Philosophy Cheat Sheet

CHEAT SHEETS HERO

A comprehensive cheat sheet covering key concepts, branches, and influential figures in philosophy. This guide provides a quick reference for understanding and navigating the complex landscape of philosophical thought.

Core Branches of Philosophy

Metaphysics

Definition: Explores the fundamental nature of reality, existence, and being.

Key Questions: What is real? What is the nature of time and space? Does God exist? What is consciousness?

Sub-branches:
- Ontology: The study of being and existence.
- Cosmology: The study of the origin, evolution, and structure of the universe.
- Philosophy of Mind: Examines the nature of the mind, consciousness, and their relationship to the physical world.

Key Concepts:
- Substance: Underlying essence or reality.
- Causation: The relationship between cause and effect.
- Possibility and Necessity: What could be and what must be.

Epistemology

Definition: The study of knowledge, justification, and belief.

Key Questions: What is knowledge? How do we acquire knowledge? What are the limits of knowledge?

Key Concepts:
- Justification: The reasons or evidence that support a belief.
- Truth: Correspondence to reality; accuracy of representation.
- Belief: Acceptance that something is true.

Theories of Knowledge:
- Empiricism: Knowledge comes primarily from sensory experience.
- Rationalism: Knowledge comes primarily from reason and logic.
- Skepticism: Doubts or denies the possibility of certain knowledge.

Ethics

Definition: Moral philosophy; the study of moral principles, values, and duties.

Key Questions: What is right and wrong? How should we live? What are our moral obligations?

Normative Ethical Theories:
- Consequentialism: Morality is determined by the consequences of actions.
- Deontology: Morality is based on duties and rules.
- Virtue Ethics: Morality is based on developing good character traits.

Key Concepts:
- Moral Principles: Fundamental rules or guidelines for behavior.
- Values: Ideals or beliefs that are considered important.
- Moral Dilemmas: Situations in which moral principles conflict.

Logic

Definition: The study of reasoning and argumentation.

Key Questions: What is valid reasoning? How can we construct sound arguments? What are common fallacies?

Key Concepts:
- Arguments: A set of statements (premises) intended to support a conclusion.
- Validity: An argument is valid if the conclusion necessarily follows from the premises.
- Soundness: An argument is sound if it is valid and its premises are true.

Types of Reasoning:
- Deductive: Reasoning from general principles to specific conclusions.
- Inductive: Reasoning from specific observations to general principles.
- Abductive: Reasoning to the best explanation.

Key Philosophical Concepts

The Problem of Evil

Description: The challenge of reconciling the existence of evil and suffering with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God.

Logical Problem: The existence of evil is logically incompatible with the existence of God as traditionally defined.

Evidential Problem: The amount and types of evil in the world provide strong evidence against the existence of God.

Theodicies (Defenses of God):
- Free Will Defense: Evil is a result of human free will.
- Soul-Making Theodicy: Suffering is necessary for moral and spiritual growth.

Free Will vs. Determinism

Free Will: The capacity of agents to choose between different possible courses of action unimpeded.

Determinism: The belief that all events are ultimately determined by causes external to the will. Some proponents believe that individual human beings have no free will and cannot be held morally responsible for their actions.

Compatibilism: The belief that free will and determinism are compatible ideas, and that it is possible to believe in both without being logically inconsistent.

Incompatibilism: The belief that free will and determinism are not compatible ideas.

The Mind-Body Problem

Description: The challenge of explaining the relationship between the mind (consciousness, thoughts, feelings) and the body (physical matter).

Dualism: The mind and body are distinct substances.
- Substance Dualism: The mind is a non-physical substance.
- Property Dualism: Mental properties are non-physical properties of physical substances.

Physicalism (Materialism): The mind is ultimately reducible to physical matter.
- Identity Theory: Mental states are identical to brain states.
- Functionalism: Mental states are defined by their causal roles.

Idealism:
- Everything is mental.

Ethical Theories

Utilitarianism

Core Idea: Actions are right insofar as they promote happiness or pleasure, wrong as they tend to produce unhappiness or pain. The greatest happiness for the greatest number.

Key Thinkers: Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill.

Types:
- Act Utilitarianism: Each action should be evaluated based on its consequences.
- Rule Utilitarianism: Moral rules should be established based on their overall utility.

Criticisms: Can justify actions that seem intuitively wrong; difficult to predict consequences accurately.

Deontology (Kantian Ethics)

Core Idea: Morality is based on duties and rules, not consequences. Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.

Key Thinker: Immanuel Kant.

Categorical Imperative: A moral obligation derived from pure reason that is binding regardless of one's desires.
- Universalizability: Act only according to principles that you could will to become universal laws.
- Respect for Persons: Treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end.

Criticisms: Can be inflexible; difficult to resolve conflicting duties.

Virtue Ethics

Core Idea: Morality is about developing good character traits (virtues) rather than following rules or maximizing consequences.

Key Thinkers: Aristotle, Alasdair MacIntyre.

Virtues: Courage, honesty, compassion, justice, etc.

Criticisms: Can be vague; difficult to determine what constitutes a virtue in specific situations.

Logical Fallacies

Fallacies of Relevance

Definition: Arguments where the premises are logically irrelevant to the conclusion.

Ad Hominem: Attacking the person making the argument rather than the argument itself.
Example: "You can't trust her opinion on healthcare; she's a politician."

Appeal to Authority: Claiming that something is true simply because an authority figure said so, without providing further evidence.
Example: "My doctor said this new diet is the best, so it must be true."

Appeal to Popularity (Bandwagon): Arguing that something is true because many people believe it.
Example: "Everyone is buying this new phone, so it must be good."

Appeal to Emotion: Manipulating emotions to persuade someone to accept a claim, rather than providing logical reasons.
Example: "Think of all the starving children! We must donate to this charity."

Fallacies of Ambiguity

Definition: Arguments that contain ambiguous words or phrases, leading to a misleading conclusion.

Equivocation: Using the same word in different senses within the same argument.
Example: "The sign said 'fine for parking here', and since it was fine to park there, I parked there."

Amphiboly: Using a sentence with a grammatical structure that allows for multiple interpretations.
Example: "I saw the man on the hill with a telescope."

Fallacies of Presumption

Definition: Arguments that rely on unwarranted or unjustified assumptions.

Begging the Question (Circular Reasoning): Assuming the conclusion in the premises.
Example: "God exists because the Bible says so, and the Bible is the word of God."

False Dilemma (Either/Or Fallacy): Presenting only two options when more exist.
Example: "You're either with us, or you're against us."

Hasty Generalization: Drawing a conclusion based on insufficient evidence.
Example: "I met two rude people from New York, so everyone from New York must be rude."

Straw Man: Misrepresenting an opponent's argument to make it easier to attack.
Example: "My opponent wants to increase education spending, so he must want to defund the military."