

Philosophy 101

- This is Philosophy 101 (section 2)
- **NOTE: the course is full — no SPN's available.**
- Make sure you get a *syllabus*.
- Plan for today's class:
 - PART I: Organization of Course (syllabus, website, etc.)
 - PART II: What the course is *about* – an overview:
 - This course is about *Arguments* (**not** disputes)
 - Comic Interlude: *The Argument Clinic* (Monty Python)
 - *Rationality and responsiveness to reasons/arguments*.

Arguments I

- The word “argument” has at least two meanings:
 1. a *dispute* (often a heated or angry dispute)
 2. a *set of reasons or considerations* intended to *support* (or *provide evidence in favor of*) some *statement*.
- **We're only interested in meaning (2).**
- Here's a *Comic Interlude* to illustrate the difference:
 - *The Argument Clinic* (Monty Python, via youtube)
 - Here is a link to the transcript.

The Argument Clinic



Arguments II

- There can be arguments *about anything*:
 - **Social Issues.** *E.g.*, abortion, saving Social Security, tax cuts, the causes of crime, whether violence on TV is harmful, whether stem cell research should be permitted. [Note: In each case, scientific results matter. There are arguments about what the results show and about what to do in their light.]
 - **Personal Issues.** Where to go to school, what field to major in, which party to go to Friday night.
 - **Other issues.** *E.g.*, should teachers grade on a curve, is eating red meat really bad for you, etc.

Arguments III

- On any of these issues, you can consider some *premises* (or *reasons*) and then *draw a conclusion*.
- Or you may hear someone else's argument on the topic and then think about that argument.

➡ An **argument** is just a set of *premises/reasons*, and a *conclusion* that is meant to be *supported by* the premises.

- In this course, we will be learning how to *formulate, reconstruct, analyze, and evaluate arguments*.
- This involves learning a rather subtle set of distinctions and skills. So, we will have our work cut out for us...

Irrational Reactions

- Here are several *irrational reactions* to arguments:
 - **Credulity**
 - *Unreflective acceptance* of arguments (e.g., someone who “agrees with everything” or thinks “everyone is right”).
 - **Contradiction**
 - *Unreflective rejection* of arguments (e.g., someone who “disagrees with everything” — a *contrarian*).
 - **Dogmatism**
 - *Not changing one's beliefs* in light of arguments.
 - **Skepticism**
 - *Persistent doubt* an argument/issue (i.e., someone who worries the issue *cannot be resolved* or *has no answer*).

Rational Reactions I

- Someone can be *selectively credulous* or contradictory — they may only accept arguments *from certain people*.

➡ When someone reacts in one of these ways to an argument, they are **not** engaging **rationally** with it.

- On the other hand, a **rational** person will *try their best to deal with* the information they receive and *form conclusions on the basis of* their evidence/reasons.
- Sometimes they acknowledge that people they dislike have made a good argument or those they like have not.
- They see the issues as *real* issues to which there are *correct answers*, even if they are hard to figure out.

Rational Reactions II

- In addition to trying to deal with information in this way, (successful) rational thinkers draw the *right (justified or reasonable) conclusions* from the information they have.
- *Rational thinkers can*:
 - distinguish genuine arguments from other things,
 - understand and interpret those arguments, and
 - evaluate them.
- They have an *open mind*, which:
 - changes when the arguments call for it,
 - sticks to its views when the arguments call for it,
 - goes along with popular opinion when it's right,
 - goes against popular opinion when it's called for, and
 - forms beliefs in the face of uncertainty.

Goals of the Course I

- “Dream Goal”: To turn you into rational people.
- Well, that’s too ambitious, *but...*
- I’d like you to have the right goals or motivation — to evaluate information in the manner just described, and to be able to do it effectively (or *more* effectively, at least).
- All I can test/grade is how well you acquire the skills.
- Whether you *apply* the skills *elsewhere* in your life is your business. But I do think that, individually and collectively, we'd be better off if more of us were rational people
- The course is more a “skills” than a “content” course.

Goals of the Course II

- That is not an entirely clear and precise distinction.
- Roughly, the goal is to teach you how to **do** some things — recognize, formulate, reconstruct & analyze arguments (rather *merely absorbing a lot of facts* about these *topics*).
- Of course, I will teach the skills *by telling you facts* about how to do it. So there will be many such facts to learn.
- But there is no way you will learn the skills (*just*) *by listening to me*. *Participation* and *practice* will be *crucial*.
- That’s why there are lots of short quizzes and homeworks. One really must learn these skills *by **doing***.

Goals of the Course III

- Each day I will attempt to identify a few of the key points about argument analysis that we cover in class that day.
- We’ll often spend a lot of time on some examples, but your goal should be to extract from the discussion of those examples some more general point.
- We may spend some time talking about that. I’ll ask, “What was the point of thinking about that example?”
 - There have been two such points so far: *what an argument is*, and *what a rational person is*.
- For next time: **read pages I-33 of the text**.