Philosophy 101 — Quiz #6 Solutions
05/03/11

1. Consider the following passage:

> 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."

And, consider the following reconstruction of the argument expressed at the end of this passage:

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

What is wrong with this reconstruction? How would you fix it?

Solution. The generalization (4) is *too wide* (and, as a result, *clearly false*). We can correct this by (a) using additional information about Bar that is implicit in the passage, and (b) using it to formulate a narrower (and more plausible) generalization, to replace (4). Here's the corrected 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 and articulate and who like to argue will be successful.
    _____
    6. Bar will be a successful lawyer.

If you like, you could also render (5) using a "Most" quantifier. That would also be a superior reconstruction. But, the key error in the original reconstruction is that it (a) ignores relevant information about Bar that is implicit in the passage, and (b) fails to use it to formulate a narrower, and more plausible generalization.

2. Suppose Jones reasons as follows: "Patrick is a professional basketball player, so I conclude that he is over 6 feet tall." Smith reconstructs Jones's argument as follows:

    1. Patrick is a professional basketball player. [Explicit.]
    2. All professional basketball players are over 6 feet tall. [Implicit.]
    _____
    3. Patrick is more than six feet tall.

Smith then gives a couple of counterexamples to (2) and on that basis rejects Jones's argument. Has Smith done a good job of argument analysis here? Explain your answer (*e.g.*, if you think Smith has *not* done a good job here, then *say how Smith can fix his analysis* of Jones's argument).

Solution. In this case, Jones is *not* doing a good job of argument analysis. Because the "All" generalization (2) is *clearly false*, Jones is giving an *uncharitable* reconstruction. It would be preferable to use a "Most" generalization instead. This leads to the following *strong* argument.

   1. Patrick is a professional basketball player. [Explicit.]
   2. Most professional basketball players are over 6 feet tall. [Implicit.]
   _____
   3. Patrick is more than six feet tall.

3. Reconstruct the argument in the following passage:

   | You don't really know anything. No matter what you believe, you could be wrong. |

Do you think this is a strong argument? Explain your answer.

Solution. Here is my reconstruction of this passage. [In philosophy, this is known as a *skeptical argument*.]

   1. All of your beliefs could be false.
   2. If all of your beliefs could be false, then you have no knowledge. [Implicit.]
   _____
   3. You have no knowledge.

There are more sophisticated ways to reconstruct this argument, but this simple version is perfectly acceptable.