SUPPLEMENTARY MODULE: THE MECHANICS OF COHERENCE

Simple patterns become "If this happens, then that tends to follow." Consistent regularities become rules of thumb. Blatant contradictions feel wrong because they reliably produce a strong sense of incoherence.

Rules of inference (including basic logical laws) are best understood as **stabilizers**. They are evolved, practical responses that help us reduce the frequency and intensity of incoherence experiences. They are not primarily "discovered" as eternal Platonic truths, nor are they arbitrarily invented. They are refined tools that emerge because they work in restoring or maintaining a sense of things making sense.

A Concrete Example: The Conditional ("If... then...")

One of the most useful (and surprising) insights in logic is this: The statement ***"If P, then Q"*** is logically equivalent to ***"Not-P or Q"***.

> **Example:**
>
> - "If he cared, he would have called" is logically equivalent to
> - "Either he doesn't care, or he called."

This reformulation is profound because it reveals what the conditional *minimally* guarantees:

- It rules out only one bad combination: "He cares **and** he doesn't call."
- It says nothing about whether calling proves he cares, or whether not calling definitively proves he doesn't care.

This is called **material implication**. It is the standard meaning of "If... then" in classical logic. In everyday conversation, however, we usually expect a much stronger connection — something causal, relevant, or evidential ("If he cared, he would surely call").

The gap between the bare logical meaning and our richer natural-language expectations creates what philosophers call the **paradoxes of material implication**. These paradoxes feel strange at first, but they become much less mysterious once we understand that formal logic provides only a minimal stabilizer for coherence, while natural language layers on extra meaning (implicature).

Heads-Up for the Rest of Your Philosophical Education

Many traditional philosophy courses begin by throwing students into deep skepticism (external world, induction, free will, etc.) *before* giving them this kind of grounding. As a result, students often feel unmoored and come away thinking "philosophy mostly shows that nothing can be known."

Once you understand the hygienic explanation of logic — that it arises from coherence contrasts and functions as a stabilizer — many classic "unsolved problems" start to look different. They don't necessarily disappear, but they lose much of their power to create anxiety and intellectual paralysis.

In the rest of this course, we will examine the standard problems in philosophy (skepticism, free will, mind-body, realism vs. anti-realism, etc.) and explore how a clear, experience-based understanding of logic and equanimity changes how we approach them. The goal is not to "solve" every problem once and for all, but to develop the skill of navigating them with clarity, flexibility, and reduced confusion.

Suggested Teaching Notes / Exercises

- **Class Exercise 1:** Ask students to recall a recent moment when something suddenly "didn't make sense." What felt incoherent? How did their mind try to restore coherence?
- **Class Exercise 2:** Give pairs the conditional "If it rains, the ground will be wet" and have them translate it into "not-P or Q" form. Then discuss why the logical version feels weaker than the natural-language version.
- **Reflection Question:** When do you personally feel the strongest need for certainty? How does that feeling relate to experiences of incoherence?

This module sets a very different tone from the usual "philosophy is full of unsolved problems" approach. It gives students an immediate, usable tool and a sense of grounding before diving into heavier skeptical material.