

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: ARGUMENTS

Two sample arguments are given (p.1). An argument is a sequence of statements (p.3), concerning which it is claimed that the last (the final conclusion) follows from those which are taken for granted in the argument (the premises) (p.3).

Arguments may be described or explained; I shall be concerned rather with their assessment (p.4), from a cognitive rather than a rhetorical point of view (p.5). One of the three main aspects of the cognitive assessment of an argument is an assessment of the inference(s) involved as regards their validity (p.6). Another aspect of the cognitive assessment of an argument is the assessment of its premises as regards their truth, plausibility, or belief (p.7). The final main aspect of the cognitive assessment of an argument is the interpretation of a text through regimentation and paraphrase (p.9).

The cognitive assessment of arguments is not tied to any particular language (p.11). I shall concentrate on arguments in written form (p.12). Being able to assess arguments, though not the whole, is a crucial part of being able to discover or invent them (p.12). I shall consider the assessment of inferences, the assessment of premises, and interpretation in that order, but the cognitive assessment of arguments does not proceed in that, or any other linear, order (p.13).

CHAPTER II: INFERENCES

A form of an argument is a pattern containing blanks fillable according to a key in such a way as to generate the argument as an example of the form (p.15). Forms to be considered first must contain predicate-blanks and may also contain

name-blanks (p.16). A counter-example to a form is an example all of whose premises are true and whose conclusion is false (p.21). A validating form is a form which can have no counter-examples (p.26). A valid argument is an argument which exemplifies a validating form (p.29).

An invalid argument is not just an argument which exemplifies some form which is not a validating form (p.31). An invalid argument is rather an argument which exemplifies no validating form, and to show that an argument exemplifies no validating form you must show that an adequately revealing form which it exemplifies is not a validating form (p.33).

Arguments can proceed from premises to the final conclusion by means of intermediate conclusions (p.40). Forms can be of different types, depending on whether they contain predicate-blanks (possibly along with name-blanks) or they contain sentence-blanks (p.46). The question whether to remain at the level of sentence-blanks or rather to show more structure by means of predicate-blanks (and, possibly, name-blanks) is another aspect of the problem of choosing an adequately revealing form (p.53).

Applying these techniques for deciding about validity to actual arguments depends on being able to produce interpretations which make forms manifest (p.60). [Those who know techniques of modern logic may use them to assess forms as validating or not (p.62).]

The assessment of the inferences in the original examples is displayed in a recommended format (p.66).

CHAPTER III: PREMISES

Once an argument is determined to be valid, cognitive assessment focuses on its premises (p.73).

Premises may be assessed in terms of truth or belief or plausibility (p.73). Truth is not person-relative; while belief and plausibility are (p.74). Belief is not only person-relative but it is also subjective; on the other hand, plausibility, while person-relative, is not subjective (p.78). Truth and belief are not comparative, while plausibility is (p.80).

Truth, belief, and plausibility are independent of one another (p.82). Many common terms of cognitive assessment are ambiguous as to whether they concern truth, belief, or plausibility; others unambiguously involve two or three of these concepts at once (p.84).

A valid argument even one of whose premises is neither true nor believed by an appropriate person nor plausible for an appropriate person fails to show anyone anything about its conclusion (p.87). An argument which is valid and all of whose premises are true shows (to someone who knows these facts about it independent of any assessment of its conclusion) that its conclusion is true (p.88). An argument which is valid, one (some) of whose premises is (are jointly) plausible to a certain degree for a person, and the remainder of whose premises (if any) are true, shows that its conclusion is plausible to that degree for that person (p.91). An argument which is valid, one (some) of whose premises is (are) believed by a person, and the remainder of whose premises (if any) are true, shows that that person is committed to its conclusion (p.93). An argument which is valid, one (some) of whose premises is (are) believed by a person, one (some) of whose premises is (are jointly) plausible to a certain degree for a (possibly different) person, and the remainder of whose premises (if any) are true, shows that it is plausible to that degree

for the second person that the first person is committed to its conclusion (p.96).

If your verdict is that the argument succeeds in showing something about its conclusion, conclude your assessment by asking "So what?" (p.99).

Whether or not a premise is believed by someone is determined by listening to or reading what he or she says or writes, trying to understand it, and then judging the sincerity with which it is said or written (p.100). That a premise is plausible for someone or true may sometimes be shown by displaying the premises as the conclusion of a prior valid argument whose premises have the appropriate status (p.101), but you must also be able to assess at least some premises directly as plausible or true (p.102). Direct assessments of premises as plausible or true are not argued for, but they are subject to challenge and must be defended against counter-arguments (p.103). Sometimes you will be incompetent to assess a premise in any way; then you should admit your ignorance and make any verdict you might issue a conditional one, and, if you still want to pursue the topic, try to remedy your ignorance (p.104).

An assessment of the premises of the original two sample arguments is set out in a recommended format (p.106).

CHAPTER IV: INTERPRETATIONS

Interpreting texts which express arguments typically requires regimentation and paraphrase (p.109). The first question to ask about a text is whether or not it expresses an argument (p.109).

In regimenting a text which expresses an argument, the first task is to identify the final conclusion (p.116). The next task is to identify the premises (p.119). If premises must be

supplied, they should be premises which, first of all, help to make the argument valid (p.120). Supplied premises should also, as far as possible, be true or be believed by or plausible for appropriate people (p.121). To complete a regimented (but unparaphrased) interpretation, insert intermediate conclusions as appropriate, making sure that in the final version all steps but the final conclusion are used in getting to the final conclusion (p.124).

Regimented but unparaphrased versions of each of the two original sample texts are given (p.126).

One aim of paraphrase is to make possible the assessment of inferences by exhibiting form, that is, by reflecting sameness and difference in statements, names, and predicates by sameness and difference in sentences, words, and phrases (p.129). [Those who know modern logic will be able to turn paraphrases into well-formed formulas of sentential or predicate logic (p.133).] Another aim of paraphrase is to make possible the assessment of premises by clarifying what they say (p.133).

For each step in your final regimented and paraphrased interpretation, you will claim either that it is quoted from the text, that it is paraphrased from the text, or that it is supplied (p.136).

Complete assessments of the original sample arguments are finally given (p.139).

CHAPTER V: EXAMPLES

Several examples will be assessed and many more provided for you to assess (p.149).

An ancient sceptical argument is assessed (p.149). An argument about the limits of scientific inquiry is assessed as an illustration of ethical argument (p.164). This argument also

illustrates the use of suppositions in conditional arguments and in indirect arguments (also known as negative arguments, reductio ad absurdum arguments, or arguments by contradiction) (p.175). This argument can also be used to illustrate the use of relation-blanks (p.182). An inductive argument is assessed according to the recommended pattern (p.188).

Some arguments are presented for you to assess (p.199): an argument against "naive realism" (p.200), a famous argument for the existence of a non-denumerably infinite set (p.200), an argument by Charles Darwin for the principle of natural selection (p.202), an argument about "natural" means of controlling harmful organisms (p.203), an argument against sociobiology and a rejoinder to it (p.204), an argument about the correlation between success and genetic endowment, together with a rebuttal (p.205), an argument about animal intelligence and a rejoinder to it (p.207), an argument against a behavioristic account of language (p.209), an argument against the view that music expresses the composer's feelings and a rejoinder to it (p.210), an argument about the relation of score to performance in music (p.212), an argument about the economic interpretation of literature (p.213), an argument from literature (p.214), an argument against unilateral disarmament (p.215), an argument that the United States committed genocide under international law in the Vietnamese war (p.216), an argument about the legitimacy of judging people as members of groups and a reply to it (p.217), an argument against the corporate income tax (p.219), an argument about respect for precedent in judicial decision-making (p.219), two arguments about the "exclusionary rule," which prevents illegally gathered evidence from being used in court (p.221), an argument about the appeal to legislative intent in the interpretation of statutes by courts (p.222), an argument about the legal situation when medical personnel discontinue life-support (p.224), two arguments about abortion (p.224), a rejoinder to the argument discussed earlier against the presumed

right to health care (p.227), a selection from Plato, criticizing a proposed definition of piety (p.228), Anselm's famous argument for the existence of God (p.230), a classical atheistic argument (p.232), an attack on determinism (p.232), and, finally, an argument that may raise a doubt about the notion of validity used in this book (p.233).