Understanding Arguments: Incremental Exercises
Phil 355: Aesthetics / Philosophy of Art/ Michelle Sainte – Fall 2012

Below are the instructions for individual exercises that were provided to students. An exercise was due roughly once a week. Usually, an exercise revolving around a particular article was due on the first day that we discussed that article in class. However, if an article was particularly difficult, the exercise would be due on the second day that we discussed it.

In the exercises, I often make reference to “standard form” arguments. This is a bit of terminology students were introduced to in class. An argument in standard form looks something like this:

1. Premise
2. Premise
3. Premise

Therefore, Conclusion.

Writing an argument in standard form involves reading closely through a text to discover the author’s main point, as well as the reasons provided to support that main point. While the final result of the assignment, the argument in standard form, may look pretty simple and unimpressive, it can be difficult to develop.

Here is an actual example. This is a representation of one argument presented in Ted Cohen’s paper, which was covered by Exercise 2:

1. It is not possible to express/discover the principles behind one’s aesthetic preferences.
2. If it is not possible to express/discover the principles for one’s aesthetic preferences, then searching for the principles behind one’s aesthetic preferences is pointless.
Therefore, Searching for the principles behind one’s aesthetic preferences is pointless.

EXERCISE 1: 5 POINTS

After reading through Miller’s article, your task is to find his main conclusion. Provide a quote where Miller expresses his main conclusion, and then state his conclusion in your own words.

This exercise should require only 2 or 3 sentences to complete.

EXERCISE 2: 10 POINTS

Your task is to find one complete argument in Ted Cohen’s paper, “On Consistency in One’s Personal Aesthetics.” This argument does not have to be Cohen’s own (you can use an argument
he explains but does not endorse), and it does not have to be the main argument in the paper. I suggest finding an argument that appears in a single paragraph.

First, quote the passage the argument is from. (If it’s a long passage, just give me enough information so I can easily find it.)

Second, use your own words to state this argument in *standard form*. Provide any definitions necessary for understanding the argument.

**EXERCISE 3: 10 POINTS**

Your task is to find one complete argument in Noel Carroll’s paper, “Art, Narrative, and Moral Understanding.” This argument does not have to be Carroll’s own (you can use an argument he explains but does not endorse), and it does not have to be the main argument in the paper. I suggest finding an argument that appears in a single paragraph.

First, quote the passage the argument is from. (If it’s a long passage, just give me enough information so I can easily find it.)

Second, use your own words to state this argument in *standard form*. Provide any definitions necessary for understanding the argument.

**EXERCISE 4: 15 POINTS**

Your task is to find the *main argument* in Gregory Currie’s, “Realism of Character and the Value of Fiction.”

First, locate Currie’s main conclusion. Provide a quote that best expresses this conclusion.

Second, use your own words to state Currie’s argument for this conclusion in *standard form*. Provide any definitions necessary for understanding the argument.

**EXERCISE 5: 15 POINTS**

Your task is to find the *main argument* in Harold’s “The Ethics of Non-Realist Fiction: Morality’s Catch-22,” available online through the library.

First, locate Harold’s main conclusion. Provide a quote that best expresses this conclusion.

Second, use your own words to state Harold’s argument for this conclusion in *standard form*. Provide any definitions necessary for understanding the argument.
EXERCISE 6: 15 POINTS

Your task is to find the main argument in Berys Gaut’s “The Ethical Criticism of Art” and then critique this argument.

First, locate Gaut’s main conclusion. Provide a quote that best expresses this conclusion.

Second, use your own words to state Gaut’s argument for this conclusion in standard form. Provide any definitions necessary for understanding the argument.

Third, analyze the premises to this argument in order to develop an objection. State which premise may be false and why. (You may develop an objection to the argument’s validity, instead of its soundness, but this is often more difficult.)

Keep this in mind, if Gaut’s argument looks obviously, unquestionably bad: did Gaut mess up when developing his argument, or did you mess up when expressing it?

EXERCISE 7: 20 POINTS

Your task is to find the main argument in Karen Hanson’s “How Bad Can Good Art Be?” and then critique this argument.

First, locate Hanson’s main conclusion. Provide a quote that best expresses this conclusion.

Second, use your own words to state Hanson’s argument for this conclusion in standard form. Provide any definitions necessary for understanding the argument.

Third, analyze the premises to this argument in order to develop an objection. State which premise may be false and why. (You may develop an objection to the argument’s validity, instead of its soundness, but this is often more difficult.)

Fourth, provide a potential response Hanson may give to the objection you have raised.

EXERCISE 8: 20 POINTS

Your task is to find the main argument in Mary Devereaux’s “Beauty and Evil: The Case of Leni Riefenstahl’s Triumph of the Will” and then critique this argument.

First, locate Devereaux’s main conclusion. Provide a quote that best expresses this conclusion.
Second, use your own words to state Devereaux’s argument for this conclusion in *standard form*. Provide any definitions necessary for understanding the argument.

Third, analyze the premises to this argument in order to develop an objection. State which premise may be false and why. (You may develop an objection to the argument’s validity, instead of its soundness, but this is often more difficult.)

Fourth, provide a potential response Devereaux may give to the objection you have raised.

**EXERCISE 9: 20 POINTS**

Your task is to find the main argument in Lynne Tirrell’s “Aesthetic Derogation: Hate Speech, Pornography, and Aesthetic Contexts” and then critique this argument.

Locate Tirrell’s main conclusion. Provide a quote that best expresses this conclusion. Use your own words to state Tirrell’s argument for this conclusion. Provide any definitions necessary for understanding the argument. Analyze the premises to this argument in order to develop an objection. State which premise may be false and why. (You may develop an objection to the argument’s validity, instead of its soundness, but this is often more difficult.) Finally, provide a potential response Tirrell’s may give to the objection you have raised.

Unlike in previous exercises, however, do all of the above in paragraph form. In other words, write it as you would if writing a full essay. No introduction or conclusion is necessary. This should not be longer than a page and a half (Times New Roman, double spaced, 12 point font, standard margins).

**EXERCISE 10: 20 POINTS**

Your task is to find the main argument in Mary Devereaux’s “Oppressive Texts, Resisting Readers, and the Gendered Spectator” and then critique this argument. This paper is available online through the library.

Locate Devereaux’s main conclusion. Provide a quote that best expresses this conclusion. Use your own words to state Devereaux’s argument for this conclusion. Provide any definitions necessary for understanding the argument. Analyze the premises to this argument in order to develop an objection. State which premise may be false and why. (You may develop an objection to the argument’s validity, instead of its soundness, but this is often more difficult.) Finally, provide a potential response Devereaux’s may give to the objection you have raised.

Unlike in previous exercises, however, do all of the above in paragraph form. In other words, write it as you would if writing a full essay. No introduction or conclusion is necessary. This should not be longer than a page and a half (Times New Roman, double spaced, 12 point font, standard margins).