

Philosophy 106, Lecture1 Handout 1

I. Subject matter:

A. Combines 2 or 3 areas of knowledge:

1. Philosophy.

- a. Background in ethical theory.
- b. Skills at evaluating arguments.

2. Empirical Social and Natural Science.

- a. Provides empirical knowledge of causes of the situation we are in.

- i. “Empirical” roughly means evidence-based.

- b. Provides empirical knowledge of effects of differing decisions.

II. Particular Topics in this class. (See syllabus.)

III. Argument that topic is important (which may give some idea of point of class):

A. Social policies (like those we will consider), have a great impact on how people's lives go.

1. They determine how many resources people have access to.
2. They determine what kinds of actions are available for people to do.
3. They determine **who** gets to do those actions.
4. They may determine who goes to jail, who lives and who dies.

B. These policies are conventional.

1. They could be otherwise.
2. They depend on the actions of many people for their existence.
3. The actions on which they depend result from coordination.

C. Each of us is to some extent involved in the coordinated actions which underwrite the social structure.

1. Voting.
2. Taxes.
3. Cooperation with authorities.
4. Employment.

D. If our actions have profound effects on people's lives and are optional, we should take care to insure that we are doing the right thing.

E. Therefore with respect to the issues raised here we should take such care, and ask:

1. Do the institutions we support treat people fairly and justly?
2. Are others possible which would do better?
3. Are there actions we should take which could bring them about?

IV. Justification of our views:

A. To justify yourself to someone else you try to start with something that they might reasonably believe or be brought to believe and show how this leads to the view you are trying to justify. Sometimes bringing someone to believe something is itself to provide a justification. So we want our arguments to have:

1. Plausible motivating ideas and assumptions.
2. Consistency and coherence: Inconsistent views cannot be true, and part of showing how a plausible idea leads to the view you are trying to justify is to try to show how it would be inconsistent or incoherent not to accept the conclusion if you accept the starting points.
3. Plausible implications.
4. Empirical support for claims that require evidence of that kind.

B. Two points you might have in looking for a justification:

1. To assure yourself of correctness of position.
2. To convince others to work with you or agree with you.

C. Some sorts of justifications will serve each of these purposes differently.

1. To convince yourself, any premise which seems plausible to you either independently or based on the empirical evidence can serve as a starting point.
2. To convince others we probably have to take into account what *they* start out believing or will find plausible and to what we can find relevant empirical evidence to support.
3. Arguments from revelation & authority problematic for 2nd purpose, but maybe not for first.
 - a. Politics requires cooperation.
 - b. This implies that arguments (for 2nd purpose) should aim for the broad acceptability of their own premises.
 - c. Kinds of argument ruled out if you are trying to convince others (regarding the moral/non-empirical component):
 - i. Authority when the subject isn't empirical claims that someone has to have seen or tested or researched (thus making them an authority on these issues).
 - ii. Tradition.
 - iii. Faith or revelation.
4. You might or might not think that these are bad sources of evidence apart from concerns with what others will find plausible.