

Philosophy 106, Lecture1 Handout

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. 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?

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

IV. What we might hope to get out of studying subject-matter.

- A. Improve our own views and decisions.
- B. Helping us justify our views to ourselves & others.
- C. Help us to understand the positions of others better.
- D. Help us get a sense of what sorts of information is relevant to resolving disagreements.

V. 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 (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 of justification:

1. Assure self of correctness of position.
2. Convince others.

C. Differing justifications will serve each of these purposes differently.

1. To convince self, any premise which seems plausible can serve as a starting point.
2. To convince others, must attend to what they start out believing.
3. Arguments from revelation & authority problematic for 2nd purpose, but maybe not for first.

- a. Politics requires cooperation.
 - b. Implies that arguments (for 2nd purpose) should aim at broad acceptability of premises.
 - c. Kinds of argument ruled out (regarding the moral/non-empirical component):
 - i. Authority when matters are not empirical: Experts or Books.
 - ii. Tradition.
 - iii. Faith or revelation.
4. One might think that such plausible arguments are needed in general.

VI. Course Requirements: