

Analysis of an Argument

Topic 1. (pg no 39 topic 25)

The following was written as a part of an application for a small business loan by a group of developers in the city of Monroe.

"A jazz music club in Monroe would be a tremendously profitable enterprise. Currently, the nearest jazz club is 65 miles away; thus, our proposed club, the C Note, would have the local market all to itself. Plus, jazz is extremely popular in Monroe: over 100,000 people attended Monroe's jazz festival last summer, several well-known jazz musicians live in Monroe, and the highest-rated radio program in Monroe is 'Jazz Nightly,' which airs every weeknight. Finally, a nationwide study indicates that the typical jazz fan spends close to \$1,000 per year on jazz entertainment. It is clear that the C Note cannot help but make money."

1. Write a response in which **you discuss what specific evidence is needed to evaluate the argument** and explain how the evidence would weaken or strengthen the argument.

1. Write a response in which **you discuss one or more alternative explanations that could rival the proposed explanation** and explain how your explanation(s) can plausibly account for the facts presented in the argument.

Essay

This loan applicant claims that a jazz club in Monroe would be a profitable venture. To support this claim the applicant points out that Monroe has no other jazz clubs. He also cites various other evidence that jazz is popular among Monroe residents. Careful examination of this supporting evidence, however, reveals that it lends little credible support to the applicant's claim.

First of all, if the demand for a live jazz club in Monroe were as great as the applicant claims, it seems that Monroe would already have one or more such clubs. The fact that the closest jazz club is 65 miles away suggests a lack of interest among Monroe residents in a local jazz club. Since the applicant has not adequately responded to this concern, his claim that the proposed club would be profitable is untenable.

The popularity of Monroe's annual jazz festival and of its nightly jazz radio show might appear to lend support to the applicant's claim. However, it is entirely possible that the vast majority of festival attendees are out-of-town visitors. Moreover, the author provides no evidence that radio listeners would be interested in going out to hear live jazz. For that matter, the radio program might actually pose competition for the C-Note club, especially considering that the program airs during the evening.

Nor does the mere fact that several well-known jazz musicians live in Monroe lend significant support to the applicant's claim. It is entirely possible that these musicians perform elsewhere. Also, there is no assurance that they would be interested to perform at proposed jazz club. The irony that these well known musicians do not perform in the city of Monroe would go a long way toward explaining why Monroe does not currently have a jazz club, and it would weaken the applicant's assertion that the C-Note would be profitable.

Finally, the nationwide study showing that the average jazz fan spends \$1,000 each year on jazz entertainment would lend support to the applicant's claim only if Monroe residents typify jazz fans nationwide. However, the applicant provides no credible evidence that this is the case.

In conclusion, the loan applicant's argument is not persuasive. To bolster it he must provide clearer evidence that Monroe residents would patronize the C-Note on a regular basis. Such

evidence might include the following: statistics showing that a significant number of Monroe residents attend the jazz festival each year; a survey showing that fans of Monroe's jazz radio program would go out to hear live jazz if they had the chance; and assurances from well-known local jazz musicians that they would play at the C-Note if given the opportunity.

To sum up, a certain measure of distrust of so-called "facts" is the very stuff of which human knowledge and progress are fashioned, whether in the physical sciences, the social sciences, or the law. Therefore, with few exceptions I strongly agree that we should strive to look at facts through skeptical eyes.

Topic 2 (pg no. 43 topic no 46)

The following appeared in a memorandum written by the vice president of Nature's Way, a chain of stores selling health food and other health-related products.

"Previous experience has shown that our stores are most profitable in areas where residents are highly concerned with leading healthy lives. We should therefore build our next new store in Plainsville, which has many such residents. Plainsville merchants report that sales of running shoes and exercise clothing are at all-time highs. The local health club, which nearly closed five years ago due to lack of business, has more members than ever, and the weight training and aerobics classes are always full. We can even anticipate a new generation of customers: Plainsville's schoolchildren are required to participate in a 'fitness for life' program, which emphasizes the benefits of regular exercise at an early age."

Essay

In this memo the vice president of Nature's Way (NW), a chain of stores selling health food and health-related products, recommends opening a store in Plainsville. To support this recommendation the vice president cites the following facts about Plainsville: sales of exercise shoes and clothing are at all-time highs; the local health club is more popular than ever; and the city's schoolchildren are required to participate in a fitness program. Close scrutiny of each of these facts, however, reveals that none of them lend credible support to the recommendation.

First, strong sales of exercise apparel do not necessarily indicate that Plainsville residents would be interested in NW's products, or that these residents are interested in exercising. Perhaps exercise apparel happens to be fashionable at the moment, or inexpensive compared to other types of clothing and that may be the reason behind all time high sales. For that matter, perhaps the stronger-than-usual sales are due to increasing sales to tourists. In short, without ruling out other possible reasons for the strong sales the vice president cannot convince me on the basis of them that Plainsville residents are exercising regularly, let alone that they would be interested in buying the sorts of food and other products that NW sells.

Secondly, even if exercise is more popular among Plainsville residents than ever before, the vice president assumes further that people who exercise regularly are also interested in buying health food and health-related products. Yet the memo contains no evidence to support this assumption. Lacking such evidence it is equally possible that aside from exercising Plainsville residents have little interest in leading a healthy lifestyle. In fact, perhaps as a result of regular exercise they believe they are sufficiently fit and healthy and do not need a healthy diet.

Thirdly, the popularity of the local health club is little indication that NW will earn a profit from a store in Plainsville. The sudden popularity of the club may be due to seasonal discounts or schemes to attract more and more members. Or perhaps the club's primary appeal is as a singles meeting place, and that members actually have little interest in a healthy lifestyle. Besides, even if the

club's members would patronize a NW store these members might be insufficient in number to ensure a profit for the store, especially considering that this health club is the only one in Plainesville.

Fourth, the fact that a certain fitness program is mandatory for Plainesville's schoolchildren accomplishes nothing toward bolstering the recommendation. Many years must pass before these children will be old enough to make buying decisions when it comes to food and health-related products. Their habits and interests might change radically over time. Besides, mandatory participation is no indication of genuine interest in health or fitness. Moreover, when these children grow older it is entirely possible that they will favor an unhealthy lifestyle--as a reaction to the healthful habits imposed upon them now.

In sum, the recommendation relies on certain doubtful assumptions that render it unconvincing as it stands. To bolster the recommendation the vice president must provide dear evidence--perhaps by way of a local survey or study--that Plainesville residents who buy and wear exercise apparel, and especially the health club's members, do in fact exercise regularly, and that these exercisers are likely to buy health foods and health related products at a NW store. To better assess the recommendation, I would need to know why Plainesville's health club is popular, and why Plainesville does not contain more health clubs. I would also need to know what competition NW might face in Plainesville.

Analysis of an Issue

Topic 1

"A nation should require all its students to study the same national curriculum until they enter college rather than allow schools in different parts of the nation to determine which academic courses to offer."

Write a response in which **you discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement and explain your reasoning for the position you take.** In developing and supporting your position, you should consider ways in which the statement might or might not hold true and explain how these considerations shape your position

Essay

The speaker would prefer a national curriculum for all children up until college instead of allowing schools in different regions the freedom to decide on their own curricula. I agree insofar as some common core curriculum would serve useful purposes for any nation. At the same time, however, individual states and communities should have some freedom to modify any such curriculum as they see fit; otherwise, a nation's educational system might defeat its own purposes in the long term

Body paragraph1.

A national core curriculum would be beneficial to a nation in a number of respects. First of all, by providing all children with fundamental skills and knowledge, a common core curriculum would help ensure that our children grow up to become reasonably informed, productive members of society. In addition, a common core curriculum would provide a predictable foundation upon which college administrators and faculty could more easily build curricula and select course materials for freshmen that are neither below nor above their level of educational experience. Finally, a core curriculum would ensure that all school-children are taught core values upon which any democratic society depends to thrive, and even survive--values such as tolerance of others with different viewpoints, and respect for others.

However, a common curriculum also would pose certain problems, which might outweigh the benefits, noted above. First of all, on what basis would certain course work be included or excluded, and who would be the final decision-maker? In all likelihood these decisions would be in the hands of federal

legislators and regulators, who are likely to have their own quirky notions of what should and should not be taught to children--notions that may or may not reflect those of most communities, schools, or parents.

Also, the inflexible nature of a uniform national curriculum would preclude the inclusion of programs, courses, and materials that are primarily of regional or local significance. For example, India requires children at certain grade levels to learn about the local languages of particular ethnic groups who make up the country's diverse population. A national curriculum might not allow for this feature, and India's youngsters would be worse off as a result of their ignorance about the traditions, values, and cultural contributions of all the people whose citizenship they share.

Finally, it seems to me that imposing a uniform national curriculum would serve to undermine the authority of parents over their own children,. Admittedly, laws requiring parents to ensure that their children receive an education that meets certain minimum standards are well-justified, for the reasons mentioned earlier. However, when such standards are imposed by the state rather than at the community level parents are left with far less power to participate meaningfully in the decision-making process. This problem would only be exacerbated were these decisions left exclusively to federal regulators.

In the final analysis, homogenization of elementary and secondary education would amount to a double-edged sword. While it would serve as an insurance policy against a future populated with illiterates and ignoramuses, at the same time it might serve to obliterate cultural diversity and tradition. The optimal federal approach, in my view, is a balanced one that imposes a basic curriculum yet leaves the rest up to each state--or better yet, to each community.

Topic 2

"The best way to teach---whether as an educator, employer, or parent---is to praise positive actions and ignore negative ones."

Essay

The speaker suggests that the most effective way to teach others is to praise positive actions while ignoring negative ones. In my view, this statement is too extreme. While it is important to praise positive actions and ignore those trivial mistakes, it is equally significant to not to overlook circumstances under which praise might be inappropriate.

The recommendation that parents, teachers, and employers praise positive actions is generally good advice. For young children positive reinforcement is critical in the development of healthy self-esteem and self-confidence. For students appropriate positive feedback serves as a motivating force, which spurs them on to greater academic achievement. For employees, appropriately administered praise enhances productivity and employee loyalty, and makes for a more congenial and pleasant work environment overall.

As for ignoring negative actions, I agree that minor peccadilloes can, and in many cases should, be overlooked. Mistakes and other negative actions are often part of the natural learning process. Young children are naturally curious, and parents should not scold their children for every broken plate or precocious act. Otherwise, children do not develop a healthy sense of wonder and curiosity, and will not learn what they must in order to make their own way in the world. Teachers should avoid rebuking or punishing students for faulty reasoning, incorrect responses to questions, and so forth. Otherwise, students might stop trying to learn altogether. And employees who know they are being monitored closely for any sign of errant behavior are likely to be less productive, more resentful of their supervisors, and less loyal to their employers.

At the same time, some measure of constructive criticism and critique, and sometimes even punishment, is appropriate. Parents must not turn a blind eye to their child's behavior if it jeopardizes the child's physical safety or the safety of others. Teachers should not ignore behavior that unduly disrupts the learning process; and of course teachers should correct and critique students' class work, homework and tests as needed to help the students learn from their mistakes and avoid repeating them. Finally, employers must not permit employee behavior that amounts to harassment or that otherwise undermines the overall productivity at the workplace. Acquiescence in these sorts of behaviors only serves to sanction them.

To sum up, the speaker's dual recommendation is too extreme. Both praise and criticism serve useful purposes in promoting a child's development, a student's education, and an employee's loyalty and productivity. Yet both must be appropriately and evenhandedly administered; otherwise, they might serve instead to defeat these purposes.

Topic 3

"Governments must ensure that their major cities receive the financial support they need in order to thrive, because it is primarily in cities that a nation's cultural traditions are preserved and generated."

The speaker claims to ensure the survival of large cities and, in turn, that of cultural traditions in cities, through proper funding so that they survive and thrive because cultural traditions are preserved and generated primarily in our large cities. I strongly disagree with all three claims.

First of all, subsidizing cultural traditions is not a proper role of government. Admittedly, certain objectives, such as public health and safety, are so essential to the survival of large cities of nations that government has a duty to ensure that they are met. However, these objectives should not extend tenuously to preserving cultural traditions. Moreover, government cannot possibly play an evenhanded role as cultural patron. Inadequate resources call for restrictions, priorities, and choices. It is unconscionable to relegate normative decisions as to which cities or cultural traditions are more deserving, valuable, or needy to a few legislators, whose notions about culture might be misguided or unrepresentative of those of the general populace. Also, legislators are all too likely to make choices in favor of the cultural agendas of their home towns and states, or of lobbyists with the most money and influence.

Secondly, subsidizing cultural traditions is not a necessary role of government. A lack of private funding might justify an exception. However, culture--by which I chiefly mean the fine arts--has always depended primarily on the patronage of private individuals and businesses, and not on the government. The Medicis, a powerful banking family of Renaissance Italy, supported artists Michelangelo and Raphael. During the 20th Century the primary source of cultural support were private foundations established by industrial magnates Carnegie, Mellon, Rockefeller and Getty. And tomorrow cultural support will come from our new technology and media moguls---including the likes of Ted Turner and Bill Gates. In short, philanthropy is alive and well today, and so government need not intervene to ensure that our cultural traditions are preserved and promoted.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the speaker unfairly suggests that large cities serve as the primary breeding ground and sanctuaries for a nation's cultural traditions. Today a nation's distinct cultural traditions--its folk art, crafts, traditional songs, customs and ceremonies--burgeon instead in small towns and rural regions. Admittedly, our cities do serve as our centers for "high art"; big cities are where we deposit, display, and boast the world's preeminent art, architecture, and music. But big-city culture has little to do any- more with one nation's distinct cultural traditions. After all, modern cities are essentially multicultural stew pots; accordingly, by assisting large cities a government is actually helping to create a global culture as well to subsidize the traditions of other nations' cultures.

In the final analysis, government cannot philosophically justify assisting large cities for the purpose of either promoting or preserving the nation's cultural traditions; nor is government assistance necessary toward these ends. Moreover, assisting large cities

Other topics:

1. To understand the most important characteristics of a society, one must study its major cities.
2. As people rely more and more on technology to solve problems, the ability of humans to think for themselves will surely deteriorate.

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