Glossary of Key Terms

Ad hominem: An argument directed at an opponent in a disagreement, not at the topic under discussion.

Analytic judgment: A judgment that unites a subject with a predicate necessarily contained in it. An explication of a concept.

A posteriori: The phrase literally means “posterior to” or “after.” In philosophical contexts it means “based on experience.” A posteriori reasoning is based on propositions known only from experience.

A priori: The phrase literally means “prior to” or “beforehand.” In philosophical contexts it often means “not based on experience.” A priori reasoning depends only on self-evident propositions that can be known independently of experience.

Argument: A set of statements organized into premises and conclusion. The premises are supposed to support the conclusion.

Body: A physical substance that exists in space and time.

Categorical imperative: Kant’s supreme principle of morality, of which he gives various formulations. It is a command of reason that represents an action as good in itself.

Closed concept: One for which necessary and sufficient conditions can be given as a definition.

Coercion: The use of force or intimidation to obtain compliance.

Conclusion: The claim that an argument is supposed to establish as true or likely true.

Contingent: Something is contingent if it is possible for it to have been otherwise.

Contradictory beliefs: Two or more beliefs that cannot possibly be true in the same circumstances. For example, the belief that the world is flat and the belief that the world is not flat are contradictory because there can be no single set of circumstances such that the world is both flat and not flat.

Cultural relativism: The thesis that there is no such thing as universal truth in morality, only different cultural codes on a par.

Deductive argument: An argument such that if it is valid, the truth of the premises guarantees the truth of the conclusion.

Determinism: The thesis that the laws of nature and the totality of past circumstances necessitate a single possible way things might happen.

Dualism: The view that the mind is distinct from the body.

Ethics: The study of how to live. (See also Morality.)
**Existentialism:** The view (associated with, e.g., Sartre) that human beings are condemned to responsibility for their own being. The human situation is one that requires free choice and action, but there are no values able to justify our choices and actions before they are made.

**Fallacious argument:** An argument such that the truth of the premises does not support the truth of the conclusion.

**Fallacy:** A tempting logical mistake in reasoning.

**Family resemblances:** A network of properties more or less shared by the items that fall under a given concept. The idea is that things aptly called “x” do not all share a common property, but we can identify something as an x by its having some (but perhaps not others) of the properties shared by some (but not other) things that are also aptly called “x.” The notion comes from Wittgenstein and is in contrast to a set of necessary and sufficient conditions that give the definition of a concept.

**God:** The traditional (Judeo-Christian-Islamic) conception of God is of an omnibenevolent, omnipotent, omniscient creator of the universe.

**Greatest happiness principle:** The basic principle of utilitarianism. It says that an action is right to the extent that it promotes pleasure and wrong to the extent that it produces pain and prevents pleasure.

**Hypothesis:** A proposed explanation for something that can be tested.

**Hypothetical imperative:** A command of reason that represents an action as good as a means to another end.

**Identity:** Two objects are identical if they are one and the same.

**Indeterminism:** The thesis that at any given moment there is more than one possible way things might proceed in the future.

**Inductive argument:** An argument such that, if it is correct, the truth of the premises shows that the conclusion is probably true.

**Invalid argument:** An argument for which there is at least one case (a counterexample) where the premises are all true and the conclusion false.

**Materialism:** (1) The view that reality consists only of physical objects and their properties. (2) The view that the mind is identical to the body.

**Maxim:** In Kant’s moral theory, a maxim is the general principle one expresses in a particular action.

**Metaphysics:** The study of the basic features of existence.

**Mind:** A conscious entity that exists in time, but not space, and to which the person has private access.
Morality: The study of right and wrong, especially as applied to actions.

Naturalism: The thesis that all that exists is or is reducible to the objects of scientific inquiry.

Necessary: To say that something is necessary is to say that it is impossible for it to have been otherwise.

Necessary condition: To say that $p$ is a necessary condition on $q$ is to say that one cannot have $q$ without also having $p$. A necessary condition is like a requirement.

Objectivity: From a third-person or disinterested point of view. Something is said to have objective value if the justification of its worth does not appeal, say, to a particular individual’s desires. Something is said to be objectively justified if its truth can be seen from a perspective that can, at least in principle, be shared by anyone.

Omnibenevolent: Motivated to do all and only what is good.

Omnipotent: All-powerful.

Omniscient: All-knowing.

Open concept: One characterized in terms of family resemblances but for which one cannot give necessary and sufficient conditions of application. One can give paradigm cases of things that fall under the concept, but new and novel cases are possible and require a decision whether to extend the concept or not.

Personal identity: The problem of personal identity is that of supplying criteria for when person A is one and the same person as person B.

Petitio principii (begging the question): An argument that takes for granted what it is supposed to prove.

Phenomenon: Something known through the senses. An experience.

Predicate: A term that refers to a property or relation of a thing or things.

Premise: A piece of support for the conclusion of an argument.

Prima facie: Literally, “on its face.” To call something prima facie wrong, for example, is to say that it is considered wrong unless there are convincing reasons to the contrary.

Primary quality: A power of an object to produce ideas in our minds that resemble actual properties of the object itself. Primary qualities are mind-independent. The five primary qualities are solidity, extension, figure, number, and mobility.

Principle of utility: (See Greatest happiness principle.)

Problem of dirty hands: The problem of dirty hands arises from the assumption that political success sometimes requires doing something that is morally wrong. When one
feels guilty about committing the wrong, then one is said to have dirty hands. A morally good, successful politician will have dirty hands.

**Problem of evil**: The problem of reconciling the existence of evil with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly benevolent God.

**Qualia**: The subject matter of information about what it is like to have a certain experience (e.g., what it is like to taste chocolate).

**Question-begging**: An argument is question-begging when one or more of the premises presupposes the truth of the conclusion.

**Reasonable belief**: A belief one can justify by giving a good reason for holding it.

**Secondary quality**: A power of an object to produce ideas in our minds that do not resemble actual properties of the object itself. Secondary qualities are mind-dependent. Examples of secondary qualities are color, temperature, and odor.

**Sound argument**: A valid argument with all true premises.

**Subjective**: From a particular individual’s point of view. Something is said to be subjectively valuable if it is judged valuable from the perspective of, say, a particular individual’s desires. Something is said to be subjectively justified if it has support from the beliefs of a particular individual, where some of these beliefs may be false.

**Sufficient condition**: To say that $p$ is a sufficient condition for $q$ is to say that all one needs to have $q$ is to have $p$. A sufficient condition for something is all it takes to have that thing.

**Supernatural**: Something that is not reducible to the objects of scientific inquiry.

**Synthetic judgment**: A judgment that unites a subject with a predicate not necessarily contained in it. An ampliative judgment.

**Teleology**: Explanation of natural phenomena in terms of purpose or design.

**Theodicy**: An explanation of why God would allow the evil in this world to occur.

**Valid argument**: A correct, good deductive argument. An argument such that there is no case where the premises are all true and the conclusion false. Alternatively, an argument such that the truth of the premises guarantees the truth of the conclusion.

**Virtue**: A synonym for “virtue” is “excellence.” Virtue ethical theories take virtue to be a standard for the evaluation of conduct. Right action is what the virtuous person would do.