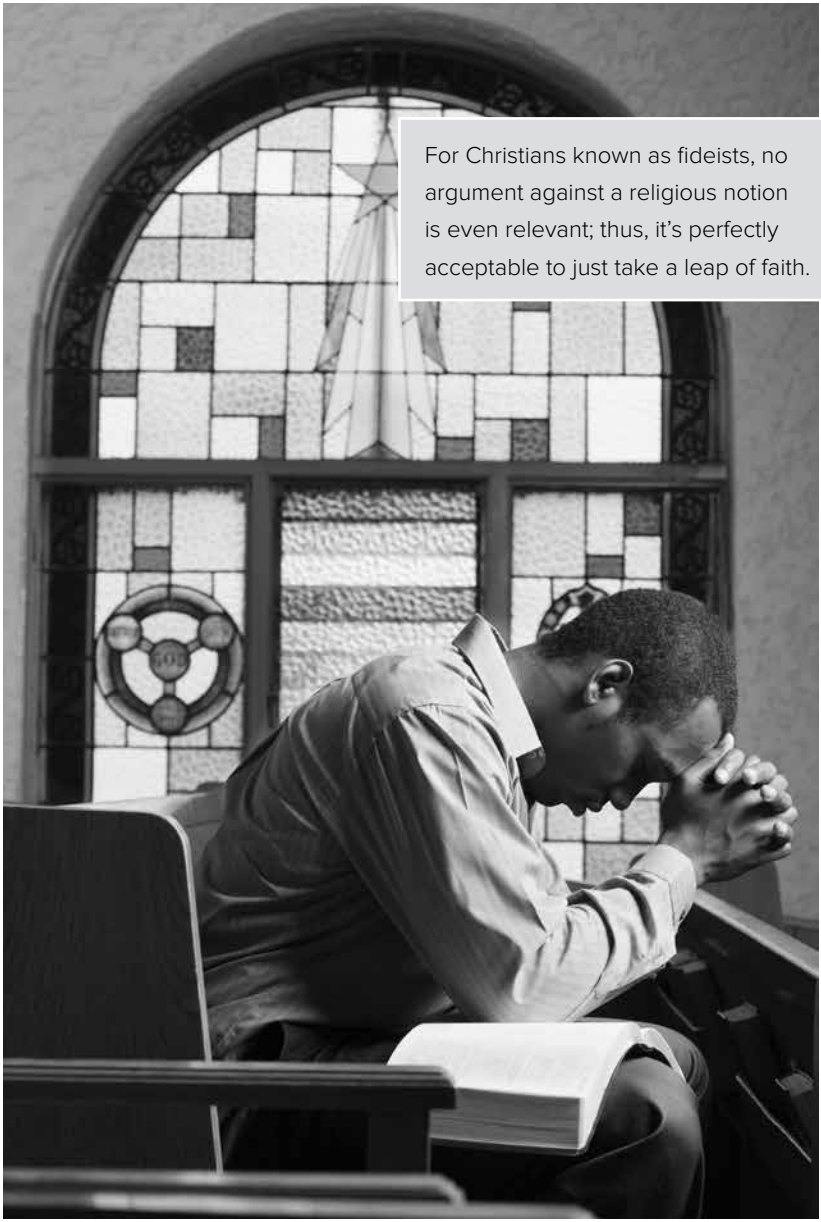
Fideism

- Let's consider whether rational faith can be extended beyond the reliability of careful reasoning to the religious notion that God exists. Christian philosopher Tim Chappell argues that faith is a virtue only if God exists. But that means that in order to establish that faith in God is virtuous, you'd have to establish that God exists. But if you could establish that God exists, you wouldn't need faith to believe it. Thus, it seems that "faith is a virtue" is a dead end as a way to defend the rationality of religious faith.

- Some Christians, called *fideists*, admit that religious faith is not rational. According to them, religion is a domain in which reason does not apply; indeed, it is un-rational—it is beyond reason—and, thus, doesn't make rational sense.

- Indeed, for many fideists, it is imperative to take a leap of faith; they think faith is a more reliable path to truth than reason. In Latin, *fideism* basically means "faith-ism." The philosophical poster boy for fideism is the Danish Christian philosopher Søren Kierkegaard.

- Fideism shields you from having to evaluate your beliefs; what's more, it leaves you unable to evaluate anything else without being hypocritical. Once you excuse your own belief despite the fact—even based on the fact—that it is not rational, the fact that some other belief is not rational can't be a reason to doubt it.



For Christians known as fideists, no argument against a religious notion is even relevant; thus, it's perfectly acceptable to just take a leap of faith.

Pascal's Wager

- Another philosopher who is sometimes labeled a fideist (but probably wasn't) took a different approach to defending the rationality of faith: 17th-century French philosopher Blaise Pascal. Reason can't settle the matter of God's existence, he admitted, but it's rational to believe anyway because of the benefits of belief.

- Pascal's argument, famously known as Pascal's wager, goes like this: If you have nothing to lose and everything to win by believing, and nothing to win and everything to lose by not believing, then it makes sense to believe. And that's what is true of religious belief. Either God exists or he doesn't, and either you believe or you don't.

- If you believe and he does exist, then you get an infinite reward: heaven. If you believe and he doesn't, you've lost nothing. However, if you don't believe and God does exist, you lose everything; you spend an eternity in hell. Pascal suggests that we can put ourselves in a situation where we come to genuinely believe.

William James

- If reason cannot decide religious matters, as Pascal suggests, then we have no idea what the risks and benefits of religious belief are; we should simply say, "I don't know" and leave it at that. We should be agnostic.

- The 19th-century American philosopher William James, however, suggested that agnosticism is not always an option. In "The Will to Believe," which he later said should have been called "The Right to Believe," James argues that some options are "forced." We have to choose to believe one way or the other. He observes, "Every dilemma based on a complete logical disjunction, with no possibility of not choosing, is an option of this forced kind."

- Religion, James suggests, presents us with exactly this kind of decision. He notes, "We cannot escape the issue by remaining skeptical and waiting for more light, because, although we do avoid error in that way if religion be untrue, we lose the good, if it be true, just as certainly as if

we positively chose to disbelieve." In other words, to be agnostic about religion is effectively the same as rejecting it.

- Further, James argues, when an option about whether to believe something is not only forced but momentous—important enough to significantly impact one's life—we have a right to choose to believe one way or the other. And, of course, James thinks, religious belief is momentous.

- According to James, if being religious is a "living option" for you—if it's actually possible for you to believe—then it's what he calls a "genuine option." What's more, it is your right—your epistemic and moral right—to believe if you wish, even if you're not justified. Therefore, not only is religious faith rational, but it's also moral.

William Kingdon Clifford

- William James's point about rationality might hold for non-existential matters. Faith on a matter of value or ethics, in which there really is no relevant evidence, might be rational. Perhaps these are yet more examples of rational faith. But given where the burden of proof lies on existential matters—such as whether God exists—it will still not be rational to believe on faith.

- But James could still be right about the moral acceptability of faith. He made this point in response to the English mathematician and philosopher William Kingdon Clifford, who argued that "it is [morally] *wrong* always, *everywhere*, and for *anyone to believe anything upon* insufficient *evidence*."

- Clifford argues that anytime people believe anything without sufficient evidence, they are risking harm to others. Obviously, if what they believe is false, by believing it, they are promoting it—and believing false things is bad for individuals and society. But even if what you believe without evidence just happens to be true, you're still promoting an attitude that evidence doesn't matter and, in turn. promoting credulity—which hinders the progress of humankind.

- Notice that, instead of thinking that it's a virtue, Clifford is arguing that faith is a vice. Indeed, it might be that, in the absence of evidence, doubt is virtuous, because it guards against credulity. Clifford was likely mistaken that it is always wrong to believe something without evidence, because belief without evidence is sometimes unavoidable—and we can't be morally blamed for doing that which is unavoidable.

- However, Clifford is right that the consequences of belief matter. If you're merely choosing to believe something—something for which you lack justification—then you'd better be sure that by doing so, you are not risking harm to others.

Suggested Sources

Chappell, "Why Is Faith a Virtue?"

Johnson, *The Myths That Stole Christmas*.

Silverman, *Candidate without a Prayer*.

Questions to Consider

1. Suppose faith generates a belief, then that belief generates another. Then you discover, for reasoning independent of your faith or original belief, that the second belief is true. That second belief now counts as knowledge; it's a justified true belief. Would this be a case of faith generating knowledge?

2. It's true that we cannot present evidence for the reliability of careful reasoning without just arguing in a circle. But we have argued that believing that careful reasoning is reliable by faith is rational because it is not possible to doubt that careful reasoning is reliable without assuming that it is. Does that fact count as evidence for it, and thus, it's not really faith? Is there perhaps a better way to describe such belief?

3. How culpable are you for actions by the members of a group to which you belong? If you belong to a group and the majority of that group does things in the name of the group that you consider immoral, are you morally obligated to try to change the group? If you can't, are you obligated to leave it? What if the group did terrible things in the past? Should you leave it? If you don't now belong to that group, how should such past actions affect your decision to join?

4. According to Karen Armstrong's book *The Bible: A Biography*, the notion that the Bible must be interpreted literally from cover to cover was unheard of until around the 19th century. How much of the Bible do you think Christians took literally before then? Many Christians today regard the stories of Adam and Eve and Noah to be mythical because science has proved they didn't happen. What reasons would Christians have had for thinking a biblical story was mythical in the 15th century?

5. If someone regards all of the stories of the Bible to be just as mythical as the stories of the *Lord of the Rings*, it is appropriate for that person to call himself or herself a Christian?

Lecture 12

Why Is There Something Rather Than Nothing?

A customary way of proving that God exists is to demonstrate that God's existence is the best explanation for the universe. In our attempt to explain the existence of the universe in this lecture, we address two related arguments: teleological arguments and cosmological arguments. Teleological arguments suggest that God is the best explanation for the universe's design. (*Telos* in Greek means "end, goal, purpose.") Cosmological arguments suggest that God is the best explanation for the existence of the universe. (*Cosmos* in Greek means "world, universe.")

The Kalām Cosmological Argument

- Philosophers agree that the best version of the cosmological argument is the *Kalām cosmological argument*. This argument gets its name from those who developed it—medieval Muslim theologians who formed various schools of 'Ilm al-kalām, the "science of discourse" used to defend Islam.

- The Kalām group thought that the arguments for God as propounded by the Falāsifa—a competing sect of Muslim theologians inspired by Greek philosophy—were faulty. The Falāsifas' arguments suggested that all material things depended on the existence of a "necessary entity"—an entity that must exist. Kalām theologians, however, pointed out that, even if there must be a necessary entity, there is no reason that entity couldn't simply be the universe itself.

- Similar worries would arise later regarding the arguments of the Christian theologian Thomas Aquinas, who was also influenced by Greek thought, namely the work of Aristotle. In the 13th century, Aquinas suggested that all chains of causation had to terminate in an "uncaused causer," and that the uncaused causer was God.

- Modern versions of the Kalām argument, found in the works of such Christian apologists as William Lane Craig, go something like this:

- Things that begin to exist need an explanation. For example, think about all the objects around you right now; they began to exist, and their existence has an explanation.

- But something that did not begin to exist would not have, and does not need, an explanation. If it has always been, then it has always been.

- The universe began to exist; God did not.

- Thus, the universe needs an explanation, but God does not.

- According to the modern Kalām argument, because God can explain the universe without needing an explanation himself, God is the best explanation for the universe and, thus, exists. Initially, it seems, this argument is valid and its premises are true. Nevertheless, in reality, the argument is fraught with many problems.

Countering the Kalām Argument

- To bolster its first premise, the argument uses the example of everyday objects that clearly began to exist. But everyday objects are very different from the universe, especially in the way they come into existence. When you explain the existence of such an object, you are just explaining how the matter that makes up that object came to be arranged in the way that it is. Of course, the universe is the matter that makes up objects. That means the argument now simply begs the question—it argues in a circle.

- The modern Kalām argument asserts that everything that begins to exist has a cause. But, in fact, matter can come into existence without a cause. This has been measured and well documented by scientists studying quantum physics; in a vacuum, subatomic particle/antiparticle pairs occasionally come into existence spontaneously, without a cause.

- We might say that this violates the cliché “Something can’t come from nothing,” but instead, some scientists have suggested that vacuums are not really nothing. Although they contain no matter, vacuums do

contain virtual particles—a kind *quantum foam* or probability field that can collapse into physical particles. This quantum foam exists everywhere, even where matter does not, and it would even exist in the absence of a universe.

- Physicist Ed Tryon has even argued that our universe could simply be a large version of such a fluctuation. If so, Tryon notes, our universe is "simply one of those things which happen from time to time." A vacuum fluctuation creates a singularity—a single point containing a large amount of matter—which then explodes, generating the universe.

- The Kalām argument is flawed because quantum foam is eternal. It never began to exist; it always has been and always will be. Thus, the foam needs no explanation. Because quantum foam is fairly well understood, and God is an unexplained entity with inexplicable powers, the God hypothesis does not fare well against it.

- What's more, the singularity itself may not even need an explanation. Because its explosion marks the beginning of time, nothing can come before it and, thus, nothing can cause it. In fact, it might even be wrong to say that it began to exist.

- And even if it did begin to exist, the singularity is as small as anything can be, exists for no time, and is governed by no laws. If anything is a candidate for something that need not be explained, it would seem to be the singularity. The concept of God—because he has wide array of infinite properties—is more complex than the singularity.

- The best answer to the question of why there is something rather than nothing may simply be: It just is. The existence of the universe may simply be a brute fact—something that simply is true.

The Teleological Argument

- Even if the existence of the universe is a brute fact, its properties may not be. After all, if the arrangement of the matter of ordinary objects needs an explanation, then maybe the matter that makes up the universe needs an explanation for its arrangement, as well. In short,

perhaps the universe exhibits design indicative of a designer. This brings us to the teleological argument—the argument from design.

- Earlier versions of the teleological argument fell short because of modern knowledge—the evidence of evolution of not only the human body but also the structure of the universe. For this reason, some modern thinkers, such as the British physicist Paul Davies and American philosopher Robin Collins, argue that it is the universe itself that seems to be designed—fine-tuned—for the evolution of life within it.

- Although there is only one universe, there are a seemingly infinite number of ways that it could have turned out. Consider, for example, the mass of neutrinos—tiny particles that travel near the speed of light and are so small that they can pass through solid objects. Advocates of the fine-tuning argument rightly observe that their mass is a mere 5×10^{-35} kg. But, they point out, if their mass had been 5×10^{-34} or 5×10^{-36} kg, then life could not have evolved. These thinkers suggest that the mass of neutrinos can't be simply a matter of luck. The better explanation is that the universe had a designer who fine-tuned it for life.

Countering the Teleological Argument

- Although the teleological argument seems impressive, it has flaws. For example, the neutrino could actually be much lighter or heavier than it is, and it would not affect the expansion of the universe to any great degree—certainly not to a degree that would make evolution impossible. Something similar could be said about each of the values mentioned by advocates of the fine-tuning argument.

- Suppose we said that every variable that we could assign to the values of the laws and constants of our universe is equally likely. If so, it would seem that the chances that their values fall within the range necessary for life is unimaginably low. We could even put a number on it; the chances are $1/\infty$ (1 in infinity). In fact, this is what the fine-tuning argument suggests.

- The problem is that $1/\infty$ is a meaningless fraction. In order for statements of odds to be meaningful, they must be expressed in finite numbers. Consider the chances that the neutrino had exactly the mass that it

needed for life to evolve. Because we are assuming that it could have had any value, and there are an infinite number of values outside that range, the chances are 1/∞.

- The fine-tuning argument is also logically fallacious; its conclusion doesn't follow from its premises. It concludes that the universe must be fine-tuned, based on the observation that if one of its properties were any different, then it could no longer support life. But it does not follow that the laws we have are the only ones conducive to life. There may be more than one way for life to emerge.

- And indeed there is. American physicist Victor Stenger has shown that if you allow for changes in all the governing factors and allow them to be set randomly, you get a universe conducive to life about 50 percent of the time. There is more than one way to set the dials and get a universe conducive to life.

- What's more, many of these supposedly fine-tuned values are intrinsically linked—changing one necessarily and automatically changes the others and keeps them in balance. This is a result of conservation—the fact that the total amount of measureable properties in a closed system always remains constant. And because conservation is an intrinsic property of space-time itself, it doesn't require any further explanation.

Deus ex Machina

- As the ancient philosopher Plato suggested, to explain something by appealing to the gods is simply an attempt to evade admitting that you actually have no explanation at all. As Plato observes in the *Cratylus*, the tragic poets, when stuck in a dilemma, "have recourse to the introduction of gods on machines." This is where we get the phrase *deus ex machina* in literature. When there is no other way out of a plot problem, you can just invoke God—or a twist of fate—to fix it.

- But Plato brings us to an interesting point and perhaps even gives us a ray of hope. Many object to the cosmological and teleological arguments by suggesting that they do not point specifically to God. But perhaps humanity itself may be responsible for the universe's

Under the laws of conservation, the universe is similar to a Hoberman sphere; because all its pieces are linked, no matter how we adjust them, they all move to the same degree.

existence and design. Suppose the existence of the universe is a brute fact. Perhaps the universe itself is God.

- Indeed, some philosophers argue that God is just the mind that emerges from the complexity of the universe. Or perhaps the singularity is God; maybe the quantum foam is God. These intriguing possibilities turn us toward our next question: What is God like?

Suggested Sources

Johnson, "Interstellar, Causal Loops, and Saving Humanity."

Muehlhauser, "History of the Kalam Cosmological Argument."

Schick, "Can God Explain Anything?"

Sinnott-Armstrong and Craig, *God? A Debate between a Christian and an Atheist*.

Questions to Consider

1. How can you determine when a fact is brute versus when you should continue to look for deeper explanations?
2. Suppose your friend believes that interdimensional aliens outside our universe are responsible for its existence. Is that the same as believing that God created our universe? Is whoever created our universe, by definition, God?

Lecture 13

What Is God Like?

In this lecture, we study the history of our conception of God and explore the logical inconsistencies of a being who is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent. We compare and contrast the arguments of philosophers who have abandoned the traditional conception of God and the arguments of those who have attempted to prove it. We then conclude with Immanuel Kant's refutation of the Benedictine monk Anselm's arguments to defend the existence of God.

The Western Conception of God

- The history of the Western conception of God is long and diverse. Some suggest that anthropomorphic bias—our tendency to ascribe human agency to inanimate objects—is originally responsible for our belief in God. The Greeks believed in an entire pantheon of gods; what's more, those gods were far from perfect. They were basically just powerful humans, with all the normal virtues and vices that humans have.

- The story of the Judeo-Christian conception of God starts with the ancient Hebrews. Interestingly, the Hebrews also originally believed in many gods. Biblical scholars agree that the parts of the Old Testament that were written earliest reflect polytheism; however, the ancient Jews were devoted to only one of those gods: Yahweh.

- Later writings indicate that belief in the other gods eventually faded away, and Hebrews came to acknowledge only the existence of Yahweh. But even then, their belief was still somewhat like the Greeks, in that they didn't believe that Yahweh was perfect. Like the Greek gods, Yahweh was basically just a powerful person. Although he could be beneficent, Yahweh was often vengeful and even downright immoral.

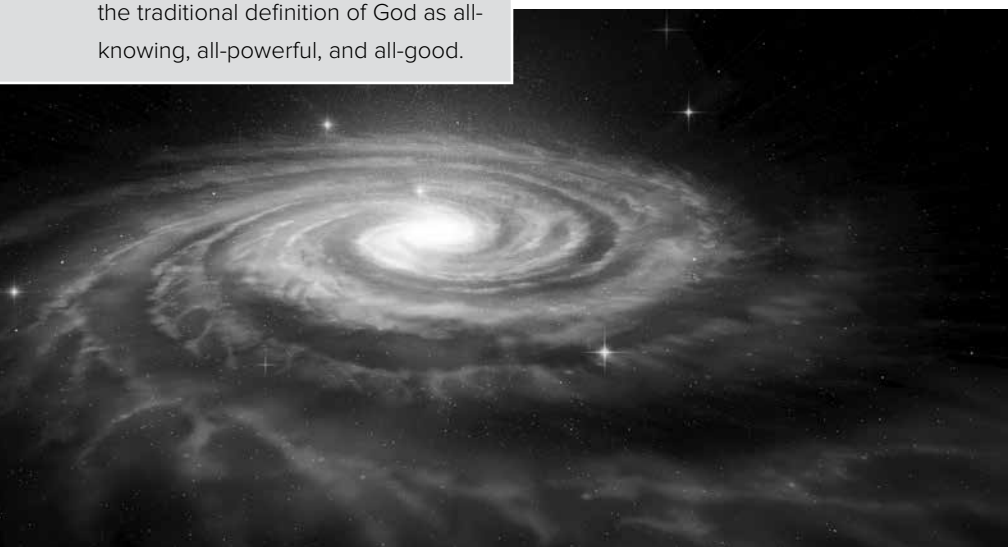
The Demiurge, or Perfect Being

- Our conception of God today is that he is a perfect being. In fact, it is not even possible to imagine a being that has more knowledge, power, and goodness than God.

- These three concepts are central: God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-good, or omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent—"tri-omni." And, for about the past 1,500 years, this is what philosophers, theologians, and every major world religion has meant by God. It's not the original conception, but it is today called the traditional conception of God.

- The idea of the perfect God comes from Plato. In his *Timaeus*, Plato proposed the existence of a perfect being that he called the "demiurge," which created the universe and ordered it using the Forms as a blueprint. Later, the 4th-century philosopher and theologian Augustine, who was an admirer of Plato, incorporated the properties of the demiurge into his conception of God.

It seems inappropriate to call the universe God because it falls outside the traditional definition of God as all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-good.



- It was then, for the first time, that God was considered to be a perfect being. Because Augustine's works were highly regarded, his understanding of God became the orthodox view.

Freedom and Foreknowledge

- Interestingly, there recently has been an effort (at least among theists in academia) to revise the traditional understanding of God—to not think of God has perfect anymore. There are many reasons for this.

- For example, some feel that the existence of a perfect being cannot be reconciled with the fact that there is evil in the world. If God is perfect, then the world he created would have to be perfect or, at the least, much better than our world actually is.

- Other philosophers think that the existence of a perfect being is incompatible with humans having certain properties, such as free will. This is called the *freedom and foreknowledge problem*, and some—such as theologian Clark Pinnock—suggest that we should reject the idea that God is all-knowing.

- Still other scholars believe that we should abandon the idea that God is a perfect being because the very notion of a perfect being is logically incoherent. Those who embrace this line of reasoning argue that we were mistaken to think that anything could be perfect in the first place—that the existence of a perfect being is logically impossible.

Logical Inconsistencies

- As mentioned earlier, in order to be perfect, God must be all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-good. However, it's not actually possible for a single being to have all these properties at the same time. In fact, some of these properties may be logically inconsistent themselves.

- Being omnipotent may be logically inconsistent: To truly be omnipotent, a being must have the power to do anything, including limit his own power, but any being whose power can be limited is not omnipotent.

- Because God is omnibenevolent—that is, all-good, or morally perfect—God is unable to perform an evil action. An evil action is incompatible with his essential moral perfection. But because God is also all-powerful, he should be able to do anything.

- In fact, an omnibenevolent being may be logically impossible. One can be morally praiseworthy for performing an action only if one has a choice between good and evil and chooses good over evil. Yet God, by definition, must always do good.

- Omniscience—being all-knowing—falls prey to a similar problem. If God knows everything, then he knows how he himself will behave in the future. However, to make a choice, one must deliberate about which option to take, and to deliberate about which option to take, one must believe that both options are genuinely possible. But God already, infallibly, knows what he will do. And yet, if God is to behave morally, he must choose to do good.

Anselm of Canterbury

- Although some philosophers have abandoned the concept of a perfect God, others seem to be emphasizing it. Indeed, they think that the existence of a perfect God can be proved—and that such a being must exist, by definition. All such arguments trace back to those of Anselm of Canterbury, a medieval Benedictine monk, who argued that a perfect being must exist because God's nonexistence would entail a contradiction.

- Anselm's argument is as follows: First, any real-world object is more perfect than an object that exists only in one's mind. Second, God's perfection entails that there is no greater conceivable being than God.

- Now, consider the atheist's idea of God. The atheist doesn't believe that God exists. For Anselm, to believe in something is to have an idea and give that idea the property of existence; to not believe in something is to have an idea but not give that idea the property of existence. Thus, the atheist has an idea of God, but his idea lacks the property of existence. Anselm argues, however, that an idea of God

without the property of existence is not really an idea of the greatest conceivable being.

- In this way, the atheist contradicts himself if he says that he doesn't believe in God. That's the same as saying that he has an idea of the greatest conceivable being that really isn't the greatest conceivable being. If atheism commits one to a logical contradiction, Anselm argues, then it must be that atheism is false. This type of argument is known as a *reductio ad absurdum*, which begins by assuming something is true, then demonstrates that an absurd consequent would follow.

Kant on God's Existence

- For Anselm, the property of existence is part of the definition of God; for him, the definition of God is "a tri-omni being that exists." In that case, to say that God does not exist is to say "a tri-omni being that exists does not exist." And that's logically incoherent, because the essence of the most perfect being is to exist.

- Nevertheless, most philosophers still seemed to feel that something was wrong with Anselm's argument, even though it was difficult to identify. The one who finally pinpointed the problem was the 18th-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant.

- Kant objected to Anselm's argument—that God exists because existence is a property that God has by definition—with a simple statement: "Existence is not a property." It should be noted that Kant wasn't an atheist; he was a theist. But he wasn't interested in endorsing bad arguments to defend God. And Anselm's argument, Kant argued, was a bad one.

- To understand what Kant means by "existence is not a property," imagine something in your mind—a sword, perhaps. First, imagine the hilt is silver. Now, that the hilt is round. Now, imagine that its blade is a glowing red beam of light. You will notice that your conception of the sword changes with each new property. Now, imagine that it exists.

You will notice that your conception of the sword did not change; this is because existence is not a property.

- Existence is not a property but rather a state of being that allows a thing to have properties. A saber cannot be made of light unless it exists first. Because existence is not a property, it cannot be an essential property of anything and, thus, the greatest possible being cannot exist by definition.

- Let's examine Kant's objection in the context of the first step of Anselm's argument. For Anselm, to believe that something exists is to have an idea of something in your mind and then give that idea the property of existence; as such, for Anselm, objects can exist in the mind but not in reality.

- When we have an idea in mind, and if we believe it exists, we simply have an additional idea—the belief that there is something in the world that corresponds to the thing we have conceived in our minds. If you don't believe that God exists, you don't contradict yourself. You are not simultaneously believing that your idea of God both has and does not have the property of existence.

- What's more, we can't really compare ideas in one person's mind as being greater or more perfect than the ideas in another person's mind, as Anselm suggests. Objects cannot exist "in one's understanding"—only ideas do. And ideas of objects don't actually have all the properties that objects in the world do. The theist's and atheist's ideas of God likely differ very little. It's just that one person has a belief that the other does not.

Suggested Sources

Armstrong, *A History of God*.

Martin and Monnier, *The Impossibility of God*.

Pickover, *The Paradox of God and the Science of Omniscience*.

Questions to Consider

1. Can you think of any other ways that the conception of God might be inconsistent? For example, can one and the same being be perfectly just (making sure everyone gets what he or she deserves) and perfectly merciful?
2. Many believe God to be a person—with a mind and free will—with which we can have a relationship. Is it possible for a perfect being to be a person or for a human to have a relationship with a perfect being?
3. Can you think of a way to revise the ontological argument so that it works—or is at least more persuasive?
4. In this lecture, we said that Augustine borrowed the idea of a perfect being or deity from Plato and his conception of the demiurge and applied it to the Judeo-Christian god (which we call "God"). As such, we might say that Augustine was the first to suggest that God was perfect. But given that Plato was essentially talking about a perfect being, might we say that Plato was actually talking about "God" without knowing about it? Are Plato's Demiurge and Augustine's God the same thing? If so, would it be correct to say that Plato suggested that God was perfect before Augustine did?

Lecture 14

How Could God Allow Moral Evil?

In the past several lectures, we have considered the most convincing arguments for God's existence. In this lecture, we will consider arguments against God's existence—crucial to our examination of the existence of God. The most common such argument is called the *problem of evil*. The philosophical problem of evil is an argument that concludes God doesn't exist because, if he did, he wouldn't allow the evil that does exist in the world.

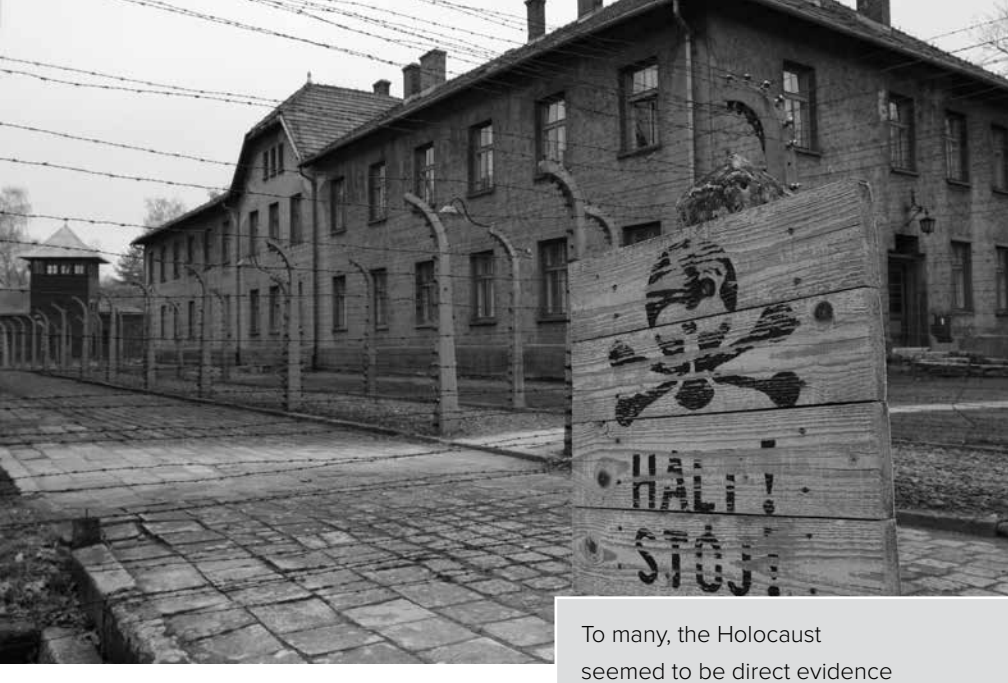
The Logical Problem of Evil

- The question of how God could allow evil is a staple in philosophy. In fact, it may be older than the discipline itself. It is the central topic of the Old Testament's Book of Job, which is at least as old as the works of the earliest Greek philosophers. But in Job, the existence of God is not up for debate; instead, Job wonders why he should continue to worship a God that would allow him to suffer so much.

- However, Job's predicament is not the philosophical problem. In philosophy, the problem is thought to be a logical one. It seems that these two things can't be true together: God exists, and evil exists. The seemingly logical incompatibility of these two things is often put in the form of an argument that concludes that God does not exist. The following is the *logical problem of evil*:

  If God exists, then there would be no evil.
  There is evil.
  Therefore, God does not exist.

- The form of the argument is valid. According to *modus tollens*: If G, then ~E; E thus ~G. If the premises are true, the argument is sound, and the conclusion is true. To attack the argument, we must prove that one of the premises is false. It's hard to deny that the second premise is true; evil undoubtedly exists. The only premise to challenge is the first one.



To many, the Holocaust seemed to be direct evidence that God does not exist.

Free Will

- It seems that God would want to eliminate all evil. Thus, if God exists, it seems that there would be no evil; at least initially, the first premise of the problem of evil is on very solid footing. However, there may be reason to think that the first premise is false. For God, maybe there is something else besides the elimination of evil that he wants more, but he can't have it without allowing evil to occur.

- There are two kinds of evil: moral evil and natural evil. Natural evil is evil brought about by natural processes, such as hurricanes, earthquakes, genetic birth defects, the Black Plague, and so on. Moral evil, in contrast, is evil brought about by human action, such as the Holocaust or 9/11. Following is the logical problem of moral evil:

  If God exists, then there would be no moral evil.
  There is moral evil.
  Therefore, God does not exist.

- To solve this problem, we need to think of a reason that God might allow moral evil. Although philosophers have suggested many answers, the most convincing by far is that God wanted to preserve human free will. Most important, God wishes to preserve our ability to choose to do good or evil. In fact, it's been suggested that without free will, moral good can't exist; the only free acts are good acts.

- This is the solution that St. Augustine endorsed. As he put it: "If man is good, and if he would not be able to act rightly except by willing to do so, he ought to have free will because without it he would not be able to act rightly."

Second-Order Goods

- As the Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga suggests, it could be that every possible world in which there is free will is also a world in which evil is freely chosen. Because any world with free will is clearly better than one without it, when God chooses the best possible world to create—which he must do by definition—he must choose one with free will and moral evil.

- Many (even some atheists) agree that this solves the logical problem of moral evil. It demonstrates that the existence of God and some moral evil is at least logically possible. But it raises another related problem. Even granting that all possible worlds with free will would have evil and that the best possible world would be one with both free will and evil, it's still the case that God would create the best possible world. Yet when you look around, clearly this is not the best possible world.

- Of course, some evils make possible what are called *second-order goods*. As a simple example, a friend's divorce, while sad, may be for the better. Perhaps that failed relationship taught both parties more about what they want in life and freed them up to meet their true loves.

Evidential Problem of Moral Evil

- Yet some evils seem not only to be unjustified (no good in fact comes out of them) but are also unjustifiable. To borrow an example from

contemporary philosopher William Rowe, consider the rape and murder of a child.

- In Fyodor Dostoyevsky's book *The Brothers Karamazov*, a general has a small boy torn apart by dogs. Ivan, one of the brothers, argues that such an evil could never be justified because no evil could be justified in the name of some greater good unless that good is enjoyed by the person who suffered—and clearly the boy did not benefit at all from being torn apart.

- Inspired by the philosopher William Rowe, we might call this the *evidential problem of moral evil*. Although the mere existence of moral evil may be logically compatible with God's existence, the occurrence of seemingly unjustified moral evils seems to count as evidence against God's existence. The evidential problem is not a deductive logical proof against God's existence, but it is an inductive argument against God's existence. If successful, it provides evidence against God's existence and, thus, renders belief in God irrational.

Marilyn McCord Adams

- British philosopher Richard Swinburne has suggested that all evil in the world can be justified by the opportunities for courage, compassion, and generosity that it makes possible. British philosopher John Hick suggests that, without evil, humans would never get the chance to build their character—or "make their soul" into something better.

- Although she's a theist, Rutgers Distinguished Research Professor Marilyn McCord Adams admits that solutions like Swinburne's and Hick's fall short. She asserts, "For better and worse, the by now standard strategies for 'solving' the problem of evil are powerless in the face of [such] horrendous evils." In fact, Adams takes the argument even further: God's moral perfection entails that God cannot allow anyone to suffer to such a degree that their life, as a whole, was not worth living.

- Adams concludes that God takes everyone to heaven (where their existence can become worthwhile), then guides them into appreciating

why they wouldn't change a thing—even the fact that they suffered horrendously. This, of course, is very unorthodox theology, and as a solution to the problem we are concerned with, it falls short. In fact, it merely begs the question. Adams assumes that God and heaven exist, yet those are the very things that are challenged by the evidential problem of evil.

Skeptical Theism

- Adams's solution takes us to a similar solution to Rowe's evidential problem—one that is inspired by what God says to Job in Job 38: "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the Earth? Tell me, if you think you understand [so much]."

- The position is called *skeptical theism*. It doesn't articulate a reason for God to allow seemingly unjustifiable evils, but it does observe that it's possible God has such a reason that we simply cannot detect. In other words, if we see an evil that seems to be unjustifiable, it cannot count as evidence against God's existence because, for all we know, God has a reason for allowing that evil that we simply cannot detect.

- A problem with skeptical theism is that it seems to render theism unfalsifiable and is, thus, irrational. No matter how bad an evil is, we can always say that God has a reason for it. Nothing, it seems, could ever count as evidence against God's existence. But as we've seen, when nothing can count as evidence against a hypothesis, that's a good indication that the hypothesis is irrational.

- Along the same lines, skeptical theism seems to render us incapable of making any moral judgments. After all, regardless of whether God exists, there could always be some unseen good consequence of an event that outweighs how evil it is. For multiple reasons, then, it seems that skeptical theism fails as a response to the evidential problem of moral evil.

The Deistic View

- The best response to the evidential problem simply adapts the free will response to the logical problem. This response suggests that it may be

the case that every possible world in which free will exists is also one in which moral evil exists. If you give creatures free will, evil may be inevitable. If so, even the best possible world has evil in it.

- It may be that in order to preserve free will, God must maintain a kind of "noninterference policy"—that is, he won't interfere with free will for any reason. If we're to be truly free, then everyone all the time must be allowed to freely choose to do what they want and have the consequences of those actions come to fruition. Any tinkering by God is simply too great a threat to free will. In a sense, we might say that free will is too important to tolerate any interference. If this is true, it seems we have a way out of the evidential problem of moral evil.

- To believe that God has a noninterference policy when it comes to divine intervention is essentially to adopt a deistic view of God—one where God designed the universe, wound it up like a watch, and then let it go. This is not a popular theology, however. For example, the incarnation of Christ would be impossible on this view.

- The other shortcoming with the deistic view is that it doesn't address the problem of natural evil. We will turn to that problem in the next lecture.

Suggested Sources

Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism."

Questions to Consider

1. One way to answer the problem of evil is to suggest that God is not perfect—that he is either unable, doesn't know how, or doesn't want to eliminate evil. (Harold Kushner, for example, argues that in light of the Holocaust, we should conclude that God did not have the power to stop it.) If you were to take such a route in addressing the problem of evil, which one would you choose and why? What are the benefits and downfalls of saying that God is not all-knowing, all-powerful, or all-good?
2. Is a being that lacks one of the omni-properties still worthy of worship? Why would a perfect being or a being that lacks only one of the omni-properties desire to be worshipped?

Lecture 15

Why Would God Cause Natural Evil?

In this lecture, we consider how God could allow natural evil—the suffering caused by such natural calamities as earthquakes, hurricanes, plagues, and genetic birth defects. On a basic level, there seems to be a logical incompatibility between the existence of a tri-omni being— omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent—and the existence of natural evil.

Origin of Natural Evil

- According to contemporary American philosopher Alvin Plantinga, it's not possible for both of the following propositions to be true at the same time: God exists. Natural evil exists. In fact, the resolution of the problem is to tell a logically consistent story in which both these propositions are true. The story need not even be true in order for the solution to work.

- The story Plantinga suggests is one in which nonhuman beings—such as Satan and his demons—are responsible for natural evil. If that were the case, and Satan and his demons have free will in the same way that humans do, then God would allow such evils for the greater good—for the preservation of free will. Such a story, Plantinga suggests, is one in which both propositions are true.

- Basically, what Plantinga's solution does is change natural evil into moral evil, then provides the solution of free will. However, natural evil, by definition, is evil brought about by natural processes—not demons. Thus, the story that Plantinga tells is not one in which both God and natural evil exist; it's a story in which natural evil does not exist at all and, instead, all evil is moral evil.

Natural Disasters

- Throughout religious history, the existence of calamities and adversities has never posed a serious logical threat to God's existence. Before moral perfection was ascribed to the Judeo-Christian God by

Augustine, God's wrath was thought, by many, to be responsible for such events. Once God was considered morally perfect, however, natural disasters were thought to be punishments for sin or the result of demonic activity.

- But things changed after the scientific revolution. One of the main motivating factors behind the scientific revolution was the assumption that the universe was governed by laws that we could discover. And many natural philosophers suggested that the laws of nature were the result of divine activity.

There seems to be no reason for God to maintain a "noninterference policy" with natural disasters because doing so doesn't protect free will.

- As English theologian and philosopher Samuel Clarke put it, the orderliness of the world is merely the result of "the Arbitrary Will and Pleasure of God exerting itself and acting upon Matter continually." For Clarke, God was the "laws of nature."

- As our knowledge of the laws matured, scientists discovered that such calamities as hurricanes, earthquakes, and plagues were a necessary consequence of the working of those laws. Calamities and adversities began to be viewed as "natural disasters"—disasters that were the result of the newly discovered natural laws.

The Logical Problem of Natural Evil

- It seems as if God created a world that can randomly reach out and kill us without warning and for no reason. In fact, what seems logically impossible is that an all-perfect being embedded laws into the universe that necessitated evil in the form of horrendous suffering. The following propositions in the logical problem of natural evil seem to be logically incompatible—that is, they cannot be true together:
  1. God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent.
  2. God is the creator and designer of the universe, including the natural laws that govern it.
  3. Calamities and adversities, such as hurricanes, earthquakes, diseases, and the evils they bring about, are the product of the laws that govern our universe.

- Proposition 1 suggests that God is all-good, but propositions 2 and 3 together seem to entail that he is not—that he authored much of the evil of our world by designing the laws that govern it. The problem of natural evil poses a serious threat to theistic belief—one that has not been adequately addressed by contemporary philosophers.

Solving the Problem of Natural Evil

- Let's consider ways to solve the logical problem of natural evil. We might try to modify some of the solutions to the problem of moral evil to deal with natural evil, but it doesn't seem as if any would be satisfactory. As we've discussed, the free will solution won't work—we know that natural evil is not a result of free action. What's more, it doesn't seem

as if Hick's solution that evil builds character or Swinburne's solution that evil provides opportunities for compassion will work either.

- First, such goods do not outweigh the natural evil that makes them possible. Second, we have far more natural evil than is necessary for soul-making and compassion. And third, natural evil is not even necessary for the existence of such goods. If God simply gave us free will, we would create more than enough evil on our own to provide us with ample opportunity for soul-making and compassion.

- It doesn't seem skeptical theism will work either. For one, it isn't mathematically sound. And suggesting that God has reasons to author natural disasters that we cannot detect would lead to moral agnosticism.

A Thought Experiment in Natural Evil

- As a way out of this problem, consider this thought experiment: Suppose you know your neighbor Mike well, and you know him to be an exceptionally good person; you think him incapable of performing a morally heinous act. But suppose, one day, he is accused of the cold-blooded murder of a child, and the evidence against him is quite compelling.

- There's obviously a conflict here: It's not possible to hold both that he can't perform a morally heinous act and that he killed a small child. But it is logically possible to maintain that Mike both can't have committed the crime and that the evidence against him is compelling. No matter how good the evidence is, it could be faulty. Videos can be faked, and DNA traces can be planted. At least, in terms of pure deductive logic, you would not be forced to conclude that Mike is guilty; you could always maintain that someone else did it.

- The same is true regarding God and natural evil. It can still be true that the inevitability of natural evil is woven into the very fabric of our universe and that God exists—as long as God is not the one who did it. If someone or something else is responsible for the laws that govern our universe, then God is not guilty.

Another Creator

- In fact, there is a story in which all three of the propositions of the logical problem of natural evil are true; God is not responsible for the natural evil in our world and, thus, still could be morally perfect. It goes like this:

  > God creates the universe and the physical laws that govern it but has to maintain a complete "noninterference policy" when it comes to free will; then, some free creature in that universe discovers how to create universes itself. That creature decides to do so and lets universes be governed by laws of his choosing—laws that make inevitable natural disasters. That is the universe in which we live.

- This is a story in which (1) God exists and is wholly good; (2) God created the universe, including its laws; and (3) the laws that govern our universe make inevitable natural disasters. In short, in this story, God can't be blamed for weaving natural disasters into the fabric of our universe because he didn't do it. Some other free creature did. If free will is important enough for God to maintain a noninterference policy in the universe he created, God is off the moral hook.

- It seems that if you are in step with science and admit that natural disasters are a consequence of the laws that govern our universe but also believe that God exists and created the universe, then you are forced to conclude that God didn't create our universe—someone else must have.

A Logical Incompatibility

- If we assume that we don't live in a computer simulation or an alternate universe and that indeed God is the designer and creator of our universe, then there seems to be an irresolvable logical incompatibility between the following four statements:
  1. God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent.
  2. God is the creator and designer of the (physical) universe, including the natural laws that govern it.
  3. Calamities and adversities, such as hurricanes, earthquakes, diseases, and the evils they bring about, are the product of the laws that govern our universe.

4. Our universe is the (physical) universe (that is, our universe was designed and created by God).

- There is no story in which these four statements are true. It is logically impossible for a perfect being to be the author of horrendous evils by embedding laws that make them inevitable into the universe he creates for conscious creatures to inhabit.

- But theists still have one option: They can reject one of the premises. And it would seem that the most obvious choice would be premise 1—the notion that God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent. After all, we've already seen reasons to think that the notion of a tri-omni being is logically incoherent itself.

- Perhaps control of the universe's laws is beyond God's power; he must work with what the universe gave him. Maybe he is not the creator of the universe at all but merely oversees it. And because the traditional tri-omni definition of God is not the first one, abandoning it is not necessarily just an ad hoc excuse. One might even argue that it was a mistake for Augustine to have imported the idea of a perfect being from Plato in the first place.

- In the next lecture, we explore the possibility that God is not all-knowing or, at least, that he doesn't know the future. Many have suggested that such foreknowledge is incompatible with free will—that it's not possible for God to know beforehand how you will choose, if that choice is to be free. The question is: Are freedom and foreknowledge compatible?

Suggested Sources

Bostrom, "Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?"

Boyd, Greg. "Did God Send a Tornado to Warn the ELCA?"

The Huffington Post. "Japan Earthquake 2011."

Russell, "An Outline of Intellectual Rubbish."

Questions to Consider

1. Which do you find more troubling or difficult to reconcile with God's existence: moral evil, such as the Holocaust, or natural evil, such as the Indian Ocean tsunami?
2. Can simply abandoning one of God's traditional attributes avoid both the moral and natural problem of evil? If so, which is the easiest to give up? Which option is, theologically, less troubling? Philosophically, which option is most beneficial?
3. Would you be willing to "bite the bullet," so to speak, and embrace the idea that we live in a computer simulation to square your belief in God with the problem of natural evil?
4. If Bostrom is right, how troubling is it that there is a 20 percent chance that we live in a computer simulation?
5. Can you concoct a story in which propositions 1, 2, 3, and 4 (mentioned in the lecture) are all true together?

Lecture 16

Are Freedom and Foreknowledge Compatible?

In this lecture, we consider a crucial question about the compatibility of God's foreknowledge (knowledge of the future) to human free will (our ability to freely choose what we will do). Whether freedom and foreknowledge are compatible is a question that explores the concept of God and examines whether the facts of our world are consistent with God's existence. What's more, this question is relevant to other philosophical issues regarding the nature of truth, time, and the possibility of free will.

The Libertarian Intuition

- The question we consider in this lecture regards human free will, or *metaphysical freedom*. The concept of metaphysical freedom aligns with a classic philosophical notion called the *libertarian intuition*—that free will requires alternate possibilities. In order to freely choose to do some action X, it must be possible to not do action X. If there is only one action you can take, then you cannot act freely. You would have no choice.

- As we've noted in past lectures, free will is important to many religious believers. For some, the preservation of free will is the reason God allows moral evil to occur. Moreover, free will seems to be required for moral responsibility. We cannot be morally responsible for an action if we were not able to freely decide on that action.

- American philosopher Harry Frankfurt captured the libertarian intuition in his now-famous *principle of alternate possibilities*: "A person is morally responsible for what he has done only if he could have done otherwise."

Middle Knowledge

- If God exists and is omniscient, it seems that we can't be free, and if we are not free, then we cannot be held morally responsible for what we do. This is problematic for theistic belief for many reasons; one is that it makes the preservation of free will an inadequate response to the problem of evil.

- There are a number of common solutions to the freedom/foreknowledge problem, but most of them fall short. For example, some suggest that freedom and foreknowledge are compatible because, by having foreknowledge, God is not using his power to actively force you to make a certain decision. However, the freedom/foreknowledge problem is not a problem of action but of logical consequence. The suggestion that God has foreknowledge logically entails that you do not have alternate possibilities—and if you don't have alternate possibilities, you aren't free.

- Others suggest *middle knowledge* as a solution to the freedom/foreknowledge problem. This is the suggestion that God knows how every person would freely choose to behave in every possible circumstance and that God can know what actions you will take in the future by simply knowing which person you are.

- Although middle knowledge is regularly touted as a solution to the freedom/foreknowledge problem, it is nothing of the kind. The doctrine of middle knowledge simply assumes that freedom and foreknowledge are compatible. It assumes that foreknowledge of a free choice is possible not only for you but also for every person that could ever exist. Yet it does not explain how this is possible, nor does it suggest a reason to doubt the premises or structure of the freedom/foreknowledge argument.

Backtracking Counterfactual Objection

- Luis de Molina, the 16th-century Jesuit theologian responsible for the doctrine of middle knowledge, admitted its flaws and suggested an alternative solution to the freedom/foreknowledge problem. This solution, defended in the 20th century by J. T. Sanders and Alvin Plantinga, is called the *backtracking counterfactual objection*.

- The backtracking counterfactual objection suggests that even if God does have foreknowledge, it's still within your power to act otherwise because, if you were to act otherwise, then God would just have had a different belief than he did. In other words, if you were to act differently, God would have believed differently than he had.

- Unfortunately, the problem is that God can't have believed differently than he did. The fact that God believed as he did is already a fact, written in the past, that cannot be undone. God's believing differently than he did is no longer possible; thus, your acting otherwise is no longer possible.

- Although the backtracking counterexamples do not solve the problem, such counterfactuals are still true: If you were to behave differently, God would have believed differently. The reason is that our future action determines the content of God's past knowledge.

Omnitemporalism

- Consider this thought experiment: You are in a movie theater watching a movie, wondering how it will end. You can imagine many possible endings, but there's really only one way the movie can end. As you're watching it, every frame of the movie is already wound into the reel in a certain sequence. Even though you see only one frame at a time, the end of the movie exists before you even see it.

- The doctrine of divine foreknowledge suggests that our timeline is like that movie reel. God can know what the future holds only if it already exists. Although each moment is being shown to us in a certain order, they already all exist. Consequently, no other future is possible—just as no other ending of the movie is possible; thus, free will is impossible.

- Philosophically speaking, God's foreknowledge is incompatible with free will because it entails a temporal ontology—or view of time—called *omnitemporalism*, which is incompatible with free will. If free will requires alternate possibilities, one cannot be free if the future already exists. Yet God's having foreknowledge entails omnitemporalism. Although God's foreknowledge does not make you do what you do, it does entail that your future actions are already written on the timeline.

- Some philosophers have suggested that God is atemporal; that is, God is outside the timeline and, thus, doesn't believe anything at a particular past moment. Instead, God sits above the timeline, comprehending it as a whole.

- We cannot be free without alternate possibilities, and there are no alternate possibilities if the future already exists. But if God sits outside the entire timeline, then the entire timeline exists—past, present, and future. As long as omnitemporalism is true, there is only one possible future, which means there is no human free will.

The Story of Osmo

- Consider the philosopher Richard Taylor's story of Osmo. A man named Osmo stumbles on a book called *The Life of Osmo*, which seems to tell his entire life story. He reads the book from his birth to the present day, and it gets everything right, all the way up to the sentence about his finding the book and reading it. Osmo realizes that the book has been on the shelf for a long while and, in fact, was published before his birth. He skips to the end to read about a flight he will take and how he dies when the aircraft crashes on the runway at Fort Wayne.

- Osmo decides that he can prevent his own death by never getting on a plane to Fort Wayne. But three years later, he takes a flight to St. Paul. When that flight is diverted to Fort Wayne, Osmo hijacks the plane in hopes of landing it at another airfield and ends up causing the crash himself. It seems quite clear that Osmo cannot act other than the book says he will. Osmo's life was prewritten, even if the book never existed.

- But that's true for us all. There is a set of true propositions that describes each of our lives. But it doesn't need to be written for us to realize that the propositions that describe our lives must all have truthmakers and that those truthmakers would be all the events of our life. Given that those propositions would be true before our life occurs, all the events of our lives exist before they occur. Ultimately, the basic axioms of logic and the correspondence theory of truth entail a temporal ontology that is incompatible with free will. This problem is known as *logical fatalism*.

"Fuzzy Logic" Systems

- Perhaps propositions about our future actions are neither true nor false until we make or fail to make the choice in question. If so, then we

don't need future events as truthmakers—just present and past ones. This suggestion allows us to reject omnitemporalism and embrace a temporal ontology called the *growing block*. According to the growing block, all that exists is the present and the past, and the past continually grows as the occurrence of the present adds moments to it.

- But suggesting that propositions about the future are neither true nor false would require us to develop a new system of logic. Perhaps propositions could have three truth values, such as true, false, or indeterminate, as philosopher Craig Bourne has suggested. Or maybe the truth value of propositions falls along a continuum, akin to the suggestions of Czech philosopher Vilém Novák.

- These are intriguing suggestions, but it is extremely difficult to get so-called "multivalued" or "fuzzy logic" systems to cohere with all our logical intuitions. For example, it appears obvious that for any given future action you might take, the following proposition is true: "Either you will do that action, or you will not do that action." In fact, the statement is not only true, but it's also a tautology—it must be true. For any given proposition P, either P or not P.

- Another temporal ontology that might present a solution is called *presentism*, endorsed by Arthur Prior in the mid-20th century. As its name suggests, presentism rejects the existence of the past and future and suggests that everything exists only in the present.

Changing the Future

- A final issue related to the freedom/foreknowledge problem is the question of whether we can change the future.

- Suppose the future contains the event of your choosing to eat pizza at noon tomorrow. But you think you have the power to change this fact tomorrow by eating a turkey sandwich instead. Then, it was not the case, the previous day, that the future contained the event of your eating pizza. By eating the turkey sandwich, you made it the case that the future had always contained the event of your eating

a turkey sandwich. The notion of "changing the future" is logically incoherent.

- As we shall see, omnitemporalism is not the only thing that raises serious questions about free will. Many other arguments, both philosophic and scientific, suggest that human free will may indeed be an illusion. The answer to the crucial question "Do we have free will?"—which we ask in the next lecture—may simply be no.

Suggested Sources

Pinnock, *The Openness of God*.

Taylor, *Metaphysics*.

Questions to Consider

1. To avoid facing the incompatibility of human freedom and divine foreknowledge, *open theists* suggest that God does not have foreknowledge and yet is still all-knowing. They suggest that the future does not exist for God to know—and, thus, his lack of knowledge of it is not a defect. To be all-knowing, God must simply know everything that is true (and believe nothing false). If there is no future, nothing can be true of it; thus, God's not knowing about it doesn't mean he has failed to know something that is true. Are the open theists right? Must God know the future to be all-knowing? Do you find open theism problematic? If so, what is so important about believing that God knows the future? And which temporal ontology does open theism cohere with?
2. Suppose you found the book of your life, as Osmo did. Would you read it? How much of it would you read? Keep in mind, even if you did read it cover to cover, you could not deviate from what it says you would do. Try as you might, like Osmo, your efforts to prevent what it predicts would just make it come true. How much would you read?

Lecture 17

Do Our Souls Make Us Free?

Inherent in our concept of free will is a belief in free decision making. When presented with options for action, we consider them mentally, and it is generally believed that this mental consideration takes place in the soul. In this lecture, we discuss why the soul hypothesis, or substance dualism, is widely rejected in the philosophical community. We then conclude with an examination of experiments in neuroscience that cast serious doubt on the existence of free will and the concept of a soul in general.

Substance Dualism

- Substance dualists believe that humans consist of two separable substances: the physical and the mental. They think that the mental substance can and does exist independently of the physical substance following death.

- According to substance dualists, the soul is a nonmaterial substance that exists above and beyond—and is even separable from—the physical body. Your brain may make your soul aware of options, but it is in your soul that the options are considered and weighed and where decisions are made. And once a decision is made, the soul reaches out from beyond the physical world and causes your body to take action.

- Most people believe that our souls make us free—that there really are alternate possibilities, and the mental process of considering two options for action could turn out either way.

Phineas Gage

- We have good reason to think that souls are a fiction, however. To understand why the soul hypothesis, or substance dualism, is so widely rejected in the philosophical community, it's always helpful to begin with Phineas Gage. Phineas Gage was an even-tempered railroad worker in the 1800s. After an accident severely damaged part of his forebrain, however, his personality changed completely.

- If the soul hypothesis were correct, Gage's personality would be housed in his soul and could not be affected by physical damage to his brain. This led to the realization that Gage's personality—and, indeed, everyone's personality—is not housed in our souls but in our brains.

- Although Gage's story is hotly debated, it sparked a wave of discoveries about the brain that led to the realization that all our mental faculties are a direct result of brain activity. Visual operations are not housed in a separable substance but in the back of the brain, in a region now known as the visual cortex. Emotions are the result of brain activity primarily in the limbic system. Decisions are made by the prefrontal cortex. Damage to these centers in the brain eliminates the ability to perform certain mental operations.

- This discovery is problematic for the notion of free will for two reasons. First, it seems to entail that when we're making a decision, there really are no alternate possibilities. Second, it implies that the result of the decision-making process is really not up to us.

Brain Structure

- The brain is a collection of neurons sending electrical signals along pathways called axons. Neurochemicals help conduct these electrical signals. The way the neurons are wired together (and fire signals to one another) determines the kind of signals that they send to the nervous system—which determines how we behave.

- As a biological organ, your brain is determined by genetics. And the structure of your DNA is not up to you; therefore, any action that is a result of the genetic structure in your brain cannot be said to be free. Of course, genetics does not play the only role in determining how your brain is configured. In fact, biologically, our brains are able to reconfigure themselves based on our experiences with our environment.

- However, your choice to place yourself in a particular environment is a result of your brain structure, as well. And once we retrace this process all the way back to whenever your brain started to function, we realize

Ultimately, all of a child's actions are a result of his brain structure, which is ultimately a result of his genetics and environment—both of which are ultimately out of his control.

that none of your actions was ever up to you. They were all simply the result of a brain structure that was beyond your control.

Quantum Randomness

- If our behavior is ultimately determined by the functioning of the brain, we are not free, because we cannot behave differently than we do. In other words, there are no "alternate possibilities" when it comes to how we will act or what we will decide. And, as we discussed in the previous lecture, free will seems to require alternate possibilities.

- It turns out, however, that not all physical systems have outcomes determined by the laws of physics. One of the major discoveries of the 20th century was quantum mechanics. According to quantum mechanics, some physical events—that is, events at the quantum level, or the realm of entities smaller than atoms—are truly random. Thus, if the outcome of some series of neural firings was dependent upon how

or when a certain quantum event occurred, we could say that there is more than one possible outcome—that there are alternate possibilities.

- The problem is that this fact won't actually help us defend the idea that we have free will. First of all, it's not at all clear that the brain is a physical system whose outcome is dependent on certain quantum events. The behavior of the system is predictable, even though the behavior of the parts is not.

- Or think of a computer: There actually are random quantum events happening inside your computer all the time, but none of them dictates the outcome of its processes. When you run a certain program or click a certain icon, you'll always get the same result.

- The reason for this is that the causal reactions that dictate how a computer behaves happen above the quantum level—at the level of chips and circuits, at which any quantum effects are averaged out. What's more, the causal reactions that dictate how a brain behaves happen at the level of chemicals and cells, where the effects of quantum randomness are not felt.

Flaws in the Soul Hypothesis

- We could argue that the soul really does reach down from beyond the physical world to cause our behavior in that it causes our brain to fire in certain ways or even causes the outcome of quantum events in our brain.

- But this suggestion contradicts fundamental laws of science. Such a theory violates the law of conservation of energy, which states that energy cannot be created or destroyed. It also violates the law of conservation of momentum, which states that the total momentum of any system always remains constant. What's more, it violates the "causal closure of the physical," which states that physical events that do have causes only have physical causes.

- Its conflict with established science makes the soul hypothesis very un-conservative. Its scope is also poor because it raises unanswered

philosophical problems. The soul hypothesis also lacks simplicity, because it introduces an extra entity made out of an extra substance to explain our behavior. Clearly, the soul hypothesis is not an adequate hypothesis.

Decisions Driven by Emotion

- Consider what goes on in the brain during decision making. First of all, our brain functions by sending signals back and forth, and different parts of the brain vie for control by sending inhibitory signals back and forth along pathways between those parts.

- For example, if you have an emotional reaction to something that causes you to want to behave a certain way—but you know, rationally, that it's not the best way to behave—your emotional limbic system and your rational prefrontal cortex will basically battle it out. Your limbic system will send signals to your cortex, suggesting that you lash out, and your cortex will send inhibitory signals to your limbic system to try to dampen its influence.

- Unfortunately—according to New York University neuroscientist Joseph DeLoux—the inhibitory connections running from the cortex are never as strong as those running from the limbic system. Thus, even for adults, our emotions control most of our actions. We may think that our reasoning is responsible for the decisions we make, but most of our decisions are driven by our emotions; afterward, we just rationalize our emotional decisions.

The Readiness Potential

- If we consider scientific experiments about what goes on in the brain during decision making, things look even worse for free will.

- In the 1960s, the neuroscientists Hans Helmut Kornhuber and Lüder Deecke discovered that it's possible to measure brain activity before a decision occurs and actually see the processes that led to the decision being made. As it turns out, those processes happen before the decision is consciously made and have nothing to do with the

part of the brain responsible for conscious decisions. They called this phenomenon a *readiness potential*.

- Since the 1960s, Kornhuber and Deecke's findings have been supported and reiterated in many ways. In the 1980s, Benjamin Libet showed that the readiness potential occurs 0.35 seconds before a decision is consciously made.

- In 2008, neuroscientist John-Dylan Haynes performed an experiment in which people decided which button to push while watching a series of letters being displayed and reported what letter was displayed while making their decision. Haynes found that unconscious parts of the brain were busy doing their work to bring about the eventual action seconds before the reported letter appeared—long before the conscious decision was made.

- Neuroscientist Itzhak Fried did a similar experiment where he observed neurons more directly. Not only was he able to see the brain unconsciously deciding what to do before the conscious decision, but he was even able to predict the conscious decision with 80–90 percent accuracy before it was made.

- What these experiments seem to indicate is that your conscious decision is an afterthought. The brain is literally creating the illusion that we have free will.

- In fact, even if we don't have free will, it's not clear that we could actually believe that we don't. Next time you're making a decision, try to believe that you are not doing so freely, and see how successful you are. Perhaps, when asked whether you believe that we have free will, the correct response is Isaac Bashevis Singer's: "We must believe in free will—we have no choice."

Suggested Sources

Carter, *Mapping the Mind*.

Damasio, *Descartes' Error*.

Gazzaniga, *Who's in Charge?*

Sacks, Oliver. *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*.

Questions to Consider

1. Imagine you are sitting in a room with one door. You are told that you are free to leave, but sitting across from you is someone you would really like to have a conversation with. For this reason, you choose to stay. Unbeknownst to you, however, the door was locked, which means that leaving the room wasn't possible. Was your choice to stay in the room free? Why or why not? What does your answer say about what is required for free will?
2. Think of Kant's noumenal/phenomenal distinction mentioned at the end of this lecture. Would it be accurate to say that the noumenal world is one in which free will does not exist, and the phenomenal world is one in which it does? If so, does that mean the phenomenal world is one in which moral responsibility exists? If so, does that "satisfy" your intuitions regarding your own free will, or do you think you have free will on the noumenal level?

Lecture 18

What Does It Mean to Be Free?

Philosophers called *compatibilists* have suggested that if we understand free will correctly, the notion that humans are free becomes defensible. Some of these philosophers argue that, while free will does indeed require alternate possibilities, determinism is not incompatible with alternate possibilities. In this lecture, we examine the arguments of the compatibilists and conclude by considering the wide-ranging consequences of admitting that humans have no free will.

The Consequence Argument

- The argument that determinism and alternate possibilities are incompatible was most famously articulated by Carl Ginet and dubbed by Peter van Inwagen as the *consequence argument*. It posits that if determinism is true, there's only one possible future. Because the past has already occurred and because determinism entails that the laws of nature causally necessitate only one possible outcome of past facts, it seems that there's only one possible future—there are no alternate possibilities.

- But some compatibilists, such as David Lewis and John Martin Fischer, insist that the consequence argument is unsound—that even in a deterministic universe, there are alternate possibilities.

- Their argument goes like this: Despite the fact that one and only one future is causally determined, it's still the case that other futures are possible; they're just possible in a different sense of the word. An agent acting otherwise is still possible because agents have the power to have acted otherwise. Fischer specifically suggests that, if the agent had chosen to do otherwise, the past would have been different than it is.

- But this argument misses the point. It's true that acting differently would entail that the past would be different; the problem is that the past can no longer be different than it is. If determinism is true, acting

otherwise would require the past to be different than it is—which is now impossible. Therefore, acting otherwise is not a genuine possibility.

Free Will without Alternate Possibilities

- Perhaps free will doesn't require alternate possibilities. For example, British philosopher P. F. Strawson suggests that whether or not a person is morally responsible for his action—and, in turn, whether his action is free—is determined by the reaction of his community to his action. If they judge him to be morally responsible and free, then he is. And they will do this, even if determinism is true and there are no alternate possibilities.

- But suggesting that an agent's free will is dependent upon the reaction of a community seems a bit questionable. After all, the notion of whether one is free, in the metaphysical sense, should be independent of the opinion of others.

- The philosopher Harry Frankfurt gives us an objective reason for rejecting the libertarian notion that free will requires alternate possibilities. Following is an adaptation of Frankfurt's thought experiment:
    - Imagine a person, Oswald, who has an opportunity to kill another person, Kennedy. Let's say that Oswald will have Kennedy in the sights of his rifle and will have the opportunity to kill Kennedy by deciding to pull the trigger. But suppose there is an evil Russian neuroscientist who wants to make sure that Kennedy dies. The neuroscientist plants a machine in Oswald's brain to monitor his brain activity to make sure that he will kill Kennedy when the time comes.

    - If the machine detects that Oswald is about to pull the trigger on his own, it will do nothing. But if it sees that Oswald won't pull the trigger, then the machine will kick in and make his neurons fire in such a way that he will pull the trigger.

    - In this scenario it seems that it is possible for Oswald to freely choose to kill Kennedy even though it's not possible for him do

otherwise; thus, it seems that free will does not really require alternate possibilities.

Different Versions of Compatibilism

- The central claim of the compatibilist is that all that's required for an agent to freely perform an action is for that action to somehow be driven or motivated by some component of the agent. The simplest way to think about this is in terms of wants and desires. A compatibilist might say that we perform an action freely as long as we do so in response to our wants and desires.

- Other compatibilists make different observations about what is required for free will. Philosophers Daniel Dennett and John Martin Fischer have developed a version of compatibilism that defines freedom in terms of responsiveness to reason. Roughly put, if a decision is reached as a process of reasonable deliberation, the action is said to be free.

- It's very easy to defend the notion that humans have free will in a compatibilist sense. For example, even if the behavior of our brains is deterministic—causally determined by the laws of physics—that doesn't mean we can't be free. It can still be the case that our actions are a consequence of our second-order desires or rational deliberation—even if our rational deliberation could not have ended any other way or even if our second-order desires could have produced anything else.

Intuitions about Freedom

- The biggest problem for compatibilism is that it doesn't tend to track with most people's intuitions about what it means to be free. Suppose, for example, you built a robot and programmed it to have certain wants and desires and certain second-order wants and desires and to always act in accordance with the second-order wants and desires after a rational deliberation. Everything the robot does would ultimately be a result of your programming it.

- It seems that the robot does not act freely. However, according to the compatibilist's definition, it does, because it acts in accordance with its

second-order wants and desires after a rational deliberation. In reality, it seems the robot is not to blame or praise for anything it does; its maker is. Yet according to the compatibilist definition, the robot is free and morally responsible for everything it does.

- This is problematic because our biology suggests that we are like the robot, programmed by our genetics and environment to behave a certain way. But for compatibilism, this doesn't matter; the causal explanation for your action could trace all the way back to the beginning of the universe, but as long as you are involved at some point, you'd be free.

Agent Causation

- The notion that we need to cause our actions for them to be free leads us to our next theory of free will: *agent causation*. Despite its name, agent causation does not merely suggest that an action is free if it's caused by an agent. Agent causation theorists believe that the only way for there to be alternate possibilities is if our actions are caused by ourselves. Consequently, agent causation theorists are usually not compatibilists.

- But there is a version of agent causation that is compatibilistic. In this view, in order for an action to be free (and for one to be morally responsible for it), all that's required is that the action be caused by an agent. This view is persuasively argued by philosopher Ned Markosian.

- Markosian observes that we need not think of agents in a dualistic sense—as some kind of soul or mind that exists independent of one's body. An agent is simply a person, and we can identify persons with bodies. Markosian notes that "being caused by the agent" is not the only thing agent causation usually requires for an action to be free. The action also can't be caused by events outside the agent in question; the agent must be the only cause of the action.

- Consider this: An agent chooses to pass the salt in response to someone's request that the salt be passed. By all meaningful accounts of causation, asking for the salt is what causes it to be passed, yet we

would still say that the agent causes the salt to be passed and does so freely.

- All in all, Markosian suggests that an action is morally free if and only if that action is caused by an agent—even if that action can also be said to be caused by events or forces outside the agent. In order for an action to be free, a causal explanation must be found that traces back to and ends in the agent, but it is not necessary that this be the only existing explanation.

A Future without Free Will

- If we admitted that humans don't have free will—that their actions are a result of their brain structure, which is ultimately outside their control—it would make no sense to hold them morally responsible for their behavior. It would be difficult to blame criminals and hold

If we admit that there is no free will, then it seems to make sense to try to undo the damage done to criminals by their genetics and environment; jails should be rehabilitation centers instead of retribution centers.

them responsible for their actions, knowing that there are causal explanations for their behavior that extend far beyond their power.

- But as it currently stands, especially in the mind of the public, a major justification for punishing criminals for their behavior is the idea that they are morally blameworthy and, thus, morally deserving of punishment. But if we admit that there's no free will, we can no longer punish people. Without free will and moral responsibility, no one would deserve punishment.

- If we do one day finally admit we don't have free will, it will likely be because neuroscience has so drastically advanced that we can no longer defend the notion of free will in any way. But once we have such advanced knowledge of the brain, we will likely be able to correct any malfunction that leads to criminal behavior with a medical procedure. We would not need to expose criminals to corrective environments for a long period of time; we could simply adjust their faulty neural wiring with brain surgery.

- One might still object that such a procedure is immoral because it interferes with the person's free will. However, we're simply giving the criminal's brain a new cause for its wiring. Instead of genetics and environment, it's the surgery. The criminal no more has free will before or after the surgery than a computer does before or after being reprogrammed.

- This leads to the possibility that not having free will may dehumanize us. But, more likely, it will simply change our understanding of what it means to be human.

Suggested Sources

Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange.*

Johnson and Schmitz, "Johnny Cash, Prison Reform and Capital Punishment."

Kane, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will.*

Questions to Consider

1. Is there a difference between believing something philosophically—being convinced by the arguments and concluding that it is true—and "really believing" something? Can you philosophically believe that we do not have free will yet not "really" believe it? How might this relate to Kant's noumenal/phenomenal distinction?
2. Which theory of free will do you find most intuitive? Libertarian, compatibilism, or Markosian agent causation? Why do you favor it? Is it the case that we are "free" according to (what you find to be) the most intuitive definition of free will?

Lecture 19

What Preserves Personal Identity?

In this lecture, we explore many aspects of the soul hypothesis as a response to the question of personal identity. We consider the concept of personal identity over time, or numerical identity; examine the idea of a soul in the context of free will; note the flaws in the soul hypothesis; trace the history of both Eastern and Western religious concepts; and contemplate whether the soul hypothesis can explain survival into the afterlife.

Personal Identity over Time

- Are you still the same person now as you were when you were eight years old? You might answer that you are not the same person you were when you were eight in the same way that people say "I am not the same person" after a traumatic event or after returning home from a war, for example.

- But when people come back from war and say they are not the same person, they don't mean it in a literal sense. They don't mean that the person who was born to their mother has died and a new, distinct, and unique person has come into existence. They simply mean that the kind of person they are has changed—they are qualitatively different.

- There are obvious qualitative differences between your previous and current selves. Many things about you have changed since you were eight. Nevertheless, you are one and the same person—you are still what philosophers call "numerically identical" to your eight-year-old self. You are the same object—the same thing. When philosophers refer to "personal identity over time," they are referring to numerical identity.

What Is the Soul?

- A customary—but unsatisfactory—answer to philosophical questions regarding personal identity is that you have the same soul as your eight-year-old self. The notion that humans are ensouled beings

is quite common, and it would seem that the soul hypothesis could provide an easy answer to the question of personal identity.

- As a proper answer to the question of personal identity, our conception of the soul needs to be directly related to the notion of soul as discussed in the lectures on free will. The soul is you—a separable nonmaterial entity, composed of a nonmaterial substance, that houses or contains your mentality. It's where visual experiences are had and emotions are felt. It houses your personality and makes your decisions based on it.

- Although mental activity can flow in and out of the soul—you have different experiences, memories, and personality over time—the substance of the soul supposedly remains the same. It is one and the same object over time. And so, the theory goes, it is in virtue of possessing the same soul that you now and your eight-year-old self are the same person.

- In a way, your soul is like a drinking glass; you can fill a glass with different liquids at different times, but it's still the same glass—it's still the same object made of the same material. Likewise, the mentality that our soul now houses may be different than the mentality it once housed, but it's still the same soul.

Flaws in the Soul Hypothesis

- As an answer to the question of personal identity, the soul hypothesis fails for many reasons. First, the soul hypothesis conflicts with neuroscience and conservation laws in physics and, in general, cannot account for downward causation. Simply put, we have good reason to think that souls don't exist; thus, they can't very well explain personal identity.

- Second, if the soul did preserve personal identity, it would both be necessary and sufficient for personal identity. In other words, you couldn't be the same person over time without having the same soul over time, and having the same soul over time would be enough to make you the same person. But, upon examination, it seems that neither of these conditions is true.

- Third, in order for souls to preserve personal identity, souls must be numerically distinct. They must be different objects. Your soul must be a different object than someone else's soul. In order for souls to be numerically distinct, they have to be distinct and distinguishable even when they're empty—even when they have no mentality. The problem is that there's no way to distinguish bare souls. They would be identical in every way; there would be no property that delineates them or differentiates them.

Leibniz's Identity of Indiscernibles

- As a thought experiment, let's say that pencils were produced by the same machine in the same factory. All the pencils come out exactly the same in weight, length, width, mass, and so on. However, they are distinct physical objects because they still have different properties. Gottfried Leibniz articulated a law called the *identity of indiscernibles*: If two objects have all the same properties, then they really are not two objects at all; they are one object.

- But two physically identical pencils will still have different properties. For example, they will always differ regarding the property of location; they will never be in exactly the same location—taking up the exact same space—at the same time. Even though they are materially identical, because physical objects can be distinguished by their physical location, they are not one and the same object.

- Two bare souls would not only lack all material properties, but they would also seem to have no properties at all—except for the property of being able to house mentality. But because both souls have that property, it cannot be used to distinguish them. If they were physical objects, we could distinguish them by location, but they are not physical objects; they do not have physical location. It would seem, therefore, that they share all the same properties—they are indistinguishable—and, thus, by Leibniz's law, two bare souls would actually be the same object.

- We might say that what distinguishes your soul from someone else's is that your soul is attached to your body; however, being attached to a body is not an essential property of the soul. For example, your

Unlike, for example, pencils produced in a factory, there is no way to distinguish bare souls; there is no property that delineates or differentiates them.

soul isn't attached your body in the afterlife, but it's still yours. Further, if souls really are numerically distinct, they can be transferred from one body to another and retain their identity. But if being attached to your body is what makes a soul yours, it's no longer your soul.

Eastern Religious Concepts

- It is commonly held that if souls don't exist, then survival into the afterlife is impossible. After all, most people think there is an afterlife because they believe that, upon death, your soul detaches from your body and floats away to heaven. If souls don't exist, that can't happen.

- In reality, however, the nonexistence of the soul does not threaten the religious notion that an afterlife is possible; in fact, many religions do not subscribe to the existence of a soul, and their conception of the afterlife has nothing to do with souls.

- For example, the Hindu conception of *Atman*, which is often translated in English as "soul," is drastically different from the Western concept of

soul. The Hindu Atman is supposed to be identical to Brahma—which is, basically, all of reality itself. And that clearly is not true of the Western concept of soul. In fact, it's not even clear if souls are compatible with the Hindu belief in reincarnation.

- Traditionally, Buddhists don't even believe in persons—much less souls. The Buddha said: "Only through ignorance and delusion do men indulge in the dream that their souls are separate and self-existent entities."

Western Religious Concepts

- The ancient Jews did not believe in souls either—only *ruach*, a word often translated as "spirit" but that simply means "wind" or "breath of life." The Jews believed that persons were essentially physical entities. What's more, the ancient Jews did not really believe in the afterlife—at least not a conscious one where people go to live after they die.

- According to the 1906 *Jewish Encyclopedia*, "The belief that the soul continues its existence after the dissolution of the body is a matter of philosophical or theological speculation rather than of simple faith, and is accordingly nowhere expressly taught in Holy Scripture."

- Because their roots were in Judaism, early Christians didn't believe in souls either. Instead, early Christians believed that persons were physical objects. That is why the resurrection of the body was so important to early Christian theology; it is only by the resurrection of the body that existence into the afterlife can be facilitated. In fact, belief in the resurrection of the body doesn't make any sense if you believe in souls. There is no need for resurrection of the body if the soul survives into the afterlife without it.

- In reality—just like the conception of God as a perfect being—the Western notion of the soul was a philosophical invention defended by Plato that was integrated into Christian theology by St. Augustine.

- Recognizing the philosophical problems that the soul creates for Christians—and with an understanding that the true origins of Christianity did not include the existence of a soul—many Christians

want to rid Christian theology of the notion of a soul and return to the Jewish conception of the person as a physical object. This idea stretches perhaps as far back as the medieval philosopher Aquinas (who argued against many Platonic ideas) and extends to present-day philosophers and theologians.

- Christian philosopher John Hick argues that God will facilitate our survival into the afterlife by re-creating us. First, God would observe or record the physical configuration of your brain upon death. He would then make you a new, perfect body and write that configuration onto the brain of that new body. The resultant person would have the same mentality that you did—the same memories, the same personality. Then, God would place that body in heaven. Of course, believing that God will actually accomplish this will simply be a matter of faith.

Suggested Sources

Davis, "Life after Life."

Johnson, "Do Souls Exist?"

The Mr. T Experience, "The History of the Concept of the Soul" (song).

Questions to Consider

1. Where did you first learn about souls? Did what you were taught align with how souls are conceived of in this lecture? Were there any reasons put forth for thinking souls exist? If so, what were they, and were they any good?
2. Where did you first learn about the afterlife? How were you told that life into the hereafter would be facilitated? Was your soul to survive? Were you to be resurrected? Where there good reasons put forth for believing that this was true, or were you simply told that it was true?
3. The average Christian conception of the afterlife includes both the survival of the soul and the resurrection of the dead. Having both seems to be unnecessary. If your soul survives (and facilitates your survival), why would you need to be resurrected? If you are going to be resurrected anyway, what would it matter if your soul survived, as well? To reconcile these views, some suggest that your soul survives your death but then will reunited with your body when everyone is raised from the dead. Is this soul/resurrection theory of the afterlife preferable to the soul-only theory and/or the resurrection-only theory? Or is this story simply a way to reconcile what the scripture says about the afterlife with what philosophically influenced theologians have said about it?

Lecture 20

Are Persons Mere Minds?

In this lecture, we investigate various criteria for the preservation of personal identity—specifically, John Locke's theory that memory preserves personal identity and Derek Parfit's psychological criterion, which entails that psychological continuity exists if there are overlapping chains of strong connectedness and this continuity has the right kind of cause.

John Locke's Memory Criterion

- In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 17th-century philosopher John Locke observes that memory preserves personal identity. In short, according to Locke, having the same memories over time makes your past, present, and future selves the same person. However, Locke's memory criterion has some clear shortcomings.

- For example, Locke's theory seems to entail that people are not responsible for their actions when they undoubtedly are. Suppose, for example, that a friend got so drunk that he blacked out. Although he continued to function and act, when he woke up the next morning, he couldn't remember what he'd done. It would be wrong for him to avoid responsibility for any actions by claiming that he "wasn't himself" when he blacked out—that is, because he couldn't remember anything, he wasn't responsible for it. Yet if memory preserves personal identity, he could rightly make this claim.

- We can see the relevance of this to our question about the possibility of an afterlife by looking at how some of Locke's contemporaries criticized his view. They suggested that, if Locke was right, then sinners could avoid divine punishment and evade hell by causing themselves to have amnesia. If memory is what is responsible for preserving personal identity, if you forget your sins, you cannot be held responsible for them.

- In addition, if memory is to preserve personal identity, it must have all the same properties of personal identity—that is, it must function in the same way. But it doesn't seem to. For example, personhood doesn't have any gaps. As time moves on, you are always the same person. From the moment you're born to the moment you die, you are you. But memory has a number of gaps in it. There are a number of moments in your life that you can't remember, including when you are sleeping.

- Yet you are still identical to those past instances of yourself that you do not now remember. Most certainly, you are you—you are identical to yourself—every moment of your life.

Thomas Reid

- Philosopher Thomas Reid criticized Locke's memory criterion with a thought experiment about a brave officer who became a senile general. Imagine a boy who grows up to be a brave officer in the army. The brave officer remembers being a boy; thus, the brave officer and the boy are identical. The officer gets older and becomes a general, but the general suffers from senility and doesn't remember being the brave officer. Thus, the officer and the general are not identical. But the general still remembers being a small boy.

- According to Locke's criterion, the boy is identical to the officer, and the boy is identical to the general. However, because the general became senile, the officer is not identical to the general. But this is a logical impossibility. If A = B and B = C, then A = C. It seems that Locke's memory criterion simply doesn't work.

- Perhaps Locke's suggestion was too simplistic; it doesn't account for all the different things that memory can do or all the dynamic ways that memory behaves. Perhaps by taking into account the way memories overlap and incorporating that into the way memory preserves personal identity, we could avoid some of the objections.

- Perhaps if we make our memory criterion function like identity—taking into account memory overlap regardless of whether it runs from the past to the future or the future to the past—then we could avoid the

objection. In other words, we could simply say that if A remembers or is remembered by B, and B remembers or is remembered by C, then there is a memory connection (and, thus, identity) between A and C.

Flaws in the Memory Criterion

- The memory criterion seems to have everything backward. Put simply, your memories belong to you; you do not belong to your memories. In other words, a memory is yours in virtue of the fact that you have it. You are not you in virtue of the fact that you have a memory.

- To understand this problem, consider the possibility of someone else's memories being implanted into you. We could tweak the memory criterion by suggesting that only remembering "your memories" makes you identical to the person who had them. Remembering someone else's memories doesn't.

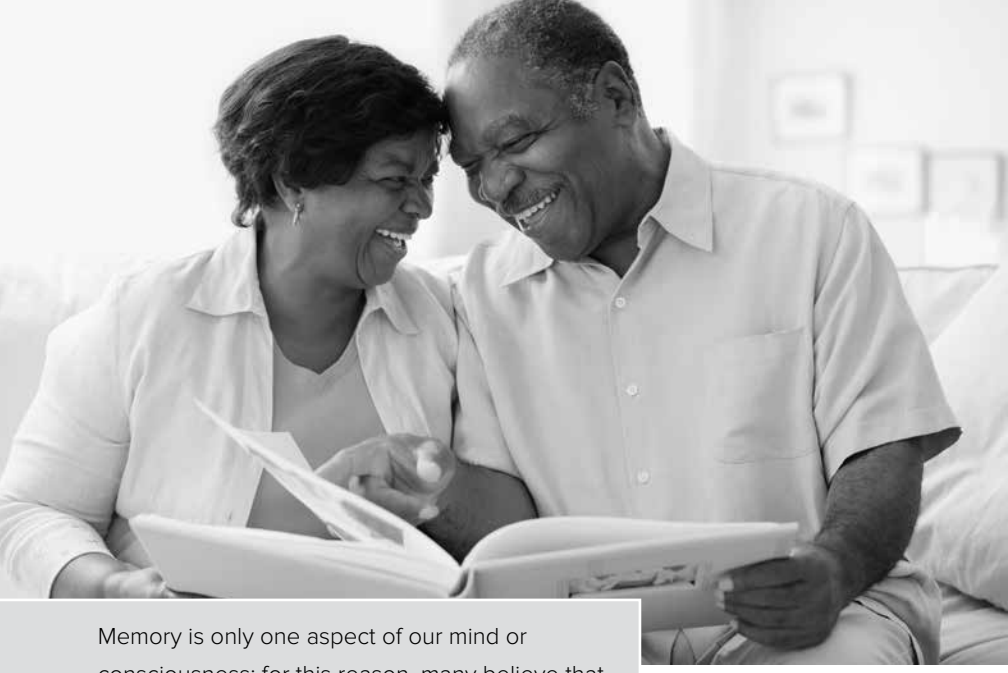
- In short, you can define who "you" are by appealing to memories that only "you" have. To say that only having "your" memories preserves personal identity presumes that personal identity is already established before we even consider memories; this criterion is circular and, thus, refutes itself.

Derek Parfit's Psychological Continuity Criterion

- Even though the memory criterion falls short, it seems that, in a significant way, you are your mind—you are the consciousness that persists over time. In fact, many feel that it is the continuity of our entire psychology over time that preserves our identity.

- Think about the psychological state you're in right now—your visual and auditory experiences, your memories, your thoughts, your emotions, your beliefs, your desires. Call all of that together your psychological state.

- Now, consider the psychological state you were in a moment ago. Likely, there's a great deal of overlap or connection between those two states. If they had only one thing in common, we'd say they were connected, but likely they have many things in common. In fact, there's even a causal connection; past states lead to present ones.



Memory is only one aspect of our mind or consciousness; for this reason, many believe that it is the continuity of our entire psychology over time—not memory—that preserves our identity.

- Psychological continuity is simply the holding of overlapping chains of strong connectedness. Because there is a strong psychological connection between your psychological states over the past few days, we would say that they are in psychological continuity. And as we continue to trace your psychological states back through your life, we would see that each was strongly connected to those around it. We find a chain of connectedness and see a psychological continuity over your entire life.

- In light of this, we might propose a new criterion for the preservation of personal identity over time—one inspired by the work of the contemporary British philosopher Derek Parfit. It is the psychological criterion: "Psychological continuity exists if and only if there are overlapping chains of strong connectedness, and person X is identical to person Y if and only if there is such continuity and it has the right kind of cause."

John Hick's Counterexample

- Parfit's definition of the psychological criterion includes the addendum "right kind of cause" to avoid objections that arise from certain counterexamples. Following is an adaptation of a counterexample from John Hick.

- Let us suppose that Bob is walking along one day, trips, and falls into a manhole, killing himself. Let's suppose also that on the other side of the planet, George trips, falls, and hits his head in a way that erases his memories and his personality. But when George awakes, he has a psychology directly continuous with Bob's. George now even thinks that his name is Bob.

- Let's further suppose that the fact that this happened is a complete coincidence; there is no causal connection between the two events at all. Although George and Bob have similar psychologies, they are not really continuous; in order for George to be Bob, there would have to be some kind of causal connection between the two. If it's just a coincidence, then they are not the same person, no matter how psychologically similar they are.

Flaws in the Psychological Continuity Criterion

- The only way to argue that a certain kind of cause preserves personal identity is to rely on our intuitions regarding whether a case where that kind of causation occurred has preserved identity.

- The only way a divine action would preserve personality identity is if it is the right kind of cause, but of course, it's the right kind of cause only if it preserves personal identity. The answer comes down to our intuitions or assumptions.

- The psychological continuity criterion suggests that psychological continuity must be preserved by the right kind of cause, but there is no way to define what counts as the right kind of cause without simply appealing to intuitions about preserving personal identity. For this reason, the psychological continuity criterion is not helpful.

- What's more, even if we could define the right kind of cause, it's not clear that psychological continuity can truly define identity. Identity is a property that can trace to only one thing, whereas psychological continuity can trace to multiple things. If there was a qualitatively identical copy of you—that was physically identical to you in every way, including its brain structure—then it would be psychologically continuous with you, but it would not be numerically identical to you.

- The relationship of personal identity is unique, by definition. One and only one future person can be identical to you, and you can be identical to one and only one past person. However, because of the possibility of qualitative duplicates, it is possible for more than one future person to be psychologically continuous with you or for you to be psychologically continuous with more than one person in the past.

- In fact, we might call this the *duplicate problem*. Identity and psychological continuity must not be the same relationship; one is necessarily unique, and the other is not.

- The duplicate problem seems to suggest that the survival of personal identity is somehow tied to the survival of the body. Perhaps because you have the same body over time, you are the same person over time. This leads us to the question of the next lecture: Are you your body?

Suggested Sources

Hick, "Resurrection of the Person."

Johnson, "Is the Doctor Still the Doctor, Am I Still Me?"

Questions to Consider

1. Does the fact that someone can't remember doing something immoral in any way diminish his moral responsibility for it? (Assume that he is not lying and really can't remember.) Is he any less to blame? Why or why not? What if you couldn't remember something bad you did? Would you feel less morally responsible? Would you be?
2. Would you use a *Star Trek*–style transporter to travel? Potentially, you could travel anywhere on earth in mere seconds. But would the person on the other end really be you? Does information transport preserve personal identity? Does matter transport preserve identity? Why or why not?
3. If you hit your head and it erased your memory and changed your personality, would you be numerically a different person or just a different kind of person?

Lecture 21

Are Persons Just Bodies?

One philosophical view maintains that it is the body that preserves personal identity. By virtue of the fact that you and your eight-year-old self have the same body, you are the same person over time. If this view is correct, survival into the afterlife is possible only if some person in the afterlife can have the same body as you. In this lecture, we examine the strengths and weaknesses of the view that it is the preservation of the body that preserves our personal identity.

Physical Resurrection into the Afterlife

- Because the early Christians and Jews held that it is the preservation of the body that preserves personal identity, bodily resurrection played a prominent role in their understanding of the afterlife. For them, survival into the afterlife is not accomplished by the survival of the soul; one's identity is directly tied to one's body. Therefore, survival into the afterlife is accomplished by the physical resurrection of the body.

- This is why Jesus's resurrection is so important to early Christian theology. For example, according to Paul's writings in 1 Corinthians 15, belief in the resurrection is an essential component of Christianity. Paul's argument goes as follows: If Jesus was not resurrected, then there is no resurrection after death; if there's no resurrection, then there is no afterlife. What's more, if there is no afterlife, the Corinthians' faith is "empty," Paul's preaching is "in vain," and Christianity is pointless. As Paul himself says, "If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'"

Peter van Inwagen's Thought Experiment

- The notion that an afterlife can be accomplished by resurrecting the dead faces some serious objections. First of all, if your body preserves your personal identity, then whatever body is resurrected at the end of days would have to be the same body you had when you died.

The problem is that your body will have long since decomposed and turned to dust.

- Even the atoms that made up your body have reentered the ecosystem. There's only a limited amount of matter on earth, and it constantly goes through the cycle of life and death. Strictly speaking, at least some of the atoms that are in your body now were most likely atoms that belonged to some person in the past. In general, we all share so many atoms that, when it comes time for the resurrection, it will be impossible for everyone to be raised.

- Even if God did somehow ensure that everyone had unique atoms upon death, it's still not clear that a person resurrected by reconstruction is really the same person. Consider this thought experiment from the Christian philosopher Peter van Inwagen.
    - Suppose a little boy builds a house of LEGO bricks. He then goes out to play with his friends. While he's gone, his sister kicks over his LEGO house. Dad comes along, sees what happened, and rebuilds the house, just as his son had built it. He puts every piece in exactly the same place that it was.

    - The father's LEGO house is not only a qualitative duplicate, but it is also a physical duplicate. Yet it is not the son's LEGO house. Essential to the identity of the house that the son built was the fact that he built it. Thus, even though the father's house is made of the same material configured in exactly the same way, it's not numerically the same house. It seems, van Inwagen suggests, that just having the same body does not suffice for numerical identity. The causal process that preserves identity must be unbroken. The origin of the configuration makes a difference.

Ship of Theseus

- The idea that personal identity is preserved by body identity faces another challenge. To understand why, consider a classic philosophical thought experiment: the Ship of Theseus. The ancient Greek biographer Plutarch gives us one of the earliest versions of this puzzle.

- Theseus, the legendary founder of Athens, sailed home from Crete in a ship that the Athenians kept for hundreds of years afterward. Over time, the sails and planks decayed and had to be replaced one by one. Eventually, every plank had been replaced. The question is whether what remained was still Theseus's ship—one and the same object.

- This thought experiment raises the question of numerical identity, and the story is analogous to what happens with our own bodies. As we live, the cells that make up our body are replaced, every seven years or so. If we are going to equate personal survival with bodily survival, we must account for the fact that all the cells in our body are gradually replaced.

- Instead of thinking in terms of bodily identity, then, we can think in terms of bodily continuity. Just as there is tremendous overlap in our psychology from moment to moment, there is also overlap in our body's configuration. Most of the atoms in our body at this particular moment are the same atoms that we had the moment before. Thus, we might say that bodily continuity preserves personal identity.

- What's more, we could say that body continuity is not as important as continuity of the brain. However, contrary to common belief, just like every other cell in your body, neurons die and are replaced in your brain. Mere physical continuity of the brain is not enough to preserve identity.

Cryonics

- Therefore, we might maintain that the physical continuity of a functioning brain is necessary for the survival of personal identity. However, our insatiable quest for immortality leads us to a counterexample that highlights a problem with this criterion.

- Cryonics is the process of freezing one's body just prior to death in hopes of preserving that body until medical science has advanced enough to cure whatever would cause death. During the time that the body is frozen, the brain is not functioning or capable of producing mentality. If one day, the body were successfully thawed and cured, we would likely say that that person survived, despite the fact that there was significant time during which the brain did not function properly.

Even if we think the physical survival of the brain is what preserves personal identity, we must admit that we are appealing to physical continuity, and physical continuity, although likely necessary for personal survival over time, is still not sufficient.

- American philosopher Peter Unger has proposed a way out of this problem. He suggests that although a cryopreserved brain is not currently producing mentality, it still has “mental capacities”; that is, it could still produce mentality if it were thawed, if its corresponding body appropriately healed, and if brain and body were both fed the appropriate nutrients.

- With this in mind, we could say that personal identity is preserved by the physical continuity of a brain that has mental capacities. This seems to be the strongest version of the bodily theory of personal identity.

- In fact, however, the physical continuity criterion doesn't seem to track well with our intuitions, which seem to tell us that continuity of both the mental and the physical, to some degree, is required for personal survival.

Split-Brain Patients

- The two hemispheres of our brain are joined by the corpus callosum. These two hemispheres can become separated when damaged by a seizure or cut by a surgeon. This results in a split-brain patient; one side of the body can and will act independently of the other.

- Split-brain patients sometimes suffer from what is called *alien hand syndrome*. For example, there is a case of a woman who had difficulty picking out what to wear to work in the morning because her right hand would pick out a business suit, but her left hand would pick out a tube top and miniskirt—and she could not will her left hand to put the inappropriate outfit down.

- Experiments suggest that each brain hemisphere has its own stream of consciousness; you can say things that only one hemisphere hears, show things that only one hemisphere sees, and even elicit separate responses to the same question from each hemisphere. In another noted example, one patient's right hemisphere indicated that he wanted to be a draftsman when he grew up, but his left hemisphere indicated that he wanted to be a race car driver.

- The difficulty comes when we realize that the two numerically distinct persons who exist in split-brain patients are both physically and psychologically continuous with one and the same person—the past person who existed before the brain was split. It can't be that one and the same person both did and did not hear the same thing.

- A second problem arises when we realize that numerical identity does not exist in degrees. Some future person either is or is not you; if God creates a physically distinct but psychologically identical person in the afterlife, either that's you or it isn't—there is no in between.

- Physical and psychological continuity does exist in degrees, however. For example, the body of a transplant patient is not as physically continuous as that of a person who has not had a transplant. Consider the fact that someday, we will be able to transplant parts of the brain. While someone who has had no transplant has a 100 percent physically continuous brain, someone else may have an 80 percent continuous brain. Here, there are different degrees of physical continuity.

- In the same way, we can talk about degrees of psychological continuity. As the result of an accident, disease, or surgery, changes in the brain might cause someone's personality or memories or some other part of his or her psychology to change. Someone might be 80 percent or 50 percent psychologically continuous with his or her former self.

- Drawing the line between the new person and the old person is difficult. Physical and mental continuity are vague. There are clear cases of continuity, cases where it's clearly lacking, and borderline cases where it's just a matter of interpretation. Because physical and mental continuity is a vague concept, but identity is not, it cannot be that physical and mental continuity is what accounts for personal survival over time.

Suggested Sources

Conradt, "The Quick 8."

Dennet, "Where Am I?"

Gazzaniga, *Tales from Both Sides of the Brain*.

Nye, James, "Woman, 23, Has Her Head Frozen So She Can Be Reborn after a Cure for Her Brain Cancer Is Found."

Questions to Consider

1. If money were no concern, would you have yourself cryogenically frozen in the hopes of one day being thawed and healed? Why or why not? Would the person who awakens be you? (And would you rather have your body or a robot body that functions like a biological one?)
2. How many people are there in a split-brain patient before the split? What about during the split? What about if the hemispheres are later reunited?
3. Doctors sometimes cut the corpus callosum as a treatment for seizures. If you had sever seizures, would you undergo such a procedure to cure them? Do you think you would be, numerically, the same person afterwards? Why or why not?

Lecture 22

Are You Really You?

We often have conflicting intuitions about what matters for the survival of personal identity. Sometimes, what matters appears to be physical continuity; at other times, it seems to be psychological continuity. American philosopher Robert Nozick observes that this conflict reveals what actually is necessary for survival. His theory is called the *closest continuer view*, which we will explore in this lecture. Here, we also examine the theory of *perdurantism*, which suggests that a person is a four-dimensional object stretched across time. And we'll consider whether personhood might be a construct or conception and whether the question of personal identity over time is merely a linguistic problem—a question about definitions.

Robert Nozick's Closest Continuer Theory

- According to Robert Nozick's *closest continuer theory*, neither physical nor psychological continuity is absolutely required for the survival of personal identity; instead, the future person who is most closely psychologically and/or physically continuous with you is numerically identical to you. Identity is preserved in the closest continuer.

- Some philosophers are not convinced because Nozick's principle seems to violate the "only *x* and *y*" principle. This principle suggests that whether two things, call them *x* and *y*, are identical can be determined only by the properties *x* and *y* possess. The existence of some other thing, *z*, cannot be relevant.

The Clone/Copy Argument

- Nozick argues that the existence of other objects can be relevant when dealing with identity. There is one counterexample, however, that even Nozick himself admits his closest continuer theory can't quite explain. To understand it, we need to look at ways that an afterlife might be possible outside of religion, with the use of future technologies.

- Suppose you are diagnosed with a terminal illness. To ensure your survival, you might do the following: Have yourself cloned; have your neural configuration scanned; and arrange for your neural configuration to be written on your clone's brain after your death. Clearly, this clone/copy will not be physically continuous with you—it will have a body made of new material—but it will be 100 percent psychologically continuous with you. Therefore, if the closest continuer theory is correct, this is a way to survive biological death. The clone/copy will actually be you because it would be your closest continuer.

- However, if you create a clone/copy of yourself a year before you die, you will still be you, and the clone/copy will not. Your clone/copy may be qualitatively the same, but it couldn't be numerically identical; otherwise, you could be in two places at once.

- Now, you might think that once you die, the clone/copy would become you—because it would then be your closest continuer. But that can't be right because the clone/copy was not you while you were still alive. It was another person. In fact, if there is any overlap at all—any time at all in which both you and your clone/copy are alive at the same time—then creating a clone/copy would not help you survive death. If there is even a single moment in which the clone/copy is not the one and only closest continuer, then it is not you in that moment, nor could it ever be.

- Herein lies the objection to Nozick's theory: Let's suppose that you want to make sure that there is no overlap. You arrange to have the clone/copy created and record your neural configuration now; then, you schedule the clone/copy to activate in two years—a full year after your expected death. But suppose that you live longer than a year. A nanosecond of overlap could mean the difference between survival and nonsurvival. That seems ridiculous, and even Nozick agrees.

Perdurantism

- Perhaps we are failing to articulate a successful theory of personal survival because we have been thinking about persons in the wrong way. As a result, we may have been asking the wrong question; in fact, maybe the question we've been asking doesn't even make sense.

In the same way that an interstate highway doesn't exist at any one particular location, persons may not exist in any one particular location and time but stretched across time.

- We have been wondering whether you now and your eight-year-old self are the same person. But that question assumes that a person exists at a particular time at a particular location, something like an individual television episode. But suppose we think about a person like an entire television series—something that exists stretched across time. Suppose that a person is actually a series of what we might call "person episodes"—individual instances of bodies that exist at particular locations at particular times.

- In a theory called *perdurantism*, the philosopher David Lewis suggests that persons are just such objects. Essentially, the idea is that a person is not a three-dimensional object that exists at a particular location and time but a four-dimensional object stretched across time that consists of three-dimensional objects.

- In order for that set of time slices to be part of a single person, they would have to share certain relations, such as psychological and physical continuity. What's more, you can't just think of yourself from birth to eight years old and call that a person. It has to be the whole collection.

- If anything can make sense of personhood, it seems that it is perdurantism. But of course, perdurantism is not without its problems. For example, the theory seems to entail that you don't exist until you die. For example, if a person is a maximally large set of continuous person slices and a person does not exist until that set is maximally large, then persons don't fully exist until they die—unless, of course, you subscribe to *omnitemporalism* and, thus, think that your future times slices already exist. Stranger still is the fact that if there is an afterlife and it will last forever, then persons will never exist.

An Empty Question

- Some philosophers suggest that the reason all these theories fail is that they are trying to make sense of the nonsensical; they're trying to account for the existence of something that doesn't actually exist.

- To understand what they might be getting at, consider a classic philosophical problem: the sorites paradox, or the pile/heap problem.

Suppose that you have what is clearly a heap of sand. You then start taking away one grain at a time. Eventually, you will no longer have a heap—just a pile. But we are left wondering what the difference is between a heap and a pile and how many grains constitute a heap.

- When considering such questions, it quickly becomes obvious that any answer you give will merely be a matter of convention or opinion. If we said that 1 million grains of sand are needed to constitute a heap, we're giving a lot of power to that millionth grain of sand. What we would come to realize is that, metaphysically or ontologically speaking, there is no genuine difference between the pile and the heap. All that exists is a collection of sand that can be described in different ways.

- The question of when the pile becomes a heap is what philosophers call an *empty question*. If you know everything there is to know about a subject and you still don't know the answer—that's an empty question.

Bundles of Perceptions

- Perhaps this is why we've had so much trouble finding an answer to the personhood question: The question of personal identity may be empty. Personhood might just be a construct or conception—one that has been invented by brains to help them make sense of the world. We might even say that the question of personal identity over time is merely a linguistic problem—just a question about definitions.

- Although it may seem strange to seriously consider the suggestion that persons don't exist, the reason may be that we are "programmed" to see the world that way. Think about Kant's distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal. Philosophical reflection reveals that the noumenal world—the world as it is—contains no persons. The phenomenal world—the world of our perceptions—contains persons, but of course, the phenomenal world is not reality.

- What's more, the suggestion that persons don't exist is nothing new. David Hume, for example, suggested we are all just bundles of perceptions, collections of experiences, and that there is no

extra thing called "the person" that exists above and beyond those bundles. All arguments over personhood or personal identity are really just disputes about how to describe the bundles. And roughly a couple thousand years earlier, the Buddha told us essentially the same thing: The terms *self* and *I* don't really refer to anything; they're just grammatical devices.

Conventional Speech and Ultimate Speech

- Philosophers who defend the *no-self* or *no-person* notion today, such as James Giles, are quick to point out that the words *I*, *you*, *self*, and *person* are not meaningless or useless. It's just that there are two different kinds of meaningful speech: conventional speech and ultimate speech. The proposition "There are persons" is conventionally true, because it serves as a useful convention; it helps us make sense of the world. But it is not ultimately true.

- As Giles observes, "[A person's name] is a generally understood term whose proper use is determined by mutual agreement." He notes, "Although personal names and personal pronouns do not at the ultimate level refer to anything, at the conventional level it is quite acceptable to use such expression for pragmatic reasons." We just must not be led astray by using such words into thinking they refer to anything ultimately real.

- Of course, if there are ultimately no persons, then ultimately, there can be no afterlife. But that doesn't mean that there can't be something that could be conventionally described as an afterlife. It would just be the case that, in an ultimate sense, it would not constitute survival of the person, because persons never really existed in the first place.

- There is another question relevant to life's meaning that we have yet to consider: the question of consciousness. For many, the meaning of life may be derived from the experiences we have; this leads us to ask: How does the brain produce the mind?

Suggested Sources

Bhikkhu, "No-Self or Not-Self?"

Giles, "The No-Self Theory."

Questions to Consider

1. Do you like the closest continuer view? Can you see a way out of the "Quick, kill me, or I won't survive!" counterexample?
2. Can you think of other examples (from science fiction or elsewhere) where the question of personal identity is raised? Which theory would give a positive answer—"Yes, that is the same person"—to the example you are thinking of?
3. As we've discussed, Buddhists accept the no-self view. But it's also common for Buddhists to accept the doctrine of reincarnation. Does that make logical sense? Does reincarnation require persons to exist? Is there a way to reconcile the two views?
4. Is the idea that there is no self like the idea that there is no free will? Can we not help but believe in the self in the same way that we can't help but believe that we are free? Can we believe it philosophically but not "really" believe it?
5. Compare Kant's distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal to Grice's distinction between ultimate truth and conventional truth. Then ask yourself: Is the comparison apt? The lecture suggested that we might say that the noumenal world contains no persons, but the phenomenal world does. Is that a meaningful way to use Kant's terminology? When Grice says that the statement "There are no persons" is ultimately true, does that mean the same thing as "The noumenal world contains no persons"? Is the "real truth" that there are no persons, but "we" perceive persons anyway simply because that is how we see the world—through categories?

Lecture 23

How Does the Brain Produce the Mind?

We now turn a critical philosophical eye onto our presumptions about the mind, questioning not only the nature of the mind but also its very existence. In this lecture, we contrast mind events with brain events; consider whether the mind and body are separate entities; and explore several versions of identity theory, which assumes that the brain and mind are one and the same.

Differentiating *Mind* and *Brain*

- In this lecture, it is crucial to keep the terms *mind* and *brain* completely separate. In common parlance, they are often equated, perhaps because of the close relationship between the two. Here, we reserve the term *mind* for that which houses mental activity, such as decision making, memories, emotions, visual sensations, and so on. We use the term *brain* for the biological organ that sits atop the spinal column.

- To understand one of the most significant and most difficult philosophical questions of all—how the brain produces the mind—consider how the brain and the mind work. In a brain event, neurons send electrical signals to one another. In a mental event, for example, you have a visual experience of seeing an American flag waving in the sky.

- When you look at the flag, you have a red experience in a certain part of your visual field because neuron A sends a signal to neuron B, and neuron B sends a signal to neuron C. (This is an oversimplification, but it will do for our purposes.) And let's say that, if the process were reversed—neuron C sends a signal to B and B to A—then you have a blue experience in that part of your visual field instead. But both experiences involve neurons' sending signals to one another. It's not as if your brain actually changes color.

The visual experience of seeing a red stripe on a flag is a mental event, in contrast to a brain event, which consists of neurons sending electrical signals to one another; nowhere is the property of "redness" found in the brain.

The Inverted Spectrum Problem

- Consider the problem in another way. Suppose your friend is also looking at the flag, and a brain scan shows that the same thing is happening in her brain. But you cannot know whether she actually sees red. She will say that she sees red—but that's only because that is what she has learned to call the kind of experience she has when her ABC neurons fire. For all you know, her ABC neurons produce what you would call a green experience.

- In fact, your friend's entire visual world could be inverted; the flag may look to her like a photographic negative of what it looks like to you. You both describe it the same way—as red, white, and blue—but only because you have learned the same words, not because your experience is actually the same. This is called the *inverted spectrum problem*, and it dates back to John Locke.

- How the brain produces the mind is what philosopher David Chalmers dubbed the *hard problem of consciousness*. We've already discussed the problem of downward causation. The hard problem of consciousness, we might say, is a problem of upward production. There are two possible answers to this problem.

The Soul Hypothesis

- The first possible answer is the soul hypothesis. In the philosophy of mind, the soul hypothesis usually goes by the name *substance dualism*. The idea is that persons are made out of two substances. There is a physical substance, which constitutes the brain, and a nonphysical substance, which is or houses the mind. Each can exist without the other.

- However, substance dualism faces a number of difficulties. Because it suggests that a nonmaterial substance can cause things to happen in the material world, it defies many laws of nature. What's more, philosophically, substance dualism is very difficult to prove.

- Initially, there is no problem with assuming that the mental exists. But if we're going to believe that it is housed by another kind of substance—an immaterial substance—we're going to need some kind of evidence. Unfortunately, no such evidence or argument has ever been considered satisfactory.

The Hard Problem of Consciousness

- When it comes to arguments for the soul, the most famous were given by Descartes; however, they have never been considered to be successful or persuasive. The best of his arguments suggests that the mind and body must be separable entities because we can doubt the existence of our brain but not our mind.

- According to Descartes, it's possible to doubt that we have a body and brain because an evil demon could be fooling us. But it's not possible to doubt we have a mind because doubting is a mental exercise and, thus, cannot occur unless the mind exists. Body and mind must be distinct and separable, Descartes argues, because one has a property the other lacks: doubtability.

- One problem with this argument is that distinctness does not necessarily entail separability. The second problem is that doubtability is not a property that can be used to delineate objects. The same follows for the mind and brain. Descartes can doubt the existence of the brain and not the mind, but that doesn't mean they're distinct. If he understood their full nature and the dependence relation between them, he might realize that he can't doubt the one's existence without doubting the other's.

- What's more, even if we had a working argument, substance dualism is not a solution to the hard problem of consciousness. Substance dualism, if true, would simply entail that the hard problem is not a problem at all because the brain does not produce the mind. According to substance dualism, the mind is a separately existing entity.

- The hard problem of consciousness is generated because we have realized that substance dualism is false: The mind is not a separately existing entity; it is produced by the brain.

Identity Theory

- Interestingly, the second solution to the hard problem of consciousness operates by denying the suggestion that the brain produces the mind. This solution is called *identity theory*.

- Unlike substance dualism, identity theory doesn't deny the findings of neuroscience. It admits that the mind is completely dependent upon the brain. But this dependence, it suggests, is not due to the fact that the brain produces the mind; instead, it's because the brain simply is the mind. The brain and mind are one and the same thing.

- If this theory is correct, there's no need to answer the hard problem of consciousness. The identity does all the explaining for you.

Type Identity

- The strictest form of identity theory is called *type identity*. It suggests that all types of mental states are one and the same thing with a certain type of biological brain state. For example, philosophers used to suggest that pain was numerically identical to C-fiber firings. C-fibers

are one of three types of nerve fibers in the central and peripheral nervous system, and it was believed that pain was experienced when those neurons were firing.

- As it turns out, however, what goes on in the brain when one is in pain is far more complicated than just C-fibers firing. Pain—and the mental in general—seems to be what philosophers call "multiply realizable." It's something that can be realized or produced by more than one kind of thing.

- Mentality, too, seems to be multiply realizable. If different types of things can produce mentality, then it's wrong to identify types of mental activity with particular types of brain activity.

Token Identity

- Convinced that the mental is multiply realizable, philosophers put forth another version of identity theory, called *token identity*. This theory suggests that each individual instance or "token" of a mental event is identical to a particular instance or token of a brain event. Philosopher David Papineau has produced a persuasive argument in favor of token identity theory.

- Suppose that the mind and brain are not identical; the mind is still dependent upon the brain, but they aren't the same thing. Mental events cause our bodily actions. Say that you decide to wave at a friend, and your decision to do so moves your arm back and forth. But we also know that all physical events, including arm movements, have physical causes. Your arm moved because specific neurons in your motor cortex fired in a certain way.

- It can't be that both the mental and the physical are sufficient causes of your arm movement. That would mean that your arm movement was what philosophers call "overdetermined."

- But taking away either would mean that your arm doesn't move. Thus, there must be something wrong with suggesting that your mind and brain are not identical. The problem is this: If the mind and brain are not

identical, then our actions have two sufficient causes: one mental and one physical. But they cannot; both causes are necessary. Subtracting either one means the action won't happen.

- However, if we simply say that the mind and brain are the same thing, this problem is averted. The two causes of your movement are really one and the same thing. That's why they're both sufficient and necessary. And that is exactly what token identity theory says.

Qualia

- As persuasive as the argument might seem, however, token identity theory still faces a fairly significant challenge. As we saw in previous lectures, numerical identity requires sameness of all properties. This is Leibniz's identity of indiscernibles law: If two objects have all the same properties, then they really are not two objects at all; they are one object.

- The reverse is also true: If two seemingly different things actually are one and the same thing, then they must have all the same properties. Numerical identity demands sameness of properties.

- According to Leibniz's law, if a particular mental event and brain event really are numerically identical—if they really are one and the same thing—they must have all the same properties. The problem is, they don't; the brain and mind do not share all the same properties. Remember the mental event of seeing the red stripe on the flag. The property of redness your experience has is not a property that any brain event has. The redness experience has certain properties, which philosophers call *qualia*. But no physical event, including any brain event, has qualia.

- There may be another description of the nature of the mind and a possible answer to the hard problem of consciousness: *property dualism*. We turn to that theory in the next lecture as we make our way to considering what minds do—if, in fact, they do anything at all.

Suggested Sources

Chalmers, “The Puzzle of Conscious Experience.”

Damasio, “How Does the Brain Create the Mind?”

Fodor, “The Mind-Body Problem.”

Questions to Consider

1. Did you ascribe to substance dualism before taking this course? Where did you get this idea? Yale Psychologist Paul Bloom suggests that we are born believing it. Were you? Do you recall good arguments being put forth for its truth?
2. Does the overdetermination argument convince you that the mind and brain are identical? The different-properties argument is used to attack that argument and suggests that its conclusion is wrong. (“Because identical objects must have the same properties and the mind and brain have different properties, they can’t be identical.”) But might we turn the tables, so to speak, and argue that the overdetermination argument shows that the different-properties argument is wrong. (“Because there can’t be overdetermination and, thus, the mind and brain must be identical, the mind and brain must not have different properties.”) After all, the different-properties argument doesn’t actually point out anything wrong with the overdetermination argument. Can you find anything wrong? Is it invalid? Is there a false premise? What does this say about the different-properties argument?
3. Does the argument that the mind and brain have different properties convince you that they cannot be identical? Can you think of a way out of this problem?

Lecture 24

What Do Minds Do, If Anything?

In this lecture, we continue our attempts to explain the hard problem of consciousness—how the brain produces the mind. To that end, we examine the philosophical theory of property dualism, which suggests that the mind is a property of the brain; epiphenomenalism, which asserts that the mental has no causal efficacy; and eliminative materialism, which takes epiphenomenalism to its logical extreme, claiming that not only does the mind not cause anything, but it doesn't exist at all.

Property Dualism

- The theory of *property dualism* suggests that the mind is a property of the brain. Property dualists are not dualists about substances, however; there's only one substance: the physical. But the physical can have two kinds of properties: physical properties (such as location and mass) and emergent mental properties (such as qualia and "aboutness").

- For the property dualist, the crucial aspect of the mental properties that emerge from brain activity is that they are nonreductive, or nonreducible.

- A nonreducible emergent property is simply a property that emerges from a collection of parts but that is not explainable in terms of the properties of those parts. You cannot account for the fact that the collection has that property by explaining how the properties of the individual parts of the collection add up or interact.

- The property dualist suggests that this is true of the mind. Mental properties emerge from the interaction of our brain's neurons, but mental properties (and their causal powers) cannot be fully explained by their interaction.

Nonreducible Emergent Properties

- Although property dualism has been advanced by some of the biggest names in philosophy, it still has problems. For example, it's

The liquidity of water is an emergent property—a property not had by its individual parts—but it isn't a nonreducible property; all the properties of water can be explained in virtue of the properties of their parts and how the parts interact given those properties.

difficult to describe a nonreducible emergent property or even to determine whether or not such a thing is possible. As emergent nonreducible properties, mental properties seem to be unique. The property dualist essentially suggests that their existence is a brute fact; such properties "just are."

- Although this might seem like a cheat, it's perhaps the closest thing we can get to a solution to the hard problem of consciousness. The brain gives rise to the mind because … it just does. By studying the brain and realizing that mentality corresponds to its activity, we have simply "discovered" a fundamental law of the universe: When atoms, in the form of neurons, are sufficiently complex or interact in certain ways, mental properties necessarily emerge. There is no further explanation; they just do.

- To hypothesize a fundamental law that "just is" may seem a bit too convenient, however. It seems ad hoc—like an excuse. Indeed, a few property dualists are so troubled by this that they claim that all matter has mental properties, even atoms. Everything is conscious, at least to some degree. Italian philosopher Francesco Patrizi calls this view *panpsychism*.

Substance Dualism in Disguise

- According to property dualism, mental properties are properties that physical things can have when they're properly complex, as brains are. But just like other properties, mental properties cause things to happen in the physical world. For example, mental properties can cause our bodies to move by changing the physical properties of our brain and, thus, making our neurons fire in a certain kind of way.

- But logically speaking, a nonphysical property cannot change a physical property. They are in two different "realms." In fact, such interactions cannot occur without defying the same constants and laws that the soul hypothesis and substance dualism violate. Property dualism, it seems, fares no better than substance dualism when it comes to the problem of downward causation.

- In fact, contemporary philosopher Susan Schneider has argued that there is no way to make sense of property dualism without appealing to some variety of substance dualism. Property dualism, it seems, is just substance dualism in disguise.

Epiphenomenalism

- The shortcomings of property dualism, however, are avoided by another theory of mind called *epiphenomenalism*. This theory is not as concerned with answering the hard problem of consciousness, that is, explaining why or how the mental emerges from the complex activity of the brain. Epiphenomenalists are comfortable with realizing that the mental does emerge from (and is dependent upon) the brain, and they leave it at that.

- But to avoid the problem of downward causation that plagues both property dualism and substance dualism, the epiphenomenalist suggests that the mental is causally inert. Mentality does emerge from complex brain activity, but that mentality doesn't actually do anything. Therefore, there is no need to account for how it's possible for something that is nonphysical, such as the mental, to cause something to happen in the physical world—because it doesn't. The mental has no causal efficacy; it is an epiphenomenon.

- But of course, the objection to epiphenomenalism is obvious—the idea that mental phenomena have causal efficacy is almost universally accepted. Epiphenomenalism runs counter to our most basic intuitions. What's more, it seems that if the mental doesn't cause anything, then the world would not be any different if the mental didn't exist.

Supervenient Relationships

- In response, the epiphenomenalists suggest that the intuition that the mental has causal efficacy is rooted in logically fallacious reasoning. The reason we assume that mental events, such as decisions, cause our behavior is that the mental events are always correlated with our behavior. But as we've discussed many times, correlation does not entail causation. Correlation could be the result of a third factor, for example. And this, says the epiphenomenalist, is why our behavior and mentality are correlated—because they are both brought about by our brain activity.

- What's more, epiphenomenalists insist, even though mental activity—such as hate, for example—doesn't cause anything, it's still the case that if there were no hate in the world, there would be much less war

(or no war at all). Even though the mentality of hate doesn't cause anything, it is necessarily correlated with certain kinds of brain events that do.

- The reason those brain events necessarily give rise to mental events is that the relationship that exists between the mind and brain is *supervenient*. A supervenient relationship holds between two things, say M and B, when no change in one (M) is possible without a change in the other (B). The mind supervenes on the brain because no change in mentality is possible unless there is some change in the brain. The mind is a supervenient property.

Eliminative Materialism

- Although the notion that the mental does not cause anything is still difficult to embrace, some philosophers suggest that epiphenomenalism does not go far enough. These philosophers, called *eliminative materialists*, claim that not only does the mind not cause anything, but the mind doesn't exist at all. The reason we can't make sense of the mind is that it's merely a fiction.

- Eliminative materialism suggests that "mental words" should be eliminated from our vocabulary entirely. Although we used to think our actions were caused by mental activity, neuroscience has revealed that actions result from the activity of our brain. Consequently, we should no longer talk as if minds exist.

- Philosophically, this hypothesis is quite strong. It is certainly the simplest among all the available alternatives, because it avoids suggesting that there are two substances, a physical substance and a nonphysical one. All that exists is the brain. What's more, the hypothesis doesn't have to account for downward causation or explain the qualia of mental experiences.

- If minds exist, they are separable from the brain, identical to the brain, or somehow a byproduct of the brain. But as neuroscience has shown us, minds are not separable from the brain. This is the reason the soul hypothesis failed. But neither are minds identical to the brain, because

each has properties the other lacks. This is the reason identity theory failed.

- But it's also impossible to account for how the mind could be a byproduct of the brain. It would have to be a completely unique thing—a nonreducible emergent property—which can only be trivially explained by appealing to ad hoc brute facts and fundamental laws. If the mind can only exist if it is separate from, identical to, or a byproduct of the brain—and it can be none of these—then it must not exist at all.

- It's obvious that eliminative materialism faces some serious objections. Not only does it endorse the highly unintuitive notion that the mind does not exist, but it also makes suggestions for how language should be used and, indeed, the way it will be used.

- Eliminative materialism would do well to adopt the approach of those who are nominalists with regard to persons. Nominalists believe that there are two kinds of speech: conventional speech and ultimate speech. Although ultimately, minds don't exist, conventionally, it makes sense to talk about them as if they do. Conventional speech, although inaccurate, can be used to help us make sense of the world in a way that doesn't commit us ontologically to the existence of minds.

A "Remnant of Misguided Cartesian Intuitions"

- Eliminative materialists seem to be denying something that is utterly obvious to everyone—that a person has a mind. In fact, some have argued that even if we don't know anything else, we at least know that we have minds. Recall the skeptical problem and Descartes's conclusion that, although he could doubt the existence of the material world, he could not doubt the existence of his own mind because doubting itself is a mental activity that can occur only if a mind exists.

- However, as we have discussed in earlier lectures, our perceptions often lead us astray—as do our intuitions and introspection. More important,

although it seems undisputable that we have free will and that we indeed are a "self" or person, we've already seen convincing philosophical arguments against these notions. It may be that "free will" and "self" are merely illusions generated by the brain's own perception of itself.

- Likewise, it may be that the existence of the mind is yet another one of these illusions—something the brain makes us think or believe is true when in fact it's not. It may be that the existence of minds is nothing more than what philosopher William Ramsey, explaining the work of Georges Rey in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, called a "remnant of misguided Cartesian intuitions."

Suggested Sources

Greene, "How the Higgs Boson Was Found."

Robinson, Maley, and Piccinini, "Is Consciousness a Spandrel?"

Searle, "Why I Am Not a Property Dualist."

UCSB Science Line, "Water."

Questions to Consider

1. How comfortable are you with solving the hard problem of consciousness with a brute fact or fundamental law? Does the fact that it would apply only to brains and minds bother you? Or is such an "exception" acceptable?
2. Usually, property dualists suggest that mental properties are had only by matter that is sufficiently complex. Do you find this ad hoc? If any matter can have mental properties, must all matter have them? Should all property dualists really be panpsychists?
3. Is the causal efficacy of our mental states really just an illusion created by correlation? How bothered are you by the suggestion that the mind doesn't do anything and is there merely for us to "observe"?
4. Can we believe that the mind does not exist? Or, like the existence of free will and the self, is it just something we can't help but believe in? (And is the same true for the causal efficacy of the mental?) Can we believe it philosophically but not "really" believe it?
5. Could the eliminative materialist adopt a Kant-like noumenal/phenomenal distinction and say that the noumenal world contains no minds but the phenomenal does? Consider: Can the phenomenal world exist if the noumenal world contains no minds? After all, the phenomenal world is the world as we perceive it, but perceptions are mental events. Can there be a way that we perceive the world if there are no minds?

Lecture 25

Could Machines Think?

Each person can experience only his or her own mind; we cannot experience the minds of others. Consequently, we cannot be certain that others actually have minds. Even if we can confirm that other people's neurons are firing, we have no way to confirm that those neuronal firings are producing mentality in the same way that ours are. As we determined in the previous lecture, we cannot see mentality by looking at the brain. In this lecture, we will consider these issues in light of functionalism—a theory about what we should conclude is "minded."

Functionalism

- According to the theory of *functionalism*, anything that functions like our brain functions must be said to have mentality. We could even look more precisely at the particular functions of parts or pathways in the brain, identify the mentality that they produce, and suggest that anything that functions as they do produces that particular kind of mentality.

- A function itself is often understood in terms of inputs and outputs; if two things give the same output after being given the same input, then they are functionally equivalent. What's more, understanding functionalism lets us better understand what it means for something to be multiply realizable.

- Minds are multiply realizable because minds also have a functional definition. Anything that behaves like we do—whose interworking functions as our brains do to produce behavior—contains a mind, or is "minded."

Androids

- Functionalism helps us understand why human-made artificial life is a distinct possibility. If the mind has a functional definition, then it is very much like a computer program. Computer programs have a functional

definition and are, thus, multiply realizable. If the same inputs give us the same outputs, then we have the same program.

- If minds have a functional definition and, thus, are multiply realizable, then they can be realized by other mediums, too—mediums other than the human brain. In fact, there is good reason to believe that a sufficiently complicated computer could perform what a human brain does.

- Ultimately, the brain is just a collection of neurons, which send electrical signals to other nerve cells. Those familiar with computers will realize that this is similar to what happens inside a computer. In the same way that your neural configuration dictates how your neurons fire and ultimately how you behave, the configuration of a computer's transistors and microchips determines how it behaves.

- It would seem, then, that if a robot had a sufficiently complicated computer as a brain and that computer's chips and transistors were arranged such that they mimicked how a human's neurons are wired and fire, then it would behave just as a human would. That robot would be an android.

According to some experts, computers with enough power and complexity to run the same programs our brains do may exist in the near future.

Alan Turing and the Turing Test

- According to functionalism, something is minded if it functions as if it is minded. Functionalism was endorsed by the father of computer science, the British mathematician and logician Alan Turing. In fact, Turing proposed the Turing test to determine whether a machine can think. His basic idea was functionalist: If a machine can imitate human behavior, then it is minded.

- Specifically, the Turing test was designed to determine whether or not a machine can understand language. If a computer could have a conversation with you that was indistinguishable from one that another human might have with you, then we would say that the computer understands language. Because understanding language would seem to be impossible without a mind, if Turing's functionalist assumption is right, a machine that passes the Turing test would be minded.

- The Turing test operates in this way: Suppose you are chatting with two different "people" online—one is a real human, and the other is a computer program. If you can't tell which is which—or, better yet, if no one call tell—then the program passes the Turing test and we should conclude that the program understands language.

- However, we have not yet seen a computer program pass the Turing test. The closest contender would seem to be IBM's Watson, which bested two top *Jeopardy!* players. This is significant because playing *Jeopardy!* requires a sophisticated understanding of the English language. The categories are often filled with puns, jokes, and other linguistic nuances that can mislead even the smartest human. Yet Watson handled them all with ease. That's not to say that Watson was perfect—but neither are humans.

- However, playing *Jeopardy!* is not the same thing as holding a conversation, which means that we can't say that Watson definitively passed the Turing test. And even if a computer passed the Turing test, that wouldn't necessarily mean that it's minded in exactly the same way that humans are.

John Searle's Chinese Room Argument

- American philosopher John Searle is a strong opponent of functionalism and the Turing test. Specifically, he has objected to the original Turing test and its suggestion that mimicking human language skills would entail that a computer had linguistic understanding. To make his point, he proposed a thought experiment now known as Searle's Chinese room argument.

- Imagine a room locked off except for two slots, one for input and one for output. In the input slot, someone can slide questions written in Chinese, and in the output slot, that person can receive answers to those questions in Chinese. Inside the room is someone who doesn't understand Chinese but has a giant book filled with Chinese symbols, consisting of every possible question anyone can ask in Chinese paired with a corresponding answer. When the person receives a question, he finds the symbols in his book, then writes them on another piece of paper and slips it through the output slot.

- Searle suggests that someone on the outside of the room might think the person on the inside understands Chinese. However, there is no understanding of Chinese going on anywhere in the room. All that is happening is that symbols are being shuffled around—a "program" is being followed where one set of symbols, the question, is exchanged for another set of symbols, the answer. There is no understanding.

- This, Searle suggests, is exactly what goes on inside a computer—it's just shuffling symbols. It does not understand language. According to Searle, even passing the Turing test would not indicate that a computer understands language.

Flaws in the Chinese Room Argument

- Philosopher Jack Copeland points out that Searle's Chinese room argument commits the fallacy of composition. Searle concludes that there is no understanding of Chinese going on in the scenario because no individual part, including the human inside the room, understands Chinese. But the fact that individual parts lack a property does not mean that the whole lacks that property.

- The conclusion that the Chinese room argument is supposed to establish is that shuffling symbols does not generate understanding. Yet that is what we would have to assume for the Chinese room argument to work; thus, the argument just begs the question.

- What's more, even if we were to grant that symbol shuffling does not generate linguistic understanding, it does not follow from this that a computer that passed the Turing test cannot understand language—because, ultimately, computers are not symbol shufflers.

- Symbols don't literally exist inside the computer and get shuffled around. Neither are there 0s and 1s floating around inside a computer—that's all a metaphor.

Evolutionary Programming

- Neurons in the brain fire signals at each other in certain ways in certain circumstances. In reality, we could develop a program language to describe what our neurons do in terms of symbol shuffling. In fact, knowing that our behavior is driven by our brain's neural configuration, it would seem that getting a computer to replicate that behavior would require configuring the computer in a similar way.

- We could produce a program through evolutionary programming, which is already common in robotics. In evolutionary programming, programmers write a program, then vary its parameters randomly. Whichever variation does the best becomes the parent program. Then that program is varied randomly to find an even better parent program and so on. Eventually, the result is a program that is exactly suited to the task.

- But if we want to create an android—a robot that behaves like a human—perhaps the best way is to let it program itself, just as we do when we grow up. Think of how a baby learns to mimic human behavior. A baby is born with a collection of neurons, many of which are not yet connected. They will become connected as a result of the baby's experiences in the world.

Androids and Free Will

- Although we may not actually program artificial intelligence, we may reverse-engineer it, or discover the right program by natural selection, or even let it program itself. What's more, even if androids' brains were programmed, that wouldn't keep them from having minds. Our mentality is a result of the way our neurons are configured. Anything else that is configured in the same way as we are produces the same mentality—regardless of how or why it became configured that way, naturally or artificially.

- If an android has been given a certain kind of neural configuration that will make it behave in a particular kind of way, that is a reason for thinking it does not have libertarian free will—because it can't behave any other way than it was programmed. But of course, free will is not the same thing as mentality, and something can have mentality and not be free. We've already discussed many reasons for thinking that we aren't free; in fact, we may be programmed by our DNA and environment to behave the way that we do.

- We might suggest that androids don't have minds because they don't have carbon-based brains, like ours, but we don't actually know that a brain must be made of carbon in order to be capable of mentation. Because we have yet to answer the hard problem of consciousness—to discover how our brains produce mentality—we have no reason to think that carbon plays a special role.

Suggested Sources

Bartlett, "No, Eugene Didn't Pass the Turing Test—But He Will Soon."

Bisson, "They're Made out of Meat."

Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Near*.

Snodgrass and Scheerer, "The Measure of a Man" (television show episode).

Questions to Consider

1. Do you think apes, monkeys, and chimps have minds—feel pain, have emotions, and so on? If so, why? What are your criteria? Would these criteria by which you conclude that other primates are minded also entail that an android is minded? Why or why not?
2. In the movie *Interstellar*, our planet becomes uninhabitable, and we try to colonize another planet by seeding it with embryos—our offspring. What if, instead, we seeded the universe with the artificial intelligence we created? Would they be our offspring in a sufficient way to say that our race had survived? (What if the first androids had the minds of biological beings written on them? Would they be our offspring then?)
3. We might argue that not even having Spock's ability to mind-meld could solve the problem of other minds. All it would show is that physical interactions with someone else's brain could produce new sensations in your brain, but you would still be aware of only your own experiences. "Spock doesn't feel the Horta's pain; he feels pain in his own mind produced by the Horta." Do you agree? Could a mind-meld prove that others have minds? Could it solve the inverted-spectrum problem?
4. Some people claim that androids wouldn't have souls. For what reasons might we think this is true? If these reasons are religious in nature, would such reasons really give us knowledge that androids don't have souls? Why might a person with religious reasons think that other humans have souls? Could the same criteria be fulfilled by an android?

Lecture 26

Does God Define the Good?

If humans do not have free will in the libertarian sense—as has been suggested in previous lectures—many argue that we are not morally responsible for our actions. However, an absence of moral responsibility does not entail an absence of moral facts. When it comes to choices, certain options can still be morally superior to others. In this lecture, we consider the discipline of ethics and the many ways ethicists attempt to discover the truth of moral statements.

Truth of Moral Statements

- Based on the compatibilist's understanding of free will, we are morally responsible for our actions as long as we act in accordance with our wants and desires; what's more, our ethical deliberations inform our wants and desires and, ultimately, the choices we make. In this lecture, we will assume that we are free—at least in the compatibilistic sense. We will also assume that there actually are moral facts—that certain things are morally right and morally wrong.

- Intuitively, you might think that you can tell the difference between right and wrong; however, there are a great many moral questions that are difficult to answer. Answering moral questions is not always easy; if it were, people wouldn't disagree so fundamentally on moral issues. But such disagreement abounds because, unlike questions in science, moral questions cannot be settled by an experiment or by examining some part of the world.

- This raises an important problem. Recall our favored theory of truth: the correspondence theory. A statement is true if it corresponds to the way the world is. To discover whether a proposition is true, we have to figure out the way the world would be if it were true, then figure out if the world actually is that way. If it is, we call that piece of the world the proposition's *truthmaker* and declare the statement to be true.

We might think that we can easily tell the difference between right and wrong, and often we can, but there are also a great many moral questions, such was the justification for war, that are difficult to answer.

- But if moral statements can't be settled by looking at the world, how do we determine what the truthmaker is for a moral statement, such as "Murder is wrong"? If we can figure out what it is that makes moral statements true, we should be able to find the moral knowledge we're seeking.

Emotivism

- The ethical theory called *emotivism* came out of a school of thought in the philosophy of language, *verificationism*, which was inspired by the early writings of British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. Verificationism suggested that statements were meaningless unless they could be verified by empirical observation. Eventually, verificationism gave rise to an entire movement in philosophy called *logical positivism*.

- Positivism ruled philosophy for the first half of the 20th century. To make sense of ethical statements, some positivists suggested that moral statements were really just a different way of expressing emotions—hence, the name *emotivism*. In other words, to say "Murder is morally wrong" is really just to vilify murder. To say that charity is morally good is just to applaud charity.

- If emotivism is correct, we can at least understand, to some degree, what is implied when someone says that murder is wrong. In contrast, we might think that saying murder is wrong really just amounts to "I don't like murder." And that can be meaningful—it can even be true. The state of affairs of our not liking murder is its truthmaker. By reducing moral statements to statements about ourselves, we can find truthmakers for them in the real world.

Divine Command Theory

- According to *divine command theory*, when people say that an act is immoral, they mean that God disapproves of it. In this way, divine command theory provides truthmakers for moral statements: They are not found in facts in the physical world but in facts about what God has commanded and forbidden.

- Of course, a full defense of divine command theory would require establishing knowledge of God's existence. And, as we discussed in previous lectures, that is most likely just a matter of faith—not knowledge.

- Divine command theory is one of our oldest ethical theories—one that Plato dealt with well over 2,000 years ago in a dialogue called

Euthyphro. The divine commands that concerned Plato came from the Greek gods, such as Zeus and Apollo.

- The setting for the *Euthyphro* is outside the court of Athens. Euthyphro is prosecuting his own father for murder, because he killed one of the family's servants. Socrates wishes to obtain knowledge of piety. And who would know better than Euthyphro, Socrates figures, because who would prosecute his own father for murder without knowing for sure that it was the right thing to do.

- But when Euthyphro gives his definition of piety, Socrates is disappointed. "To do as I am doing," Euthyphro says, "prosecuting the impious." Socrates points out that although prosecuting the impious is certainly an example of a pious action, there are obviously other kinds of pious actions. Socrates wants to know what all (and only) pious actions have in common that makes them pious.

- Euthyphro says, "There are things that all the gods agree on. That must be what makes something pious: being loved by all the gods." Certainly this is something that all and only pious actions have in common, Socrates points out, but is that what makes them pious? In other words, the gods love pious actions because they are pious; those actions are not pious because the gods love them.

- The argument regarding piety that both Socrates and Euthyphro agree is sound can be applied to modern divine command theory, as well. God's commanding something is not what makes it moral; rather, God commands things because they are moral—because he recognizes something about them that makes them good.

Moral Intuitions

- A standard way of testing ethical theories, or definitions of morality, is to check them against your moral intuitions. If an ethical theory entails that something that is clearly wrong in all circumstances is actually morally right in some circumstances, that's a good reason to think the ethical theory is faulty.

- You can test your intuitions about whether you are a divine command theorist by considering the following scenario. Suppose God appeared to you and commanded you to bash some babies' heads against the rocks. According to the Old Testament, in 1 Samuel 15:2–3, God commanded the Israelites to do this to the Amalekites, and according to Psalm 137:8–9, God praised those who did it to the Babylonians.

- Up to this point, you had thought that God was an all-perfect being, but you also thought that bashing babies' heads against the rocks was immoral. Given what just happened, however, one of these beliefs must be wrong. Either your belief that God is good is wrong, or you have to think that whoever wrote those biblical verses is wrong, and God didn't actually command the dashing of infants' heads upon the rocks.

- To save divine command theory from this objection, some have suggesting modifying it. That which is moral is moral not because it's commanded by God but because it's like God. Love is moral because God loves; you should love everyone because God loves everyone.

Flaws in Divine Command Theory

- Even if we ignore all its problems and embrace divine command theory anyway, it still falls short because it can't generate moral knowledge. First, we've already discussed the difficulties with proving God's existence; it would be even more difficult to prove that God commanded one thing and not another.

- Second, the idea that the Bible contains God's commands really is just a matter of faith, as most people admit. But faith can't get you knowledge: Faith is belief without justification. Faith that the Bible contains God's command doesn't give you knowledge of what God's commands are and, thus, will not give you knowledge about what is moral and immoral.

- Third, it's not clear that divine command theory provides what the ethicist is looking for: a truthmaker for moral statements.
    - Suppose God commands some action X. The fact of God's commanding it doesn't make it moral. The fact that God

commanded X is only a truthmaker for the proposition "God commanded X." Assuming that God exists and is all-good, we can deduce from this that X is moral, but that's not the same thing as God's command being the truthmaker for "X is moral."

- Morality is not, by definition, what God commands. If it were, then there would only be debates about what God has commanded and forbidden, not about what actually constitutes morality. If it were, then it would be impossible for our conception of morality to predate our conception of the Judeo-Christian God, yet it does. Convincing people that God has forbidden something and that they will burn in hell for doing it may be an effective way to regulate bad behavior, but that is not what makes an action immoral.

- Finally, the reasoning behind divine command theory may simply be fallacious. In previous lectures, we discussed the error of filling in conceptual or explanatory gaps with God. Recall the "mystery, therefore magic" fallacy: interjecting a favorite supernatural explanation for that which has yet to be explained. It's a variety of appealing to ignorance, where an inability to prove that the supernatural explanation is wrong (by actually finding the natural explanation) is taken to be evidence that the supernatural explanation is right.
  - Recall what we learned from Plato in the *Cratylus*. To say "God did it" is not to actually offer an explanation but simply to offer an excuse for not having one. As the contemporary philosopher Theodore Schick argues, "God did it" will always fall short, abductively, as an explanation for natural phenomena.

  - For similar reasons, it seems that "God did it" falls short as an explanation for moral facts. As we shall soon see, discovering moral truths—in particular, the truthmakers for moral statements—is a difficult task indeed, but that's not a legitimate excuse for invoking the supernatural. Such an explanation certainly is not intellectually satisfying. It's basically equivalent to saying, "It's magic."

Suggested Sources

Audi, "Intuition and Its Place in Ethics."

Blackburn, *Being Good*.

Singer, *Writings on an Ethical Life*.

Questions to Consider

1. Is it possible to know what God wants? Under what conditions might we be justified in believing that God had commanded something? What if a friend told you that God had given her commandments? Would you believe your friend and do what she says you should do? Must belief about God's commands remain, necessarily, a matter of faith?
2. Legal laws are a matter of social convention. What makes something passed by Congress "the law" is the fact that we have all agreed to be governed by such laws; if we all collectively ignored them, then what Congress passed wouldn't be law. Should this be how divine command theory works? Moral laws are simply things that God has "approved" that we all agree to be governed by; if we all collectively ignored his command, then they would no longer be moral laws.
3. Some might suggest that God commanding something isn't like the president saying it is illegal; it's like Congress passing a law making it illegal. Congress's declaration is what makes it illegal; in the same way, the divine command theorist might say God's declaration is what makes something wrong. Does this analogy hold? Can you think of relevant differences between morality and legality that weaken this analogy?

Lecture 27

Does Happiness Define the Good?

To determine the nature of morality, we seek truthmakers for moral statements. In this lecture, we explore the Epicurean theory of hedonism, which considers happiness (and the absence of pain) as the only intrinsic good, and the doctrine of utilitarianism, which some philosophers have used to quantify happiness and—by extension—morality.

Epicurus and Hedonism

- One way to determine whether an action is morally right or wrong is to examine the consequences of performing that action. The ethical theory called *consequentialism* looks at the consequences of actions.

- The Greek philosopher Epicurus proposed an early consequentialist theory called *hedonism*. Epicurus thought that you could determine whether you ought to perform an action based on how beneficial to you that action was. And for Epicurus, benefit was found in the absence of pain and the attainment of pleasure or happiness. Epicurus considered happiness (and the absence of pain) as something that was intrinsically good; in fact, he thought it was the only intrinsic good.

- As Epicurus put it: "Pleasure is our first and kindred good. It is the starting point of every choice and of every aversion, and to it we always come back." Explaining further, he said:

  > When we say, then, that pleasure is the end and the aim, we do not mean the pleasures of the prodigal or the pleasures of sensuality. By pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and trouble in the soul. It is not an unbroken succession of drinking bouts and of revelry, not sexual lust, not the enjoyment of fish and other delicacies of a luxurious table that produces a pleasant life. It is rather sober reasoning, searching out the grounds of choice and avoidance, and banishing those beliefs that lead to the tumult of the soul.

For Epicurus, to attain true happiness, you must rid yourself of a desire for physical pleasures; this frees you from the worry they produce and enables you to pursue worthwhile cerebral pleasures, such as studying philosophy.

- For Epicurus, money can't buy true happiness, and the pleasures of fame, drugs, sex, food, and even world travel are not really worthwhile. Indeed, Epicurus himself never married and was celibate; the only travel he did was for the purpose of learning, teaching, and discussing philosophy, and he considered whom you ate with (and what you discussed while eating) to be far more significant than what you consumed.

Bentham and Quantitative Utilitarianism

- Nevertheless, Epicurean hedonism faces some serious objections. Because we determine the rightness or wrongness of our actions by whether or not they lead to the long-term attainment of pleasures for ourselves, this means that it can be acceptable to sacrifice the happiness of others to attain that goal.

- Such objections led the British philosopher Jeremy Bentham to develop the theory of *utilitarianism*. He agreed with Epicurus that happiness was an intrinsic good and pain an intrinsic evil—and even that the morality of an action should be determined by how much happiness (and lack of pain) it caused. As Bentham put it, "Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do."

- But Bentham also believed that we are sometimes obligated to sacrifice our happiness and even suffer pain for the sake of others. For this reason, he argued, the morality of an action should be determined by how much happiness (and lack of pain) it causes overall, for everyone—not just the person performing that action. Or, as he put it, "It is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong."

- Bentham called this "hedonistic calculus"—although, to avoid confusion, we'll call it "utilitarian calculus": calculating the utilitarian worth of an action. It's important to note that according to Bentham, when deciding how to act, you also have to consider intensity, duration, and proximity to the action in question; how likely it is that the action would lead to happiness or pain for others; the purity of the action; and how likely it is that your action will have the intended results.

- After such considerations are taken into account, Bentham simply tallies up the number of happy people and pained people, then declares that whichever action produces the most overall happiness in the long run is the right thing to do. That is why his is often called *quantitative utilitarianism*.

Mill and Qualitative Utilitarianism

- The 19th-century British philosopher John Stuart Mill argued that Bentham missed an important distinction—one that he should have learned from Epicurus. Mill noted that there are higher and lower forms of happiness. First, there are the pleasures of the sensations—the kind of pleasures that can also be experienced by animals. Then, there are the higher pleasures of the intellect that only humans can attain—appreciating Beethoven, solving a complicated math problem, and perhaps most important of all, doing philosophy.

- Mill insisted, "Some kinds of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others. It would be absurd that … pleasures should be supposed to depend on quantity alone. … quality [should be] considered as well as quantity." This is why Mill's theory is called *qualitative utilitarianism*.

- According to Mill, an action is morally best if and only if it maximizes, overall, the best kind of happiness available.

Flaws in Utilitarianism

- One objection to utilitarianism is that it's not clear how solid a truthmaker it provides for moral statements. Once you perform an action, it may be possible to figure out how much happiness that action caused. But what would make that action morally right is the fact that it produced more happiness than failing to do the action—a situation you cannot know.

- Therefore, the truth of moral statements depends partly on the truth of counterfactuals—what would have happened had you not done what you did. But it's just as difficult to find truthmakers for counterfactuals as it is for moral statements.

- A good moral theory should tell you what the right thing to do is before you do it, but that means you would have to be able to predict the future regarding how much happiness your action will produce.

- What's more, it's difficult to perform a utilitarian calculus. Not only do you have to predict the future, but you have to weigh different amounts

and kinds of happiness against each other. Happiness doesn't come in easily quantifiable units that you can measure and test.

Act Utilitarianism and Rule Utilitarianism

- What's more, utilitarianism doesn't seem to be consistent with our moral intuitions. Some philosophers have tried to alter the utilitarian theory to make it generate more intuitive results. Most notably, such philosophers as Richard Brandt and Brad Hooker have drawn a distinction between *act utilitarianism* and *rule utilitarianism* and advocated for the latter.

- Act utilitarianism is the kind of utilitarianism we've been considering so far, where the rightness or wrongness of an action is based on the consequences—the overall happiness—that the action produces. Therefore, if you give money to someone in need, but that needy person gets drunk and kills someone, then giving the person money was morally wrong. That action led to a lesser amount of happiness than refraining would have.

- Rule utilitarianism suggests that an action is right if it utilizes (is done in accordance with) a rule that, if followed consistently, would maximize the overall amount of happiness.

- For rule utilitarianism, the question of how much happiness is produced should be applied only to general rules about action, not specific actions. If you're trying to figure out what the moral thing is to do in a specific situation, you consider what rule you might be following by performing a particular action, then ask yourself whether following that rule in general would maximize happiness. If it would, then you should act on it.

- Rule utilitarianism is aimed at avoiding the standard objections to act utilitarianism. Although we might be able to conjure up specific circumstances in which violating justice, fairness, rights, or obligations would generate more happiness, such violations generally lead to less happiness and, according to rule utilitarianism, are immoral.

- But a couple of problems still remain. First of all, it's not clear that, in practice, rule utilitarianism doesn't just collapse into act utilitarianism.

To actually get rule utilitarianism to work and get the right results, the rules you're acting on need to have exceptions embedded into them.

- For example, following the rule "Don't kill" in general leads to more happiness overall; however, there are exceptions—in the case of self-defense, in war, to kill Hitler, and so on.

- In general, you might say something like "Don't kill except when it promotes happiness," but then, rule utilitarianism is just sanctioning the same actions as act utilitarianism.

Intrinsic Value of True Belief

- The final issue with utilitarianism points to the intrinsic value of true belief. American philosopher Robert Nozick asks us to consider what he calls an experience machine—a machine that you can hook yourself into that would give you a lifetime of pleasurable experience by generating a false reality tailored to your wishes and desires. You could live out a fake life in a simulated world (all the while believing it to be real), being whatever you want to be and getting whatever you want.

- Suppose everyone is given the opportunity to plug into this machine, following the general rule that it would definitely produce more happiness overall; indeed, people will have almost as much happiness as they can handle. Yet most would argue that one should not plug into such a machine because there is no value in living a fictitious life in a simulated world. There is something intrinsically valuable about true belief that utilitarianism just seems to miss. Indeed, if ignorance truly is bliss, then according to utilitarianism, ignorance should be preferred, but clearly, it should not.

- Perhaps we can look to logic to find the truthmakers for moral statements. Simply put, perhaps immoral actions are immoral because they are illogical or unreasonable. This was a suggestion made by Immanuel Kant. We will turn to him in the following lecture, as we consider our next question: Does reason define the good?

Suggested Sources

Jackson, "The Lottery."

Smart and Williams. *Utilitarianism*.

Thomson, "The Trolley Problem."

Questions to Consider

1. It is possible to be a hedonist and also always behave morally?
2. Can you think of other examples where an action creates more overall happiness but is immoral?
3. Is there a way to tweak rule utility so that it doesn't allow ad hoc exceptions and/or collapse back into act utility?
4. Can you figure out a reasonably easy way to do utilitarian calculus?
5. Science is our best way to understand the way the world is. Sam Harris has argued that science might also be used to answer ethical questions. Is he right? How might one go about doing this? Could philosophy of mind somehow be combined with utility?

Lecture 28

Does Reason Define the Good?

According to German philosopher Immanuel Kant, it is reason that determines what is moral or immoral. Although he believed in God, Kant did not think God's commands were what made moral statements true. Further, he didn't think the consequences of an action were relevant to whether or not it was moral. Instead, Kant argued, any correct moral theory must take our motivations into consideration. In this lecture, we consider many aspects of Kant's theory, known as *deontological ethics*.

Kant on Morality

- The German philosopher Immanuel Kant didn't look to certainties about the world to determine right and wrong; instead, he looked to truths of logic. What's more, Kant believed that concentrating on the consequences of an action to determine its morality was too shortsighted. A person's intentions and motivations are more relevant; in fact, the actual outcome may not be relevant at all. If you act with the right kind of motivation, then you are performing a moral action—even if the action ends up causing more harm than good.

- Simply put, if you act with the intention of doing your moral duty—which we might call your Kantian duty—then your action is morally right. If you violate your Kantian duty, then your action is morally wrong. It doesn't matter what the consequences of your actions are; all that matters is that you did your duty. This is why Kant's theory and those like it are called *deontological*— *deon* is Greek for "duty."

- According to Kant, there are certain actions that we are obligated to do regardless of the circumstances or consequences, such as don't lie, don't cheat, don't steal, don't murder, develop your natural talents, help others in need, and so on.

- Kant divides these duties into two types: perfect duties and imperfect duties. Perfect duties are those you must do at all times; most of the

"don'ts" fall into this category. The imperfect duties, in contrast, are more flexible; you can choose to perform the duty to "help others" at different places and times.

The Categorical Imperative

- The Kantian duties are in accordance with what Kant calls the "categorical imperative": "Act only on that maxim [rule] through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."

- To use the categorical imperative, you first identify the rule that governs what you are doing. Then, you decide if you would universalize it, that is, if you would be willing to live in a world in which everyone followed your example. If you would not like everyone else to act as you are about to act, then it is irrational for you to act that way yourself, and thus, the act is immoral.

- Do not confuse the categorical imperative with the Golden Rule, which is "Treat others as you would have them treat you." They are not the same. Unlike the Golden Rule, Kant's categorical imperative doesn't depend on how you would want to be treated. The categorical imperative depends on what kind of world you want to live in.

- There is another consideration when applying the categorical imperative: whether it is possible that following the rule could be universalized. If it is not possible, then you could not will it to become a universal rule; thus, performing the action is irrational and, consequently, immoral.

- Think about how it could be impossible to universalize a rule. The easiest example is murder. If everyone murdered, there would be no one left to murder, and thus, it would be impossible to follow the rule. For this reason, says Kant, following through on your impulse to murder is immoral: It couldn't be universalized.

A Second Version of the Categorical Imperative

- The categorical imperative is flawed because it doesn't properly label everything that is immoral. Consider a rule about slavery. Such

a rule as "Enslave all people of race X" could be universalized without contradiction. Under Kant's categorical imperative, it would be moral to enslave a specific race, but clearly it is not.

- To avoid these kinds of objections, Kant provided another version of the categorical imperative: "Act only on that maxim [rule] through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (version 1).

- Kant maintained that another way of putting the same idea is this: "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity [other persons] … never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end" (version 2). In other words, human beings are valuable in and of themselves; a person's well-being is a goal unto itself. Therefore, no one should ever use a person merely as a means to achieve some other goal.

- Most philosophers agree that Kant was wrong in thinking that versions 1 and 2 are equivalent. But we are not concerned here with whether Kant was right about everything he said. We want a correct moral theory. To get one, we might be able to tweak Kant a bit by using both rules.

- To determine whether or not something is moral, we first ask whether we can will our action to be universalized; if we can, then we ask whether the action involves treating people merely as a means to an end. If it doesn't, then we can say it is moral. Perhaps meeting both versions of the categorical imperative is what is necessary and sufficient for something to be morally good (or, at least, not morally bad).

- The heart of the reasoning behind Kant's second categorical imperative is this: The reason that humans should never be treated merely as a means to an end is because they are unique—because, unlike animals, they are aware of their own consciousness and (more important) because they are rational and, thus, are free to make their own decisions. Only humans can be held morally responsible for what they do.

- As Kant says, "Everything in nature works in accordance with laws. Only a rational being has the power to act in accordance with his

idea of the law—that is, in accordance with principles—[and so only a rational being has] a will." A rational being can act on what Kant calls "impulsions" and defy the laws by choice. For Kant, to act morally, we must choose to act in accordance with the categorical imperatives because we recognize that doing such an action is our duty.

Flaws in Kant's Theory

- This leads us to the first major objection to Kant. To even talk about morality, we've been assuming that we are free and morally responsible in a compatibilist sense. Kant's theory of morality seems to assume that we are free in a libertarian sense. Kant thinks that we are not caused by outside forces to act as we will but, instead, are the ultimate cause of our actions—even able to act otherwise. But we've already seen the difficulty in maintaining that we are free in this sense; we're just as subject to the laws as everything else in nature.

- Another problem is what Kant's theory entails about animals. Because animals are not rational creatures, Kant says that it is perfectly acceptable to use them as a means to an end. But that seems wrong, at least in some circumstances. Even if using them as beasts of burden and for food is justified to some extent, animals should be treated with some respect. Although animals are not rational, they are conscious and can feel pain.

- What's more, the fact that Kant's theory endorses capital punishment gives some people pause. According to Kant, when people act in accordance with a rule, they are showing that they wouldn't mind its being universalized. By killing someone else, a murderer is showing that he or she is willing to be murdered.

- Another objection to Kant that we must consider is that there are no real categorical imperatives—there are no perfect duties. There are no things that we must do regardless of the circumstances. Also, Kant didn't seem to realize that our duties can conflict; if he did realize it, he gave us no way to solve the paradox that his theory generates when they do.

- And this gives rise to perhaps the most famous objection of all: For Kant, you are obligated never to lie but also never to murder or, obviously, be complicit in a murder. But suppose an ax-wielding murderer comes to your door and asks where your mother is so he can murder her. You can lie and say she isn't home, thus violating your duty always to tell the truth, or you can tell the truth and violate your duty not to be complicit in murder. According to Kant's theory, you should lie and you should not lie—a contradiction.

Emotional Impetus versus Kantian Duty

- One final problem with Kant's theory is that it seems to underappreciate other motivations and the role that emotion plays in moral behavior. Consider this: On your anniversary, would you prefer that your significant other give you a gift because she loves you and is excited about giving you something you'll like or simply because she remembered it's your anniversary and knows she is obligated to get you something? Obviously, you'd prefer the former. You don't want her to do it simply because she recognizes that she should.

- The same seems to be true for moral behavior. People should act morally because they want to—even because they love doing so—and desire to do the right thing. They shouldn't do the right thing merely because they recognize, rationally, that it is their Kantian duty. But for Kant, that's all that is or should be involved in acting morally: the rational recognition of one's duty and a corresponding action in accordance with that duty.

- So far, we have considered three theories—divine command theory, utilitarianism, and Kant's deontology—none of which has been satisfactory in providing truthmakers for moral statements. Perhaps we shouldn't be looking for truthmakers for moral statements but, instead, simply trying to figure out how to act morally. Our challenge is to determine which moral statements are true without knowing what makes them true. In essence, this is the goal of virtue theory—the topic of our next lecture.

Suggested Sources

Johnson and Schmitz, “Johnny Cash, Prison Reform and Capital Punishment.”

Marchand, “Was Emmanuel Kant’s Dementia Symptomatic of a Frontal Tumor?”

Slachevsky and Garcia-Borreguero, “Did Immanuel Kant Have Dementia with Lewy Bodies and REM Behavior Disorder?”

Townshend and McAnuff, *The Who’s Tommy* (Broadway musical).

Questions to Consider

1. Can you think of a way to capture version 1 and version 2 of Kant’s categorical imperative with one rule?
2. Can you think of other situations when Kantian duties might conflict? When they do conflict, which duty should you favor, and why? What other ethical theory informs your decision?
3. Would you be satisfied if we simply discovered what is good, even if we fail to discover why the good is good? In other worlds, could you be philosophically content with simply discovering the truth value of moral statements without figuring out what gives them their truth value?

Lecture 29

How Ought We to Live?

Our quest for what is morally wrong or right is ultimately concerned with determining how we should live our lives. Because every ethical conundrum is different, we don't have to try to answer every ethical question; we just have to figure out how to be the kind of person who can answer the ethical questions presented by real life. In this lecture, we explore the approach of the virtue ethicist, who argues that we perform the right actions not by figuring out what the right action is and doing it, but by becoming the right kind of person—a virtuous person.

Virtue Ethics

- Virtue ethics is one of the oldest ethical theories, dating back to Plato and most fervently defended by Aristotle. Virtue ethics suggests that the goal of ethics should be to figure out how to have a good life, which can be accomplished only by being a good person. Once you have become a good person, good actions will follow.

- To be a good person, we need three things: virtue, practical wisdom, and eudaimonia. Another way of saying this is that, with virtue and practical wisdom, we can achieve eudaimonia.

- Aristotle, who likely had the clearest and most comprehensive articulation of virtue theory, suggested that virtue is often found in the mean—the average between defects and excesses. For example, courage is the middle point between cowardice and foolhardiness. Likewise, generosity is the mean between stinginess and extravagance; modesty is the mean between shamelessness and bashfulness; self-control is the mean between insensibility and debauchery; and temperance is the mean between excess and abstinence.

- In virtue theory, to be virtuous is not simply to engage in virtuous actions. To truly be a virtuous person, your virtuous behavior must be the result of your virtuous character. Virtue ethics maintains that becoming a

We can never expect to accomplish perfect virtue, but we should try to cultivate appreciation of the virtues through training and practice.

virtuous person requires much training and practice. We must get in the habit of acting virtuously and valuing virtues for their own sake.

- Therefore, moral education and development are important aspects of virtue ethics. We have to practice right behavior, surround ourselves with others who do the same, and expose ourselves to appropriate teachings. That is how we come to value the virtues down to our core and, thus, how we come to be virtuous.

- What's more, the virtue ethicist is more concerned with evaluating persons than individual actions. A virtuous action done begrudgingly is not all that virtuous; one done with a glad heart is.

Practical Wisdom

- By itself, however, being virtuous is not enough to guarantee virtuous behavior. Consider the example of a courageous firefighter. He acts courageously when he rescues someone, knowing that there is at

least some chance of success. If he were to rush into a building that is already a lost cause, then he's just foolhardy. Thus, being a courageous person doesn't just require you to value courage; it also requires you to have a certain kind of knowledge—in this case, knowledge of whether your action has a reasonable chance of success.

- Virtue ethicists would call this kind of knowledge *practical wisdom*; Aristotle called it *phronesis.* Although virtue ethics is not a consequentialist theory, a virtuous person does want to accomplish certain virtuous things. Simply valuing a virtue down to your core is not enough to guarantee you'll always accomplish virtuous goals. You have to know which actions will successfully engender virtues and which actions, given the circumstances, will likely accomplish your virtuous goals.

- Practical wisdom also involves the ability to evaluate a situation fully and consider multiple conflicting possibilities and other relevant virtuous goals. For example, even though virtuous people value honesty, they will not tell the truth in every situation; practical wisdom allows them to recognize when a lie is actually the more virtuous option—an option perhaps in line with other virtues that are more significant in that situation.

- What's more, practical wisdom can prevent people from being virtuous to a fault, for example, being too generous and giving away everything they own, causing themselves and their family to fall into abject poverty. Or people can be too honest, for example, spreading truthful but hurtful gossip.

- We think of practical wisdom as the kind of wisdom that comes through life experience. Through living life, we learn what kinds of things are worthwhile and what kinds of actions are likely to succeed. Practical wisdom is the sort of wisdom that an adult has but a child—no matter how kindhearted or generous—lacks.

Eudaimonia

- *Eudaimonia* is a Greek word often rendered as "happiness," but that translation is inadequate. In English, *happiness* usually refers to a momentary subjective mental state—feeling happy. But feeling happy

is neither necessary nor sufficient for eudaimonia. Eudaimonia is not a subjective state; it is an objective condition of life. To understand what eudaimonia means in virtue ethics, we can't simply rely on a single-word translation. We must look deeper into its theory and concept.

- According to Aristotle, eudaimonia consists in fulfilling one's function, and to find something's function, we should look at what makes it unique. For Aristotle, what makes humans unique is our ability to reason. Thus, we fulfill our function and have a eudaimonistic life by living in accordance with reason. A human is a good human by being someone who effectively uses reason.

- For Aristotle, living the kind of life that is truly worthwhile doesn't have anything to do with being in a certain state or condition, such as being happy or satisfied. It's about acting in a certain kind of way—a way that aligns with reason. For Aristotle, doing philosophy is an important part of the best kind of life.

Moral Exemplars

- In virtue ethics, it would be helpful to have some kind of truthmaker for statements about what the virtues are—a kind of "meta-ethical" approach. However, the virtue ethicist is not interested in grounding moral truths but in being a virtuous person.

- In order to understand what the virtues are, we can use the concept of moral exemplars. A moral exemplar is a morally outstanding person whom we admire. An important part of our attempt to become more virtuous is learning about, surrounding ourselves by, and trying to emulate moral exemplars. Further, we can discover what the virtues are by looking at the virtues that moral exemplars embody.

Objections to Virtue Ethics

- Virtue ethicists list what they consider to be virtues based mainly on intuition. There are no good arguments presented for why certain things are virtuous and others are lacking. Without those arguments, however, virtue theory seems to fall short as an ultimate guide to how we ought to live our lives.

- Another objection to virtue ethics is the implication that it is self-effacing. Consider this example from Michael Stocker's 1976 paper "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories": If you visit someone in the hospital, you should do it because you care for the other person, not because you want to emulate how someone else would act. Thus, even if virtue does define morality, to act morally, you can't simply be acting in the name of virtue. However, the virtue ethicist would suggest that if you've engendered the virtue of care or nurturing in yourself, you might actually be able to visit your friend in the hospital for the right reason.

- Another objection to the theory is that virtue ethics is too self-centered. Morality is very much about other people, and the moral acceptability of a behavior is largely determined by how it affects others. Yet virtue theory seems to be centered on individual actors—whether they are virtuous and whether their virtue constitutes their leading a good life. In fact, virtue theory may be the best way to accomplish what is required by morality and be centered on others, yet also do what is required by your own self-interest. By being virtuous, you can both be self-centered and other-centered.

- Still other philosophers suggest that virtue ethics leaves too much to chance, but virtue ethicists respond by embracing this consequence. Virtue, and ultimately a life worth living, is a matter of luck; it's hard to come by. This makes it all the more valuable—something we ought to strive to achieve.

Virtue Theory and Free Will

- Virtue theory maintains that people who are not morally virtuous are morally blameworthy—even if they are morally blameworthy because of bad luck. Interestingly, this situation leads to the issue of free will. If we really can't be morally blamed for something that's outside our control, then perhaps we can't be morally blamed for anything. Our actions may simply be a product of our genetics and our environment.

- Perhaps virtue ethics assumes a libertarian notion of free will and moral responsibility that is highly subject to doubt—which would likely force

us to admit that nothing really is morally right or wrong because there is no such thing as free will or moral responsibility.

- At the same time, virtue ethics seems to be completely in line with compatibilism, the suggestion that we are free and morally responsible for what we do as long as our action springs from some aspect of ourselves, such as our character or the fact that we care for the virtues down to the core.

- Like the compatibilist, the virtue ethicist admits that our behavior is ultimately a result of genetics and environment; we become virtuous people by exposing ourselves to a virtuous education. Both also admit that moral evaluations of actions are best understood as moral evaluations of the character or virtues from which those actions spring. We get moral credit for an action if that action springs from a moral virtue.

- Therefore, virtue ethics takes an entirely different approach to the quest of ethics. Instead of attempting to become the right kind of person by figuring out which actions you should perform, you can come to know which actions you should perform by becoming the right kind of person—a virtuous person. If you're lucky and all the conditions are right, your virtuousness will lead to eudaimonia—the kind of flourishing life that is most worth living.

Suggested Sources

Becker, *A New Stoicism*.

Johnson and Rhodes, "The Virtuous Batman."

Schofield, "Stoic Ethics."

Questions to Consider

1. Does it bother you that we have yet to find truthmakers for moral statements? Without truthmakers, can we think there are moral truths? And if there are no moral truths, can one be a virtuous person?
2. Can you think of any uncontroversial moral exemplars—people that everyone would agree are virtuous? Think of some and do some research to see if anyone disagrees with you.
3. Are you comfortable with using fictional characters as moral exemplars? (After all, unlike real people, they can be perfect.)

Lecture 30

Why Bother Being Good?

Consider two different kinds of people: someone who lives a life of virtue and faces hardship as a result or someone who is nonvirtuous and lives a life of comfort as a result. In this lecture, we compare the stories of Socrates and Gyges of Lydia to answer the question of why we should be moral at all. We'll also examine Plato's *Republic* in depth to prove that being virtuous, or "just," is the only way to be happy and to lead a flourishing and worthwhile life.

Socrates and Gyges of Lydia

- Plato provides us an example of a virtuous person who was scorned by the public as a nonvirtuous person: Socrates. No one was more devoted to the intellectual virtues than Socrates, and he strove daily to understand all the virtues. But Socrates was largely despised by the public because in his quest for knowledge, he exposed the ignorance of others. Socrates was so hated, in fact, that he was eventually brought to trial in Athens and put to death.

- Compare Socrates to Gyges of Lydia who, according to myth, found a ring that made him invisible. Gyges used his ring of invisibility to secretly seduce the wife of the king of Lydia, and Gyges became king himself. Because he was able to accomplish these nefarious deeds while invisible, it looked as if he simply benefited from good fortune—and everyone revered him as a great and virtuous man.

- As Glaucon, the brother of Plato, recounts in the *Republic*, acting unjustly would guarantee happiness in life if it weren't for the public scorn and ridicule that accompany getting caught. But if you could accomplish all you wanted without being caught—say, by being invisible—then you would be much happier as a result. In reality, says Glaucon, virtue leads to a better life only because it gets you recognition as a virtuous person and all the benefits that go with that.

Thus, Glaucon argues, it's better not to be actually virtuous but to be regarded by the public as virtuous.

- However, in the *Republic*, Plato observes that being virtuous, or "just," is the only way to be happy and to lead a flourishing and worthwhile life. To get us to that conclusion, Plato takes us on a roundabout journey—a lengthy argument from analogy.

The *Republic*

- According to Plato, the most just society—what he calls the Republic—would be divided into three classes, each dedicated to a specific function: workers, guardians, and rulers.

- The workers are those who supply the material needs of the Republic: farmers, health-care workers, sanitation workers, and so on. The guardians are the equivalent of the police and military forces. The rulers lead the Republic. Plato insists that rulers must be courageous and loyal, but most important, they should be wise. According to Plato, this is only possible for those who have an intimate knowledge of the Forms—the abstract objects that are perfect examples of justice, fairness, and so on. In fact, the rulers would be philosophers. This is where we get the term *philosopher-king*.

- To ensure that all people play the role best suited to their abilities—and that all people find themselves in the class in which they belong—the state will evaluate all persons and place them accordingly. In fact, all children will be raised by the state. Their talents and abilities will be decided at an early age, and they'll be trained and placed in the appropriate class when they're adults.

- Now, it might be the case that people would complain about their lot in life; they may not like to be placed in a certain class or given a certain job. To avoid this problem, Plato suggests the "noble lie." The rulers would tell the population that the gods had determined everyone's class. This noble lie, adequately reinforced, would keep people from complaining and revolting.

- Plato argues that this society is just and, indeed, virtuous because of its organization and its properties. The Republic embodies the intellectual virtues because its rulers are wise. It is courageous because its guardians are valiant. It is temperate because it is self-controlled; everyone does his or her own job, and the guardians keep all the workers in line.

Reason, Spirit, and Appetites

- All of this is also Plato's way of explaining that a virtuous person is like the Republic. According to Plato, a person's mind or soul—and we need not think of a soul in this case as a separable entity (although Plato thought it was)—was divided into three parts: reason, spirit drive, and appetites. A virtuous person has those parts arranged in the same way that the Republic organizes its classes.

- For the virtuous person, reason rules; it sets the laws and makes the decisions, just as the rulers do in the Republic. The appetites, like the workers, provide for the needs of the body. The spirit element plays a role analogous to the role of the guardians of the Republic; it keeps the appetites in line. The spirit element is also responsible for defending the body from those who might harm it. In this way, the virtuous person is courageous.

- According to Plato, a just state is one in which each class fulfills its function, and the working class is ruled by the wise. A just person is one in whom the appetites and spirit are ruled (tempered) by the intellect, and each part of the person fulfills its function.

- Plato argues that such a virtuous person flourishes—attains eudaimonia—in the same way and for the same reason that the Republic flourishes. This is why the virtuous person is better off than the wicked person, even if the virtuous person is scorned and the wicked person is not. To make his case, Plato draws an analogy between different kinds of governments or societies and different kinds of persons.

Hierarchy of Governments

- If the Republic were to degenerate into the second-best form of government, it would become a timocracy—a guardian-ruled city. The

main goal of such a city would be its own protection; it would resemble a police state.

- But if the soldiers get too oppressive, the workers might organize a revolt and turn the government into an oligarchy—a city where the workers rule in a united fashion to their own advantage.

- As the unity between the workers disintegrates, the oligarchy will likely turn into a democracy. Americans today might think it strange to find democracy so far down on the list of Plato's ideal governments, but Plato's democracy is not the representative democracy we have in the United States. What Plato was talking about is a direct democracy, where every person has exactly one vote in every decision the government makes. In a direct democracy, the majority always rules—more specifically, whoever can swing the majority opinion on any given day will rule on that day.

- As the workers in the democracy vie for power, eventually, one will emerge as dominant, turning a democracy into a tyranny.

More Justice/More Flourishing

- As we look at these governments and societies, we see a "more justice/more flourishing" pattern emerge. Clearly, as we go down the list, moving from the Republic to tyranny, each society is a bit less just than the one before it, and each society flourishes a bit less than the one before it. There are certainly fewer opportunities for intellectual pursuits and advancements or even for citizens to lead good and virtuous lives. Conversely, as we go up the list, we see that the more just a society, the more it flourishes and the greater opportunity it gives its citizens to flourish.

- We see a similar pattern emerge in individuals. People who are wise because reason rules their actions, courageous because their spirit element is properly motivated, and tempered because they control their appetites are people who are likely to live the kind of life most worth living.

- Thus, Plato argues, it is reasonable to conclude that such virtuous people still flourish and are even happier than may otherwise be expected, even if they do suffer hardships and are ill-regarded by the public. Being virtuous comes with its own kind of internal reward that makes it worth attaining regardless of whether it is recognized. For Plato, both the just person and the just society participate in the same thing—the Form of Justice.

Thomas Schick's Inference to the Best Action

- Philosophy in general is frustrating because it's so difficult to find concrete answers. However, we can still take what we have learned and use it to guide our actions. Theodore Schick has provided an excellent method of moral reasoning called *inference to the best action*, which uses the scientific method of inference as a model to find the best explanation.

- Recall that when trying to discover the best explanation, we rely on multiple criteria: fruitfulness, scope, simplicity, and conservatism. Schick suggests we take a similar approach with ethical questions. In his paper "A Humanist Theory of Ethics," Schick suggests four criteria. The following criteria have been modified to reflect the terminology used in these lectures.
    - Justice: The extent to which an action treats equals people equally, that is, something that we could will to be universalized.
    - Mercy: The extent to which an action alleviates the most unnecessary suffering/pain for the most people.
    - Beneficence: The extent to which an action promotes the best kind of happiness for the largest number of people.
    - Autonomy: The extent to which an action respects individual rights, that is, avoids treating others as a means to an end.
    - Virtue: The extent to which an action reflects what a moral exemplar would do and fits within a life that is conducive to well-being or eudaimonia.

When we are presented with ethical conundrums, we should consider our options in light of how they meet the criteria of justice, mercy, beneficence, autonomy, and virtue.

- Obviously, such actions as saving a drowning baby fit all five criteria, but when we are presented with ethical conundrums, we can consider our options and figure out which one fulfills the most of these criteria. Because there will sometimes be ties, inference to the best action won't answer all our questions, but the same is true for scientific abduction, and it's still the best method we have. At the very least, in this way, we could arrive at rational ethical answers more often than we did before.

Suggested Sources

Belfort, *The Wolf of Wall Street*.

Groening and Haaland, "I, Meatbag" (television show episode).

Martinez, "Where Did Tolkien Get the Idea for a Ring of Invisibility?"

Vlastos, "Was Plato a Feminist?"

Questions to Consider

1. Do you accept the conclusion that Socrates's life was of better quality than Gyges's life? Are there limits to how bad a virtuous person's life can get and still be worth living?
2. Would you want to live in Plato's Republic? What class would you be in?
3. The lecture left divine command theory out of the five suggested criteria because it didn't seem useful; it's too difficult to determine what God commands. If you're a theist, however, might you use the criteria to discover what God commands?
4. How might you use Schick's "ethical abduction" to answer these ethical questions asked in an earlier lecture:
    a. When, if ever, is abortion moral? In the case of unwanted pregnancy? In the case of rape or incest? To save the mother's life?
    b. When, if ever, is war morally justified? In what conditions, if any, is it acceptable to kill another human being?
    c. If a person has been diagnosed with a terminal illness, should she have the right to terminate her own life in a medically controlled fashion? Is it morally acceptable for a doctor to help her?
    d. Is there actually something morally wrong with homosexual activity? Is premarital sex really immoral? (Both are forbidden by many religions.)
    e. Is human cloning immoral?
    f. Is it acceptable to steal a loaf of bread to feed your starving family?
    g. Should you tell a friend that his spouse is having an affair if you find out? Is it acceptable to lie to your friends about the way they look, or how much you like them, or whether you think they're making a mistake with their lives?
    h. Are you obligated to give a dollar to save a needy child's life or to keep a puppy from being euthanized?

Lecture 31

Should Government Exist?

To a great extent, government dictates our lives; it enforces numerous rules and regulations about how we ought to live, and it automatically deducts a large percentage of our pay from our paychecks. If anyone else did that, it would be called theft. Philosophical anarchists maintain that there is no difference between a thief and the government; what's more, the government is not morally justified in what it does. In this lecture, we'll explore the philosophical anarchists' claim that the government has no right to tell you what to do at all.

Theoretical Anarchism

- There are three kinds of anarchism: theoretical anarchism, "serious" anarchism, and violent anarchism.

- Theoretical anarchists make the claim that the government has no legitimate moral authority; they maintain that no one person or organization has the right to restrict your movement, take your property or money in the form of taxes, or tell you how to live your life. Theoretical anarchists refrain from commenting on whether or not we are better off living under a government; even if we were better off, according to the theoretical anarchist, government still has no moral authority.

- Making your life better, or even a majority of people's lives better, is not enough to give the government the right to tell you what to do. Theoretical anarchists will tolerate the existence of the government as a matter of practical necessity and likely would suggest that most others do the same. Even though the government has no moral authority over any aspect of your life, it's not worth ruining your life by demonstrating this fact.

- American political philosopher Robert Paul Wolff, in his 1970 book *In Defense of Anarchism*, observes that individual autonomy (or freedom) and the rights of the government to dictate your actions are mutually

exclusive; that is, it's not possible to truly be free while living under a government. The right to freedom is inalienable; thus, the government has no moral authority.

"Serious" Anarchism, Violent Anarchism

- So-called serious anarchists take this thinking a step further. Not only do they claim the government has no moral authority, but they also assert that—despite its supposed benefits—we would all be better off without government. The serious anarchist suggests that if government did not exist, we would still achieve the same benefits through mutual cooperation, without having to sacrifice our liberty.

- Serious anarchism is related to political libertarianism. Libertarians value liberty above all else and believe the government is not justified in restricting us from any action unless it will interfere with the liberty of others. As such, they are in favor of a very small government with a limited amount of responsibility.

- Violent anarchism argues that we ought to overthrow and eradicate government (thus creating anarchy) through violent means. Few philosophers subscribe to violent action; instead, they prefer nonviolent action. For example, if enough of the populace can be convinced that they are better off without the government, the government would lose the ability to enforce its laws.

Lack of Moral Authority

- Reasoning put forward by philosophical anarchists to defend their position constitutes a kind of disjunctive argument for theoretical anarchy—the notion that the government has no moral authority.

- If the government has moral authority, then its laws have moral import, that is, they are "morally relevant." The fact that there is a law commanding or restricting something is relevant to whether or not you are morally obligated to perform or refrain from performing that action. But the reasoning behind theoretical anarchy suggests that no law has moral import, and no law is relevant to whether or not you are morally obligated to do something.

- Every action is either morally obligatory, merely morally permissible, or morally wrong. If the law commands you to do something morally wrong, you are not morally obligated to obey. In fact, you are morally obligated to disobey. Therefore, in the case of immoral action, no law could have moral import.

- Consider a situation in which the law commands you to do something that is morally obligatory. However, you are already morally obligated. The fact that there is a law concerning it is irrelevant. Thus, in the case of morally obligatory action, the law has no moral import.

- If the law commands you to do something that is merely morally permissible but not obligatory, then you're not really morally obligated to obey. Again, in the case of morally permissible actions, the law has no moral import.

Robert Paul Wolff's Autonomy Argument

- Following is an argument for theoretical anarchy propounded by Robert Paul Wolff*:* the autonomy argument.
    - The fundamental assumption of moral philosophy is that people are responsible for their actions.

    - The only way to truly be responsible for one's actions is to be a free/autonomous agent (to have free will and determine actions by reason).

    - Thus, the highest virtue and primary obligation of a person is autonomy—to determine actions by free will and reason.

    - Government necessarily infringes on autonomy. It forces people to act, instead of letting them act autonomously; life-threatening punishment is a consequence if they do not behave as it dictates.

    - Obeying the law simply because it is the law is not acting autonomously. To truly act autonomously, one must choose to act unencumbered from threat or coercion. One can be told what is right, but one must choose to do it to truly act morally.

- Thus, one cannot have a moral obligation to obey the law because it is the law. One must do what is morally right simply because it is morally right, regardless of the law.

- Wolff observes: "If all men have a continuing obligation to achieve the highest degree of autonomy possible, then there would appear to be no state whose subjects have a moral obligation to obey its commands."

The Prisoners' Dilemma

- To bolster their argument against the serious anarchists, theoretical anarchists—and anyone else who thinks we are better off without government—point to the prisoners' dilemma as evidence.

- The prisoners' dilemma is a situation in which two people are given a choice of whether to cooperate or defect; mutual cooperation will give the overall best result. But because defection is in the best self-interest of each individual, both will defect and get the worst result possible. Consider this case:
  - Two prisoners are suspected of a crime.
  - If they both keep quiet, they will get only one year in jail.
  - If each informs against the other, they will get four years each.
  - But if one informs and the other doesn't, the informant goes free and the other gets six years.

- Notice that, for each person, it is better to defect—no matter what the other does. Say that you're person A. If you think person B is going to inform, then you should, too: If person B informs and you don't, you get six years, but if you inform, too, you get only four.

- Even if you think person B is going to cooperate, you should still inform. If you both cooperate, you'll still get a year, but if you inform and person B doesn't, then you get nothing. Again, regardless of what the other person does, it is better for you to defect. Of course, the same is

true for person B, as well; no matter what person A does, it's better to defect. For this reason, both will defect.

- But notice that this is the worst possible overall result. If both prisoners defect, collectively, they will serve eight years. If only one defects, there would be only six years served, and if they both cooperated, they would, collectively, get only two. Without any overarching influence to guarantee that they cooperate, they get the worst possible overall result.

The Bean Game

- Some have suggested that the prisoners' dilemma is flawed because the prisoners are given only one try. When multiple tries are allowed,

Without government, the anti-anarchist argues, we would always get the worst result; for example, without environmental regulations, companies would dispose of waste in the cheapest way, leaving all of us without potable water.

people learn to cooperate, as in the bean game. In the bean game, it is always in one person's interest to defect; however, mutual defection gets the worst result, and only cooperation gets to the goal.

- There are two players; the object is simply to increase your count of beans by 5. If you do, you get 10 bonus points on the final round. If you don't, you lose 20 points on the final round.
- On each turn, you can place down either 1 bean or 2 beans.
- There will be 10 turns.
- If you both place down 1 bean, each person gets none.
- If you both place down 2 beans, each person gets 1 more.
- However, if one places 2 and the other 1, whoever places 1 bean gets the other's 2 beans.

- Notice two things: Regardless of what the other person does, it is always better to put down 1 bean. If the other person is going to put down 1, you should put down 1 to protect your 2 from being stolen. But if the other person is going to put down 2 beans, then you should still put down 1 bean; that way, you'll get 2 beans instead of 1.

- But if you both always put down 1 bean, neither of you will reach your goal. If an overarching power is necessary to enforce cooperation, to reach the best result, it would seem that if you make people actually play the bean game, no one would ever win. Everyone would just continually put down 1 bean and have no more beans than when they started.

- But in reality, the bean game does not work this way. In fact, people learn to cooperate without any coercion. Many times, they will simply put down 2 beans from the very beginning and reach their goal quickly. Other times, someone might defect by putting down a single bean and stealing the other's 2, but a quick tit for tat will teach her a lesson and soon she'll learn to cooperate.

- This is what the serious anarchist suggests would happen in the real world. Mutual interest and even social pressures will guide us to cooperation; no government is needed. There is other evidence that we would learn to cooperate in an anarchist state, including the fact that society organized into government in the first place. Humans used to live in a state of anarchy, but we eventually learned to cooperate, which led to the formation of government.

Suggested Sources

Singer, *Democracy and Disobedience*.

Wilson and Chomsky, "Noam Chomsky."

Questions to Consider

1. Anarchist Mikhail Makunin argues for the abolition of government and the establishment of trade unions that would control production and protect rights. But is he really an anarchist? Are not trade unions just small governments? Why or why not?
2. Can you think of times when violent anarchy might have been justified? The lecture suggested Nazi Germany. Can you think of other examples?
3. What would an anarchist say if you broke the law in a way that led to consequences he didn't like. Say, perhaps, you simply started living in the house of an anarchist without his consent. What should his reaction be? Would it be inconsistent for the anarchist to call the police? Can the anarchist use the law to his benefit? How might the different varieties of anarchism answer the question differently?
4. Should an anarchist vote? Why or why not?

Lecture 32

What Justifies a Government?

In the last lecture, we discussed the philosophical anarchists, who observe that the laws of the state have no moral authority and maintain that government should not exist at all. Some philosophers speculate that in the "state of nature"—a state in which people are left to their own devices without government oversight—people would learn to cooperate on their own. What's more, the motivation behind that cooperation actually gives government its moral authority. This is the concept behind the *social contract*. In this lecture, we study the three major social contract theorists—two of whom influenced America's Founding Fathers and the American Revolution: Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

The State of Nature and the Social Contract

- The basic idea of the social contract is that government gains moral authority over its citizens because the citizens mutually give up their right to govern themselves in exchange for the benefits that supposedly come with a lawful, organized society. Of course, the social contract is not a written agreement; the agreement is implicit. Further, under the contract, the government has the right to restrict certain rights and exercise powers over its citizens.

- According to English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, citizens would mutually give up their rights to avoid the "state of nature"—the condition that humans would face without government. In his book *Leviathan*, Hobbes describes life in the state of nature as "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short."

- For Hobbes, we enter into the social contract—and trade our rights and autonomy—for security provided by "the sovereign." There are no limits on the rights we sacrifice and no limits on how the sovereign can restrict our actions. The sovereign can do no moral wrong.

- The philosophical argument is this: Hobbes was a moral relativist; he believed that there are no natural moral laws in the state of nature. Moral obligations are created only when one enters into the social contract—when one promises to obey the sovereign. And that promise goes only one way; the sovereign can't break a promise because he didn't make one. And the sovereign can't violate your natural rights; you don't have any. Subjects are obligated to obey. Thus, Hobbes argues, rebellion is never justified.

- A likely influence on Hobbes's writing was the political turmoil that he witnessed—namely, the English Civil Wars of the mid-1600s, a time when religions struggled for political power. For Hobbes, the English Civil Wars revealed what the state of nature was really like. Life is fear, and fearing the sovereign is a better choice than fearing the state of nature. The sovereign is morally permitted do whatever he can to guard his subjects against the state of nature.

John Locke

- The English philosopher John Locke witnessed the tumultuous aftermath of the English Civil Wars in his younger years. Locke's work remains one of the most influential works in all of political philosophy, especially because it discusses when rebellion against the state is justified.

- Unlike Hobbes, Locke believed that the sovereign can do wrong—by violating the natural rights to life, liberty, and property that all citizens have. For Locke, the state of nature was not as bad as Hobbes envisioned; Locke had a more optimistic view of human nature. But in the state of nature, people have no guarantee of protection; someone always could, without consequence, steal your land and goods, force you into servitude, or even take your life. Because Locke thought we had a natural right to life, liberty, and property, if the sovereign failed to protect them—or violated those rights himself—then rebellion is justified.

- Locke is noted for his labor view of property—that people come to own something when they mix their labor with it. If you pick an apple off a wild tree, it's your apple. If you cultivate land to grow food, both

the land and food are yours. But if you take an apple off a tree that someone else planted on his land, you're violating his right to property. For this reason, if the government seizes your farmland, it's violating your natural right to property.

- Locke's theories might lead us to believe that he opposed government taxes and state-led warfare. However, according to Locke, such things are not a violation of your rights if they are done with your consent. And, Locke argues, when you enter into the social contract and create a government, you consent to give up your rights to an extent—the extent necessary to keep the government existing and functioning.

Influence on the Founding Fathers

- Even though he was writing in the context of the English political revolutions of the 1600s, Locke helped inspire the American Revolution of the 1700s. "No taxation without representation" was a rallying cry. The fact that the king of England taxed the American colonies without giving them a voice in the government was seen as justification for revolution; it was a violation of the colonists' Lockean natural rights to life, liberty, and property. In fact, the American Founding Fathers insisted in the Declaration of Independence that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were inalienable rights.

- Like Hobbes, Locke also recognized the danger posed by the struggle of religious factions fighting for political power. But instead of proposing a state religion, Locke suggested making religious devotion a matter of private conscience. Political power does not come from God, he argued, but instead, comes from the consent of the governed. In effect, Locke's theory separated religion from government.

- The notion of the separation of church and state was groundbreaking and likely played a role in the creation of the First Amendment of the Constitution: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

- Thomas Jefferson, who coined the term "separation of church and state," wrote, "Christianity neither is, nor ever was a part of the

common law." Like many of the Founding Fathers, Jefferson probably embraced deism—a religious view that believed in God, a moral code, and perhaps an afterlife but rejected all other supernatural and superstitious elements of religion, including the biblical miracles and the divinity of Christ.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

- Locke wasn't the only philosopher to influence the Founding Fathers; Jean-Jacques Rousseau inspired them, as well. Perhaps the greatest influence Rousseau had on the Founders was his adamant defense of democracy. During Rousseau's time, most people were uneducated and illiterate and certainly couldn't understand sophisticated political philosophy. Thus, many thought that only the educated elite should hold the responsibly of running the government and passing laws.

- But Rousseau thought the common people were more capable of deciding what was in the best interest of society. For Rousseau, the superiority of the elite amounted mostly to their ability to deceive and manipulate the public. When left to its own devices, the public will agree on what is best for themselves. Rousseau's term "general will" was what was in the best interest of society—what we might today call the "common good."

- Interestingly, according to Rousseau, a crucial way to ensure that the population is free from manipulation is to do away with political parties. Rousseau also opposed representative democracy, in which the people elect others to decide for them what laws to pass. He advocated a direct democracy, in which the people all vote directly. In representative democracy, Rousseau said, people are slaves every other day of the year—except the day they are voting.

- Rousseau's confidence in the common people extended to his view of the state of nature. Unlike Hobbes, Rousseau didn't think the state of nature was a state of war—quite the opposite, in fact. Rousseau embraced what many have called the "noble savage" view. In the state of nature, people are peaceful and content.

For Rousseau, political parties simply manipulate people's opinions, skewing them away from their concern for the general will.

- In fact, Rousseau thought that civilization had "unimproved" humans in many ways. The noble savage was stronger, more ingenious, and more independent. The best thing about the state of nature was that, within it, humans were truly free—with no government, laws, or sovereign. As Rousseau begins his most famous work, *The Social Contract*, "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains."

Rousseau's Vision of the Republic

- Rousseau didn't think it was possible to return to the state of nature, however. His aim was to try to describe how we might once again approach the kind of freedom we enjoyed in the state of nature within the bounds of modern society.

- According to Rousseau, an individual's social contract would be with the entire population as a whole—the republic. The entire population would decide, by majority vote, what should be the law of the land. Because each person giving up his rights to the republic is a member of that republic, he wouldn't be giving up his rights to anyone else, reducing the chances for abuse. The republic would act in its own interest, not in the interest of the rich, the elite, or the monarch.

- Government would function only as an executive—an entity to enforce or execute the laws that the people had created. Like Thomas Jefferson, Rousseau thought revolutions to overthrow the government and return power to the people would be needed quite often—perhaps once every generation.

Political Freedom

- Rousseau's other great influence on the Founding Fathers was his emphasis on freedom. It's important to note, however, that Rousseau's idea of freedom is not freedom in a metaphysical sense; it is political freedom. Rousseau suggested that those who do not obey the general will—in other words, those who disobey the law and, thus, do not act in the best interests of the republic—must be "forced to be free."

- To understand this, consider the two kinds of political freedom: negative freedom and positive freedom. Negative freedom is the ability to do what you want, without any obstacles. Positive freedom is the kind of freedom that people have when they pursue their true goals, wants, and desires, unencumbered by outside influences.

- Rousseau believed that an individual's true self always aligns with the general will. If someone acts contrary to the general will, we must free

him from whatever wants and desires are keeping him from seeking his true self. To benefit the republic must be what our true self wants, and only in that way can we truly be free.

Suggested Sources

Cahoon, *The Modern Political Tradition*.

Questions to Consider

1. What do you think the state of nature—a world without government—would really be like?
2. In 2014, polls definitively showed that the vast majority of the general public wanted immigration reform and stricter gun regulation (92 percent in favor of expanded background checks). If you had put these issues up for a popular vote, they would have passed. Yet despite more than ample opportunity to do so, Congress never got these things passed; the House of Representatives, in fact, never even brought them up for a vote. Is this an example of what Rousseau says about political parties skewing people away from the common good? Does it align with what he said about the people in a representative democracy being slaves every other day of the year, except when they are voting?
3. What kind of government would you rather live under: one that matches Hobbes's vision, Locke's, or Rousseau's?
4. Do you think revolutions should happen as often as Jefferson and Rousseau suggest—every generation?
5. Would the majority opinion, free from manipulation, really align with the general will (the common good)?
6. Can you think of a time when someone was unsure of what to think on a topic until she learned what position her party took on it? How does this align with Rousseau's concerns about political parties?

Lecture 33

How Big Should Government Be?

In order to answer the question of how much power the government should have—that is, how big it should be—we turn to economics. Fortunately, economics is yet another academic discipline that owes its existence to philosophy; thus, its discussion here is within the realm of our course. In this lecture, we consider the extent to which the government should intervene in the economy; to that end, we examine the economic theories of Adam Smith, Karl Marx, and John Maynard Keynes.

Adam Smith

- Any discussion of modern economics must start with the Scottish philosopher and economist Adam Smith, who published *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* in the same year of America's founding, 1776. Smith is considered the father of modern capitalism; his groundbreaking theory was a response to the prevailing economic theory of the time: mercantilism.

- In Smith's eyes, under mercantilism, nations protected and promoted their industries at the expense of the welfare of their citizens. The government protected its national industries with strict tariffs and taxes on foreign imports, essentially granting local merchants a price-controlling monopoly on their goods. Although it was thought that this system benefited the nation, Smith argued that the monopoly's higher prices made products unavailable to most citizens and, thus, hurt the nation as a whole.

- If fair competition were allowed, Smith observed, then local businesses would be forced to lower their prices, which would make their goods more affordable for everyone. Increased demand, Smith argued, would also motivate more production and encourage businesses to use efficiencies, such as the division of labor. Increased production would drive down prices further, making products even more widely available.

The "Invisible Hand"

- Smith was inspired by the success of the new Dutch commercial economy and by the French economic philosophy called *physiocracy*. The physiocrats coined the term *laissez-faire*—essentially, "let it be"—which is now synonymous with free-market capitalism. Contrary to mercantilists, physiocrats thought that the government should stay out of the economy and simply let it take its course.

- Smith adopted and defended this notion and, in the process, popularized the term *invisible hand*. Smith maintained that people should be allowed to produce, charge, and buy what they want—not solely because such freedom better protected natural rights but also because it made everyone better off by raising the standard of living for both rich and poor. He acknowledged that people most often act self-interestedly, but the collective result of this self-interest works to the betterment of all. Guided by an invisible hand, Smith noted, self-interest would produce "universal opulence." Smith, in fact, argued that any human attempt to organize society to benefit all could never succeed as well as the invisible hand.

- But Smith thought this kind of free-market capitalistic system could flourish only with certain government institutions: a military and police force, a just legal system, a public works system, a transportation system, regulation of financial markets, and public education. To fund the government, Smith proposed a progressive tax system, in which the more you earn, the greater percentage of your money is used to fund the government.

- As the primary defender of capitalism, Smith is arguably one of the most influential thinkers in history. Smith thought that free-market capitalism was the best way to ensure overall prosperity. Although there would not be full equality—some would have more than others—everyone would be better off in general.

Karl Marx

- One man who thought capitalism fell short of its promise was German economist Karl Marx. Marx saw the plight of the poor as something

One danger of capitalism, according to Smith, is that it could lead to worker alienation; the process of doing the same task, repetitively, on an assembly line can have a negative effect on the worker and, in turn, on society as a whole.

created by greedy capitalists. The freedom defended by Locke and Smith was simply liberty for rich business owners—the capitalists, or what Marx called the "bourgeoisie"—to oppress the workers, whom he called the "proletariat."

- Marx didn't consider himself a philosopher; he considered himself a social scientist describing how society works. The philosophers of the past had only "interpreted the world," he maintained, but the real point is to change it. This is the reason he proclaimed, "Workers of the world, unite!" in the hope that capitalism would eventually destroy itself.

- Marx was influenced by the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, who saw the progress of history as a deterministic one, guided by the struggle between opposites: thesis versus antithesis,

resulting in a synthesis. In Marx's view, capitalism would eventually give rise to a workers' revolt and, in turn, to socialism, which would eventually become communism. Because all such transformations resulted from economic class struggle and because communism would be classless, Marx believed that communism would mark the end of the process.

- Workers would revolt, argued Marx, because capitalists exploit workers. According to Marx, the value of a product is equal to the price of the labor necessary to produce it; this is called the *labor theory of value*. But to make a profit, capitalists charge more for a product than it costs to produce it. In this way, capitalists are thieves; they pay workers less than their labor is worth.

- It's worth noting, however, that it is inaccurate to suggest that Marx was for big government, while Smith was for small government. In the final step of the process—full-blown communism, where the people control all political and economic decisions—the government is essentially dissolved. There are no leaders or elected officials. We might say that in Marx's communism, the people are the government.

Failings of Marxism

- Marx's theory was wrong on many counts. First, the labor theory of value is simply false. The value of a commodity is not merely the value of the labor necessary to produce it; its utility, along with the amount of the product that is available, are also major factors. In addition, Marx failed to take into account that capitalists are owed some compensation for their efforts: They not only create businesses in the first place, but they also take financial risks that workers do not.

- Second, many of Marx's predictions were wrong. He observed that communism would first arise in the most-developed nations; in fact, the opposite turned out to be true. Consider the communist revolution in Russia in 1917, when Russia had a very primitive economy. What's more, many of the nations that experienced a communist revolution eventually collapsed, such as the Soviet Union in 1991. And those that remain today are either infused with capitalism, such as China, or are

dismal failures, such as North Korea, where the communistic dictator lives in luxury while the majority of people struggle to survive.

- Third, the situation of the poor under capitalism pales in comparison to the horrors suffered under Stalin's communist Russia, Pol Pot's Cambodian communist regime, and the North Korean communist regime. As noble as his intentions might have been, Marx's utopian vision of society may have led to more suffering than any other philosophical idea in history.

John Maynard Keynes

- Despite the inaccuracies of Marx's predictions and the flaws in his economic theory, it's still true that people at that time were working in deplorable conditions for pennies a day. Eventually, though, labor laws were passed, and working conditions improved. Even with labor laws in place, however, capitalism still gave rise to two problems. The first was economic inequality; the second was that capitalism was unstable.

- Capitalism inevitably caused economic crashes, panics, recessions, and depressions. The most famous, of course, was the U.S. stock market crash of 1929 and the subsequent Great Depression of the 1930s. It was the Great Depression that motivated a new kind of economics, championed by an economist who was interested in rescuing capitalism from itself: British economist John Maynard Keynes.

- Keynes wasn't just worried about the stability of capitalism; he was concerned that the Great Depression might be permanent. Left to itself, capitalism might never correct the problem. According to Keynes, the only way to rectify the problem was through government action.

- Keynes maintained that it was possible for supply to outstrip demand, causing recessions and unemployment. This, he thought, had caused the Great Depression. But Keynes saw a way out. If supply outstripped demand, then give the people the means to buy (increasing demand), and the system will correct itself.

Flaws in Keynesian Economics

- The Keynes theory required government intervention. To correct a depression, the government needed to do two things: lower interest rates on loans, enabling the public greater access to more funds, and spend money, especially on infrastructure, creating jobs and, thus, giving people money to spend.

- Keynes is a kind of middle ground between Smith and Marx. He didn't think that the government should be involved in the economy to the extent that Marx did, and Keynes knew that many of Marx's economic theories, such as the labor theory of value, were wrong. But although Keynes agreed with Smith about many of capitalism's virtues, he disagreed about its stability and its ability to guarantee positive outcomes without outside interference. Thus, we might say that Keynes is like Smith with a little infused Marxism.

- Of course, not everyone agrees with Keynes. Some argue that it was actually government interference with the economy—especially with banking—that caused the Great Depression and even the 2008 crash. Others argue that we really have no idea how stable or dangerous a free market really is because we've never had one. Even Smith called for the regulation of the banking system and for a government-funded infrastructure and educational system.

- Libertarians believe that government should be small and should stay out of nearly every aspect of our lives. All people should be free to simply live their lives however they see fit. Clearly, however, this position must have some limits. After all, living under a government that does nothing is no different than living in a state of anarchy. When we enter the social contract, we give up some liberties. In the next lecture, we consider to what extent the government can tell us how to live our lives—and what, in effect, are the limits of liberty.

Suggested Sources

B.C., "Just One More Religion?"

Withnall, "North Korean Defector Says She Believed Kim Jong-il Was a God Who Could Read Her Mind."

Yost, *Inside North Korea* (documentary).

Questions to Consider

1. Is it reasonable to think that the free market will always lead to the best result? Is it reasonable to believe that the government is the solution to every economic problem?
2. What would each of our economists think about the 2008 bailout, about the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare), and about the government paying for everyone's college education?

Lecture 34

What Are the Limits of Liberty?

In light of our exploration of the limits of liberty, we consider three controversial issues: the legalization of marijuana, gay marriage, and inflammatory speech. We contemplate these issues in the context of John Stuart Mill's writings—specifically, what he said about the limits of liberty in his celebrated 1859 work *On Liberty*.

John Stuart Mill

- When the English philosopher and economist John Stuart Mill wrote *On Liberty*, the tyrannical rule of monarchs had largely ended, particularly in England and the West. Democracy had taken hold, at least in representative form. But, Mill argued, that did not mean that tyranny itself was a thing of the past. Even in a democracy, the majority can oppress the minority with impunity. Mill maintained that we must guard against what he called the "threat of the tyranny of the majority."

- In fact, U.S. President Abraham Lincoln was a fan of Mill, and Mill likely was at least a partial inspiration for Lincoln's convictions about slavery. Mill was concerned with protecting minority populations from tyranny, even if the minority was only a minority of one. This is why his stated intention was to define the "nature and limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual."

- Mill suggested that the answer could be found in utilitarianism. Individuals and the government should act to guarantee the highest amount and best kind of happiness for the most people. Mill argued that guaranteeing liberty was the best way to ensure the most happiness for the greatest number of people.

- Mill reasoned that when government or society restricts individual liberty, it imposes a kind of stifling conformity that strangles social experimentation and individual self-realization, which is necessary for general happiness.

- Both individuals and societies flourish when we are allowed maximum freedom to choose our own values and lifestyles. We learn from such "experiments in living," and we grow through the exercise of freedom and personal responsibility. We become stunted when we're forced to conform to societal norms that deprive us of autonomy but do nothing to prevent any identifiable harm to others.

- "Mankind are greater gainers," Mills says, "by suffering each other to live as seems good to themselves, than by compelling each other to live as seems good to the rest." The utilitarian worth of guaranteeing liberty was the result of its effects on "man as a progressive being" (that is, all humans together, present and future).

Mill's main argument for the utilitarian benefits of liberty was that government restriction of individual liberty results in mass conformity, which produces stunted individuals and stagnant societies.

Preventing Harm to Others

- Other than a situation in which people use their liberty to harm others, nothing else truly stands in the way of liberty's guaranteeing overall happiness. In other words, if an action you want to do will not harm anyone else, there is no reason that you should be restricted from that action.

- People have used superstition, religion, and social taboos to restrict such actions. But, Mill argued, such reasons are nonsense. After all, in a truly secular state, religious taboos cannot be enforced without showing favoritism for a particular religion. Ultimately, if what you plan to do is not going to harm anyone else, then you should be free to do it.

- Mill laid down his maxim: "That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others."

- It is important to note that this maxim doesn't mean that only harmful actions should be outlawed. It also includes actions that risk harm to others. Although the state has the right to outlaw actions that risk harming others, it does not have the right, says Mill, to prevent a person from harming himself or herself. As long as whatever action you are doing hurts only you and no one else—and you are not a minor or mentally deficient—then the government should stay out of your business.

- The scope of such of harm is specific, however. It has to be what Mill calls "definite harm"—which not only includes physical harm but also the violation of legal rights and the theft of property. It does not include offending your sensibilities or hurting your feelings. Such harms constitute only a minor inconvenience to others, and "the inconvenience is one which society can afford to bear, for the sake of the greater good of human freedom."

Controversial Issues: Marijuana, Gay Marriage, Inflammatory Speech

- On the issue of marijuana, Mill would maintain that using it should be legal. By smoking marijuana, you can harm only yourself. Of course, you might injure someone else if you drive while under the influence,

but this is no different from alcohol. Also, we'd want to keep marijuana out of the hands of minors, but this is no different from tobacco.

- On the issue of gay marriage, it seems that Mill would say that it should be legal. It's hard to see how another person's marriage, gay or straight, could harm someone else in any definite way. Laws restricting marriage would seem to produce the exact kind of conformity and social stagnation that Mill warned about.

- Mill had a great deal to say about the issue of freedom of speech. He believed that freedom of speech should be protected because of its utilitarian benefits; only a society that protects freedom of speech can ensure the greatest good for the greatest number.
    - According to Mill, passing laws that restrict the expression of false opinion only threatens to make the truth a "dead dogma" instead of the "living truth" it should be. If challenging the truth is not allowed, those who hold it will forget the reason it is true. People will come to hold it not because of the good evidence and argument behind it, but simply because they are forced. Consequently, people eventually won't know why something is true and may not even believe it anymore.

    - To allow the truth to be challenged forces us to continually justify it and, thus, to remind ourselves of why it is true. This means that racist speech, hurtful speech, offensive speech, hate speech, and extremist speech must all be tolerated, if for no other reason than for the opportunity they provide to prove how clearly false such speech is. That doesn't mean that inflammatory speech is moral, but it should be legal.

Free and Open Debate

- Mill's argument entails that free and open debate is like the process of purifying precious metals. When you apply heat to metals, the impurities float to the top, where they are skimmed off, leaving us with pure metal. In the same way, the heat of an open debate exposes bad arguments and false opinions so that they can be skimmed off, leaving us with only good arguments and the truth. In open debate, all

opinions and arguments can be heard; illegitimate, false opinions are discredited; and the truth becomes obvious.

- But it's not clear that life works like this. Think about the last time you changed someone's mind with an argument or someone changed yours. One of the most obvious places that such free and open debate should have this effect is in Congress. Yet it clearly does not. Members of Congress don't let arguments persuade them of anything; no truth emerges as they debate.

- The fact that free and open debate does not generate truth should perhaps not be surprising. In order for an open exchange of arguments to lead those listening to the right conclusion, those listening must be able to distinguish good arguments from bad arguments and identify logical fallacies. They must have an understanding of the facts relevant to the topic at hand to know who is telling the truth and who is not. They must not let their own biases and preconceptions influence their evaluation of the arguments or what conclusions they are willing to accept.

- However, most people can't tell a good argument from a bad one, can't recognize logical fallacies, don't know the relevant facts, and allow their own biases to determine which arguments they think are good and which conclusions they accept. In fact, most people aren't even interested in learning the truth; they are simply interested in reinforcing what they already believe.

- There are some exceptions to this, as in the scientific community, which conducts open debate in peer-reviewed journals. However, scientists are not immune to bias and don't always reason logically; the process is not perfect.

Mill and Capitalism

- Given what we have learned about him, we might conclude that Mill would support Adam Smith because of Smith's suggestion that freedom in the market guarantees positive utilitarian results: universal opulence. We might even think that Mill is just applying

Smith's economic arguments to freedom of speech and action. As a utilitarian, Mill would defend the free market only if it guaranteed the most happiness, but in general, it seems that Mill thought the real-world economic system was far too complicated to make any such pronouncements.

- For Mill, preventing harm to others is the primary motivation for passing laws. But because we live in an interconnected society, almost anything we do affects others and might even be thought to risk harm to others in some way, especially in the economic realm. Mill certainly would be in favor of market regulations that would prevent risky banking investments that could crash the economy.

- Free-market capitalism, Mill maintained, had solved the problem of production (with the division of labor) but not the problem of distribution. Indeed, he saw many of the same injustices that Karl Marx did. The gap between the rich and poor was simply too large. A more equal distribution of wealth would have significant utilitarian benefits, he reasoned. Mill was particularly fond of using inheritance taxes to fund pensions to benefit public education and the elderly.

- Mill would have called for the redistribution of wealth. But he was concerned only with utility: the greatest good for the greatest number. There may be other consequences to consider here—for example, whether it violates people's rights to take money they earned and give it to someone who didn't earn it. In the next lecture, we'll consider exactly what a fair and just society might look like—and whether such a thing is even possible.

Suggested Sources

Keohane, "How Facts Backfire."

LaBarre, "Why We're Shutting off Our Comments."

Zuesse, "United States Is Now the Most Unequal of All Advanced Economies."

Questions to Consider

1. What would Mill say about government-run health insurance programs—single-payer systems? What would he say about something like Obamacare, where everyone is required to buy health insurance? Think about why Mill defends liberty and his concern for utilitarian results.
2. Can you think of a way to overcome the free-speech problem—the fact that open debate doesn't seem to lead to the truth?
3. Clearly, there can be moral considerations that trump legal considerations; the fact that something is legal does not mean that it is moral (for example, adultery). But should any immoral action, even if it does not risk harm to others, ever be outlawed? If so, why? When, if ever, should morality be enforced by law? Can you give an argument in favor of such a law without appealing to emotion or personal preference?
4. What would Mill say about the legality of abortion?

Lecture 35

What Makes a Society Fair or Just?

To answer the question of what makes a society just, we turn first to the arguments of American philosopher John Rawls. We began our examination of political philosophy with Plato and the Republic—what Plato saw as a perfectly just society. Rawls also presents an argument for what he maintains constitutes a just society, which includes the redistribution of wealth. We then contrast Rawls's argument with that of American philosopher Robert Nozick, who maintained that humans possess natural rights—specifically, the right to life, liberty, property, and contracts. To take from the rich and give to the poor violates precisely those rights.

Fair Distribution

- John Rawls laid out his theory of a just society in his book *A Theory of Justice*, first published in 1971, and presented the essence of his argument in an essay titled "Justice as Fairness." According to Rawls, a just society is a fair society, and we should aim to make society as fair as possible. Consider the following thought experiment, which summarizes Rawls's basic argument.

- Suppose we have one pie and six people—a father and his five brothers—and need to have a fair distribution of the pie. If the father is put in charge of cutting the pie, we'll make sure that he cuts all the other pieces first and that he gets the last piece. This way, he'll make a special effort to make sure the pie is cut as equally as possible. If he cuts it unequally—making some pieces bigger or smaller—his brothers will take the bigger pieces and leave him with the smallest.

- The only way the father can guarantee that he gets his fair share of pie—and, indeed, the biggest piece he can possibly get—is by dividing the pie as equally as possible.

John Rawls

- John Rawls suggests that we can perform a similar thought experiment to discover what a just society looks like. Imagine that the earth has been made inhospitable to human life. To save the human race, we send a spaceship full of millions of frozen fertilized embryos to populate a new planet. When they arrive, they will be unfrozen, developed, and given a basic education.

- Their education will give them a rudimentary idea about how societies work. People will have different life plans based on their talents, abilities, and values. There will be a social ladder. Unlike the pie scenario, here, equality is impossible. In this way, the people are in what Rawls calls the "original position."

- However, let's suppose they're also under what Rawls terms a "veil of ignorance." Simply put, they have no idea what kind of person they're going to be in society. They don't know what job they will have or will even want to have. They have no idea what their talents or abilities will be, what kind of life they will want, what they will value. Even their gender will be unknown to them.

- The prototypes—these people who are in the original position under a veil of ignorance—will be educated about society before they are imprinted with their roles and values. Those who sent them into space want to give the prototypes the opportunity to make their society just, but they can't do this after they are imprinted. The prototypes are allowed to make declarations about what overarching rules will govern their society—what Rawls called "principles of justice"—before they are biased by their social status or values.

- Consider the perspective of the prototypes. First of all, given that you could literally end up being anyone in society, you'd want to protect all people's liberty equally. Even though you don't know what values or life plans you'll have, you do know you'll want the liberty to pursue those plans.

Rawls's Principles of Justice

- According to Rawls's thought experiment, all the prototypes would agree on a first principle of justice: "Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others."

- In terms of dividing economic resources, the prototypes will want to ensure two aspects of the social ladder. First, they will want it to be traversable. Movement up and down the social ladder should be possible for anyone. Second, they would want socioeconomic inequalities to work to everyone's advantage (especially the least fortunate).

- Thus, Rawls argues, people in the original position under the veil of ignorance would also agree on a second principle of justice: "Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all."

- Rawls believes that no economic system naturally generates inequality that works to everyone's advantage. According to Rawls, the only way to make inequalities work to everyone's advantage is with government intervention: by forcefully taking, by law, the extra monies of the rich and redistributing them to the poor—either directly, through some kind of welfare program, or by using that money on programs for the poor.

Robert Nozick

- Some thinkers argue that Rawls has it all wrong—that his very conception of fairness and justice is inaccurate. Most famously, this argument was made by one of Rawls's colleagues at Harvard, American philosopher Robert Nozick, in his 1974 book *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*.

- Nozick concludes that Rawls fails to consider how the wealth of those in society is acquired and, thus, fails to appreciate the unfairness or injustice of taking what someone earned and giving it to those who did not. The basis of Nozick's claim is that humans possess natural rights—specifically, the right to life, liberty, property, and contracts. To take from the rich and give to the poor violates precisely those rights.

Extremely unequal distribution of wealth is present in today's economy, and it seems clear that free-market capitalism will not rectify this on its own; is government intervention to alleviate this situation a just goal?

- Like Locke, Nozick articulates his views by imagining how we emerged from the state of nature. Nozick takes it as a given that it's wrong to harm people without their consent—especially by violating their life, liberty, or property or by failing to uphold an agreement or contract. He calls such rules "moral side-constraints." Because violation of people's natural rights would be common in a state of nature, people would quickly learn to band together in associations and hire protectors to guard against such dangers.

- Eventually, the guardian forces would become large enough to be called a state, but it would be a state whose only role was the preservation of natural rights. Inevitably, as the states grew, some people who live in the area will not have paid for the guardians' protective services—either because they couldn't afford it or because they didn't wish to pay. These are the "independents."

- Nozick does not suggest that the guardians should extract payment from them; that would be harming them without their consent, in violation of the moral side-constraint. He argues, instead, that they should be treated just like paying members anyway. The nonpaying independents would become de facto members of the protective association.

- In order to honor their contract with paying members, the guardians have to somewhat restrict the liberty of everyone living in their area, including the independents. But, Nozick says, it's a given that it's never acceptable to restrict people's liberty without giving them something in return; that's another moral side-constraint. Thus, because the guardians must restrict the independents' liberty, they must give all independents living in their area their protective services in exchange.

Unjust Coercion

- It's also a given, Nozick argues, that it's immoral to stand by and let people's rights be violated or to let them be harmed, if you can prevent it. Thus, all independents in a geographic area protected by guardians—by a state—are not only rightfully bound by its laws but also rightfully under its protection. But that's all a state should do: protect the natural rights of those in the area it controls. Anything beyond that

would either be harming people without their consent or violating their liberty without giving them something in return—both of which are moral side-constraints.

- There would be no taxes: That's harm without consent. All funds necessary to keep the government running must be given voluntarily. (As soon as things start reverting to the state of nature, people will gladly pay.) And there would be no redistribution of wealth: That's "involuntary charity." Any other program traditionally handled by the government—say, roads and education—would have to be done by private enterprise. This ensures that all funds necessary for such programs are acquired voluntarily; you'd have to buy your right to use them.

- This may mean that some people will starve, and Nozick admits that this is an unfortunate evil. But you shouldn't rectify one evil (starvation) with another one (theft). Two wrongs don't make a right, and it's still wrong to harm others by taking from them what they have earned, without their consent, regardless of the consequences. And this, Nozick argues, is what Rawls failed to recognize. The state's attempting to distribute resources fairly will not make society just; it will always involve unjust coercion.

- One objection to Nozick's theory is that although it's true that people earn things in the real world, it's far from clear that they deserve everything they earn. Nozick's reply is that, although it's likely true that people don't morally deserve the talents or status they are born with, they are entitled to these things. We are, Nozick maintains, entitled to what we own; in the same way people own their own bodies and their own talents, they are entitled to whatever they produce with their labor or barter in exchange for it. Whatever you can get someone to agree to pay you for your work, you are entitled to—regardless of whether you are morally deserving of it or not.

- That leaves us with one more big question in philosophy to consider. Nearly everything we've considered in this lecture series so far is relevant to this question, which we will tackle in the final lecture: What is the meaning of life?

Suggested Sources

BBC News, "Study: U.S. Is an Oligarchy, Not a Democracy."

Nolan and Nolan, *Interstellar* (film).

Questions to Consider

1. Consider four men playing poker. The cards are shuffled by a machine and dealt out. One man is dealt a good hand (a flush), two are dealt average hands (two pairs), and one is dealt a poor hand (high-card jack.) Is the distribution of the cards fair? Is it just? Does each person deserve the hand he got? Is he entitled to it? When the man with the flush wins, would we say that he deserves his winnings? Is he entitled? Would it be wrong to take his earnings and redistribute them? How does this situation compare to real life? Would it be different if they were all forced to play, instead of playing voluntarily?
2. What would happen if the federal government followed Nozick's model and each state selected its own method of economic distribution?
3. In what other way does your, or some other, society fall short of Rawls's ideal?
4. In what kind of society would you like to live—Rawls's or Nozick's?

Lecture 36

What Is the Meaning of Life?

We conclude our lecture series by considering one final big question of philosophy—the biggest question of them all. It's probably the first question that comes to mind when most people think of philosophy. Nearly everything we've considered so far in this course is relevant to this question; thus, we are now prepared to tackle it: What is the meaning of life?

Troubling Answers

- As we considered all the big questions of philosophy in this course, many of the answers that our philosophical questioning made tempting were also troubling: There is no God, no soul, no afterlife, no free will, no persons, no mind, and so on. Embracing as true any one of these troubling answers might lead us to think that life is meaningless.

- It's important to note that even if those troubling answers did entail that life is meaningless, that is not a reason to think those answers are false. You may not want life to be meaningless, but remember: The fact that you want something to be true is not a reason to think it is. If the troubling answers are the best answers we have, and they really do entail that life is meaningless—then, life is meaningless. We can't abandon basic logic simply because it doesn't tell us what we want to hear.

- Fortunately, however, we are not forced to such a conclusion. Simply put, even if those troubling answers were true, their truth does not entail that life is meaningless. In this lecture, we'll investigate why.

Meaning, Purpose, and Significance

- It is customary to believe that life is meaningful when it has a purpose. Some think that God's existence is necessary for life to be meaningful. Our life can be meaningful only if God caused us to exist for a particular purpose—because he had a specific plan.

Although not perfect, abductive reasoning is our best method for discovering truth about the world; it not only lies behind all scientific discoveries but can also help us avoid adopting false philosophical beliefs and being duped by charlatans and frauds.

- The problem with this conception of meaning, however, is that having a purpose is not the same as having meaning. What's more, we cannot say that whatever goal God has for us is, by definition, good. That presents us with the same problem as in Plato's *Euthyphro*: God would choose such a goal because he recognizes it as good by some outside standard. However, if there is a goal that is good by an outside standard, then our life could be meaningful, regardless of whether God exists.

- Some believe that the soul or afterlife makes our life significant, that is, meaningful. Otherwise, we are but insignificant lumps of matter on a speck of dust that will be obliterated by the sun in short order—if we don't obliterate ourselves first. An objection to this view is that it doesn't seem that the soul is necessary for this kind of significance, nor is an afterlife. What's more, it's not even clear that significance should concern us at all.

- Those who suggest that life is not meaningful are called *nihilists*. A noted nihilist was French author Albert Camus. He agreed that God was necessary for life to have meaning; only because God gives us an essence, gives us function or purpose, does life even have a chance at being meaningful. Because, as Camus suggested, God does not exist—then life is meaningless.
    - For Camus, all one can do is realize that the game of life is absurd and find joy in it anyway. Camus used the example of the myth of Sisyphus—a man who was cursed by the gods to endlessly roll a rock up a hill, only to have it always fall down once he reached the top.

    - Camus argued that all that Sisyphus can do (and, indeed, what he should do) is decide to "find meaning" in rock rolling and take joy in it anyway, despite its absurdity.

Objective and Subjective Meaning

- This brings us to the suggestion that life can have a subjective meaning—a meaning that derives from our own purposes, plans, attitudes, intentions, and mental states. One can have a meaningful life by accomplishing goals, fulfilling desires, or attaining and promoting virtues that one sees as worthwhile or significant.

- For example, perhaps you think caring for others is important, and you involve yourself in charities and organizations that do so. Perhaps you value family and find meaning in raising your children. Perhaps there is a political cause that you find worth pursuing and are engaged in that.

- The idea is that we can have a meaningful life by accomplishing things that we see as meaningful. It's not an objective meaning, but it's a meaning all the same.

A Thought Experiment on Meaning

- To understand the difference between objective and subjective meaning, consider this classic thought experiment: A billion monkeys type randomly on typewriters for billions of years. One of them will eventually produce a book that, when read by you, makes sense—

it will look like it was written by a human author. It will appear as if someone actually intended those words to appear in that order.

- But compare that book to a book that is actually written by a human author. The author's book seems to have a kind of meaning that the monkey's book lacks. We can impose a meaning on the monkey's book, but only the author's book has an independent objective meaning, apart from our reading of it. In the same way, we can impose meaning on our lives—we can find purpose in them—but, Camus would argue, our lives are not truly objectively meaningful.

- There are several important objections to the nihilism of Camus, the notion that life cannot be objectively meaningful. First of all, if God can impose an objective meaning on our lives by intending them to have a certain purpose, humans should be able to do that with their own lives. Suppose that God didn't create the universe and that it always existed alongside him. And suppose that God developed a plan for the universe and then intended us to play a role in that plan. It seems that our lives would still be objectively meaningful.

- We should be able to notice our own lives and bestow meaning upon them in the same way—by drawing out a plan and accomplishing it. After all, if we cannot impose objective meaning on our own existence, then God's existence has no meaning.

Worthy Goals

- Simply accomplishing our intended goals or fulfilling desires isn't sufficient for life to have objective meaning, however, because one can have trivial or harmful desires. But that same intuition suggests that other goals are worthwhile—objectively worthwhile. Accomplishing such worthwhile goals might help produce an objectively meaningful life.

- British philosopher Julian Baggini has observed that the mere accomplishment of certain goals—even worthwhile goals—can fall short when it comes to making life meaningful. The brief satisfaction of accomplishing a goal can often be followed by an empty sensation of not knowing what to do next. To help ensure a meaningful life,

we need to pick goals that are worthy of pursuit even if they are not accomplished—that is, where the pursuit itself is worthwhile.

- Perhaps a life spent in the pursuit of justice or fairness could be a good example; of course, the world will never be perfectly just or fair, but a life spent trying to make it so would seem to be a meaningful one. Or consider a life spent in the pursuit of charity and helping others or a life spent caring for one's family. Such goals seem worthwhile, and as such would seem to impart objective meaning.

Intrinsic Meaning

- Life can be objectively meaningful because some things simply are intrinsically valuable—they are valuable in and of themselves. Consider the foundation associated with Make-A-Wish America, which grants the wishes of terminally ill children. Of course, if there is no God or no afterlife, once that child dies, the universe will be the same, regardless of whether the child got her wish or not. And yet, we still think there is objective value in the fact that the child got to have her wish granted before she died. The experience itself is intrinsically valuable.

- Also, consider the utilitarian proposition that happiness is an intrinsic value. Because experiencing something special—her dream come true—made the child happy, helping her experience that could bestow meaning on one's life.

- As Julian Baggini might observe, there is no sense in asking what value or meaning there is in a life spent employed doing something you find fulfilling, spending your free time on what you find most interesting, helping others, and coming home to people who love you. Of course, once the sun explodes, it will be as if your life never happened, but your life did happen, and there is objective value in that fact.

Intrinsic Value of True Belief

- It's true that someone might value the wrong things, and certain lives may be worth more than others or mean more than others, but that's no surprise. It would actually be quite unintuitive to suggest that all lives—consider the lives of Hitler and Gandhi—are equally meaningful. But

that doesn't mean that meaningful lives and worthy goals do not exist. And notice that such lives can happen and such goals can exist, even if there is no God, no soul, and no afterlife and even if the existence of free will, persons, and minds are just illusions.

- Think back to Plato's cave and recall the intrinsic value of true belief. It is good—in and of itself—not to be duped and to really know how the world is. And even though our knowledge will never be complete, or even certain, there is a value in the pursuit of truth itself. Thus, even though we may not have settled on very many answers at all, simply considering and exploring the ideas in this course is intrinsically valuable and part of a truly meaningful life. As Socrates observed, "The unexamined life is not worth living."

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Questions to Consider

1. Would you be satisfied if life were only subjectively meaningful?
2. Is eliminativism, the suggestion that we do not have minds, compatible with the suggestion that our lives can be objectively meaningful?
3. What goals and values do you think are intrinsically valuable? Does pursuing them make your life objectively meaningful?
4. What do you think is the most significant philosophical question to attempt to answer?

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