

Ch. 07: Understanding and Evaluating Arguments (from 5th ed.)

I. Structure of the Argument

a. Basic Structure

- i. **Conclusion:** the claim that the argument intends to support
- ii. **Premise:** the claim offered in support of the conclusion

b. Unstated Premise or Conclusion

- i. “[Conclusion] You don’t want to shop at Lucky’s Car Stereo. [Premise] A man has to court disaster to win the name ‘Lucky’” Unstated premise: You don’t want to shop at a car stereo business owned by a man who courts disaster.

P1: A man has to court disaster to win the name ‘Lucky’

P2: You don’t want to shop at a car stereo business owned by a man who courts disaster.

C: You don’t want to shop at Lucky’s Car Stereo

- ii. “[Premise] If old age were bad in itself, every old person would be unhappy. But [premise] I’m old and I’m happy.” Unstated conclusions: Old age is not bad in itself.

P1: If old age were bad in itself, every old person would be unhappy.

P1: (If A, then B)

P2: But I’m old and I’m happy.

P2: (Not B)

C: Old age is not bad in itself.

C: (Therefore, not A)

The above is *modus tollens*, or denying the consequent.

c. Dependent and Independent Premises

- i. Dependent premises need one another all to be true, to make the argument work.
- ii. Independent premises work individuals even when one of them is false.
 - a. You may think of an argument with two independent premises as two arguments for the same conclusion.

II. Good, Bad, Valid, Invalid, Strong, and Weak Arguments

a. A Good Argument

- i. In most general terms, we call an argument good if it gives grounds for accepting its conclusion.

b. Valid and Sound Arguments (Deductive Arguments)

i. Validity

1. An argument is valid if, whenever all its premises are true, the conclusion is true as well.
2. More causally, you may say that the conclusion of a valid argument must follow from its premises.
3. The premises do not all have to be true for an argument to be valid. So validity does not guarantee a true conclusion.
4. An argument intended to be valid, but isn't, is invalid.

ii. A Sound Argument

1. An argument is sound if it is valid and all its premises are true.
2. Given the definition of validity, it follows that a sound argument always has a true conclusion.

c. Strong and Weak Arguments (Inductive Arguments)

- i. An argument is strong if, whenever all its premises are true, the conclusion is unlikely to be false.
- ii. Good examples of strong arguments are those that rest on prior experience or observation.

III. Unstated Premises

- a. Many arguments encountered in daily life contain unstated premises.
- b. An unstated premise is an assumption that, when added to the stated premises, makes the argument either valid or strong.

- i. The argument “My car won’t start, so the starter wires must have shorted” becomes valid if we add “Whenever a car does not start, its starter wires have shorted.”

P1: Whenever a car does not start, its starter wires have shorted.

P1: (If A, then B)

P2: My car won’t start.

P2: (A)

C: The starter wires must have shorted.

C: (B)

- ii. The same elliptical argument becomes strong with the added assumption “Lately my car has not been starting, and each time the starter wires had shorted.”
 - iii. The second added assumption has much more plausibility, so we should go with that one and produce a strong argument rather than a valid one.
- c. The merit of the argument depends on the plausibility of these added assumptions.
 - i. When an argument needs false or unlikely assumptions to become good, it is not a good argument.
 - ii. It is also not a good argument if reasonable added assumptions leave it invalid or weak.