Philosophy 101
(1/20/11)

- This is PHIL 101 (section 2) — "Logic, Reason, and Persuasion"
  - **NOTE: the course is full — no SPN's available.**

- If you weren't here last time, make sure to (1) buy the book (Ch. 1 is on the website), and (2) checkout the course website:

  `http://fitelson.org/101/`

- *Chapter 1* of Feldman's *Reason & Argument*:
  - *Arguments & argument analysis*
  - *Reason, rhetoric & argument analysis*
  - [*Ways people deal with arguments* — did this § last time]
  - *Impediments to good reasoning*
  - *Truth & correspondence to the facts*
  - *Rational Belief*

Homework #1

- **HW #1 is being assigned today**.

- **It is due in two weeks, on 2/3/11**.

- **It consists of these 5 problems**:

- **(1) p. 8: #4, (2) p. 14: #2, (3) p. 14: #4, (4) p. 20: #4, (5) p. 22: #5**.

- I'll say more about the formatting, structure, *etc.*, of your homeworks next week.

Arguments & Argument Analysis I

- An **argument** is a collection of **statements**, one of which is its **conclusion**, and the rest are its **premises**.

- **Statements** are *expressed by declarative sentences*.

- It is important to distinguish *statements* and *sentences*.

  - Not all sentences express statements:

    - "What time is it?" is a perfectly good sentence. But, it does not express any statement (or proposition).

  - Any statement will be expressible using *many* sentences:

    - "Snow is white" and "Schnee ist weiß" express *the same statement*, even though they are *different sentences*.

Arguments & Argument Analysis II

- Statements are either **true** or **false** (*and not both*).
  - We'll return to truth and falsity later in chapter 1.

- The premises of an argument are supposed to *support* its conclusion — that is, the premises are meant to *provide reasons to believe that the conclusion of the argument is true*.

- We will be looking at many (English) **passages**, which may or may not contain arguments. We will focus on **argumentative passages**, which *do* contain arguments.

  - Note: not all passages (in real life) contain arguments.

- So, the "zeroth" step in **argument analysis** is *recognizing that an argument is present*. [Our examples will always have one.]

Arguments & Argument Analysis III

• The *first* step in argument analysis is **reconstruction**.

• Reconstruction is challenging, for many reasons:
  • people do not always express their arguments *clearly*.
  • they often leave some of their premises *unstated*.
  • the *structure* of an argument is usually *not* obvious either.

• And, since we want to reconstruct arguments in a **charitable** way (*i.e.,* we want *the strongest version* of an argument), we need to understand *what makes an argument* **good**.

• That brings us to the *second* step in argument analysis: **evaluation**. This is also challenging, for various reasons:
  • Generally, it is difficult to determine whether (and to what degree) the premises of an argument support its conclusion.

Arguments & Argument Analysis IV

• We will develop various *techniques* for reconstructing and evaluating arguments, which will lead to a *systematic approach*.

• An example from the text (to illustrate some subtleties).
  • This is not unusual for a "letter to the editor" type passage:

> I have a few questions for those who have raised their voices against the recent Supreme Court decision to preserve our constitutional right to engage in symbolic acts of protest, including the burning of the American flag:
> Are you as outraged when our Constitution is assaulted?
> Did you protest when the constitutional rights of black citizens were denied? Did you work for their rights to vote, to equal education, to fair housing?
> Have you spoken out against the assault on our Constitution by the illegal maneuverings of the boys in the White House during the Iran-Contra affair?
> . . . In short, can you honestly say that you love your flag when you have been silent in protecting all that it stands for?[1]

Reason, Rhetoric, and Argument Analysis I

• What we are doing in this course is *neither* rhetoric *nor* debate. Those are *not purely rational* activities.

• Debates are typically about "winning" — they are *not* (usually) about producing the *most rational arguments*.

• Political debates are a prime example of the sort of thing that we will *not* be concerned with in this course.

• "Winning" a debate involves having the right sort of **rhetorical power**, which usually does not require (or involve) giving *arguments with greater* **rational strength**.

  • Things like charisma, speaking ability, attractive looks (and sounds), and persuasiveness factor into *rhetorical power*.

Reason, Rhetoric, and Argument Analysis II

• We must also distinguish rational *vs* non-rational aspects of *written* passages, as well as verbal presentations/speeches.

• An argumentative passage may be *well-written* (*e.g.,* from an English language perspective), and it may be funny, poetic, *etc.*

• These aspects of a written passage can contribute to its **literary merit** (and often to its *rhetorical power* as well).

  • But, the literary merit of a passage is *not* relevant to the rational strength of the arguments it contains.

• So, when we are *analyzing the arguments* contained in a written passage, we must not be distracted by literary (or other rhetorical) virtues (or vices!) of the passage.

Reason, Rhetoric, and Argument Analysis III

• **GOAL**: to determine whether the premises of an argument provide good reason to believe that its conclusion is true.

• In real life, we're not always interested in achieving this goal.

• Sometimes, we might want to be comforted, or amused, or morally challenged by written (or spoken) words.

• In this course, we will not be interested in such uses of (or ways of interpreting) written or spoken words.

• In some contexts, we are not concerned with determining whether a statement is *true or false*, or whether a body of evidence (*i.e.*, a set of premises) *supports a conclusion*.
    • But, in this course, *that will be our focus*.