

## Unit 15 - Classwork 1: Gorgias and Antisthenes

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For reasons that remain unclear (but might have to do with the art of rhetoric), Gorgias made multiple arguments in support of an ontological nihilism. In general, nihilism is the philosophy of nothingness, and ontology is the philosophy about whether or not something exists (or is), because ontology is the philosophy of *being* (or *existence*). So, an ontological nihilism is a philosophy that nothing whatsoever exists at all. For reasons that remain unclear, Gorgias made multiple arguments in support of an ontological nihilism, and two of those arguments drew directly from Eleatic philosophy. If you need to refresh your memory about Eleatic philosophy, you might want to review Unit 8, and you might also want to review Unit 9 and Unit 10.

On the basis of logical arguments in support of Eleatic philosophy, Gorgias made two logical arguments for ontological nihilism, and both of those arguments were ultimately *modus tollens* syllogisms. If you need to refresh your memory about what a modus tollens syllogism is, it is any syllogism with the following logical form:

**Premise 1:** If P then Q.

**Premise 2:** Not-Q.

**Conclusion:** Therefore, not-P

After making his *first* Eleatic argument for ontological nihilism, his student Antisthenes presented an ontological argument in the form of a hypothetical syllogism. If you need to refresh your memory about what a hypothetical syllogism is, it is any syllogism with the following logical form:

**Premise 1:** If P then Q.

**Premise 2:** If Q then R.

**Conclusion:** Therefore, if P then R.

As a counterargument to the argument that his student Gorgias had made, Gorgias then made his *second* Eleatic argument for ontological nihilism. Hence overall, the aforementioned order is the order in which we shall examine those three logical arguments.

We shall examine the three aforementioned arguments in the following order.

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- (1) For ontological nihilism, the *first* Eleatic argument that Gorgias made was the following *modus tollens* syllogism.

**Premise 1:** If something exists, then either something has *always* existed or something *began* to exist.

**Premise 2:** Yet, nothing whatsoever has always existed, and nothing at all ever began to exist.

**Conclusion:** Therefore, *nothing* whatsoever exists at *all*.

- (2) On the basis of the commonsensical assumption that multiple things exist, Antisthenes tried to refute ontological nihilism with the following hypothetical syllogism (as a counterargument to the aforementioned argument made by Gorgias).

**Premise 1:** If *multiple* things exist, then *at least one* thing exists.

**Premise 2:** If at least *one* thing exists, then *something* exists..

**Conclusion:** Therefore, if *multiple* things exist, then *something* exists.

- (3) To defend ontological nihilism, the *second* Eleatic argument that Gorgias made was the following *modus tollens*.

**Premise 1:** If *something* exists, then at least *one* thing exists.

**Premise 2:** Yet, *not* even *one* thing exists.

**Conclusion:** Therefore, *nothing* whatsoever exists at *all*.

I. For his *first* Eleatic argument in support of ontological nihilism, fill in the blanks of the following polysyllogism.

|        |   |                           |
|--------|---|---------------------------|
| LINE 1 | If something exists,<br>then <i>either something has <b>always</b> existed or something began to exist.</i> | <i>leading assumption</i> |
|--------|---|---------------------------|

|        |  |   |
|--------|--|---|
| LINE 2 | If <b>something has <i>always</i> existed</b> , then something is <i>unlimited</i> . | <i>For the explanation from Melissus,<br/>see page 58 of Unit 8.</i>  |
| LINE 3 | If something is <i>unlimited</i> , then something is <i>nowhere</i> at all.          | <i>See the Eleatic explanation<br/>on page 13 of Unit 15.<br/>(For the explanation from Zeno,<br/>see page 44 of Unit 8.)</i> |
| LINE 4 | If _____,<br>then _____.   | In a hypothetical syllogism,<br>if the premises are Line 2 and Line 3,<br>then Line 4 is the logical conclusion.              |
| LINE 5 | Nothing whatsoever is nowhere at all.  | <i>assumption</i>   |
| LINE 6 | _____.   | In a <i>modus tollens</i> syllogism,<br>if the premises are Line 4 and Line 5,<br>then Line 6 is the logical conclusion.      |

|         |   |  |
|---------|---|--|
| LINE 7  | If <b>something began to exist</b> , then part of <i>nonexistence</i> became a part of <i>existence</i> . | <i>assumption</i>  |
| LINE 8  | If part of nonexistence became a part of existence, then nonexistence existed.                            | <i>assumption</i>  |
| LINE 9  | If _____,<br>then _____.  | In a hypothetical syllogism,<br>if the premises are Line 7 and Line 8,<br>then Line 9 is the logical conclusion.           |
| LINE 10 | Nonexistence has never existed in any way at all.   |  |
| LINE 11 | _____.  | In a <i>modus tollens</i> syllogism,<br>if the premises are Line 9 and Line 10,<br>then Line 11 is the logical conclusion. |

II. In order to refute that argument for ontological nihilism, Antisthenes made the following counterargument. Accordingly, fill in the blanks of the following hypothetical polysyllogism.

|        |  |  |
|--------|--|--|
| LINE 1 | If <i>multiple</i> things exist, then at least <i>two</i> things exist.      | <i>assumption</i>  |
| LINE 2 | If at least <i>two</i> things exist, then more than <i>one</i> thing exists. | <i>assumption</i>  |
| LINE 3 | If _____,<br>then _____.   | In a hypothetical syllogism,<br>if the premises are Line 1 and Line 2,<br>then Line 3 is the logical conclusion. |
| LINE 4 | If <i>more than one</i> thing exists, then <i>at least one</i> thing exists  | <i>assumption</i>  |
| LINE 5 | If _____,<br>then _____.   | In a hypothetical syllogism,<br>if the premises are Line 3 and Line 4,<br>then Line 5 is the logical conclusion. |
| LINE 6 | If <i>at least one</i> thing exists, then <i>something</i> exists.           | <i>assumption</i>  |
| LINE 7 | If _____,<br>then _____.   | In a hypothetical syllogism,<br>if the premises are Line 5 and Line 6,<br>then Line 7 is the logical conclusion. |

III. In any hypothetical syllogism, the premises and the conclusion are conditional statements (or 'if-then' statements). Every conditional statement has a converse, and only a conditional statement can be the converse of each conditional statement. In order to find the converse of any conditional statement, reverse the order of its antecedent and its consequent.

(i) What is the converse of the conditional statement in Line 7?

(ii) What is the converse of the conditional statement in Line 6?

IV. After considering the polysyllogism formulated by his student Antisthenes, Gorgias responded with the following polysyllogism. Hence for his *second* Eleatic argument in support of ontological nihilism, fill in the blanks of the following polysyllogism.

|         |  |  |
|---------|--|--|
| LINE 1  | If <i>something</i> exists, then at least <i>one</i> thing exists.   | <i>assumption</i>  |
| LINE 2  | If <i>at least</i> one thing exists, then<br>either <i>only</i> one thing exists or <i>more than</i> one thing exists. | <i>assumption</i>  |
| LINE 3  | If _____,<br>then <i>either</i> _____ <i>or</i> _____.   | In a hypothetical syllogism,<br>if the premises are Line 1 and Line 2,<br>then Line 3 is the logical conclusion.   |
| LINE 4  | If <i>only one</i> thing exists, then <i>something</i> is the <i>only</i> thing.                                       | <i>assumption</i>  |
| LINE 5  | If something is the <i>only</i> thing, then something is <i>only one</i> thing.  | <i>assumption</i>  |
| LINE 6  | If _____,<br>then _____.   | In a hypothetical syllogism,<br>if the premises are Line 4 and Line 5,<br>then Line 6 is the logical conclusion.   |
| LINE 7  | If <i>more</i> than one thing exists, then <i>multiple</i> things exist.   | <i>assumption</i>  |
| LINE 8  | If <i>multiple</i> things exist, then each one of the multiple things is <i>only one</i> thing.                        | <i>assumption</i>  |
| LINE 9  | If _____,<br>then _____.   | In a hypothetical syllogism,<br>if the premises are Line 7 and Line 8,<br>then Line 9 is the logical conclusion.   |
| LINE 10 | If each one of multiple things is <i>only one</i> thing, then something is <i>only one</i> thing.                      | <i>assumption</i>  |
| LINE 11 | If _____,<br>then _____.   | In a hypothetical syllogism,<br>if the premises are Line 9 and Line 10,<br>then Line 11 is the logical conclusion. |

|         |   |   |
|---------|---|---|
| LINE 12 | If something is only one thing, then something isn't multiple things at once.       | <i>assumption</i>   |
| LINE 13 | If something isn't multiple things at once, then something has no parts at all.     | <i>assumption</i>   |
| LINE 14 | If _____,<br>then _____.  | In a hypothetical syllogism,<br>if the premises are Line 12 and Line 13,<br>then Line 14 is the logical conclusion.         |
| LINE 15 | If something has no parts at all, then something has <i>no</i> size at <i>all</i> . | In a hypothetical syllogism,<br>if the premises are Line 14 and Line 15,<br>then Line 14 is the logical conclusion.         |
| LINE 16 | If _____,<br>then _____.  | In a hypothetical syllogism,<br>if the premises are Line 14 and Line 15,<br>then Line 16 is the logical conclusion.         |
| LINE 17 | Nothing whatsoever has <i>no</i> size at <i>all</i> .                               |   |
| LINE 18 | _____.  | In a <i>modus tollens</i> syllogism,<br>if the premises are Line 16 and Line 17,<br>then Line 18 is the logical conclusion. |

|         |                   |   |
|---------|-------------------|---|
| LINE 19 | _____.            | In a <i>modus tollens</i> syllogism,<br>if the premises are Line 18 and Line 6,<br>then Line 19 is the logical conclusion.  |
| LINE 20 | _____.            | In a <i>modus tollens</i> syllogism,<br>if the premises are Line 18 and Line 11,<br>then Line 19 is the logical conclusion. |
| LINE 21 | _____, and _____. | By conjoining Line 19 and Line 20,<br>their logical conjunction is Line 21.   |
| LINE 22 | _____.            | In a <i>modus tollens</i> syllogism,<br>if the premises are Line 21 and Line 3,<br>then Line 22 is the logical conclusion.  |

In the end, we have examine the following three logical arguments in the following sequential order.

(1) For ontological nihilism, the *first* Eleatic argument that Gorgias made was the following *modus tollens* syllogism.

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**Conclusion:** Therefore, *nothing* whatsoever exists at *all*.

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**Conclusion:** Therefore, *nothing* whatsoever exists at *all*.