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The Pursuit of Status: Implied Syllogism in Matthew McConaughey's Lincoln Commercials

Intro and Context

Since 2014, actor and designer Matthew McConaughey has been starring in Lincoln commercials, usually talking in a quiet and poetic style while he drives down a beautiful vista of some sort. The commercials are moody and have an elitist undertone. Though no spoken syllogism is made, several can be easily derived from the advertising. McConaughey is a famous actor driving a luxury Lincoln... You could be like McConaughey if *you* drove a Lincoln as well. That's an obvious argument taken from the advertising. The commercials don't state direct syllogisms, so I've made a syllogism from an implied argument across the advertisements. The syllogism reads:

All Lincolns are high end vehicles.

Some celebrities drive Lincolns.

Therefore, some celebrities drive high end vehicles.

The implication is that people of high status will choose Lincoln as their designer car. If you, the potential consumer wants to be like superstar actor Matthew McConaughey, you'll choose Lincoln because it's what he chose. Again, there are multiple syllogisms that could be taken from these ads, but this is the argument that I thought best fit the parameters of the classwork. We know the implied meaning of the argument now let's break it down and discuss the actual syllogism.

Standard Form Categorical Syllogism

1 Major Premise— All *M* are *P*— All Lincolns are high end vehicles

2 Minor Premise— Some *S* are *M*— Some celebrities drive Lincolns

3 Conclusion—Some *S* are *P*—Some celebrities drive high end vehicles

Examining Validity

The syllogism's validity will be tested using rules from David Kelley's *The Art of Reasoning* (pages 190-194).

1 *The middle term must be distributed in at least one of the premises*

For this syllogism, the middle term is *Lincolns*. The middle term is distributed in the major premise and undistributed in the minor premise.

2 *If either of the terms in the conclusion is distributed, it must be distributed in the premise in which it occurs*

The conclusion has no terms that are distributed. Therefore, it shouldn't fall to either the illicit major or illicit minor infractions.

3 *No valid syllogism can have two negative premises*

This syllogism passes this rule as it has no negative premises. The minor premise states, "Some celebrities drive Lincolns." This is not a negative premise, and neither is the major premise of, "All Lincolns are high end vehicles." Therefore, this syllogism meets the rule.

4 *If either premise of the valid syllogism is negative, the conclusion must be negative, and if the conclusion is negative, one premise must be negative*

For this syllogism, the rule is met because the conclusion is positive and both premises are also positive. Therefore, this syllogism cannot break this fourth rule of validity.

Conclusion: Is the syllogism valid?

After testing the validity of this syllogism with the four rules listed above, it appears that the syllogism is valid. The middle term is distributed in at least one of the premises (the major premise in this case). The conclusion has no distributed terms. There is no illicit major term or minor term, so the second rule has been met. The third rule states that, "No valid syllogism can have two negative premises," and this syllogism has no negative premises, so it meets the third rule. Finally, the syllogism meets the fourth rule by default because the conclusion is not negative and there are no negative premises anyway.

Going off these results, the syllogism is valid. Again, there are multiple syllogisms that can be taken from the implied messages of the Matthew McConaughey/Lincoln advertisements. I chose this one because it seemed like a good example for the parameters of the classwork and because it is simple to understand. Though much larger meta messages exist within these advertisements, this project focused on this categorical syllogism, which turned out to be valid after passing the four rulings.

Works Cited

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