Logic and Feminism

PIKSI 2022

What’s the Problem?

“That women are not logical is one of the recognized conventions of social life. It is one of those understandings we might say, often enough referred to if rarely stated definitely, made the foundation of allusion or hint if not so often uttered outright. It certainly is not often stated in so many words” —Edward Hale, “Women and Logic” 1913

“Here’s the problem, I know how to stand up to a man who’s unfairly trespassed against me and the reason I know that is because the parameters for my resistance are quite well-defined, which is: we talk, we argue, we push, and then it becomes physical. If we move beyond the boundaries of civil discourse, we know what the next step is. That’s forbidden in discourse with women and so I don’t think that men can control crazy women. I really don’t believe it.” —Jordan Peterson, (YouTube) 2017

Feminist Criticisms of Formal Logic

Adversariality

Adversariality: A Case Study

Adversary Paradigm: adversariality as the “gold standard” of philosophical engagement.

What’s our goal in philosophizing and what methods achieve that?
Formal Systems

- Trade-offs between complexity and expressive power.
- Example: Moving from sentential to first-order logic.

Truth-Functional Logic

- Truth tables are great!
- But what complexity do we give up?

Conjunction

- Is $A \land B$ always equivalent to $B \land A$?
- “Scooter sat down and got a treat.”
  “Scooter got a treat and sat down.”

Conditionals

- Truth Table for $\rightarrow$:

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<tr>
<th>$A$</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>$A \rightarrow B$</th>
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- A true conditional: “If Scooby was a houseplant, then Audrey would be one too.”
Validity

- Recall: An argument is valid when there is no case in which the premises are true and the conclusion is false.
- Valid or invalid?
- Cat is from Minnesota. But Cat is not from Minnesota. Therefore, the Earth is flat.

Beyond Classical Logics

- Two responses:
  - Extensions of classical logics.
  - Alternatives to classical logics.

Extending Classical Logics

- Approaches that add new operators or mechanisms to classical logic.
  - Often modal logics, or other logics that represent \textit{intensional} features of language (that’s not a typo)!

Alternatives to Classical Logics

- Approaches that reject and replace some features or mechanisms of classical logic.
  - Reject the assumption that every sentence is either T or F
  - Reject the assumption that a sentence can’t be both T and F
  - Reinterpret some of the logical operators (like the conditional)
  - Reject the idea that an argument with inconsistent premises is valid
Annoyed with classical logic? Go explore!

Now take that approach and apply it to our social world instead of the formal one!
- Trade-offs between inclusiveness and simplicity.
- Example: Strict deadlines so an answer key can be posted.
- Example: Simple requirements for a philosophy major.

Where did logic (as we study it) originate?
- Lots of philosophers we read and assign said lots of racist things and supported colonialism (Hume, Kant, Locke).
- What kinds of philosophical ideas did people have in relation to the territories we live on?
Policing and Incarceration

School to Prison Pipeline

- Not everyone is treated equally in K-12 education.
- The “school-to-prison pipeline” is the name for a process of pushing (especially Black and Indigenous) kids out of school and into the prison system.

What Could We Do?

- Two responses:
  - Reforms of institutions.
  - Replacement of institutions.

Improving on Institutions

- Approaches that improve on our institutions.
  - Diversifying syllabi, representation, faculty.
  - Anti-racism and anti-bias training for police and correctional staff.
  - Rehabilitative and counselling programs for people currently incarcerated.

Alternatives to Institutions

- Approaches that reject and replace the institutions we already have.
  - Overhaul a discipline’s major requirements, or maybe get rid of some or all disciplinary boundaries.
  - Defund the police (and replace them with a range of public health supports and other kinds of programs).
  - Abolish prisons (in favour of other kinds of approaches to justice).
Bothered by an institution? Think about the structures!