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Arguments and Non-Arguments - 5469

Arguments and Non-Arguments

Read pages 1-4 in the textbook. This will give you some background about arguments and non-arguments. I will expand on these pages in the following lecture notes.

Arguments:

Definition of an argument:

- 1) Linguistic devices used to defend points of view for the purpose of persuasion.
- 2) A combination of statements in no particular order, whereby one or more statements (called premises), are offered as reasons for another statement (called the conclusion).

Note: In this class, we will only be examining those arguments that have two premises and one conclusion. One of the premises will be of the form 'if..then..', i.e., it is a conditional premise containing containing TWO parts.

- 3) An argument also means a dispute, for example two people having an argument over a parking space. This is NOT the meaning of an argument that we will be referring to in this class.

Example:

If it's been raining then the ground would be wet. It has been raining. Thus, the ground is wet.

Note that the order of statements is PPC, which means - Premise, Premise, Conclusion.

Example:

John must be a liberal. Anyone who protested the Gulf War must be a liberal and John was a protester of that war.

Note that the order of the statements is CPP; Conclusion, Premise, Premise.

We can change the order and get the same meaning; for example:

Anyone who protested the Gulf War must be a liberal and John was a protester of that war. John must be a liberal.

Now it is in the **proper** order of PPC; Premise, Premise, Conclusion.

Later in this unit, I will discuss how to determine the validity of an argument. Noticing the order of the statements in an argument will be essential in determining an argument's validity. In order to analyze the validity of an argument, it is crucial that the argument already comes in PPC order or that we re-sequence the statements into PPC order.

Identification of an argument and its elements:

- 1) To identify whether a combination of statements is an argument, try to decide if there is an intent to persuade. Words such as 'ought' and 'should' generally indicate an intent to persuade.
- 2) To identify the premises and the conclusion in an argument, look for KEYWORDS. A keyword normally comes BEFORE the premise or conclusion.

Premise Keywords: because, since, for the reason that, for, in as much as, as, and, if...then

Note that the premise keyword 'and' connects 2 premises, one BEFORE it and one AFTER it. Example: "If the temperature is under fifty degrees then you should wear a sweater AND the temperature is under fifty degrees." Premise 1 is 'If the temperature is under fifty degrees then you should wear a sweater' and Premise 2 is 'the temperature is under fifty degrees'.

It is important to note that an if...then statement is just one premise, containing an 'if' part and a 'then' part. Note that the presence of an if...then statement almost always indicates that there is an argument involved.

Conclusion Keywords: so, thus, therefore, consequently, as a result, indicating that, it follows that, we can infer that, shows that

Example:

If you study hard then you'll pass this class. You will study hard. Therefore, you will pass this class.

ANALYSIS: The conclusion is 'you will pass this class' because it follows the conclusion keyword 'Therefore'. An argument can contain only one conclusion. Thus, the other statements must be the premises. Note that the argument is in PPC order, so that no re-sequencing is necessary.

Example:

Since it's wrong to kill a human being, it follows that capital punishment is wrong, since capital punishment takes the life of a human being.

ANALYSIS: The conclusion is 'capital punishment is wrong' because it follows the conclusion keywords 'it follows that'. Thus, the other statements must be the premises. Note that the argument is in PCP order.

ARGUMENTS WITHOUT KEYWORDS: Some arguments do not have any keywords to help us identify which statements are premises and which statement is the conclusion.

Example:

Ken is a biology major. Someone who is taking Biology 222 must be a biology major. Ken is taking Biology 222.

ANALYSIS: There are no keywords present. The conclusion is 'Ken is a biology major' because it is supported by the other statements and is most likely what is intended as the conclusion. If you were to choose a different statement for the conclusion and say the argument in PPC order then you should see that the argument doesn't make sense.

ARGUMENTS WITH AN IMPLIED STATEMENT: Sometimes people don't always state the

obvious in an argument, and thus some arguments contain an implied premise or an implied conclusion. An implied statement in this context is one that is unstated and is assumed to be part of the argument. It is necessary for us to find the missing part of the puzzle, that is, to identify what the implied statement is. The implied statement is usually fairly easy to discover using common sense.

Example: Here is one in which a premise is implied

All Italians like pasta. Hence, Maria likes pasta.

ANALYSIS: The conclusion is 'Maria likes pasta', since it follows the conclusion keyword 'Hence'. What is implied is a premise that 'Maria is Italian'.

Example: Here is another one in which a premise is implied

Kelly is in favor of a tax cut. So, she must be a Republican.

ANALYSIS: The conclusion is 'she must be a Republican', since it follows the conclusion keyword 'So'. What is implied is a premise that 'All who favor a tax cut are Republicans'.

Example: Here is another one in which a premise is implied

Mary must be a Democrat because she voted for John Kerry.

ANALYSIS: The conclusion is 'Mary must be a Democrat' and one premise is 'she voted for John Kerry'. This premise follows the keyword 'because'. The other premise is implied and is the generalization that 'All who voted for John Kerry are Democrats'. This is the most logical choice for what is assumed or implied.

Example: Here is another one in which a premise is implied

We ought to pull out of Iraq immediately for the reason that staying there any longer jeopardizes our security.

ANALYSIS: The conclusion is 'We ought to pull out of Iraq immediately' and one premise is 'staying there any longer jeopardizes our security'. This premise follows the keywords 'for the reason that'. The other premise is implied but is not a generalization. It is an if...then statement combining the stated premise and the conclusion, namely, 'If staying in Iraq jeopardizes our security then we ought to pull out immediately'. This is the most logical choice for what is assumed or implied.

Example: Here is one where a conclusion is implied

If you get to school early then you'll find a parking space and today you got to school early.

ANALYSIS: Because of the keyword 'and', we should realize that we are given two premises connected by this keyword. What is implied is the conclusion 'you'll find a parking space'.

Example: Here is a tricky one where a conclusion is implied

The better the ingredients the better the pizza. Mambos uses better ingredients.

ANALYSIS: What is implied is a conclusion 'Mambos has a better pizza'. At first you might think that this is not even an argument, but there is an intent to persuade. Many ads take this form of persuasion, leaving the conclusion as implied.

Example: Here is one where 2 premises are implied

Surely Joe must be wealthy. Isn't everyone who lives in Tiburon?

ANALYSIS: This argument is more difficult to analyze. 'Isn't everyone who lives in Tiburon?'

implies that 'If someone lives in Tiburon then they must be wealthy'. Also what is implied is that 'Joe lives in Tiburon'. What makes the most sense is the following:

Premise: If someone lives in Tiburon then they must be wealthy.

Premise (implied): Joe lives in Tiburon.

Conclusion: Joe must be wealthy.

Non-arguments:

1) Unsupported statement(s) of opinion or fact or their combination

Definition of opinion: a belief not based on absolute certainty or positive knowledge; but what seems true, valid or probable to one's own mind or judgment. This is tricky because often people will combine a known fact along with an unsubstantiated statement.

2) Descriptions, narratives or anecdotes

Definition of narrative: the practice of relating stories or accounts.

Definition of anecdote: a short entertaining account of some happening, usually personal or biographical

3) Explanations

Definition of explanation: the act of clearing from obscurity and making intelligible.

[Note: The textbook describes the above non-arguments as being forms of **exposition**, which is defined as the setting forth of facts, statements and detailed information.]

Examples:

1) This class began in January and will end in May. The final exam will be comprehensive.

(unsupported statements of fact; There is no conclusion and no intent to persuade)

2) President Bush lied about the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. He also pushed through his tax cuts to reward his wealthy supporters.

(unsupported statements of a combination of opinion and fact; There is no conclusion and no intent to persuade. Note that although there is a great deal of substantiated facts about weapons of mass destruction NOT being found in Iraq, there are no facts to prove that Bush knew this. In the second statement concerning Bush's tax cuts, it is a fact that the tax cuts benefited the very wealthy the most, we do not have proof that this was done solely as a reward to his wealthy supporters.)

3) We went to Tahoe on our summer vacation. We had a great time. Then we went to Reno and won \$25 played the slots. After that, we went to Wine Country and visited the best wineries there.

(narrative; There is no conclusion and no intent to persuade)

4) I was late to class because I couldn't find a parking space.

(explanation; There is no conclusion and no intent to persuade)

Notes about Non-Arguments:

1) Sentences are claimed to be true without showing they are true.

2) Takes the truth for granted, that is, assumes there is no doubt on the part of the listener.

3) Does not attempt to persuade by offering reasons that support a conclusion.

- 4) Lacks conclusion keywords and argument keywords such as 'ought' or 'if...then'
- 5) May contain premise keywords, such as 'because' or 'since'.
- 6) Sometimes there is a fine line between an argument and an explanation. You must decide through the context.
- 7) The difference between an argument and a non-argument is based on the intent or purpose to establish the truth. Arguments intend to persuade; Non-arguments do not.
- 8) Non-arguments provide no reason to accept the statements as facts other than the authority of the writer or speaker.
- 9) Sometimes non-arguments will lead to arguments.

Conclusion about arguments and non-arguments:

A combination of statements are called an argument if there is an intent to persuade or there are conclusion keywords.

A statement or a combination of statements is called a non-argument if they merely give information, with no intent to persuade and without conclusion keywords.

Arguments on the Internet

Arguments from Thinking Straight

Examples:

Determine whether the following are arguments or non-arguments. If an argument, identify the conclusion. Write down your answers and then see next page for my answers.

- 1) The class was canceled because of lack of enrollment. Most of the students were unhappy about this.
- 2) If a person's desk is organized then their mind is organized. Sue's desk is organized. Thus, her mind is organized.
- 3) This Thai food is sure hot. Can you pass me some water?
- 4) Since the Gulf War, this committee has been in existence.
- 5) Only adult citizens can vote and Peter is not a citizen. So, he can't vote.
- 6) We must begin to develop alternative energy sources, for our existence as an autonomous nation is at stake.
- 7) Most doctors want to set their own fees. So, doctors are natural opponents of socialized medicine.
- 8) Abortion raises serious moral questions because abortion involves taking a human life, and anything that involves taking a life raises serious moral questions.
- 9) I don't like big-time college football and I don't like pro football on TV either. In fact, I don't like sports period.
- 10) Some people are good at math and some are not. Jeri is definitely not.
- 11) Heather didn't come to the party because she was with her boyfriend.
- 12) Heather couldn't have come to the party because she was with her boyfriend and whenever she's with him, she doesn't socialize.

13) Barry doesn't have health insurance. So, he's sure to be in favor of universal coverage.

14) The bigger the burger the better the burger. The burgers are bigger at Burger King.

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