# PHILOSOPHY 210: Homework #1 Solutions

February 8, 2011

## 1 Problem #1 (p. 8: #4)

It isn't made very clear in the text exactly what the argument in Example 1.1 (pp. 1–2) is supposed to be. This is intentional on Feldman's part. It is too early on in the text to jump right into argument reconstructions (which aren't discussed until chapters 6 and 7). Here's one reconstruction (perhaps, a more *charitable* reconstruction than Feldman's) of *an* argument that I see in Example 1.1.

1. Some people who have spoken out against the Supreme Court's ruling that flag-burning *is* a form of speech protected by the First Amendment did so on the grounds that flag-burning is an "attack on the constitution."
2. Some of these same people *failed* to speak out against other "attacks on the Constitution."
3. If a person has not *consistently* spoken out against "attacks on the Constitution," then, they "have no right" to speak out against *this particular* "attack on the Constitution" (*i.e.*, the Court's ruling).

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∴ (*C*) Some of those who spoke out against the Supreme Court's ruling that flag-burning is a form of speech protected by the first Amendment "had no right" to do so.

Perhaps Feldman is assuming that the conclusion of the argument in Example 1.1 is *not C*, but

(*C′*) The Supreme Court's ruling that flag-burning is a form of speech protected by the First Amendment was a *correct* (or, *justified*) ruling.

If one takes *C′* rather than *C* to be the conclusion of the argument in Example 1.1 (while leaving the *premises* 1–3 the same as I have them above), then one seems to have good reason to say that the argument is *not* a very good one. But, what if the conclusion *is C*? It seems that the present reconstruction of Example 1.1 does lead to a stronger argument (although, it still has its problems — can you see any?[1]) than the one Feldman seems to have in mind when he says (p. 2) that it "sheds more heat than light on the issues."

☞ The moral of this story is that *the strength of an argument depends very sensitively on what one takes the conclusion of the argument to be*. This emphasizes the importance of being crystal clear about *what issue the author of a passage intends to address*, and *what the conclusion of their argument is supposed to be*.

## 2 Problem #2 (p. 14: #2)

On page 12 (¶1), Feldman lists the following factors which can make a person *rhetorically powerful*.

- The ability to present ideas in a very clear, logical, and convincing manner.
- Having the ability to speak clearly.
- Having a strong voice.
- Having a confident manner.
- Having an honest appearance.

☞ There are many other factors that can contribute to a person's rhetorical power. *These factors will vary, depending on the context in which the person speaks, and the audience to whom they speak*. For instance, if one is speaking to the NRA about the "evils of gun control," then certain kinds of factors will be rhetorically useful. On the other hand, if one is speaking to a group of mothers whose children were killed with handguns about the "evils of guns," then one's rhetorical power will probably be enhanced by a *different* set of factors. Being rhetorically powerful is rather like being a "salesperson" of propositions. And, how successful one is as a "salesperson" will depend one's audience. Some audiences will be swayed by certain factors, while other audiences will be swayed by other factors.

[1] Notice that my reconstruction of the argument in Example 1.1 is *valid*. That is, *if* its premises are all true, *then* its conclusion *must* also be true. *A charitably reconstructed argument should always be valid*. Note, also, how I have placed the locutions "had no right" and "attack on the constitution" in quotes. I did this because I think this is where the bulk of the controversy will be, regarding the reconstructed argument. What might these locutions *mean*? And, which (if any) of the premises 1–3 do we have *good reason to believe are true*? These questions would need to be answered before we could adequately assess/evaluate the rational strength of the reconstructed argument.

## 3 Problem #3 (p. 14: #4)

*Literary* aspects of an argument (*e.g.*, how grammatical it is, the vocabulary it uses, how its linguistic presentation is organized and structured) can have an important effect on the *rhetorical power* of an argument. If an argument is ungrammatical, uses lots of unusual or esoteric vocabulary (jargon), or is not well organized or structured, then actual people may (depending on the audience in question) have a difficult time understanding what it says. In such cases, the arguments will probably not *persuade* anyone of anything. They will probably just *confuse* people.

But, *can* literary aspects of an argument have an effect on its *rational strength*? The answer to this question is "**No**." Once the *statements* (*not* sentences) of an argument are specified, the rational strength of the argument is (thereby) *determined*. Rational strength depends only on how the premises of an argument (which are *propositions*) bear (*epistemically*) on its conclusion (which is also a *proposition*). Specifically, *the rational strength of an argument depends on how strongly the premises of the argument (epistemically or evidentially) support the truth of the conclusion of the argument* (where, it is understood that the premises and the conclusion are *statements*, *not* sentences). Literary merit has to do with linguistic features of *sentences* used to express arguments; whereas, rational strength has to do with (*epistemic* and *logical*) relations between the *statements* (or *propositions*) that make up the argument.

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## 4 Problem #4 (p. 20: #4)

There are *many* impediments to good reasoning, other than those mentioned in the text. Here are two

- *Dogmatism*. We discussed this a bit in class. Dogmatism concerning a proposition $P$ occurs when a person (*i*) stubbornly believes that $P$ is true, such that (*ii*) *there is no conceivable reason (be it an experience, an observation, or anything else) that could possibly change their mind about* $P$. Often (not always?[2]), being dogmatic about $P$ can prevent a person from rationally weighing evidence about $P$.

- *"Pragmatic Forces"*. A person might find themselves in a situation where they stand to suffer some painful consequences if they engage in rational argument analysis. For instance, if you are offered a million dollars (for real) to abstain from good reasoning in a certain (otherwise insignificant) case, and you value money enough, then you should probably not engage in good reasoning, in that case. This is a silly example. Here's another one. Let's say your friend has big feet (and there is lots of compelling evidence for this). But, if your friend thinks that you believe they have big feet, then they will get very upset. And, you care a lot about that person's feelings. Then, perhaps you would be ill-advised ("all things considered") to engage in rational analysis of certain arguments concerning the issue "whether or not your friend has big feet." The point of these rather ridiculous examples is to illustrate the fact that *one can have perfectly good* ***pragmatic*** *reasons not to engage in rational argument analysis, in certain cases* (but, notice how this claim can *itself* be rationally motivated using an argument!). However, in the context of this class, our *goal* is (explicitly) to become better at rational argument analysis. So, there are no "pragmatic (or non-epistemic) forces" at work *here* (or, are there?[3]).

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## 5 Problem #5 (p. 22: #5)

The *goal* of argument analysis is to determine whether (and to what degree) the premises of arguments *rationally support* their conclusions. The *means* by which we will *achieve* that goal is by engaging in (*rational*) *reconstruction* and *analysis* of arguments. [Those are the "tools" of argument analysis that we'll be learning how to use.]

I have been doing rational argument analysis for so long now, that I don't really remember what I did before I got into this business. Clearly, this is a question that people must answer for themselves. Hopefully, your answer to this question will *change* as the semester evolves, and the changes will be reflected in your assignments, *etc.*

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[2] Consider the proposition $P$ = *either* Branden is over 4 feet tall *or* Branden is *not* over 4 feet tall. Is there any conceivable reason that would change your mind about the truth of $P$? Does our "stubborn-ness" about $P$ constitute an impediment to good reasoning? Why might this case of dogmatism *not* constitute an impediment to good reasoning?

[3] If your goal is simply to get a good grade in this course (and, not necessarily to learn how to engage in good argument analysis), then this may stand in the way of your doing good reasoning in the class. Hopefully, though, my grades will *correspond* to the *facts* about who is learning about (and, becoming better at) argument analysis, and who is not!