Lesson 3: Codes of Intellectual Conduct for Effective Discussion

**Principles of Good Argument**

**1) The Structural Principle**

- Requires constructing an argument that meets fundamental structural re- quirements.

**Characteristics of a Well-Formed Argument**

- Avoids using contradictory reasons or assumptions.

- Does not draw invalid deductive inferences.

-Should either necessarily follow from premises (for deductive arguments)or probably follow (for inductive arguments).

**Criterion for a Good Argument**

- The first criterion for determining a good argument is structural soundness. - An argument should look and work like an argument, forming logically coherent structures.

**Additional Structural Features:**

Providing Reasons for Acceptance:

- A good argument provides reasons to believe the conclusion is deserving of acceptance.

- Uses premises more likely to be accepted than the conclusion in contro- versial discussions.

Avoiding Incompatible Premises:

- Incompatible premises render an argument fatally flawed.

- Arguments with incompatible premises can lead to any conclusion, in- cluding absurd ones.

Violation of Law of Non-Contradiction:

- An argument with a conclusion contradicting one of the premises vio- lates the law of non-contradiction.

Such arguments cannot effectively help in decision-making or belief for- mation.

**2) The Relevance Principle:**

- Requires presenting reasons that are relevant to the truth of the conclu- sion in an argument.

**Characteristics of Relevant Premises:**

- Premises must have a connection to the truth or merit of the conclusion.

- Irrelevant premises waste time in assessing truth or acceptability.

**Determining Relevance:**

- A premise is relevant if its acceptance provides some reason to believe, counts in favor of, or has a bearing on the truth or merit of the conclusion.

- Irrelevant premises have no bearing on, provide no evidence for, or have no connection to the truth or merit of the conclusion.

**Key Questions to Determine Relevance:**

- First question: Would the premise's truth make one more likely to believe the conclusion is true? (Yes indicates relevance: No indicates irrelevance)

- Second question: Even if the premise is true, should it be a consideration in determining the truth of the conclusion? (Yes, if relevant; No, if irrelevant)

- Example:

- Considering whether an idea widely accepted by most people is a sign of its goodness.

- If widely accepted ideas being good is likely, the premise asserting this claim is relevant.

If widely accepted ideas being good is unlikely, the premise asserting this claim is irrelevant.

**3) The Acceptability Principle:**

- Requires presenting reasons likely to be accepted by a mature, rational person and meeting standard criteria of acceptability.

**Characteristics of Acceptable Reasons:**

- Reasons supporting a conclusion must be acceptable.

- Acceptable reasons are claims a rational person would accept in the face of relevant evidence.

**Preferable Term: "Acceptable" vs. "True":**

- The term "acceptable" is preferred over "true" for several reasons.

- Nature of Argumentative Interchange:

- In argumentative situations, achieving agreement on the conclusion of ten hinges on accepting the premises.

- The arguer starts with premises likely to be accepted or that a rational per- son ought to accept.

**- Difficulty Establishing Absolute Truth:**

Establishing the absolute truth of any statement is notoriously difficult.

- Imposing an impractical requirement that premises must be true in an absolute sense would result in few good arguments.

**Language Analysis:**

- In many ordinary contexts, what we mean by "true" can be more ap- propriately expressed as "accepted as true."

Example: Contradictory testimony in a courtroom, where witnesses honestly accept their statements as true.

**Accessibility of Truth:**

Even if a premise is true in the absolute sense, it may be unacceptable to an audience unable to determine its truth.

- The practical force of an argument relies on premises being accepted or recognized as true.

- Example:

- Evidence for a premise may be too technical for a specific audience to understand, making the truth of the premise inaccessible.

- An argument is good only if the premises are accepted or recognized as true by the audience.

**4) The Sufficiency Principle**

- Requires providing relevant and acceptable reasons, sufficient in number and weight, to justify accepting the conclusion.

**Characteristics of the Sufficiency Principle:**

- Reasons must be of the right kind, relevant, and acceptable.

- Together, reasons should be sufficient in number and weight to justify ac- cepting the conclusion.

**Challenges in Applying the Sufficiency Principle**: Assigning weight toeach piece of supporting evidence is challenging and often leads to dis- agreements in informal discussions.

sons in both number and weight to support the proposed conclusion.

**Key Questions for Applying the Sufficiency Test:**

1. Adequacy of Reasons

Are the given reasons, even if relevant and acceptable, enough to lead one to the proposed conclusion?

2. Causal Analysis

- Is the presented evidence flawed by faulty causal analysis?

3. Missing Key Evidence

- Is some crucial evidence missing from the argument that must be included as a premise for one to accept the conclusion?

- **Determining Sufficiency**

Answers to these questions determine if the premises are sufficient to justify accepting the conclusion.

- **Challenge in Weight Assignment:**

- Disagreement over the weight assigned to each piece of evidence often causes problems in discussions.

Closure in Disputes

- Disputes are unlikely to be resolved until there is agreement on the relative weight given to different types of evidence.

**- Application of Sufficiency Principle:**

- Ensures the argument provides convincing rea

**5) The Rebuttal Principle**:

- Requires including an effective rebuttal to anticipated serious criticisms of the argument or the position it supports.

**Characteristics of the Rebuttal Principle**

Addresses the need to counter the opposing side's strongest arguments.

- Ensures the argument is comprehensive and considers alternate view- points.

- **Application Questions:**

1. Identifying Strongest Counterarguments:

What are the most potent arguments against the defended position?

2. Effectively Addressing Counterarguments:

- Does the argument respond to counterarguments in a compelling manner?

3. Recognizing Weaknesses:

- Are potential weaknesses in the argument acknowledged, especially those an opponent might exploit?

4. Acknowledging and Addressing Weaknesses:

Does the argument acknowledge and address its own possible weak- nesses?

5. Evaluating Alternatives:

Does the argument critique and demonstrate the flaws in arguments supporting alternative positions?

**- Failure to Meet Rebuttal Principle:**

Arguments can fail by misrepresenting criticisms, raising trivial objections, resorting to diversionary tactics, or ignoring counterevidence.

**Diversionary Tactics**:

Examples include misrepresentation, trivial objections, focusing on side is- sues, using humor or ridicule, and attacking the critic instead of the criticism.

**- Violation of Obligation:**

Avoiding honest responses to opponents' arguments by attacking the critic or employing diversionary tactics is a violation of the obligation to en- gage with opposing viewpoints.

**Principles of Critical Thinking**

**1. The Fallibility Principle**

Requires participants to acknowledge their fallibility, recognizing that their initial views may not be the most defensible.

**Application**:

Consciously accepting the possibility of being wrong or holding an inde- fensible position.

- Refusing to acknowledge fallibility suggests an unwillingness to change one's mind, hindering fair discussion.

**Significance:**

- Admission of fallibility indicates genuine interest in honest inquiry and a fair resolution of the issue.

**2. The Truth Seeking Principle:**

Requires participants to be committed to earnestly searching for the truth or the most defensible position on the issue.

**Commitments:**

Examining alternative positions seriously.

Seeking insights in others' viewpoints.

Allowing presentation of arguments and objections.

**Lifelong Endeavor:**

The search for truth is a continuous process, often facilitated through discussion and critical examination of diverse perspectives.

**Challenge:**

Balancing the desire for truth with the inclination to hold onto current beliefs.

Encourages openness to alternative viewpoints to avoid missing the complete truth.

**3. The Clarity Principle:**

Requires clear and unambiguous communication in the formulation of positions, defenses, and attacks.

**Importance:**

Clear language ensures that all parties involved can understand the discussion.

Confusing, vague, or contradictory language hinders effective commu- nication and resolution of the issue.

**4. The Burden of Proof Principle:**

Asserts that the burden of proof typically lies with the participant pre- senting a position.

**Responsibility:**

The individual making a positive or negative claim is obligated to pro- vide supporting reasons when asked.

The burden of proof is on the claimant, unless the claim is well-estab- lished or uncontroversial.

**- Logical Obligation:**

When challenged with questions like "Why?" or "How do you know that is true?", one must logically offer reasons for their claim.

**Avoiding Fallacy:**

Shifting the burden of proof or making claims without evidence consti- tutes the fallacy of "arguing from ignorance."

It is illogical to assert a position as true unless disproven by others.

**5. The Principle of Charity**

Requires opponents to reformulate a participant's argument in its strongest possible version consistent with the arguer's original intention.

- The reformulation should give the benefit of any doubt about the inten- tion or implicit parts of the argument.

**Ethical Requirement:**

Promotes fairness and ethical conduct in discussions.

Encourages participants to engage with the best version of an argu- ment to serve the goals of truth-seeking.

**Practical Reasoning:**

Creating and attacking a weak version of an argument undermines the goals of discussion.

- Fairly evaluating the best version is essential for arriving at the truth.

**6. The Suspension of Judgment Principle**

Requires suspending judgment when no position is defended by a good argument or when multiple positions seem equally supported.

- In cases where immediate decisions are necessary, one should weigh the consequences of suspending judgment.

**Practical Considerations**

Suspend judgment if no strong argument supports any position.

If practical considerations demand a decision, evaluate the conse- quences of suspending judgment.

**Basis for Decision:**

- If evidence is lacking, suspending judgment may be appropriate until a better basis for decision emerges.

Not a tactic to avoid difficult decisions but a rational response to insuffi- cient evidence.

**7) The Resolution Principle:**

- Requires considering an issue resolved if an argument for one alternative position meets specific criteria.

The argument must be structurally sound, employing relevant and ac- ceptable reasons that collectively provide sufficient grounds.

- The argument should include an effective rebuttal to all serious criticisms of both the argument and the supported position.

- **Obligation to Accept Conclusion**

- Unless one can demonstrate that the argument does not meet these conditions better than arguments for alternative positions, acceptance of its conclusion is obligatory.

**- Reopening the Issue**

- If a participant finds flaws in the argument that raise new doubts about the supported position, reopening the issue for further consideration is nec- essary.

- Reopening should be prompted by new or reinterpreted evidence not considered in the initial treatment of the issue.

**- Challenges to Rational Resolution:**

Despite the presence of many good arguments, controversial issues often fail to reach rational resolution.

- Challenges may arise from blind spots, lack of psychological conviction, rational carelessness, hidden agendas, or a desire to win the argument over finding a solution.

- Deep disagreements, rooted in unexplored fundamental assumptions, can hinder resolution.

- Permanence of Success:

No argument is considered permanently successful, acknowledging the possibility of new evidence raising doubts about previously held positions.

Reopening an issue is appropriate if new doubts arise due to the discov- ery of previously unconsidered evidence.