

Chapter 2: Arguing about Arguments

As the afternoon gave up the fight to sustain itself, Ayar Herawi, Karl Gutenberg, and Philip Sydney left the gates of the Ayar estate. The cloudy sky was strangely invigorating; it felt as if the clouds had become the sky, or the sky had assumed the gray-white shades of clouds. It was cold, but not forbiddingly so.



Figure 1: Leaving Ayar's Estate

The three cousins riding their confident horses decided to race each other to their destination—the Wantumski estate. No bets were involved; they liked winning for the spirit of competition itself and for self-improvement, and not for some silly extrinsic gain.

Pretty soon, Karl seemed to leave the other two behind, riding so fast as if he was almost flying through the snow-covered village roads. His black beauty, Koko, was a fine, strong, but lithe horse that appeared as if it knew Karl was racing.

Sydney's stallion was not accustomed to the unfamiliar terrain and seemed suspicious. And Ayar's horse, knew the roads, but for some reason appeared as if it did not want to compete with Koko.

As the early evening painted red and orange hues on the horizon, they entered the Wantumski estate gates.

Karl arrived first, soon joined by Ayar and finally by Sydney. Their horses being taken care of, they walked to the main entrance of Wantumski hall.

Wantumski was on the verandah, playing with her cats when she noticed Ayar, and his two well-dressed Caucasian companions approaching.

She was 30, but looked and acted ten years younger; with black hair, white as marble skin, and sharp,



Figure 2: Arrivin at the Wantumski estate

intelligent eyes, she was an athletic-looking woman whose profound intelligence and elegant beauty mixed in a kaleidoscopic combination.

After the greetings and the introductions, they rested, refreshed, ate, and gathered in the guest room. Arrangements were then made for Carambole, a unique and new game invented by Ayar and playable by 4 to 10 people.

When they set the board, which looked like this:



Figure 3: Carambole Board

Sydney said the board looked quite interesting.

Ayar said:

‘Indeed, when we imagine to be looking at it as if we were directly above some ground, which was enclosed in four tall walls but without a roof, we can also not help but feel as if the rectangle has actually a roof which is smaller than the floor.’

Wantumski flashed a warm smile and said:

‘You mean it appears both concave and convex.’

Ayar nodded and replied:

‘Indeed, that is why we call you Master Wantumski. But Sydney, why did you say it was interesting?’

Sydney: ‘Because it reminds me of what we discussed this morning. When Karl said the science of reasoning is based on logic and logic on inference from arguments, I suddenly wondered what kind of an inference we would get from the premises defined by this shape? Shall we say it appears convex and concave, or convex or concave? or neither?’

Karl: ‘You are referring to the idea that the same premises can lead to conflicting claims.’

Wantumski: ‘You mean, the conclusion does not have a one-to-one relation with the premises.’

Sydney: ‘So can a conclusion be invalid simply because it is one-to-many? If the same premises lead to many different conclusions, can we say the conclusions are not reliable, or, can we say some are more reliable than others?’

Ayar: ‘Let’s play. We can talk after the game.’

So they played for some time and tea was being served when Ayar said:

‘Since Wantumski knows more than me, I’ll let her answer for me.’

Wantumski passed a cup of Earl Gray to Karl and then to Ayar and answered so:

‘Here let me draw on the napkin. An argument becomes an argument when it contains n number of premises, and a conclusion or a claim.’

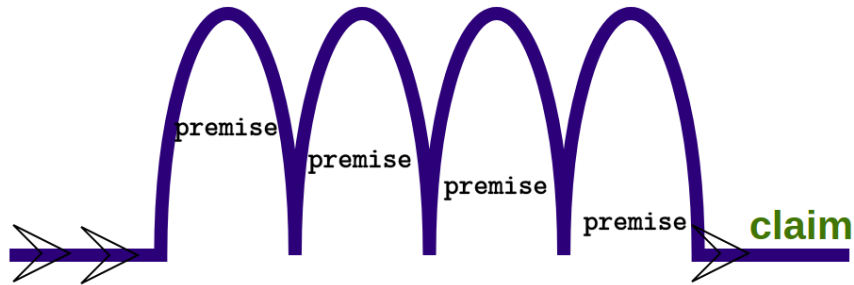


Figure 4: Valid Inference

‘Since you are English, let me tell you about Shakespeare, but I hope that you don’t mind my conclusion.

The first premise is that: only what is high quality rises to popularity, and the second: Shakespeare’s works are popular. From this, some people conclude that Shakespeare’s works must be treasures of art!’

Ayar joined:

‘But you only gave the skeleton of the argument. Premises and conclusions make an argument, but the existence of argument is not guarantee to its validity.’

Sydney:

‘Please wait. I have an issue with your premises. How did you establish the truth of the first premise? How can we be sure popular works are high quality art?’

Wantumski:

‘Good work! The 15th century English writer who shares your name says that although people may not know virtue in advance, when they see it, they can sense it because virtue resides in our souls. I paraphrase but it was something like this.’

Karl:

‘Allow me to interject my opinion. But what about network externalities?’

Wantumski:

‘I see you still miss the 21st century. (The four of them had teleported to live in the 17th century). It is true that when something mediocre, due to randomness, becomes slightly widespread, it will likely gain momentum on the back of this random popularity.

Say a certain product was heavily advertised, and in the absence of a substitute, nearly everyone buys this product. When the rival substitute appears, a new customer is falsely misled into thinking the more popular product is the better one, even though this may not be the case.'

Ayar added:

'But it also may. We can't say all popular things had benefited from network externalities.'

Karl:

'So a premise which is not 100% true is not valid.'

Sydney:

'Do you mean to say if something is sometimes false, it cannot be true?'

Karl:

'Can is a tricky word. Suppose you ask someone if they will be at the pier tomorrow and they reply: "Yes, I can be there." Does it mean she will definitely be there?'

Wantumski:

'She says she can be there, but the question is, will she be there? Here, look, I can perform a round-house kick. What can you infer from this? That I will perform it? Simply saying I can does not guarantee I will do.'

Sydney:

'Whoa, let's come back to my question. So are you all saying simply because something is sometimes false, that it *is* not a valid premise for an argument?'

Ayar:

'Sahih (Right). Let's drop a fly into a glass of milk. It is no longer drinkable.'

Wantumski softly punched Ayar's shoulder:

'That is gross. You are always strange.'

Ayar smiled and retorted:

'An undefendable conclusion.'

Wantumski:

'But if I think you are strange, and always think so, isn't my claim valid?'

Sydney:

'Guys, you forget that I am an apprentice here.'

Wantumski:

'Dear Sydney: look let me draw another graph for you:

Suppose our claim has four premises. If even one of the premises is false, or invalid, the claim becomes invalid. But frequently, some men use this precise tactic when they court their potential dates.' She chuckled.

Sydney:

'An example please?'

Ayar:

'Curiosity killed the cat.'

Wantumski:

'Invalid claim.'

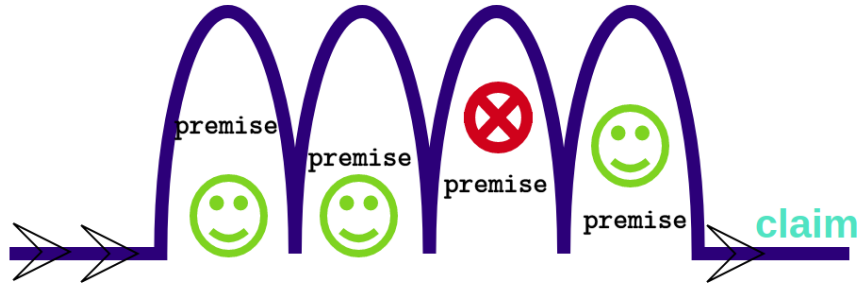


Figure 5: Invalid Premise

Ayar:

‘True. I stand corrected.’

Sydney:

‘Hullo! I am still here.’

Wantumski:

‘Say some man is talking to the woman he likes. He seeks her hand and lays the following premises:

- You are beautiful.
- We’ve known each other for a long time.
- You are my type.
- I have cause to believe you like me, too.
- I will love you forever.

Can we be together?

The last statement is a claim. Although a question, it is a statement of this type:

Because of the above premises, we should be together.’

Sydney:

‘Let me see if I can identify the invalid premise here... hmmm. I can’t find any semi-false premise. Whatever he’s saying, they can be all true.’

Karl laughed:

‘The premise may be true, but is it relevant to the claim? When we consider the validity of a premise, we must make sure it is always true but also relevant to the conclusion. What is not relevant here?’

Sydney:

‘I find every premise relevant.’

Ayar:

‘Sometimes, statements become clearer when we negate them.’

Wantumski:

‘Via Negativa.’

Ayar:

‘Right. “I will never stop loving you” is a negative form of “I will love you forever”, although it may not be so obvious.’

Karl:

“I don’t think the negative statement”I will never stop loving you" has a problem. At least for me."

Ayar:

‘Let’s see. Suppose two people are strangers and one of them wants to be the other’s friend. If one says: “I want to be your friend and I will never stab you in the back”, it makes the other person suspicious. Why did you she/he say that?’

Karl:

‘So, you’re saying the unsolicited promise is irrelevant to the conclusion. That makes senses. If I go to a doctor and right before the open-body surgery he assures me by saying: “Trust me, I can do this!” or “Trust me!” I will immediately become paranoid, wondering why he said that.’

Sydney:

‘So, irrelevant premises and false premises both invalidate an argument. Magnificent! Although, is it possible for an argument to become invalid, if all its premises are valid but the conclusion is not? Like this:’

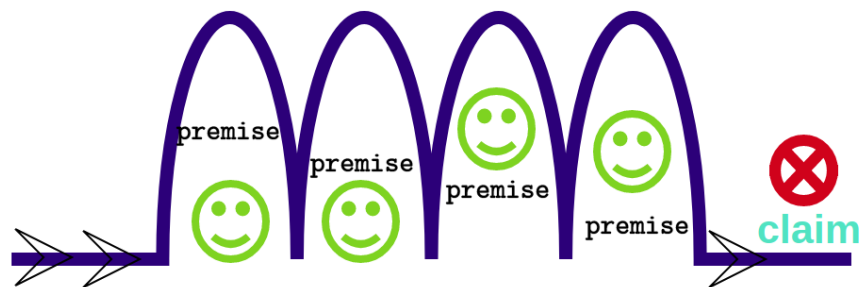


Figure 6: Invalid Argument?

Wantumski:

‘No and yes. It depends on the claim. It may be so, that the premises are all valid, whereas the claim is irrelevant or only tangentially relevant. In that case, the argument is either false or weak.’

Ayar:

'If you read Gogol's *Dead Souls*, you will have found that the main protagonist, Chichikov, was saying something like this:

- The town officials are nice people.
- The landowners are elegant people.
- I am happy to be friends with such excellent people.
- I am going to visit you, therefore.
- Here I am, my dear friend!

But his conclusion was:

You will sell your dead souls to me.

The conclusion, or the claim, at least in the mind of the addressee has no relevance to the previous premises. The landowners cannot imagine the link between Chichikov's friendliness and his desire to buy dead souls.'

Wantumski:

'Although, the claim makes sense to Chichikov, the claim does not make objective sense.'

Sydney cheerfully complained:

'I am lost! Help!'

Karl:

'The link between the premises and the conclusion must be clear, relevant and objectively verifiable. Which reminds me of a true story that happened in the future:

A friend of mine went to a restaurant and asked the garcon:

"-Do you have Fanta?

Yes.

-Sprite?

Yes.

-Then please bring me some tissue paper."

The garcon being overworked and sleepy, brought him Fanta.'

The conclusion was irrelevant to the premises and also objectively unclear.'

Ayar said:

'Although we have not finished discussing Shakespeare, I would like to persuade you all so:

We had a good meal,

We played a fun game,

We enjoyed talking about arguments,

Therefore

It's time to sleep!'

Sydney:

'I beg to differ. Mine is more complete:

We had a good meal,

We played a fun game,

We enjoyed talking about arguments,

And it's already past 10 PM

Therefore, let's call it a night!'

Wantumski smiled:

'Well done! Although Ayar's version is also correct, since the conclusion implies it must be night—and therefore getting late since we did so many things.'

Ayar:

‘Master Wantumski wins.’

With that, they retired to the rooms that Wantumski’s staff had prepared for them. The night was starry and colder; A strong wind howled in the distance, but the bedrooms were cozy and comfortably warm.