Philosophy 101

(3/24/11)

- **I've posted solutions to HW #3 (study these!)**

- **HW #4 is due *today***

- **Quiz #4 is *next Thursday***
  - **This will be *re-do* of the last quiz (on chs. 3&4)**
  - **I'll give you the higher of your two scores**

- **HW #5 is posted (see schedule page on website)**
  - **Due on Thurs. 4/7 (7 problems from Chapter 5)**

- **(Charitably) Reconstructing Arguments**
  - **Recognizing arguments *vs* non-arguments**
  - **Detecting argument structure(s) in a passage**
  - **Seeking the strongest arguments expressed**

Reconstructing Arguments 5

Distinguishing arguments from non-arguments

- The example I gave before of a rhetorical passage was an incomplete excerpt from an actual letter to the editor. Let's look at the whole letter — are there arguments in here?

Your leftist editorials have often disgusted me, but the latest one on the flag-burning decision was particularly abhorrent. Even after your own survey showed your readers overwhelmingly against the decision, you come up with this ridiculous editorial.

Can't you see that flag burning is obscene—just as obscene as walking naked down Main Street at noon? Would you defend this as freedom of expression also? You probably would.

Somewhere we have to draw the line and President Bush has proposed doing just that. How can you castigate him for responding to the will of all patriotic Americans and, I am sure, to his own outrage at this decision?

Our office holders have an obligation to follow the will of the people and that is exactly what he is doing.[4]

Reconstructing Arguments 5.1

Distinguishing arguments from non-arguments

- This passage (which appeared, at first, to be purely rhetorical) actually contains a surprising amount of argumentation.

- The main conclusion advanced in the passage is:

  - (C) The editorial (which claimed that (C1) the Supreme Court decision on flag burning was correct, and which claimed that (C2) Bush was wrong to come out against the decision) is *incorrect*.

- There are two (independent) lines of argument for (C) here.

- One line goes *against* (C1) and the other *against* (C2), *i.e.,* the first argues that *not*-(C1) and the second argues that *not*-(C2).

- Let's have a look at each of these lines of argument.

Reconstructing Arguments 5.2

Distinguishing arguments from non-arguments

- The main conclusion of the *first* line of argument is:
  - *not*-(C1) The court's decision that flag burning is protected speech (under the 1st amendment) was *incorrect*.

- The *stated* premise for this conclusion is:
  - (1) Flag burning is obscene (indeed, flag burning is *as* obscene as walking down Main Street naked at noon-time).

- This means we'll need to add two *implicit premises*:
  - (2) If flag burning is obscene, then it is not protected speech under the first amendment.
  - (3) If (1) and (2) are both true, then *not*-(C1).

- Thus, we have reconstructed a (*valid!*) argument for *not*-(C1), from one *stated* premise (1), and two *implicit* premises (2)/(3).

Reconstructing Arguments 5.3

Distinguishing arguments from non-arguments

- The main conclusion of the *second* line of argument is:
  - *not*-(C2) Bush was *right* to come out against the decision.

- The *stated* premises for this conclusion are:
  - (4) In coming out *against* the supreme court's decision, Bush was following the "will of the people".
  - (5) All office holders are always *right* to follow the "will of the people".
  - (7) A poll of the paper's readers was overwhelmingly against the supreme court's decision.

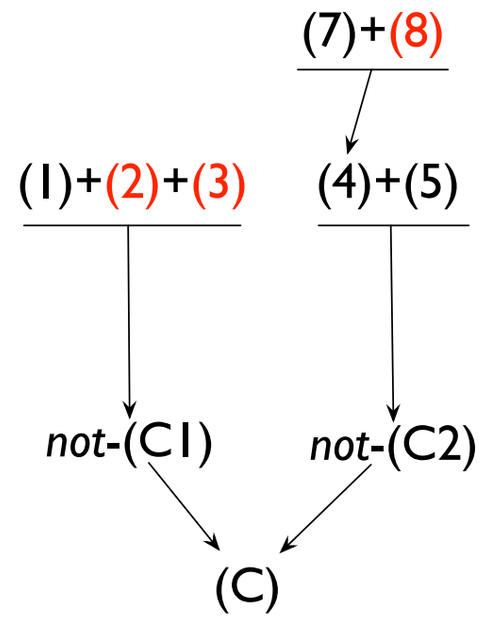
- This means we'll need to add an *implicit premise*:
  - (8) If (7) is true, then the "will of the people" was *against* the supreme court decision.

- We have here a (*valid!*) argument for *not*-(C2).

Reconstructing Arguments 5.4

Distinguishing arguments from non-arguments

- It is helpful to look at a *diagram* of the structure of the arguments expressed in this passage.



Reconstructing Arguments 6

Identifying Conclusions of Arguments

- If you think you've got an argument expressed in a passage, you'll first need to *identify its conclusion*. Some guidelines:

  - Ask yourself: *what's the main point of the passage*?
    - Conclusions need not be controversial claims — they can be about any sort of topic.
  - Longer passages may contain *multiple* arguments. It can be useful to *outline the structure* of a passage, if you think there are multiple conclusions being argued for in the passage.
  - Look for *conclusion indicators* ("therefore", "hence", "thus").
  - Try to *insert* a conclusion indicator, and see if the passage still reads smoothly (*as an argument for that claim*).
  - Sometimes conclusions are *not explicitly stated, or* they are stated in an unclear or imprecise (or even *misleading!*) way.

Reconstructing Arguments 7

Identifying Premises of Arguments

- Ask yourself: *what are the author's reasons* for believing the conclusion (or *what reasons are they offering*)?
  - If there are *multiple* arguments in the passage, be careful to *group premises with their associated conclusions*.
- Look for *premise indicators*. [Or, try to *insert* premise indicators, and see if the passage still reads smoothly.]
- Some premises are *implicit*, and must be articulated *by us*.
- Premises can be stated in obscure or unclear ways. Our reconstructions should make such premises *clear and precise*.
- Sometimes statements in a passage are *unnecessary premises*.
- Some stated premises may be *irrelevant* to the conclusion (we may *omit* these if it makes the argument stronger).

Reconstructing Arguments 8

General *vs* Specific Premises

- Premises can be either general or specific.
- Specific premises are claims about individual objects.
  - e.g., Socrates is a man.
- General premises involve "quantifying" over groups of objects. There are various types of "quantifiers":
  - Some, many, most, all, none, almost all, every, any.
- Often, specific and general premises are *combined* in arguments. We've seen examples from predicate logic.
- We will reconstruct general premises in *standard form*:
  - *All A*s are *B*s.
  - *Most A*s are *B*s.
  - *Some A*s are *B*s.

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General *vs* Specific Premises

- Here are some examples (to convert into *standard form*):
  - If something is a bird, then it can fly.
    - Form: All *A*s are *B*s.
  - The only people who got an "A" did it by bribing the prof.
    - Form: All *A*s are *B*s.
  - A person is a student only if that person is registered.
    - Form: All *A*s are *B*s.
  - Lying is always risky.
    - Form: All *A*s are *B*s.
  - In most cases, honesty is the best policy.
    - Form: Most *A*s are *B*s.

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Adding Implicit Premises

- We have three basic principles to help guide us in the addition of implicit premises (when it is clear that this is needed).
- **Faithfulness**:
  - (**PF**) Add implicit premises that are *consistent with the intention of the author* of the argument.
- **Charity**:
  - (**PCI**) Add implicit premises that are *reasonable to accept* rather than implicit premises that are obviously false.
- **Generalization**:
- (**PG**) When adding a generalization as an implicit premise, add a *true wide* generalization rather than a *true narrow* one, and add a *true narrow* generalization rather than a *false wide* one.

Reconstructing Arguments 11

Adding Implicit Generalizations (Example)

Bar X. Am is a recent law-school graduate who has just been interviewed for a position in a law firm. The interviewer says, "Bar will be a successful lawyer. She's smart and articulate, and she likes to argue."

- As a first pass, we might try the following reconstruction:

1. Bar is smart.
2. Bar is articulate.
3. Bar likes to argue.

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4. Bar will be a successful lawyer.

- But, this reconstruction is *missing a generalization*.
- What generalization should we add here?

Reconstructing Arguments 12

Adding Implicit Generalizations (Example)

- The first thing to try would be something like this:

1. Bar is smart.
2. Bar is articulate.
3. Bar likes to argue.
4. All people who are smart, articulate, and like to argue will be successful lawyers.

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5. Bar will be a successful lawyer.

- At least the argument is *valid* now (assuming Bar is a person).
- But, the generalization we added is *too wide* to be plausible.
  - Why is it clear that this generalization is *false*?

Reconstructing Arguments 13

Adding Implicit Generalizations (Example)

- This suggests the following amended reconstruction:

1. Bar is smart.
2. Bar is articulate.
3. Bar likes to argue.
4. Bar is a *lawyer*.
5. All *lawyers* who are smart, articulate, and like to argue will be successful lawyers.

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6. Bar will be a successful lawyer.

- This *narrower* generalization is more reasonable/likely.
  - (**PG**) recommends *true narrow* over *false wide*.

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Adding Implicit Generalizations (Example)

- Why not go *even narrower*?

1. Bar is smart.
2. Bar is articulate.
3. Bar likes to argue.
4. Bar is a *lawyer*.
5. Bar is a *woman*.
6. All *lawyers* who are *women and* are smart, articulate, and like to argue will be successful lawyers.

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7. Bar will be a successful lawyer.

- (**PG**) favors *true wide* over *true narrow*, unless there is a specific reason to think the author intended the narrower generalization.

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Adding Implicit Generalizations (Example)

- The principle of charity urges us to find *the strongest argument in the vicinity*. Consider the following *non*-deductive alternative:

1. Bar is smart.
2. Bar is articulate.
3. Bar likes to argue.
4. Bar is a lawyer.
5. *Most* lawyers who are smart, articulate, and like to argue will be successful lawyers.

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6. Bar will be a successful lawyer.

- This ***may*** be a *stronger argument* than the deductive rendition. This "most" generalization is *more plausible*, to be sure…

Reconstructing Arguments 15

Adding Implicit Generalizations (Example #2)

- Two common mistakes here:
  - (a) leaving out a requisite general premise
  - (b) leaving the quantifier off a general premise
- Example:
  - Michael must be tall. After all, he's a professional basketball player.
- Mistake (a) would lead to this *incomplete reconstruction*:

1. Michael is a professional basketball player.

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2. Michael is tall.

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Adding Implicit Generalizations (Example #2)

- Mistake (b) would lead to this *incomplete reconstruction*:

1. Michael is a professional basketball player.
2. Professional basketball players are tall.

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3. Michael is tall.

- This is *still incomplete*, since (2) is *missing a quantifier*.

- Which quantifier should we add here?
  - All? Most? or some other quantifier?
  - Remember, we want the *strongest, plausibly true claim*…

Reconstructing Arguments 17

Two Example Argumentative Passages:

- God does not exist. For there is a tremendous amount of pain and suffering in the world. And if God existed, then there would not be this much suffering in the world. For God is supposed to be all-powerful. In addition, he is supposed to be all-knowing, and he is supposed to be all-good. And if he has these qualities, he wouldn't allow so much gratuitous suffering.

- Bush should not have won the election, since Gore should have won. For Gore won the national popular vote by some 300,000 votes. And he also would have won the popular vote in Florida if the Supreme Court had allowed the re-counts to continue, and surely this is something they ought to have done.