Arguments for normative conclusions

# Questions for evaluating normative argument

1. Are the premises acceptable as true?
   * Are the descriptive premises well supported by good evidence? Are the sources used credible? If you do not know, how could you find out? What sources would you use?
   * If the argument relies on normative general principles, can you think of any counter-examples? What further consequences does the principle have? Are those consequences acceptable?
2. Assuming that the premises are true, are they sufficient to establish the conclusion?
   * Are there any unstated normative assumptions in the argument?
   * Have all the relevant considerations, for and against, been considered?

Exercises

**Exercise 1:**

For each of the following domains of life, do the following:

1. Give a normative claim in this domain like the example provided – but come up with your own!
2. Try writing a short argument for the claim.
3. Is your argument successful? Why or why not?
4. **Individual Choices and Goals**

e.g. Musicians should practice for at least an hour every day.

a) students need to study at least 1 hour every day \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. **Health, Safety and Risk**

e.g. Every house should have a smoke detector installed and it’s a good idea to check the battery once a month.

a)\_\_ people should quit smoke \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

b)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ because it is harmful for people health

because it waste money.

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1. **Organisational Decisions**

e.g. Google needs to ensure that our computer systems are protected against cyber-attacks.

a) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. **Social Policies and Laws**

e.g. The proposal to raise petrol taxes to support public transport is unfair to drivers who never use buses, trams or trains.

a)

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1. **Interpersonal Ethics and Morality**

e.g. If you borrow money from a friend, you should pay it back as soon as you can.

a) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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**Exercise 2:** Evaluate the following arguments, using the above questions as a guide. Note that some of these arguments include sub-arguments: you should evaluate those too. If you do not know whether a particular factual claim is true, what further research would you need to do to find out? What sources would you use?

1. Increasing the size of the police force is only a stopgap method of crime prevention because it does not get at the root causes of crime. Therefore, the government should not respond to rising crime rates by increasing the size of the police force.

P1. Increasing the size of the police force does not get at the root causes of crime

Therefore,

P2. Increasing the size of the police force is only a stopgap method of crime prevention

C. government should not respond to rising crime rates by increasing the size of the police force

NO. Relied on wrong assumption: gov should not implement the temporally policy for crime prevention.

1. There are several reasons why the Australian Government should not give handouts to the car industry. Firstly, if Australian car manufacturers are not successful, it is not the responsibility of the Australian taxpayer to help them become more innovative and creative. Secondly, the car industry is not a major employer in Australia. It employs only about 50,000 people, compared to over 100,000 employed in mining for example.

P1. if Australian car manufacturers are not successful, it is not the responsibility of the Australian taxpayer to help them become more innovative and creative

P2. the car industry employs only about 50,000 people, compared to over 100,000 employed in mining for example

Therefore,

P3. the car industry is not a major employer

C. Australian Government should not give handouts to the car industry

NO.

1, handouts should not be based on the industry success or not, and maybe the

2, handout should not be based on employer number, e.g education, art

1. Many foods which are marketed to children are regarded by health experts as ‘unhealthy’; they are high in fat, salt and sugar and low in vitamins, minerals and other things important for good health. The result is that many children are overweight or even obese and are increasing their chances of getting heart disease, diabetes and various other diseases. Since governments prohibit the sale to children of other harmful products – like cigarettes and alcohol – why not treat harmful foods in the same way? Young people under 18 should only be allowed to buy foods which are healthy and nutritious. (From Fisher, ‘Critical Thinking’, 2nd edition, page

179)

A1, cigi and alcohol == harmful food

A2, eating harmful food result heart disease, diabetes and various other diseases

A3. What food should children eat?

P1. Many foods which are marketed to children are regarded by health experts as ‘unhealthy’, high in fat, salt and sugar and low in vitamins, minerals and other things important for good health

Therefore,

P2. many children are overweight or even obese and are increasing their chances of getting heart disease, diabetes and various other diseases

P3. governments prohibit the sale to children of other harmful products – like cigarettes and alcohol

Therefore,

P4. Governments should prohibit the sale to children of harmful foods

C. Young people under 18 should only be allowed to buy foods which are healthy and nutritious

1. An increased number of oil spills and the consequent damage to the environment indicate the need for stricter safety standards for the oil industry. Since the industry refuses to take action, it is the national government that must regulate industry safety standards. In particular, the government should require oil companies to put double hulls on their tankers and to assume financial responsibility for accidents.

**P1.** increased number of oil spills and the consequent damage to the environment

**P3.** the industry refuses to take action for stricter safety standards

Therefore,

P4. national government that must regulate industry safety standards

**C.** government should require oil companies to put double hulls on their tankers and to assume financial responsibility for accidents

**Exercise 4: Constructing and engaging with normative arguments in a discussion**

1. Work in pairs. From the following list, choose a statement with which you either strongly agree or disagree (or choose your own topics).
2. Take a couple of minutes to develop an argument for (or against) this statement.
3. Then, present your argument to your discussion partner.
4. Your partner must then offer some (constructive!) points of criticism. Are they relying on unstated normative assumptions? Should we accept those assumptions? Should we accept the descriptive premises they are relying on? Is the argument one-sided? Have potential consequences been considered?
5. Remember the scout mindset! Your job is not to shoot down your partner’s argument or prove that you have the right view. Your job is to work together to arrive at the best solution, given what you know.

* Monash should abolish timed assessments and exams.
* It is wrong for countries like Australia to use offshore immigration detention facilities, in other countries like Papua New-Guinea and Nauru, to detain people suspected of attempting to enter Australia illegally.
* We should cut taxes on corporations.
* If someone makes racist, misogynistic, or otherwise discriminatory comments online, it is morally acceptable to put pressure on their employer to fire them.
* Those who spread misinformation on platforms like Twitter should be banned.
* It is bad parenting to allow children under high school age to access the internet unsupervised, using tablets, laptops or smartphones.