

Philosophy of the Human Person

Lecture #4

Stoic Logic: Complex Forms

Chain Argument

Example—“If guns are outlawed only outlaws will have guns. If only outlaws have guns, our country will be a more dangerous place to live. So, if guns are outlawed, our country will be a more dangerous place to live.”

Form

$$\begin{array}{l} P \supset Q \\ Q \supset R \\ \hline \supset P \supset R \end{array}$$

limitation—this only gets us from one conditional to another

Dilemmas

example of “being in a dilemma”

St Thomas More in the Tower of London being questioned on whether he thought the Supremacy Act [declaring King Henry to be head of the Church in England] was legal:

“if it were so that my conscience gave me against the statutes ... then ... it were a very hard thing to compel me to say either precisely with it against my conscience to the loss of my soul, or precisely against it to the destruction of my body”

reconstructed argument

I lie (and say the statute is lawful)	□	I will burn in Hell for perjury
I tell the truth (and say the statute is unlawful)	□	I will be executed for treason
I lie		I tell the truth
□ I will burn in Hell for perjury		I will be executed for treason

definition of a logical dilemma

an hypothetical argument offering alternatives (in a disjunction) and proving something (via hypothetical propositions) in either case

kinds of dilemma

simple constructive

Caliph Omar (according to legend) on whether the books at the library of Alexandria should be preserved: “If the books agree with the Quran, they are superfluous and should be burned. If they disagree, they are dangerous and should be burned. They must either agree with the Quran or disagree. So, they should be burned.”

simple destructive

If Homer speaks the truth then the heroes are the sons of the gods and if he speaks the truth then they did many wicked things. But either they are not the sons of gods or they did not to many wicked things. So, Homer does not speak the truth. (cf. Plato, *Republic* iii, 391c–e)

complex constructive

“[Evel Knievel] estimates that he has a 50-50 chance of failing in his [1500-foot] jump across [Snake River Canyon] and falling to his death in the canyon. If the jump is not as risky as it is advertised to be it is a fraud. If, as seems probable, it does involve a serious risk of Knievel’s life, it is obscene.”

—George Will in the *Washington Post*

complex destructive

summary

	Constructive	Destructive
Simple	$P \supset Q$ $R \supset Q$ $P \supset R$ $\neg Q \supset \neg R$	$P \supset Q$ $P \supset R$ $\sim Q \supset \neg R$ $\neg \sim P$
Complex	$P \supset Q$ $R \supset S$ $P \supset R$ $\neg Q \supset \neg S$	$P \supset Q$ $R \supset S$ $\sim Q \supset \sim S$ $\neg \sim P \supset \sim R$

three methods of response to a dilemma

(NB: since dilemmas are valid, there is only one basic response—showing that one premise is false)

1. Passing through the horns of the dilemma

example—More's attempt to avoid his dilemma by refusal to say anything (i.e., neither speaking the truth nor telling a lie)

the soundness of the dilemma depends on the disjunction being exhaustive

“passing through ...” is a challenge to the truth (exhaustiveness) of the disjunction; i.e., $(p \vee q) \wedge r$ rather than $(p \wedge q)$

2. Taking the dilemma by the horns

example—John Stuart Mill's response to arguments like Omar's: “however true [a given opinion] may be, if it is not fully, frequently, & fearlessly discussed, it will be held as a dead dogma, not as a living truth,” &c.

“taking by the horns” is a challenge to the truth of one of the hypotheticals

3. Rebutting the dilemma

(by construction of another dilemma with a contradictory conclusion
no commitment made as to which premise of the original is wrong)

example

Background

Protagoras taught Eualthes rhetoric for a fee, half to be paid on completion of the training, half on Eualthes winning his first court case. Eualthes, not wanting to pay the remaining half of the tuition, refused to take any cases. Protagoras, impatient to be paid, sued for immediate payment.

Protagoras' argument (a dilemma)

If I win my suit, Eualthes must pay me by court order.

If I lose my suit, Eualthes must pay me by the terms of the contract.

Either I will win my suit or I will lose it.

So, Eualthes must pay me.

Eualthes' argument (a counter-dilemma)

If I win my suit, I won't have to pay (since that is what the suit is about).

If I lose my suit, I won't have to pay (since I still won't have won my first case).

Either I will win my suit or I will lose it.

So, I won't have to pay.

Comment:

One of these arguments has to be bad, but which one is it?
Why?

Since the arguments have valid forms, the problem must be in the premises