

The Critical Reflections are designed to help you keep up with the readings, sharpen your reasoning skills, and improve your writing skills. They also serve as stepping-stones to the next level, namely, writing your own arguments. Critical Reflections are due before class whenever there is a reading assignment. For each reading assignment, you should do the following:

1. **Identify one argument in the text and write it in *premise-conclusion format* as follows:**

Premise 1
 Premise 2...
 Premise *n*
 Conclusion

For example:

“No reason can be given why the general happiness is desirable, except that each person, so far as he believes it to be attainable, desires his own happiness. This, however, being a fact, we have not only all the proof which the case admits of, but all which it is possible to require, that happiness is a good: that each person's happiness is a good to that person, and the general happiness, therefore, a good to the aggregate of all persons. Happiness has made out its title as one of the ends of conduct, and consequently one of the criteria of morality.” (Mill, *Utilitarianism*).

Italics = conclusion

Bold = indicator words

Underline = premises

1. If each person ultimately desires their own happiness, then we should act in ways that promote the general happiness of all people.
2. Each person ultimately desires their own happiness. (In other words, happiness is an end in itself, not a means to an end.)
3. Therefore, we should act in ways that promote the general happiness of all people.

This argument is valid because, if the premises are true, the conclusion must be true as well. Any argument that has the following logical form is valid (*Bioethics*, p. 23):

If *p*, then *q*.

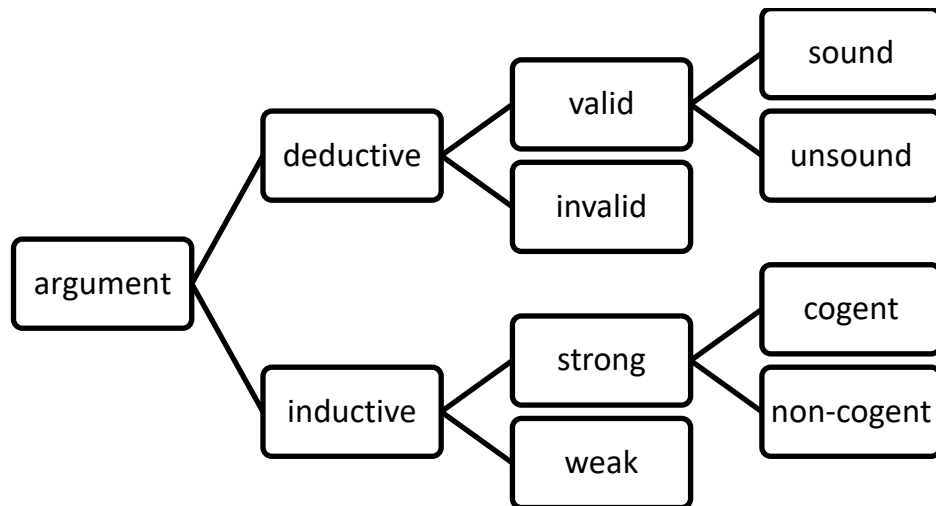
p.

Therefore, *q*.

(where *p* and *q* stand for statements). The next question, then, is whether the argument is sound. Are the premises in fact true? There may be a problem with the second premise. There is a difference between the happiness of an individual (i.e., personal happiness) and the happiness of a collective (i.e., general happiness). Even if one wants to be happy, it doesn't necessarily mean that one wants everyone else to be happy as well. Perhaps one *ought to* want everyone to be happy. But Mill's argument is supposed to show that we should promote the happiness of all concerned (i.e., everyone), so Mill cannot assume that (i.e., that we want to promote general happiness) as a premise in his argument whose conclusion is that we should promote the general happiness without begging the question (*Bioethics*, p. 25).

2. Evaluate the argument.

State whether the argument is *valid* (i.e., the premises of the argument, if true, guarantee the truth of the conclusion) or *invalid* (i.e., the premises of the argument, even if true, do not guarantee the truth of the conclusion). If valid, state whether the argument is *sound* (i.e., the argument is valid and the premises are in fact true) or *unsound* (i.e., at least one of the premises is false). If the argument is meant to be inductive, not deductive, state whether it is *strong* (i.e., the premises of the argument, if true, make the truth of the conclusion more probable) or *weak* (i.e., the premises of the argument, even if true, do not make the truth of the conclusion more probable). If strong, state whether the argument is *cogent* (i.e., the argument is strong and the premises are in fact true) or *non-cogent* (i.e., at least one of the premises is false).



These logical terms are discussed in Chapter 1 of *Bioethics* (see the Moral Reasoning Module on Canvas as well).

3. Comment on a classmate's post.

After you post your Critical Reflection on Canvas, you should comment on one of your classmate's posts. In commenting on a classmate's post, you can do one of the following:

- Clarification request. You claim that *p*, but I do not know what you mean by saying that *p*. Please clarify. By saying that *p*, do you mean that...?
- Argument request. You claim that *p*. I think I know what you mean by *p*. But why do you claim that *p*? I don't see any argument for *p*, and I think you need to give an argument for *p*.
- Objection. You claim that *p* (and maybe you argue for it). However, I think that *p* (or your argument for *p*) is problematic. Here is my objection against *p* (or against your argument for *p*): *q*. What do you say in response to *q*?
- Assistance. You claim that *p*. I agree with you that *p*, but I think the following additional reason (which you do not mention) can be given in support of *p*: *q*. Would you agree?
- Alternative interpretation. You say that the reading claims that *p*. However, I don't think that this is exactly what it says. Instead, I think it says that *p** (and here is why I think this). What do you think?
- Suggestion of parallels. You claim that *p*. Your argument for *p* reminds me of so-and-so's claim that *q* (or their argument for *q*). Are the two similar in some respects? Does comparing *p* to *q* help illuminate *p*?

If you have any questions, feel free to email me at any time: mmizrahi@fit.edu.