

Reading Questions

White, R. [2005] "Epistemic Permissiveness" in *Philosophical Perspectives*, Vol. 19, 445-459.

1. What is White's central question? State and explain it. What is at stake in answering it?
2. Reconstruct and analyze White's quick-and-dirty argument against Epistemic Permissivism. Why is it quick-and dirty? (Hint: This is the argument on p. 447.) Make sure you follow the instructions on the "How to Reconstruct and Analyze Arguments" handout.
3. Reconstruct and analyze White's second, longer argument. Again, follow the instructions on the aforementioned handout. (Hint: Look at the pill-popping case to find this argument.)

How to Reconstruct and Analyze Arguments

Reconstruction Checklist:

1. The logical form of the argument is clear. (How? See below.)
2. Argument is in numbered premise format, e.g.:
 1. You shouldn't cause sentient beings unnecessary pain.
 2. Cats are sentient beings.
 3. Therefore, you shouldn't cause cats unnecessary pain.
3. Line numbers are noted at the end of each premise and conclusion.
 - a. "(A)" means assumption.
 - b. "(1,2)" means came from premises 1 and 2.

E.g.:

 1. You shouldn't cause sentient beings unnecessary pain. (A)
 2. Cats are sentient beings. (A)
 3. So you shouldn't cause cats unnecessary pain. (1, 2)
4. No one premise comes from more than two previous lines. Compare the above with the following:
 1. You shouldn't cause sentient beings unnecessary pain. (A)
 2. Cats are sentient beings. (A)
 3. So are dogs. (A)
 4. So you shouldn't cause cats and dogs unnecessary pain. (1, 2, 3) <-- **No good.**
5. Terminology is consistent throughout.

Compare the bad version:

 1. You shouldn't cause sentient beings unnecessary pain. (A)
 2. Cats are *conscious* beings. (A)
 3. So you shouldn't cause cats unnecessary pain. (1, 2)

With the good version:

 1. You shouldn't cause *sentient* beings unnecessary pain. (A)
 2. Cats are *sentient* beings. (A)
 3. So you shouldn't cause cats unnecessary pain. (1, 2)
6. The reconstruction is *charitable* in the following ways:
 - a. the weakest and most plausible premises possible are used.
 - b. the reconstruction is faithful to the original text *unless*...
 - c. ...the author made some fixable mistake, in which case the reconstruction departs from the original in order to present an improved version of the argument.

Analysis Checklist:

1. Validity of argument is demonstrated. How? At least via a good reconstruction that clearly shows the logical form of the argument. Note any questionable inferences that opponents might reject.
2. Soundness of argument is evaluated:
 - a. Least plausible premise(s) questioned and thoughtfully objected to. (Note especially which premises opponents would reject.)
 - b. Author's replies to objection considered and either accepted or rejected for good reason.
3. Other possible counterexamples, arguments by analogy, etc., are considered. Again author's possible responses are evaluated and either accepted or rejected for good reasons.
4. Again, *charity* is exercised in considering the objections and replies.
5. No sentences or premises are written in passive voice.
(What is passive voice? For examples see almost every sentence above this one.)