## **General Principles**

- <u>*The Law of the Excluded Middle*</u>: Either *p* is true or not-*p* is true, where *p* is any statement.
- <u>*The Law of Non-Contradiction*</u>: *p* and not-p cannot both be true, where *p* is any statement.

## The Argument from Conflicting Appearances

- 1. My hand is warm and your hand is chilled. The same water that feels cool to me appears warm to you. (This can work for any such sensory conflict.)
- 2. One of the follow must be true:
  - (i) Both our senses are correct
  - (ii) Both our senses are incorrect
  - (iii) One of our senses is correct and the other incorrect
- 3. (i) is false
  - a. If (i) were true then the water is both warm and not-warm
  - b. But this is a violation of the Law of Non-Contradiction
  - c. Therefore (i) cannot be true
- 4. (iii) is false
  - a. If (iii) were true then there must be a reason to prefer one of our senses
  - b. But there is no reason to prefer one of our senses
    - i. Preferring one of our senses requires knowing the water's real properties
    - ii. And knowing the real properties of the water requires using our senses
    - iii. But the senses are offering conflicting accounts
    - iv. Therefore there is no way to resolve the conflict between our senses; our senses are equipollent
  - c. Therefore (iii) is cannot be true
- 5. Therefore, by elimination, (ii) must be true
  - a. The elimination is justified by the Law of the Excluded Middle
- 6. Hence our senses are incorrect

## The Argument for Nihilism

- 1. Take any property of atoms (weight, shape, size, and motion)
- 2. All these properties are ascertained by the senses
- 3. Therefore, if we accept the Law of the Excluded Middle and the Law of Non-Contradiction, the Argument from Conflicting Appearances applies

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Adapted from Terence Irwin's *Classical Thought*, chapter 4.

4. Hence, our senses are incorrect concerning these properties, and so reality (even the atoms) does not have them

## The Argument for Skepticism

- 1. Follow steps 1-2 in the Argument for Nihilism
- 2. But reject the Law of the Excluded Middle and the Law of Non-Contradiction
  - a. To justify these laws, need some independent criteria
  - b. But to justify these independent criteria, need further independent criteria
  - c. This is an infinite regress
- 3. Now following the Argument of Conflicting reasons (2.i), (2.ii), and (2.iii) might all be true or all be false or some other combination
- 4. Hence, we know nothing about the true nature of reality—our senses might be correct or they might not, we cannot know