Lecture 1: The Nature and Variety of Arguments

Philosophy 130
January 14 & 21, 2016
O’Rourke

I. Administrative
   A. Please let me know if you have any trouble with enrollment.
   B. Books? Does everyone have a copy of the 9th edition?
   C. Don’t forget the email assignment. (Review schedule.)
   D. Questions?

II. General Introduction to Critical Thinking
   A. Summary of Syllabus Argument:

   Fig. 1. There are many different modes of thinking; we will study critical thinking, which can be done by concentrating on arguments. In general, language provides you with a public and intersubjective medium in which to study thinking, and that is what we will use.
B. The goal is to put you in a position to think for yourself.

1. Autonomy/heteronomy distinction (Kant):
   a. **Autonomy**: reasoning/thinking that is “not dependent on an authority that itself refuses justification”
   b. **Heteronomy**: “reasoning directed from the outside, by an authority that is merely assumed” (Williams 2014, [http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-reason/](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-reason/))

2. This is a distinction in ethics, but it is really what this class is about: deciding how you want to live your life.

3. There is a subject matter here, but the methods and procedures we employ are also important: they give you insight into a way of life that gives a certain prominence to criticism and to rationality.

4. The “BS Detector” deliverable…


III. The Nature of Arguments

A. **Opening questions**:

   1. Must the elements of an argument be explicit?
   2. Must the elements of an argument be verbal (i.e., delivered in words)?
   3. Must arguments be vehicles of persuasion?

B. **Definition**: “An argument is a connected series of sentences, statements, or propositions (called “premises”) that are intended to give reasons of some kind for a sentence, statement, or proposition (called the “conclusion”)” (p. 3).

   1. Consider the elements of this definition: sentences/statements/propositions, premises, intention, reasons, conclusion.
2. Monty Python’s “Argument Clinic”:
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQFKtI6gn9Y

C. Detail about the Main Elements

1. Reasons
   a. They come in all shapes and sizes
   b. They can be explicitly delivered or implicit in what is delivered
   c. They can have a variety of rhetorical roles, e.g., persuasion, illustration, illumination, reinforcement
   d. Different people often have different reasons for the same conclusion
   e. Reasons are connected somehow to the conclusion they support—they are related by intention in their production; they can be normatively related, or perhaps just descriptively related
   f. They can be served up in response to “Why?” questions, and also “How?” questions.

2. Conclusions
   a. Like reasons, they come in all shapes and sizes, can be explicit or implicit, and can play different rhetorical roles
   b. Different people can have different conclusions for the same reasons – consider a hot-button social issue, e.g., gay marriage
   c. Conclusions are connected to the premises that support them
   d. A given proposition can serve in one place as a reason and in another as a conclusion
3. TopHat 1.1, 1.2


From “Why Ted Cruz is eligible to be president”, by Akhil Reed Amar (CNN)

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So the question is, was Ted Cruz born a citizen? The Constitution says, in the 14th Amendment, that anyone born in the United States and subject to our laws is a U.S. citizen. Today, that means everyone born on American soil except children of foreign diplomats — even children whose parents are not themselves U.S citizens. Donald Trump, are you listening?

Unlike Barack Obama, who was born in Hawaii — again, please pay attention, Donald! — Cruz is not a citizen at birth because of where he was born. Cruz was born in Canada. But neither Article II nor the 14th Amendment says that only those born in the United States are birth citizens. The 14th Amendment says that birth on American soil is sufficient to be a birth citizen. But it is not necessary.

How else can a person be a citizen at birth? Simple. From the founding to the present, Congress has enacted laws specifying that certain categories of foreign-born persons are citizens at birth. The earliest statute, passed in 1790, explicitly called certain foreign-born children of U.S. citizens "natural born citizens." It did not say they should be treated "as if" they were "natural born citizens." It said they were in law deemed and declared to be "natural born citizens." Congressional laws have changed over the years, but this 1790 law makes clear that from the beginning, Congress by law has the power to define the outer boundaries of birth-citizenship by conferring citizenship at birth to various persons born outside the United States.

And here is the key point: The statute on the books on the day Cruz was born made him a citizen on that day. The statute conferred birth-based American citizenship on any foreign-born baby who had at least one parent who was a U.S. citizen, so long as that parent had met certain conditions of extensive prior physical presence in the United States.

On the day of his birth, Cruz's mother was a U.S. citizen, even though his father was not; and his mother also apparently met the relevant rules of extensive prior physical presence.

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IV. The Variety of Arguments

A. Explicitly propositional / Implicitly propositional

1. The former are typically delivered verbally in language, with the propositions contributed by sentences or statements

2. But arguments don’t need to be delivered entirely verbally: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=axSnW-ygU5g

3. “Reading between the lines”: what is put forward and what is contextual

4. Question: Is there a common thread that binds these together?

B. Justificatory / Explanatory

1. Some arguments justify, which is to say that their reasons supply “normative justification” for their conclusions

   a. These can be personal or impersonal

   b. These can be persuasive, but need not be

   c. They can stand in different relationships to the intentions of the arguer

   d. They are often adduced to shore up a disputed claim by highlighting why one should believe it

   e. Question: are all justifications arguments?

2. Other arguments explain, which is to say that their reasons “make sense of things” (p. 7)

   a. They are typically intended to “remove bewilderment or surprise” (p. 8)

   b. These can be persuasive, but need not be

   c. These correspond to both “why” and “how” questions

   d. Question: are all explanations arguments?
3. **Examples**: think of a trial (e.g., the difference between *proving guilt* and *establishing motive*); think of a lecture or a speech