Philosophical tools

Sources of Philosophy

The Sources of Philosophical Beliefs

- Perception (i.e., sense-perception)
- Inference
- Intellect
- Intuition
- Authority ("authoritative testimony")

Perception

- Ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses.
- "the normal limits to human perception“
- Perception is a central issue in epistemology, the theory of knowledge. At root, all our empirical knowledge is grounded in how we see, hear, touch, smell and taste the world around us.
- Sun,Rain,Coffe,Green,Sky,

Intellect

- Intellect refers to the ability of the mind to come to correct conclusions about what is true or real, and about how to solve problems. It can be described as the ability to perceive information and knowledge.
- Ability to take information, process it and then be able to apply it to new situations by using facts and old knowledge in new situations so that one can create new results. e.g Fire, Blue color, chair. Stairs.

Inference

- **Inference**: A conclusion reached on the basis of evidence and reasoning.An opinion formed on the basis of known facts.
- In logic, the assertion of a conclusion, in general because one has already asserted (and thus accepted) certain premisses one considers sufficient to assert the conclusion.
- In natural language, there are terms that mark conclusions and inferences: "therefore", "so", "since", "because", "it follows", "entails" and others.

What does “rationally defensible” mean?

What makes a claim *rationally defensible?*

To be rationally defensible, at minimum,

- a claim must not be inconsistent with itself (i.e., self-contradictory), and

- it must not be inconsistent with the facts or evidence of common sense or scientific experience.

So, for example,

the claim that today is both Monday & Wednesday

- cannot be true
- because it is self-contradictory (i.e., it is inconsistent with itself),
- and it is therefore NOT rationally defensible.

Furthermore,

the claim that there is an elephant in your living room,

- although it is not inconsistent with itself (i.e., it is not self-contradictory),
- *is* inconsistent with the facts of experience,
- i.e., *as a matter of fact*, there is no elephant in your living room (is there?).
- So this claim is also NOT rationally defensible.

Of course, if there *were* an elephant in your living room, then this claim . . . .

would be rationally defensible, wouldn't it?

- It is not a self-contradictory claim.
- If there *were* an elephant in your living room, then it would not be inconsistent with the facts of experience to say that there is.
- Indeed, the facts of experience (seeing, touching, etc.) would actually *prove* that the claim is true.

This leads to . . . .

a distinction between

- claims that are rationally defensible *in the weak sense*, i.e., in the sense that they are neither self-contradictory nor negated by the facts of experience and thus cannot be refuted;

and

- claims that are rationally defensible *in the strong sense*, i.e., in the sense that they are positively supported by or even proved true on the basis of good reasons.

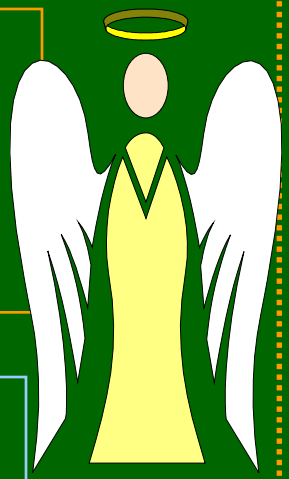
If someone were to claim that there is an elephant in your living room,

we could prove or disprove the claim by going into your living room, looking around, and, on the basis of our perceptions, discovering whether there is an elephant there or not.

And the result of our investigation -- i.e., our answer to the question as to whether or not there is an elephant in your living room -- would itself be rationally defensible *in the strong sense* because our answer would be proved on the basis of perception.

But suppose . . .

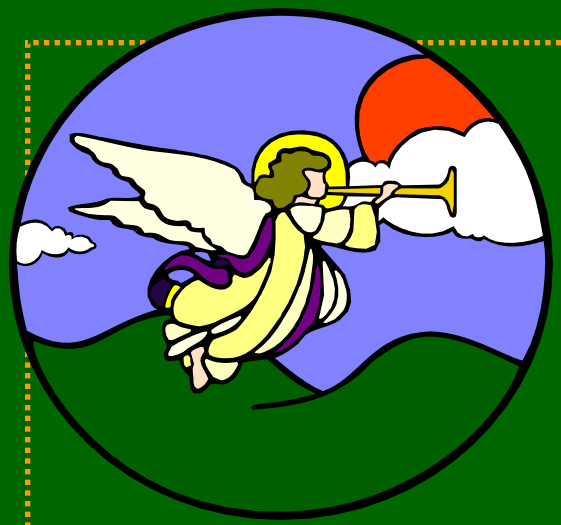
the claim is that there is an *ANGEL* in your living room?



How could we prove or disprove that claim?

If we all (& by "we," I mean the members of this class) went into your living room & saw an angel sitting on your couch (& if we all agreed that what we were seeing actually was an angel), then I suppose we could say that this claim is rationally defensible *in the strong sense* (at least to our own satisfaction although others we told about this might think that we had all been subject to a mass hallucination).

However, what is more likely to happen



when we look around your living room is that we will ***NOT*** see any angels because angels (which are spiritual rather than material beings) are ordinarily invisible (& imperceptible in general).

Will that prove that there are no angels in your living room?

No, it won't. Since angels are ordinarily imperceptible, our failure to perceive any in your living room does not prove that there are none there.

It seems that the claim that there is an angel in your living room

- is neither provable nor disprovable; and
- since the claim is neither self-contradictory
- nor inconsistent with the facts of experience,*
- it *is* rationally defensible,

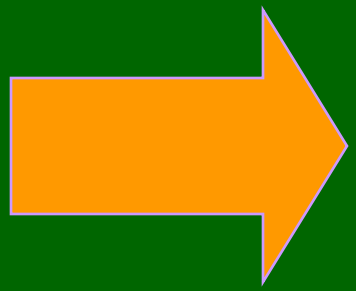
BUT...

- only ***in the weak sense*** that it cannot be refuted on the basis of either logic or factual evidence.
- To be rationally defensible ***in the strong sense***, the claim would have to be positively supported or even proved true on the basis of good reasons.

* (Remember, the fact that we do not perceive the angel does not show that the claim here is inconsistent with the facts of experience because it ***IS*** a fact of experience that angels are rarely [if ever] perceived.)

Let’s pause to summarize

our discussion of rational defensibility . . . .



A claim is rationally defensible *in the weak sense* when

- there is no good reason to believe that it is true, but when also
- it cannot be proved false because it is neither self-contradictory
- nor inconsistent with the evidence of (common sense or scientific) experience.

a claim is rationally defensible *in the strong sense* when

- it is neither inconsistent with itself
- nor with the evidence of (common sense or scientific) experience

- **AND** when there is good reason to believe that the claim is (1) *certainly true* (no doubt), or (2) *probably true* (no reasonable doubt), or at least (3) *more likely to be true than false* (because there is a preponderance of evidence supporting it).

What makes a belief or proposition rationally *in*defensible?

- A belief or proposition that is unreliable with itself (self-contradictory) is rationally defenseless. Any belief or proposition that is self-contradictory is not only false but necessarily so. Its truth is logically impossible.

- A belief or proposition that is inconsistent with the evidence of (common sense or scientific) experience is rationally indefensible. Any such belief or proposition is at least probably false.