Glossary of Philosophical Jargon. Adapted from Jim Pryor’s “A Philosophical Glossary for Beginners”: [http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/vocab/glossary.html](http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/vocab/glossary.html)

Please familiarize yourself with these terms, to make your foray into reading and writing philosophy easier. Many of these terms are also used in everyday conversations (“ordinary language”, as I will call it), but they have special meanings when used by philosophers; knowing these special meanings will help you make sense of what authors are saying in the readings.

Terms marked with an asterisk (*) may appear on Quiz #1. However, all terms should be reviewed, because they will come up at some point in the course readings or lectures.

Types of Philosophical Questions/Claims

In general, each of these types corresponds to branch or field of philosophy. However, find it helpful to think of these types of questions as various approaches or methods of doing philosophy, rather than completely separate and mutually exclusive fields, because a single work of philosophy may encompass questions and claims of multiple types.

For each of these types, I will provide examples of questions of that type. Answers that a philosopher could provide to these questions would be claims of that type.

**aesthetic** *

concerning art, beauty, and taste (in the sense of values/preferences)

E.g., Is beauty a property of objects, or is it a feeling in observers provoked by particular objects (or something else)?
What features qualify a work as “good art” or “bad art”?
What is the relationship between beauty in nature and beauty in artworks?

**epistemological/epistemic** *

concerning knowledge.

E.g., What does it mean to know something?
Are our senses a reliable source of knowledge?
Do we have innate (a priori) knowledge, or only (a posteriori) knowledge gained through experience?
Are there limits to what we are capable of knowing?

**ethical** *

concerning standards or codes of behavior appropriate in certain social groups or in social context.

E.g., What is the right thing to do if a classmate asks you to write their essay?
Is it acceptable for people of one gender to get paid more than people of the other gender to do the same work?
Is it justifiable to order a preemptive military strike on another country?
Note that “ethical” and “moral” have very similar meanings are often used interchangeably. I will not ask you to distinguish between them.

**logical** *

concerning rules and/or patterns of reasoning.

If (1) Socrates is a man and (2) men are mammals, is Socrates a mammal?  
From the facts that people who study philosophy are smart and that infants don’t study philosophy, does it follow that infants aren’t smart?  
If either Colonel Mustard or Professor Plum committed the murder, and the murder took place in the Ballroom, but Professor Plum was in the library at the time, who committed the murder?

**metaphysical / ontological** *

concerning the nature of the world and objects within it.

Is the world solely made of physical stuff, or is there mental stuff too?  
Are all the world’s events predetermined, or are they subject to change?  
By what features can we distinguish members of one biological species from members of another species?  
Which is more fundamental: a category, or its members?

**moral** *

concerning principles according to which people ought to live

Is it ever ok to kill a person even if it will save someone else’s life?  
Is an action right because it is one’s duty to perform it, or because it helps people?  
Should people of all cultures be expected to obey the same principles?  
Do we need an authority figure (a God or leader) in order to know right from wrong?

See the note under “ethical”: the two terms are often used interchangeably.

**social** *

concerned with societies and social groups.

Are there essential features that distinguish people of different ethnicities?  
Why do people bond together if they could survive separately?  
How do the beliefs and actions of individuals change when they become members of social groups?  
Why do some social groups gain power, while others are subordinated?

**political** *

concerned with institutions (usually governmental)

Can people effectively self-organize without a leader who has authority about what’s best for everyone?  
Should all citizens have voting rights, or are some people more qualified to vote than others?  
If a government is corrupt, how should one go about reforming it?
Should a government limit the freedom of its citizens to ensure that the country operates in an orderly and manageable way?

Note: “social” and “political” questions and claims often overlap (because institutions are a feature of societies). I will not ask you to distinguish between these two terms.

Philosophical Traditions

These terms identify different styles of philosophical works associated with philosophers of particular time periods and locations. Generally, you can use these terms to describe a philosopher whose work fits that style, or a work itself. (E.g., Plato and Aristotle are ancient philosophers. Plato’s *Republic* and Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* are two well-known works of Ancient philosophy.)

Note that these traditions are not entirely mutually exclusive categories: e.g., both Analytic and Continental philosophy are types of Contemporary philosophy. Also, some philosophers produce work that combines Eastern and Western influences, or that combines Analytic and Continental approaches.

Ancient

Philosophy of the Greek and Roman Empires from (roughly) the 6th century BCE to the 6th century CE

Analytic

Philosophy dominant in the English-speaking world beginning in the 20th century; “a set of overlapping traditions whose . . . main sources of authority are logic, mathematics, and science, and whose core concerns include what there is and how we can know it,” and how we use language (John Schwenker, http://philosophyofbrains.com/2007/09/03/on-analytic-vs-continental-philosophy.aspx) Influential Analytic philosophers include Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and W.V. O. Quine.

Contemporary

Philosophy from the end of the 19th century to present day.

Continental

Philosophy dominant mostly in non-English-speaking European countries (especially France, Germany, and Spain) and Latin America, beginning in the 20th century; “a set of overlapping traditions whose . . . main sources of authority are art and hermeneutics [the study of texts], and whose main concerns include understanding ‘the human condition.’” (John Schwenker, ibid.) Influential Continental philosophers include Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault.

Eastern

Philosophy originating in the Middle East and Asia. Contrasted with *Western*.

Medieval
Philosophy of the Middle Ages, spanning from the 5th-16th centuries CE

**Modern**
Philosophy from the 17th century (beginning with the Renaissance) to the end of the 19th century.

**Western**
Philosophy originating in Europe, the Americas, Russia, and many former European colonies. Influenced by historical events including the Renaissance, Protestant Reformation, Enlightenment Era, and colonialism. Contrasted with Eastern.

**Adjectives**

*ambiguous*
In a philosophical discussion, you should call a term "ambiguous" when and only when the expression has more than one acceptable meaning.
For instance, "bank" is ambiguous (river bank, Bank of America).

Also, sentences can be ambiguous, as in "Flying planes can be dangerous." Is it the activity of flying which is dangerous, or is it the planes which are dangerous? Or "Every child loves a clown." Does this mean there is one lucky clown that all the children love? Or does it mean that for each child, there is a particular clown which he or she loves (but not necessarily the same clown for each child)? Or does it mean that every child is favorably disposed to clowns in general?

You should not call an expression "ambiguous" just because different people have different views or theories about it. Different people have different views about what it means to be good, but that doesn't yet show that the expression "good" is ambiguous. It just shows that there's some controversy over what "good" means.

Nor should you call an expression "ambiguous" just because it's vague (see entry below), or imprecise, or difficult to know what the correct philosophical theory of it is.

When an argument illegitimately trades on an ambiguity (meaning, it succeeds only by inconsistent using a term in at least two different ways), we say that the argument *equivocates* (see entry under ‘Verbs’).

*contingent*
dependent on prior events occurring in a certain way, not inevitable, happening as the product of specific circumstances. Contrasted with necessary and possible.

E.g., it is a *contingent* fact that Stop signs in the United States are hexagonal (because it could have been the case that they were designed to be a different shape. The hexagonal shape depended upon someone making that decision when they could have chosen a different shape).
**descriptive** *
A descriptive claim makes a statement about what something is or what it is like under real circumstances. A descriptive question asks what something is or what it is like under real circumstances. Contrasted with normative.

**empirical** *
originating in or based upon experience, through either observation or experimentation. Often describes knowledge or data gained from observation/experimentation. An empirical question is one that can only be answered by observing the world or conducting an experience, as opposed to a theoretical question that might be answered purely through contemplation (answering the latter kind of question is sometimes called “armchair philosophy”, because it can be done sitting comfortably in one’s chair without seeking any new insight from the world).

**essential**
In ordinary language, “essential” is often used interchangeably with “necessary”, as in “It is essential to eat work hard in order to get good grades”.

In philosophy, “essential” has a more specific meaning: pertaining to fundamental or indispensible features that make something what it is (rather than something else).

**equivocal**
"Philosopher Smith is equivocal here" means that he gives some argument which equivocates. It does not mean that he’s neutral or agnostic about the matter. Nor does it mean he can’t make up his mind. (These might be explanations of why he equivocates; but you shouldn’t use the phrase "He equivocates" to describe his neutrality or agnosticism or indecision.)

**necessary** *
inevitable, could not have been another way, would turn out the same way even if prior events had been different. Contrasted with contingent.

E.g., some necessary facts are that a square has four sides, that 2+2=4, and that red is more like orange than it is like yellow.

**normative** *
A normative claim makes a statement about what something should be or what it should be like under ideal circumstances. A normative question asks what something should be or what it should be like under ideal circumstances. Contrasted with descriptive.

**objective** *
independent of any one’s particular interests and/or perspective. Contrasted with subjective.

E.g., it is objectively the case that Kim Kardashian is very wealthy.
subjective *
from the perspective of some individual or group of individuals. Contrasted with objective.

E.g., it is subjectively the case (from my perspective) that Kim Kardashian does not deserve to be so ridiculously wealthy.

vague *
Philosophers call a term "vague" when there's no sharp borderline between cases where the term applies and cases where it doesn't apply. So, for instance, it's a vague matter how few hairs on your head makes you bald, or how many dollars in your bank account makes you rich, or how many grains of sand it takes to make a heap.

"Vague" does not mean "ambiguous." Nor does it mean "unclear" or "difficult to understand." Consider the following sentence:

The point of this essay is to prove that human beings never perceive material objects themselves, but only the a priori interface between a phenomenal object and its conceptual content.

This doesn't mean anything. It's just a bunch of words put together in a way that doesn't make any clear sense. You can call such prose "opaque," or "difficult to understand," or "gibberish."

Nouns
analysis *
In ordinary speech, we use “analysis” to describe any in-depth investigation of a topic or an entity. The word comes from the Latin “to break apart”; thus, to analyze something is often to break it up into smaller parts in order to understand it better.

Sometimes philosophers use “analysis” in that ordinary way, but they also use it to describe a definition of a concept that one arrives at by careful investigation of the thing in question.

For example, I might analyze the concept “library” as “a quiet place where one goes to study and complete assignments”. You might challenge my analysis of library by claiming that it leaves out an essential feature of libraries (e.g., that they lend books to their members), or that it does not describe just libraries, but also similar places like cafes.

argument *
A philosophical argument is a set of claims (called premises) that are offered collectively as reasons to believe in one (or more) other claim(s) (conclusions). By convention, premises are listed as full sentences labeled with numbers or letters; conclusions are listed below a solid line. E.g.,
(Premise 1) Some animals can feel pain.
(Premise 2) It is morally unacceptable to deliberately cause pain.

(Conclusion) Therefore, it is wrong to kill animals in ways that cause them to feel pain.

claim *
A statement that represents someone or some group’s view on an issue or answer to a question.

E.g., the empiricists’ claim that all knowledge comes from sense experience is challenged by philosophers who believe that we have a priori knowledge of some facts about the world.

concept
An abstract idea or general notion, usually expressed in language by a noun phrase (not by a sentence). One could speak of “the concept of justice”, “the concept of human rights”, “the concept of moral goodness”, etc.

conclusion *
A claim one tries to prove by making an argument in its support. See argument.

deduction *
A form of reasoning where one draws a conclusion about a specific case from general principles. E.g., from the general principle that kids love candy, you might deduce that the kid you babysit will enjoy a lollipop. (Note, however, that a general principle is not necessarily a universal principle. A premise such as “Kids love candy” makes a generalization about kids that may not accurately describe all kids. A universal principle, on the other hand, specifies that something holds for all members or in all cases.) Contrasted with induction.

dilemma
In ordinary language, a dilemma is any difficult problem. In philosophy, it has a more specific meaning: it is a problem for which there are two possible solutions, neither of which is entirely satisfying.

equivocation *
An equivocation is a bad form of argument where one of the key terms can be understood in two ways, and the plausibility of the argument depends on reading the term differently in different premises. For instance, consider the argument:

1. All politicians are snakes.
2. No snake has legs.

3. So no politician has legs.

There’s a metaphorical sense of the word "snake" in which premise 1 might have some plausibility. But for premise 2 to be plausible, we have to understand the
word "snake" there in its literal sense. There’s no single sense of the word "snake" which makes both premises plausible. So this argument does not establish its conclusion: it *equivocates* on the word "snake."

Here are some trickier examples of equivocation:

Nature is governed by fixed and unchangeable *laws*. But every *law* is the work of some legislator. Therefore, there is some legislator responsible for the governing of Nature.

It’s impossible for two objects to be separated by a vacuum. For if a vacuum is to separate them then *nothing* can be between them. But if *nothing* is between them, then they obviously aren't separated.

That dog over there is a father. In addition, that dog over there is *yours*. So that dog must be *your* father.

**fallacy** *
A type of argument considered to be philosophically indefensible, either because it makes a logical error, or because it uses tactics considered to be unacceptable in professional philosophy.

Here’s a simple introduction to many common fallacies: http://www.informationisbeautiful.net/visualizations/rhetorical-fallacies/. You aren’t required to learn them all, but it is incredibly helpful to be aware of them, so as not to commit them in your own writing!

**induction** *
A form of reasoning where one draws a general conclusion from specific cases. E.g. from the observation that all the Baruch students I know are very hardworking, I might make an *inductive* conclusion that the next Baruch student I meet is likely to be hard-working.

Note, however, that an inductive conclusion is always expressed in terms of likelihood, rather than as a certainty. That is because there is always some chance that there is a counterexample to my generalization that I just happen to have not encountered. Consider the following classic example:

(Premise) All the swans we have seen thus far are white.

(Conclusion) Therefore, swans are white.

The conclusion happens to be false: there are black swans, too. If the conclusion was properly stated in terms of likelihood, though, as “Therefore, swans are very likely to be white”, it would be true even though there are black swans.

**maxim** *
a general principle or rule of conduct. As in,
One of Kant’s ethical *maxims* is that one should never treat another person as a mere means to an end.

**premise** *
A claim put forward in an argument as one of several reasons to believe a conclusion. See *argument*.

**problem**
Much like a mathematical problem, a philosophical problem is difficult issue that philosophers attempt to provide a convincing solution for.

Examples of well-known problems in philosophy include “the mind-body problem”, “the problem of other minds”, “the hard problem of consciousness”, “the problem of induction”, “the demarcation problem”, and so on.

**proposition**
A proposition is something that you could hold, or believe, or put forward as a claim. It’s capable of being true or false. It’s expressed in language by a complete sentence. E.g.,

The sky is blue.
If it rains today, Sarah will not run outdoors.
People are naturally selfish.

**Verbs**

**cause** *
to bring about an event or condition as a consequence. See *correlate* for an explanation of the distinction.

**correlate** *
One factor correlates with another any time there is a systematic relationship between the two such that either a) when one increases, so does the other, b) when one decreases, so does the other, or c) when one increases, the other decreases. For example, the crime rate of a city correlates with the number of churches in the city.

This does not mean, however, that high crime causes an increased number of churches to be erected in a city; nor does it mean that a greater number of churches causes more criminal activity in a city. If you have taken a psychology or statistics class, you have probably heard the phrase “correlation does not equal causation”. That phrase summarizes the important point that it is impossible to tell merely from the fact that two things are correlated what the causal relationship between those things might be – that is, which one could cause the other. It’s just as possible that neither of those things cause each other, but instead, both are caused by yet another factor, in what is called a “third variable problem”. This is the case with the churches/crime rate example: both of those things increase as the consequence of increases in a city’s population (the “third variable”).
To get a sense of how common it is for two factors to correlate without any causal relation between them, check out the graphs at http://www.tylervigen.com/.

**entail**

In ordinary language, “to entail” is sometimes used to mean “to involve”. For example, if you told me you just started a new job as an administrative assistant, I might ask you “And what does that entail?”, expecting that you will answer by telling me what tasks and duties your new job involves.

In philosophy, “to entail” has a more technical meaning: to bring about or to impose by logical necessity.

E.g., If Socrates is a man, and all men are mammals, those two premises entail that Socrates is a mammal. If the premises are both true, it is logically necessary (or in other words, there is no way for it to not be the case) that the conclusion is true.

**equivocate**

To use a term with inconsistent meanings. See *equivocation.*

**infer**

to draw conclusions from premises. People infer by looking at the evidence and deciding what hypothesis that evidence best supports.

**imply**

In ordinary language, “to imply” generally means “to suggest a meaning that is not stated explicitly”. For example, if a rival of yours congratulates you on an award by saying she/he was surprised that you won, you might take their comment to imply that they thought you didn’t deserve the award.

In philosophy, “to imply” means to suggest a conclusion. In a well-formed argument, the premises collectively imply the conclusion. Implication is a weaker notion than entailment: implication is like strongly pointing to a conclusion, whereas entailment is to bring about the conclusion by logical necessity.

**imagine**

to form an idea of some possibility, to entertain that possibility in your mind. When you imagine some possibility, you are not committing yourself to the claim that that possibility actually obtains or is likely to obtain; you treat it as a hypothetical case.

**refute**

Refuting a claim is showing it to be false—typically by producing reasons that make it clear that it’s false. Until you produce reasons, you may deny or reject the claim, but you won’t have refuted it. It isn’t appropriate to say some like:

Berkeley refutes Locke’s claim that there are material objects.
unless you think that Berkeley has succeeded in demonstrating that Locke's claim is false. If Berkeley has refuted Locke, then Locke must be wrong. You can't write: 'Berkeley refuted Locke's claim, but in fact Locke was right.'

If you doubt whether Berkeley's criticisms of Locke are successful, you should say instead:

Berkeley denies Locke's claim that...
or:
Berkeley argues against Locke's claim that...
or:
Berkeley rejects Locke's claim that...
or:
Berkeley tries to refute Locke's claim that...

**stipulate** *

to request that your reader or interlocutor (conversational partner) agree with you about the definition of a term, for the sake of understanding your argument.

Say you wanted to argue a claim about flying, and you plan to compare the flight of birds to that of aircraft. But you are aware that there are birds that do not fly, who would be a counterexample or a complication for your discussion. To make your argument straightforward, you could stipulate that "Birds are feathered animals with wings that fly", so that someone cannot criticize your argument for, say, failing to accurately compare penguins to aircraft.

**posit** *

To put forward a claim as an argumentative premise on the assumption that it is true, even if it has not been proven true. E.g.,

Rousseau posits that human beings were good-natured before they were corrupted by civilization.

**prove**

To prove a claim is to show it to be true. Similar to the example above under refute, you should not say that Locke has proven some claim, or shown that something is the case, unless you think that Locke's arguments for his claim are successful. If Locke has proven a claim, then the claim must be true. If you doubt whether Locke's arguments for a claim are successful, then you should say instead:

Locke argues that...
or:
Locke defends the claim that...
or:
Locke tries to prove that...
or something of that sort.
Foreign Phrases Used in Philosophy

You may come across some of these in the readings. Most of these are from Latin.

\textit{e.g.} *

"for example"; an abbreviation of the Latin phrase \textit{exemplī grātiā}

\textit{ibid.} *

abbreviation for the Latin \textit{ibidem}, meaning “in the same place”. Used when citing from a source that has just been cited in a text, so as not to repeat the full citation. If the second citation from the same source is from a different page, you include the new page number, as in (ibid. 45). If the second citation is from the same page as just cited, you can just use (ibid.).

\textit{i.e.} *

"that is", from the Latin phrase \textit{id est}. Used to clarify and/or provide more detail about something, as in “She presented a paper at the APA (i.e., the American Philosophical Association Conference)”.

\textit{viz.} *

"namely"

\textit{cf.}

"compare," "see"; used to direct a reader’s attention to a relevant reference

\textit{ad hoc} *

You call something \textit{ad hoc} when it’s introduced for a particular purpose, instead of for some general, antecedently-motivated reason. So, for instance, an \textit{ad hoc} decision is a decision you make when there’s no general rule or precedent telling you what to do.

Philosophers sometimes accuse their opponents of making \textit{ad hoc} hypotheses (or \textit{ad hoc} stipulations, or \textit{ad hoc} amendments to their analyses, etc.). These are hypotheses (or stipulations or amendments) adopted purely for the purpose of saving a theory from difficulty or refutation, without any independent motivation or rationale. They will usually strike the reader as artificial or "cheating."

For instance, suppose you analyze (see ‘\textit{analysis}', under Nouns) "bird" as "any creature that can fly." I then cite mosquitos as a counter-example. They can fly, but they aren't birds. Now, you might fix up your analysis as follows:

\begin{quote}
A bird is any creature that can fly, and which is not a mosquito.
\end{quote}

This would be an \textit{ad hoc} response to my counter-example. Alternatively, you might fix up your analysis as follows:
A bird is any creature that can fly, and which has a backbone.

This would be an independently motivated, and more appropriate, response to my counter-example. (Of course, someone may discover counter-examples even to this revised analysis.)

**a priori** (adj.)

prior to or independent of experience. Usually describes either knowledge or justification for a belief. Contrasted with a *posteriori*.

**a posteriori** (adj.)

following from or dependent upon experience. Usually describes either knowledge or justification for a belief. Contrasted with a *priori*.

**a fortiori** (adj.) *

"even more so," or "all the more so," as in:
If all donkeys bray incessantly, then *a fortiori* all young donkeys bray incessantly.

**ceteris paribus** *

"other things being equal," or "other things happening normally," as in the following dialogue:

Henry: Careful! You almost dropped the vase. If you dropped it, it would shatter, and Mom would kill us.

Lola: It might not have shattered. Maybe a gust of wind would have blown the pillow off the couch just as I dropped it, and it would have landed on the pillow.

   Henry: You know what I mean. If you had dropped the vase, then, *if things had otherwise happened normally*, the vase would have hit the ground and shattered.

**de facto** *

"in fact," or "as a matter of fact", As in:

In this town, the clergy have *de facto* immunity to the traffic laws. In the eyes of the law, of course, a speeder is a speeder; but no cop hereabouts would actually give a clergyman a speeding ticket.

**de jure** *

"as a matter of law", as in:

*De jure*, all Americans have equal right to fair treatment by the police, but *de facto*, some racial and religious groups face discrimination, being more prone to be targeted for stop-and-frisk procedures.

**ipso facto** *

"by that very fact," as in: “Anyone who wears chartreuse socks is *ipso facto* unfit to make fashion decisions.”
non sequitur
"it doesn't follow." The premises do not support the conclusion.

(In ordinary conversation, this term is sometimes used to remark upon instances where speakers change topics of conversation without indicating any connection between those two topics. E.g., if I say “My favorite color is purple. I ate a tuna sandwich today,” without explaining the connection between purple and my lunch, I have just made a conversational non sequitur.)

pace *
"despite what X says," as in:

Pace Freud, it is unusual for young boys to form sexual attachments to their mothers.

per se
"itself," as in:

It's not leisure per se which turns the mind to criminal pursuits; but rather the boredom which usually accompanies leisure.

prima facie *
"at first glance," as in:

Prima facie, it seems that George will inherit control of most of father's estate; but the will is complicated, and our lawyers are looking into it even as we speak. Perhaps they'll discover some clause that blocks George's inheritance.

simpliciter *
"without qualification," as in:

There are good leaders, good businessmen, and good fathers. But is there to be found anywhere in the world a man who is good simpliciter?

sui generis *
"unique, one of a kind, in a class of its own", as in:

Nietzsche’s “Thus Spoke Zarathustra” is a sui generis work of philosophy, written in a style unlike any other philosophical work of its time.