

Philosophy 114

Student**Summaries** 

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PHILOSOPHY

TOPIC 1 — HOW DO WE KNOW ANYTHING?

We all have knowledge that is based on evidence, perceptions, and personal experiences. We often regard our perceptions of the truth as the actual truth.. but sometimes our perceptions of situations can be misleading (ex: you sometimes you think you hear someone say your name even though no one has said it).

If we're relying on our perceptions and we *know* that they can sometimes be incorrect, then how do we know the difference between what is real and what we perceive to be real? This is the question that *Skepticism* raises.

SKEPTICISM

In a nutshell, skepticism is the claim that there is really nothing we can be sure of. Skepticism that the only thing we **can** ever be sure of is whatever is in our mind, and therefore, there is always a possibility that there may not be a reality outside of it.

There are various different explanations hypothesised by septic regarding what we *perceive* as the external world then, ranging from beliefs that everything we are experiencing is simply a dream, or everything we believe is being controlled by an evil force, or that we are living through a simulation. Whichever way we look at it, though, nothing we do/investigate can prove these theories wrong because even the simplest statements of knowledge are based on our understandings of the 'external world' and our belief that it exists.

Two forms of skepticism to look at are (a) everyday skepticism, and (b) philosophical skepticism.

EVERYDAY SKEPTICISM

Everyday skepticism refers to the rejection of an orthodox or commonly held belief on the basis of doubt. This doubt occurs over a subject matter which has a massive body of pre-existing knowledge and background content and can be deflected or argued easily.

The main difference between everyday skepticism and philosophical skepticism is that, everyday skepticism doubts can be confirmed or put to rest easily as long as the proper research is done and discussed until a conclusion is reached.

PHILOSOPHICAL SKEPTICISM

Philosophical skepticism is not the rejection of the belief that the external world exists, but rather an acknowledgment the **possibility** that what we believe may not actually be true or reflect reality. When dealing with philosophical skepticism, there is no body of knowledge for us to refer to because it questions the basis of *everything* we know including our experiences and perceptions.

Making any arguments against a skeptic would only lead to arguing in circles because for every point that you make suggesting there is in fact an external world, the skeptic can use the same argument: there is no way to find proof or evidence that there is an external world. Every statement of knowledge we make is based on our experience of the so-called 'external world' and our belief that it exists.

RESPONSES TO SKEPTICISM

'I THINK, THEREFORE I AM'

Cogito, ergo sum is a Latin philosophical theory by René Descartes usually translated into English as "I think, therefore I am." Essentially what it means is that even if the external world is not real— if I am a

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PHILOSOPHY

WHAT IS LOGIC?

Logic is simply a way of reasoning correctly. It is specifically about how people should reason than how they do. Logic is also about truth-preserving inference, because it tells you if A is true, and it caused B to be true, then C must be true as well.

However, although we define logic in terms of truth, it is not the same as truth; just as true claims can be entirely logical, so can false claims—perfect logic can lead to a false conclusion, which allows you to identify an error in initial assumptions.

BASIC CONCEPTS AND TERMINOLOGY

premise 1: all men are mortal
premise 2: socrates is a man
conclusion: socrates is mortal

proposition/statement: a sentence, or part of a sentence, that attempts to say something about the world. Statements are typically true or false.

*all sentences are not statements. questions, commands, exclamations, etc. are not statements because they have no way of being true or false. value judgements are essentially statements because they have logical premise, despite them not being true or false in the common sense.

premise: a statement that tries to provide support for the rational acceptance of an argument. (the reasons given for why something is true).

conclusion: a proposition that is affirmed based on other propositions in an argument. (the statement trying to be convinced).

argument: a group of propositions, some of which are presented as rational grounds for accepting the truth of others; i.e. statements and conclusions.

inference: a relation of logical support that holds between propositions; relation of inference is drawing a conclusion from a one or more premises.

RECOGNISING ARGUMENTS

- an argument will typically start with premises that lead to a conclusion. typically, there will also be premise-indicators and conclusion-indicators.
 - premise-indicators: 'since', 'because', 'as indicated by', etc.
 - conclusion-indicators: 'hence', 'thus', 'it follows that', etc.

However, things are not always this simple: propositions are not always in declarative form (compare rhetorical questions, imperatives, etc.), and conclusion- and premise-indicators are not always present. in such a case, an understanding of the text makes it possible to determine whether the writer is trying to convince the reader of a conclusion based on certain premises.

IMPLICIT CONCLUSIONS AND PREMISES / ASSUMPTIONS

Arguments frequently contain propositions that are not explicitly stated. When we reconstruct such an argument we have to make such implicit premises/conclusions explicit. we need to be able to recognise implicit premises/conclusions and make them explicit. we can do this by using:

- knowledge of the real world
- given context
- assumptions/common understandings