Reason, Relativism, and Reality

Thinking Like a Philosopher

Spring 2005

What do philosophers do?

- Argue -- This is about sentences, or propositions.
  - *"So and so must be true, because look, it follows from such and such other truths."*
- Analyze -- This is about words, or concepts.
  - *"To be a so and so boils down to having such and such features, because look, that fits all the examples."*

Argument

- There's the activity, and the product: what the arguer seeks to provide. We're interested more in the product.

- An argument in our sense is a list of sentences of which the last, the *conclusion*, is supposed to be supported by the others, the *premises*.

Good or bad?

No professors are ignorant.
<u>All ignorant people are vain.</u>
So no professors are vain.

All lions are fierce.
<u>Some lions do not drink coffee.</u>
Some creatures that drink coffee aren't fierce.

Real arguments harder to see

- You have to dig them out of complex stretches of text

- Premise-flags -- *because, since, given that, inasmuch as,..*

- Conclusion-flags -- *thus, therefore, hence, it follows that, so, consequently, in view of which it can hardly be doubted that*

Evaluating arguments

- P and Q *entail* R iff (if and only if) it is impossible for P and Q to be true and R false.
- P, Q ∴ R is *valid* iff P and Q entail R.
- "Valid" is not the same as "good."
  - Good arguments need not be valid -- *example?*
  - Valid arguments can be bad -- *example?*

How to align valid with good

- Arguments can always be made valid by adding a premise, e.g., if P and Q then R. Assume this is always done.
- Then the only remaining question is whether the premises are (plausibly) true
- A good argument *in this course* is a valid argument with true premises
- The shorthand for this is a *sound* argument

Is this valid? Is it sound?

1. Clinton's troubles were caused by a right-wing conspiracy, or by his own mistakes.
2. <u>They were caused by his own mistakes.</u>
3. There was no right-wing conspiracy

Is this valid? Is it sound?

1. If George W. can speak Spanish, I'm the Queen of England .
2. <u>George W. can speak Spanish.</u>
3. I'm the Queen of England.

Valid? Sound?

1. <u>All politicians are dishonest.</u>
2. Some dishonest politicians are Democrats.

1. Abortion is morally wrong.
2. <u>Abortion is not a constitutional right.</u>
3. Abortion ought to be outlawed.

Same questions after adding the "missing premise."

Crucial fact about soundness

- If an argument is sound, then its conclusion is true. (How do we know that?)
- This has two kinds of practical import.
  - If you *read* an argument and dislike the conclusion, the onus is on you to show that the premises fail to entail the conclusion, and/or a premise is untrue.
  - If you *write* an argument and want the conclusion accepted, make sure your premises entail your conclusion and avoid premises that skeptical readers can easily shrug off as untrue.

Analyze this

- x is a rational number iff x is…..?
- y is a sister iff y is…
- z is a bachelor iff z is….?
- I regret that P iff …….?
- I know that P iff I believe that P and…?
- ?????????

Readings for Monday

- Perry, <u>Three Dialogues on Personal Identity and Immortality</u>
- Parfit, Ch. 10, "What We Believe Ourselves to Be"