

METAPHYSICS: PAPER 1

Ted Sider, Metaphysics
2-3 pages, double-spaced
Due in class, February 1

In “Human Freedom and the Self”, Roderick Chisholm defends a form of libertarianism, and defends it from objections. Your assignment is to discuss a certain one of those objections. Specifically, you must i) briefly formulate Chisholm’s Libertarianism, and then ii) present, explain and evaluate the argument against Chisholm’s Libertarianism that Chisholm discusses in section 7 of his paper (pp. 360-361).

Let me remind you what I mean by “*present, explain, and evaluate*”:

1. Present the argument. The first stage, that of presenting the argument, is probably the most difficult part. You need to formulate an argument in *numbered premise form*, as I’ve done in class, that captures the argument Chisholm is discussing. And, that argument must be a valid argument — this means that there can be no “suppressed premises” omitted. For example, suppose you had to present a numbered premise argument based on the following paragraph:

“People that cheat on their taxes should talk to my grandfather. My grandfather is a great old man. He’s wise about all sorts of things, but particularly about advice about moral matters. Now, lots of people nowadays cheat on their taxes, but I know whose advice to take. Granddad was always clear: never cheat on your taxes!”

A first attempt might be:

1. My grandfather is very wise
2. My grandfather says that cheating on your taxes is wrong
3. Therefore, cheating on your taxes is wrong

Notice first that the conclusion of this argument is that cheating on your taxes is wrong. This is never explicitly stated in the paragraph. But that’s OK. It’s clear that the point of the paragraph is to establish that cheating on your taxes is wrong.

So, the conclusion of the argument stated above is the correct one. But the formulation is still unacceptable, because the argument thus formulated is invalid. Premises 1 and 2 don’t logically imply the conclusion, 3. It’s clear that the person offering the argument has in mind a suppressed premise: “*if* my grandfather says that cheating on your taxes is wrong, *then* cheating on your taxes is wrong”. This is a suppressed premise, since it was never explicitly stated. But it is clear that it is part of the argument being offered; and anyway it is required to make the argument valid. So it should be included:

1. My grandfather is very wise
2. My grandfather says that cheating on your taxes is wrong

3. If my grandfather says that cheating on your taxes is wrong, then cheating on your taxes is wrong
4. Therefore, cheating on your taxes is wrong

But notice now that premise 1 isn't even needed to make the argument valid. So it would be clearer to leave it out. Here is the final form of the argument:

1. My grandfather says that cheating on your taxes is wrong
2. If my grandfather says that cheating on your taxes is wrong, then cheating on your taxes is wrong
3. Therefore, cheating on your taxes is wrong

You may worry: what's happened to the claim that my grandfather is wise? Wasn't that a crucial part of the argument? Yes, it was; where it fits in now is into the *explanation* of the argument. When you give the justification for premise 2, the reason given by the defender of the argument will be that his or her grandfather is so wise about moral matters that his very assertion that cheating on taxes is wrong is sufficient for its really being wrong.

2. Explain the argument. Here, you need to do two things. First, you must define any technical terms that you use. (You don't need to use technical terms, but if you do use any then you must define them.) Secondly, and more importantly, you need to go *line by line* through the argument you've presented, and give the justification or rationale for each premise (not the conclusion, just the premises). For your paper, remember that the argument you're presenting is offered by an hypothetical objector to Chisholm, so the justifications you should give are on behalf of this hypothetical objector.

3. Evaluate the argument. Here again there are two steps. First you must answer the question: is the argument valid? The answer here had better be yes, because I've required you to formulate the argument in a valid form. Secondly, you must ask: is the argument sound? And since the argument is valid, this amounts to asking whether the premises are true.

You should first evaluate the argument *from Chisholm's point of view*. In section 7, Chisholm gives his response; you must present that response as an objection to the argument you've just formulated. It is important that this takes the form of a reason for rejecting a *specific premise*. You must say, for example: "Chisholm thinks that premise 2 is false because...".

Finally, you should give your own evaluation. Do you agree with Chisholm? If not, what's wrong with what he says? Also, if you think that there's another problem with the argument that Chisholm doesn't address, you could discuss that as well.