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# Critical reasoning: Reading 4

OER University

The aim of this course is to provide an opportunity to acquire critical thinking tools to critically analyse and evaluate knowledge claims. These tools are crucial to making informed decisions in study, work and private situations. Reading 4 explores how to evaluate arguments.



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## TOPIC 4: Evaluating arguments

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If you actively participate in the learning opportunities provided in Topic 4, you will acquire the competence to:

- evaluate simple and complex arguments
- distinguish between different types of arguments
- distinguish between good arguments and bad arguments.

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### Activity 1

Please mark the following as either TRUE or FALSE:

- (1) A statement is any claim that either asserts or denies a state of affairs in the world.

TRUE	FALSE
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- (2) An argument is a series of statements where one or more of these statements is/are intended to establish the truth or acceptability of the conclusion.

TRUE	FALSE
------	-------

- (3) A conclusion is the main claim or point in an argument that the premises are intended to prove.

TRUE	FALSE
------	-------

- (4) A premise is a reason offered in support of an argument's conclusion.

TRUE	FALSE
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- (5) An argument, either deductive or inductive, is valid if its structure is valid and if its premises offer sufficient support for the conclusion.

TRUE	FALSE
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- (6) An argument is sound if it is valid and you accept that all its premises are true.

TRUE	FALSE
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- (7) A good, convincing argument is a sound argument. That is, since you accept all the premises are true, you must accept the conclusion is true.

TRUE	FALSE
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## Feedback

If you marked all the statements as correct, you are well on your way to becoming a critical reasoner. If you have not, please revisit the previous Topics.

## 4.1 Different types of arguments

When we think of structures in general, we think of a combination of parts that belong together, for instance, a bridge, a building, a sentence, et cetera. In order to evaluate the structure, you need to know the requirements for that particular type of structure. The same applies to the evaluation of arguments.

The evaluation of arguments requires an understanding of the type of argument being evaluated and of the criteria for soundness which are appropriate to arguments of that type. When we analyse and evaluate arguments, we should be able to recognise which type of argument we are dealing with. This is because different analyses and evaluative approaches are required, depending on the type of argument we are dealing with. In this section I will introduce you to four types of arguments: empirical, value, deductive and inductive arguments. Together we will explore the difference between these types of arguments.

In your online references you come to the basic characteristics of the following types of arguments:

- Empirical arguments
- Value arguments
- Deductive arguments
- Inductive arguments

After you have read up on “Empirical arguments” and “Value arguments”, complete the activity that follows:

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### Activity 2

- (1) In your own words, explain the difference between empirical arguments and value arguments.
  - (2) What type of arguments are the following?
    - (a) If it rains today, the cricket match will be cancelled. It is raining today. Therefore, the cricket match is cancelled.
    - (b) Animals feel pain just as we do. It is only because we feel pain that it matters how others treat us. The capacity to feel pain is the origin of morality. Thus, the way we treat animals must be a matter of moral concern for us.
    - (c) My car is out of petrol. Therefore, it won't start.
    - (d) Abortion is fully justified because a foetus is not a moral agent. Moreover, a foetus cannot make rational decisions.
    - (e) Affirmative action cannot be justified. First, it amounts to reverse discrimination. Second, it begets racial conflicts. Finally, it is a short-sighted solution to redress the wrongs of the past.
    - (f) The price of petrol will go up, if there is conflict in the Middle East. There is conflict in the Middle East. Therefore, the price of petrol will increase.
-

## Feedback

- (1) The difference between empirical and value arguments is easy to detect if we understand that **empirical arguments** are about **facts**, whereas **value arguments** are about **values**. Let us now attempt to formulate the difference between these two types of arguments in greater detail.

An **empirical argument** asserts that some empirically determinable facts hold. For example, when I say that there is a power failure in town, my claim is either correct or it is not. What makes it correct is some factual state of affairs in the world. The truth or correctness of my claim does not depend on what I feel, believe or value.

A **value argument** asserts a claim of preference or a moral judgement about right and wrong, good and bad. For example, when I claim that the use of animals in biomedical research is morally wrong, there are no independent facts against which the correctness of my claim can be determined. The correctness or otherwise of my claim depends on argumentation and on substantiated reasons offered in support of my claim.

- (2) (a) an empirical argument  
(b) a value argument  
(c) an empirical argument  
(d) a value argument  
(e) a value argument  
(f) an empirical argument

Now consult your online references to find out more about the difference between deductive and inductive arguments. After you have read through the sections entitled “Deductive arguments” and “Inductive arguments”, complete the activity that follows:

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### Activity 3

- (1) In your own words, explain the difference between deductive and inductive arguments. Write down two examples of each in your journal.
- (2) Explain the difference between valid deductive arguments and invalid deductive arguments and then write down two examples of each in your journal.
- (3) In your online references, identify the differences between three major types of inductive arguments. Name each type and write down examples of each in your journal.
- (4) What is the difference between a valid argument and a sound argument? Write down two examples of each in your journal.
-

## Feedback

- (1) We will briefly explain the difference between a deductive and an inductive argument. In a **deductive argument** the premises already contain the conclusion. If all the premises in a deductive argument are true (in a provable sense), then its conclusion must be true also, because the claim asserted by its conclusion has already been stated in its premises. Put differently, in a valid deductive argument the truth of the premises supports with **certainty** the truth of the conclusion.

Unlike deductive arguments, **inductive arguments** have conclusions that supply more information than is contained in their premises. In an inductive argument the supporting connection between its premises and conclusion is loose and there is no strict proof in induction. We can thus say that inductive reasoning is a matter of **reasonable expectation** based on experience, such as observation. Inductive arguments are common in everyday situations and in the domain of science in its search for knowledge.

An example of a **deductive argument** is the following:

*If Susan is a mother, then Susan is female.*

*Susan is a mother.*

*Therefore, Susan is female.*

Here is an example of an **inductive argument**:

*The phenomenon of consciousness cannot be explained according to Descartes' dualistic view of mind and body.*

*Consciousness is not located in the mind, or the body.*

*Therefore, consciousness is a field of experience "situated" in the world.*

**Note:** The conclusion of this argument infers information beyond the contents of the premises.

- (2) In a valid deductive argument the structure of the argument is valid and the premises give sufficient support for the conclusion to follow. For example:

*All human beings are mortal.*

*George is a human being.*

*Therefore, George is mortal.*

This is a valid deductive argument because its structure is valid and the premises provide sufficient support for the conclusion to follow logically.

We can present the structure of the argument as follows:

*[All human beings are mortal]<sup>1</sup>.*

*[George is a human being]<sup>2</sup>.*

*Therefore,*

*[George is mortal]<sup>3</sup>.*

*Conclusion: 3*

*Premises: 1, 2*

The structure of this argument is valid. Do you still remember how we establish whether the structure of an argument is valid or not? If you have forgotten, go back to the sections that explore “Valid deductive arguments” and “Invalid deductive arguments” in your online references.

The argument in our example is valid because its structure is valid and the premises give sufficient support for the conclusion to follow logically. Whether the argument is sound, that is, acceptable, is another matter, as we will see when we explain the difference between the validity and soundness of arguments in activity (4).

An **invalid deductive argument** is an argument in which the structure is invalid and the premises fail to give sufficient support to the conclusion. For example:

*If Philippa is fit, she will run the marathon.  
Philippa is not fit.  
Therefore, she will not run the marathon.*

The structure of the argument is presented as follows:

*[If Philippa is fit, she will run the marathon]<sup>1</sup>.  
[Philippa is not fit]<sup>2</sup>.  
Therefore,  
[she will not run the marathon]<sup>3</sup>.*

*Conclusion: 3  
Premises: 1, 2*

The structure of the argument is invalid.

Apart from the fact that the structure of the above argument is invalid, the premises of the argument do not give sufficient support for the conclusion to follow. There might be many reasons why Philippa will not run the marathon: the fact that she is not fit is simply one such reason. Alternatively, she might decide to run the marathon even though she is not optimally fit.

- (3) Consult your online references to find out more about the differences between the three major types of inductive arguments: **statistical extrapolations**; inductive reasoning by **analogy**; and **cause-and-effect** reasoning.

When we evaluate arguments we should remember that there are different types of inductive arguments, because we evaluate different arguments differently.

- (4) The **validity** of arguments refers solely to their structure (form) and not their content. When we establish the validity of an argument, we look at the relationship between the premises and the conclusion of the argument. The **soundness** of arguments refers to the contents of their premises and conclusion. When we assess the soundness, or acceptability, of an argument we want to establish whether or not the evidence provided by the premises is actually true, or acceptable. Let us give an example to explain the difference between the validity and the soundness of arguments:

*All creatures on the planet Mercury have pointed ears.  
Beauty is a creature on the planet Mercury.  
Therefore, Beauty has pointed ears.*

We can present the structure of the argument as follows:

*[All creatures on the planet Mercury have pointed ears]<sup>1</sup>.  
[Beauty is a creature on the planet Mercury]<sup>2</sup>.  
Therefore,  
[Beauty has pointed ears]<sup>3</sup>.*

*Conclusion: 3  
Premises: 1, 2*

The argument is **valid** because its structure is valid. Also, the conclusion follows logically from the premises. But the argument itself is clearly absurd and senseless. The argument is **unsound** because, when we evaluate the premises of the argument, it is clear that the premises do not give adequate evidence for the conclusion to be true.

## In summary

In this section we have explained some important aspects of argument evaluation. We have explored the difference between various types of arguments and we have noted that the evaluation of arguments requires an understanding of the type of argument being evaluated. We have seen that the reason for this is that different analyses and evaluative approaches are required, depending on the type of argument we are dealing with. In the next section you will have the opportunity to evaluate arguments on your own.

### Some matters of interest

<p><i>Growth of gaming, TV hurting kids' critical reasoning skills</i></p> <p>A review of the literature suggests that the growth of visual media, such as games and television, is producing a generation that has greater visual reasoning skills, but a reduced ability to stop and engage in critical reasoning.</p> <p>By John Timmer   Last updated January 29, 2009 5:10 AM CT</p>	<p><b>Critical thinking is a brain training game</b></p> <p>The brain needs care just like the body. New scientific research shows that we can improve the health and function of our brains with the right mental workouts. Critical thinking is one such workout</p>
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## 4.2 Applying your knowledge and skills to argument evaluation

Look at the following picture carefully.



How does this picture make you feel? Imagine that you are the person in the picture and you are standing there with your back turned to an abyss. Do you feel that you have reached the end of a road and you are afraid of falling down the rift? Or, do you feel unbound and liberated, knowing that you are on your own but that you are guided by your experience and competence? Perhaps you identify this picture with openmindedness and a willingness to question the world, authority and preconceived ideas. Write down your responses in your journal.

Congratulations! If you have played your role as an active initiate into the society of critical thinkers and if you have worked diligently, you would now have reached the stage where you have the competence to evaluate arguments on your own. In this section you will have ample opportunity to practise your competence in evaluating arguments. We will act only as your guides. In some cases we will evaluate arguments together. In other instances you are on your own and you should be guided by the experience and competence that you have gained. Remember that the competence you acquire in applying your knowledge and skills to argument evaluation can most effectively be used in other disciplines where different opinions, assertions and theories abound.

We should take the arguments that we evaluate seriously, present them in their strongest form, and subject them to careful and deep analysis and assessment. This may require us to be charitable and fill in missing premises or it may require that we assume that an ambiguous term has a meaning suited to the argument's purposes. We might want to say that the argument is unacceptable as it stands, but that it is acceptable with the missing premises added, and so on. We are sure that you will agree that there is no point in hastily dismissing an argument because it is not clearly expressed, or because some term or phrase is open to ambiguous interpretation. The aim of argument evaluation is to reach the best understanding that we can of the issues and problems the argument deals with.

In order to evaluate arguments successfully, let us consider the following useful steps in argument evaluation:

Step 1: Understand the meaning of the argument.

Step 2: Identify the conclusion of the argument.

Step 3: Locate the reasons that support the conclusion of the argument.

Step 4: Determine whether the reasons offered in support of the conclusion are acceptable.

Step 5: State your own opinion on the issue that is debated. Here we have to decide whether the argument that is presented is a good argument, or not, and to provide reasons why we say so.

It is helpful to look out for definitions used in arguments. Sometimes people use definitions of the key concepts in their arguments in an attempt to clarify the concepts and to prevent misunderstanding in communication. For instance, in an argument in favour of active voluntary euthanasia, an arguer would define this key concept in order to distinguish it from other forms of euthanasia. Obviously, the strength of her argument would depend on the accuracy of her definition of active voluntary euthanasia.

When we have to decide whether an argument is good or bad, it is useful to look out for definitions arguers use in their arguments and determine whether the definitions are successful. It might be useful to explore the use of definitions in your online references: look for references to definitions, counterexamples and counterarguments. However, you need not memorise these definitions. It will suffice just to know that it is important to define or explain the meaning of the concepts used in arguments, whether we evaluate or construct arguments. The reason for this, as we have already said, is that often the acceptability of an argument depends on how the concepts used in it are explained.

Although there are no definite criteria to evaluate arguments, there are some guidelines we can use to distinguish between good and bad arguments. Here are some possible guidelines:

- A good argument is a sound argument.
- A good argument is an argument that is consistent.
- A good argument provides sufficient and relevant reasons to support its conclusion.
- A good argument supplies evidence or reasons that are compatible with other claims we know are true.

Before you do the activity below, please review your online references for examples and explanations related to distinguishing between good and bad arguments, as well as recommended steps in argument evaluation.

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## Activity 4

Consider the following arguments carefully and then critically evaluate them:

(A)

Pornography, like rape, is a male invention, designed to dehumanise women, to reduce the female to an object of sexual access, not to free sensuality from moralistic or parental inhibition ... Pornography is the undiluted essence of antifemale propaganda.

(Adapted from Barnett 1997:399).

(B)

A woman and the child she is carrying are as close to each other as any two humans can get. And I don't just mean biologically close, but emotionally and psychologically close as well. Just ask any mother. A woman who intentionally harms her unborn child violates the deepest levels of her unconscious needs and desires, and she is bound to pay a psychological price for it. Plenty already have, as both psychologists and women who've had abortions can tell you.

(Olen & Barry 1999:180).

(C)

The day may come when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withheld from them but by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of the tormentor. It may one day come to be recognised that the number of the legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the ossacrum are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate.

What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or perhaps the faculty of discourse? But a full grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day or a week or even a month, old. But suppose they were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not Can they reason? nor Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?

(Bentham 1970:368)

(D)

The crime rate in slums is indeed higher than elsewhere; but so is the death rate in hospitals. Slums are no more "causes" of crime than hospitals are of death; they are the locations of crime, as hospitals are of death. Slums and hospitals attract people selectively; neither is it the "cause" of the condition (disease in hospitals, poverty in slums) that leads to the selective attraction (Van den Haag 1998:52).

(E)

When I hear businessmen speak eloquently about the "social responsibilities of business a free enterprise system", I am reminded of the wonderful line about the Frenchman who discovered at the age of 70 that he had been speaking prose all his life. The businessmen believe that they are defending free enterprise when they declaim that business is not concerned "merely" with profit but also with promoting desirable "social" ends; that business has a "social conscience" and takes seriously its responsibilities for providing employment, eliminating discrimination, avoiding pollution and whatever else may be the catchwords of the contemporary crop of reformers. In fact they are — or would be if they or anyone else took them seriously — preaching pure and unadulterated socialism. Businessmen who talk this way are unwitting puppets of the intellectual forces that have been undermining the basis of a free society these past decades. (Friedman 2002:226)

(F)

Not everyone wants to spend his or her last days lying in a hospital bed wasting away to something hardly recognisable as a human being, let alone his or her former self. To constantly fight horrible pain, to be hooked up to an intravenous machine that supplies painkilling narcotics, to drift up and back between a dream state and reality, not to recognise family and friends, to waste away to nothing while dying of dehydration or starvation — to some people that’s an unacceptable affront to dignity. Out of respect for the dignity of others we allow them to live with dignity. Why not allow them to die with dignity? (Olen & Barry 1999:234)

(G)

Proponents of affirmative action programmes are guilty of intellectual inconsistency, if not racism or sexism. For, as is now readily acknowledged, in times past employers, universities, and many other social institutions did have racial or sexual quotas (when they did not practise overt racial or sexual exclusion), and of those who were most concerned to bring about the eradication of those racial quotas are now untroubled by the new programmes which reinstitute them. And this is inconsistent. If it was wrong to take race or sex into account when blacks and women were the objects of racial and sexual policies and practices of exclusion, then it is wrong to take race or sex into account when the objects of the policies have their race or sex reversed. Simple considerations of intellectual consistency — of what it means to give racism or sexism as reason for condemning these social policies and practices — require that what was good reason then is still a good reason now.

(Adapted from an argument given in Wasserstrom 1997:203.)

(H)

**BANNINGS RIGHT**

I refer to the Government restrictions imposed on 18 political and trade union organisations.

These organisations are no longer able to preach revolution or further the aims and objectives of communism as set out by the ANC. As South Africa does not subscribe to communism or tolerate communism in any shape or form, it is only natural that these restrictions should have been made.

It must follow that those who criticise the Government’s actions must either be communists or communist sympathisers.

The eradication of communism is a top priority except, of course, to these critics who are trying to tell us that we must allow it to prevail in order to placate world opinion and to prevent communist activists from operating underground. (Letter to a newspaper, from HR in Irene 1986.)

(I)

**HELP, NOT HANDOUT**

As “affirmative action” becomes the buzzword, one wonders what happened to “equal opportunity”.

The late Arthur Ashe stated he was “insulted” by the concept of affirmative action — it denigrated him as a human being. The eminent jurist Thurgood Marshall had much to say about the bad effects of formalising a policy granting “rights” on the basis of colour and not ability.

The obvious outcome of affirmative action as a policy can only be a downward curve in productivity, as the poorly equipped struggle to cope.

Surely the disadvantaged must be assisted. Surely the legacy of apartheid must be addressed in a positive way. But let’s not lower the standards of our educational institutions, making a degree internationally worthless; let’s not jeopardise standards in the workplace; and, certainly, let’s not contribute to a further loss of self-esteem among those who have had to live as second-class citizens for most of their lives.



*Arthur Ashe (1943–1993)*

Personal growth comes through the knowledge that one has achieved, not been given preference for the wrong reasons. Let’s give a helping hand — not a handout. (Letter to *The Star* 18 July 1997.)

(J)

<p>In the following passage Winston Fletcher argues that proposals to further limit or even ban tobacco advertising should not be supported:</p> <p>Though there are already restrictions upon tobacco advertising, there are calls from the health lobby to extend these restrictions. There have even been calls — especially in Europe — for a complete ban on tobacco advertising.</p> <p>At first sight the arguments in favour of banning tobacco advertising seem irresistible. Advertising encourages people to buy cigarettes. Cigarettes are bad for you. Therefore cigarette advertising must be banned.</p> <p>The missing word in this argument is “more”. Does advertising encourage more people to buy cigarettes, or people to buy more cigarettes? The answer in both cases is no. When manufacturers advertise soaps, do you wash more often? When oil companies advertise, do you increase your mileage? When cat foods are advertised, do you rush out and buy a cat? No. And, despite the welter of new launches, competitions and giveaways, promotions and advertising campaigns and other hullabaloo, total sales of newspapers have not increased.</p> <p>Manufacturers continue to spend a small fortune on advertising because they hope to persuade people to switch brands, which is much easier and so more likely to be profitable than persuading people to do something they have never done before.</p> <p>The fundamental fact is that banning cigarette advertising does not work. Advertising-free China and the old Soviet Union have among the heaviest smoking populations and the two biggest tobacco monopolies in the world. In Europe smoking has increased most since 1975 in Norway, Finland and Portugal. In all three countries advertising has been banned for more than a decade.</p> <p>In both Britain and the US, despite all the advertising, the percentage of the population that smoke has fallen significantly over the past 15 years: in Britain, it is only 37 percent; in the US, it has fallen to 26 percent. Smoking among young people has consistently fallen in these countries.</p> <p>All this is pretty strong evidence: strong enough to convince a Canadian court that examined all the international data and declared recently that there is no proven connection between advertising and tobacco consumption, no proof at all that a ban on advertising results in a fall in smoking.</p>	<p>So, if we listen to those who want to further restrict — or even ban — tobacco advertising, what will we achieve? Not only the exact opposite of what the health lobby wants to achieve, but also the tobacco companies may eventually discover the restrictions — especially a ban — to have been a blessing in disguise</p> <p>In the first place, the companies will make a great deal more profit. Cutting down on advertising and sponsorship will immediately save them hundreds of millions a year. (And, of course, it will threaten the future of many sporting events, events enjoyed by millions of people.) Second, it will effectively stop foreign competitors entering the market, good news for the big tobacco companies, who are already having to fight for a shrinking market. Third, it will remove all those frightening health warnings which smokers cannot help noticing despite themselves — from the hoardings and newspapers, and stop manufacturers promoting low tar brands. Fourth, a ban may even help reverse the present downward trend in consumption, as it appears to have done in several countries.</p> <p>There are many addictive habits — marijuana and cocaine usage, for example — that thrive without advertising. It is possible that all the posters and publicity reduce the subversive glamour of cigarettes for the young and that stopping manufacturers from targeting the young will enhance it. Human beings can be more subversive than the health lobby realises.</p> <p>I have no desire to see one single person die younger than they need. If banning tobacco advertising worked, I would be all for it; but it does not and will not. It simply foists more unnecessary controls on us — and makes those who inflict them feel good.</p> <p>Nobody objects to futile moral gestures as long as they do not interfere with other people’s freedom. If you want to shave your head and dance along a city street chanting Hare Krishna in the hope that it will bring peace and love to mankind, that is no problem. But if you indulge in futile moral gestures at other people’s expense — selfishness masquerading as selflessness — that is another matter. Further restricting cigarette advertising is a futile gesture and should not be supported (<i>The Guardian</i>, Wednesday 17 November 2004).</p>
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## Feedback

We will respond to examples (G) and (J). You can then apply the experience and competence you have gained from the previous activities and analyse the rest of the examples on your own.

Let us evaluate arguments (G) and (J) by applying the following steps:

- (1) What kind of argument are we dealing with?
- (2) What is the writer claiming?
- (3) What reasons does the author offer to support his claim?
- (4) Are the reasons in support of the conclusion acceptable?
- (5) Is it a good argument? Give reasons for your answer.

### **(G) Argument against affirmative action**

*Proponents of affirmative action programmes are guilty of intellectual inconsistency, if not racism or sexism. For, as is now readily acknowledged, at times past employers, universities, and many other social institutions did have racial or sexual quotas (when they did not practise overt racial or sexual exclusion), and of those who were most concerned to bring about the eradication of those racial quotas are now untroubled by the new programmes which reinstitute them. And this is inconsistent. If it was wrong to take race or sex into account when blacks and woman were the objects of racial and sexual policies and practices of exclusion, then it is wrong to take race or sex into account when the objects of the policies have their race or sex reversed. Simple considerations of intellectual consistency — of what it means to give racism or sexism as reason for condemning these social policies and practices — require that what was good reason then is still a good reason now.*

- (1) What kind of argument are we dealing with?

This is an inductive value argument.

- (2) What is the writer claiming?

The writer is claiming that advocates of affirmative action are guilty of intellectual inconsistency when it comes to the institution of the new affirmative action programmes that are based on racism and sexism. In support of her claim she offers reasons why supporters of affirmative action are being intellectually inconsistent.

- (3) What reasons does the author give in support of her claims?

If it was wrong to take race or sex as the basis for job reservation in the past, then it is equally wrong now to take race and sex as the basis for the implementation of affirmative action programmes.

- (4) Are the reasons in support of the conclusion acceptable?

We think the premises offered in support of the conclusion are not acceptable for the following reason:

We agree with the author that the idea of affirmative action, which amounts to reverse discrimination, is intellectually inconsistent. This, however, is hardly the point. The

implementation of affirmative action is **not about intellectual consistency**, but about the **redressing of a past reality of discrimination** against blacks and women.

- (5) Is it a good argument? Give reasons for your answer.

This is a bad argument because the argument is not sound. The author fails to offer good reasons in support of what she is claiming.

**(J) Winston Fletcher's argument that we should not support proposals to further limit or even ban tobacco advertising**

This argument is an extended complex argument. A complex, or a chain argument, has several sub-arguments, each with its own conclusion. A simple or less complex argument usually has only one conclusion. An extended argument should be evaluated in the same way as any other less complex argument. Of course, extended arguments are sometimes more difficult to evaluate, because they are usually long chains of connected arguments and you need to keep track of all of them as you read. This requires practice.

The evaluation of this argument was prepared by Dr Mashuq Ally, senior lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at Unisa.

- (1) What kind of argument are we dealing with?

This is an inductive argument containing both empirical and value claims.

- (2) What is the writer claiming?

The writer has three connected claims. In general, he argues against a ban on tobacco advertising. He includes consideration of how such a ban, contrary to the intentions of the health lobby, would in fact actively promote the interests of currently existing tobacco companies. In support of his main claim he offers pragmatic considerations which are designed to demonstrate the futility of such a ban.

- (3) What reasons does the author give in support of his claims?

The writer has three connected claims:

**First claim.** Argument against a ban on tobacco advertising:

The reasons the writer offers in support of this claim are the following:

- (a) Since the advertising of soap does not lead to increased use of soap but rather to possible switching of brands of soap, tobacco advertising does not lead to increased use of tobacco but rather to possible switching of brands.
- (b) The fundamental fact is that banning cigarette advertising does not work because, despite the banning of cigarette advertising in countries such as Norway, Finland and Portugal, smoking has increased.
- (c) Statistics show that in Britain and the United States the percentage of smokers (especially among young people) in these countries has continued to drop significantly, despite a great deal of advertising in these countries.

- (d) The findings of a Canadian court suggest that there is no proven connection between advertising and tobacco consumption. It claimed that a ban on advertising would not lead to a drop in smoking.
- (e) Banning tobacco advertising actively encourages consumption of tobacco.

**Second claim.** Argument to show that a ban on tobacco advertising will actively promote the interests of currently existing tobacco companies:

Reasons given in support of this claim:

- (a) These companies will save a great deal of money which, in the absence of the ban, would have been spent on advertising.
- (b) Existing companies will preserve a monopoly in the tobacco market.
- (c) The absence of health warnings resulting from a ban will lead to the production of products with a higher tar content (presumably cheaper to produce), which will be more dangerous to smokers.
- (d) Increased consumption of tobacco may follow in the wake of a ban.

**Third claim.** Argument to show that a ban on tobacco advertising is a futile moral gesture:

Reasons supplied in support of this claim:

- (a) The banning of advertising promotes the “forbidden fruit syndrome”. Since the use of marijuana and cocaine (examples of “forbidden fruit”) increases without the need for advertising, the use of tobacco will likewise increase if advertising is banned.
- (b) Banning advertising of tobacco does not discourage its use among those who wish to smoke.
- (c) Banning tobacco advertising “foists unnecessary controls on us” and gives those in favour of such controls a false sense of promoting the public good.
- (d) It is of no more practical value to ban tobacco advertising than practices of the Hare Krishna movement are a practical means to world peace.
- (e) It is “selfish” and duplicitous to interfere with the freedom of tobacco companies to advertise.

- (4) Are the reasons in support of the conclusion acceptable?

To answer this question we have to take each point and evaluate it.

**Point 1.** Since the advertising of soap does not lead to increased use of soap but rather to possible switching of brands of soap, tobacco advertising does not lead to increased use of tobacco but rather to possible switching of brands.

**Counterarguments:**

- (i) These “restrictions” on tobacco advertising may well have the effect of reducing sales of tobacco. Perhaps such restrictions actively discourage use among the public at large, specifically those members of the public who contemplate smoking.
- (ii) Moreover, whereas the use of soap is a necessity among people of most countries, the use of tobacco, among those who have never begun smoking, is optional.

**Point 2.** State ownership of tobacco in China and the old Soviet Union and not advertising is responsible for the heavy smoking among the population in those countries.

**Counterargument:**

In countries such as China and the old Soviet Union the high degree of smoking may be ascribed as much to ignorance of its dangers as to limited access to other “bourgeois pleasures”.

**Point 3.** Statistics show that in Britain and the United States the percentage of smokers (especially among young people) in these countries has continued to drop significantly despite a great deal of advertising in these countries.

**Counterargument:**

The fact that fewer young people smoke suggests that they have been alerted to the dangers of smoking by the “restrictions” placed on tobacco advertising. The fact that smoking has increased in Norway, Finland and Portugal is evidence in favour of restrictions on advertising and not outright banning of advertising.

**Point 4.** The findings of a Canadian court suggest that there is no proven connection between advertising and tobacco consumption. It claimed that a ban on advertising would not lead to a drop in smoking.

**Counterargument:**

Fletcher uses the term “proven connection” ambiguously to describe the court’s findings. It may very well be that a ban on advertising will not lead to a drop in smoking, but this may be as much because of the absence of warnings about the dangers of smoking resulting from the “lifting of restrictions” (presence of health warnings) as it may be because of the “forbidden fruit” syndrome (according to which the outright banning of a product encourages its use through the defiance and “subversive glamour” resulting from continued consumption of the product in such circumstances).

**Point 5.** Banning tobacco advertising actively encourages the consumption of tobacco.

A ban on tobacco advertising will actively promote the interests of currently existing tobacco companies:

- (a) They will save a great deal of money which, in the absence of the ban, would have been spent upon advertising.
- (b) Existing companies will preserve their monopoly of the tobacco market.
- (c) The absence of health warnings resulting from a ban will lead to the production of products with a higher tar content (presumably cheaper to produce), which will be more dangerous to smokers.
- (d) Increased consumption of tobacco may follow in the wake of a ban.

**Point 6.** A ban on tobacco advertising is a futile moral gesture:

- (a) The banning of advertising promotes the “forbidden fruit syndrome”. Since the use of marijuana and cocaine (examples of “forbidden fruit”) increases without the need for advertising, the use of tobacco will likewise increase if advertising is banned.

**Counterarguments:**

- (i) A false analogy is drawn between marijuana and cocaine, on the one hand, and tobacco, on the other. Whereas using the former is illegal, using the latter is not. This difference in status may account for the subversive glamour of the former — a glamour which may be significantly greater than that of the latter.
  - (ii) The addictive properties of marijuana and cocaine may be much greater than those of tobacco (especially in terms of initial use). If this is so, it may account for the fact that such habits “thrive without advertising”.
- (b) Banning advertising of tobacco does not discourage its use among people who wish to smoke.

**Counterargument:**

It has not been proved that it does, nor has it been proved that it does not. Evidence against banning of tobacco advertising is provided by the experience of certain countries. There are the countries in Europe in which “smoking has increased most”, namely Norway, Finland and Portugal, and in which tobacco advertising has been banned for more than a decade. Evidence in favour of continued restrictions (albeit not an outright ban) on tobacco advertising is provided by declining numbers of tobacco users in Britain and the United States — where, contrary to Fletcher’s interpretation of the statistics, increased awareness of the dangers of smoking (“those frightening health warnings”) would seem to play a role.

- (c) Banning advertising of tobacco “foists unnecessary controls on us” and gives those in favour of such controls a false sense of promoting the public good.

**Counterarguments:**

- (i) This is a value argument. The “controls” exerted on us by banning advertising are no different from the “controls” exerted by actual advertising. Advertising attempts to manipulate us into smoking; banning advertising denies tobacco companies the opportunity to freely promote their products.
- (ii) The argument commits the fallacy of equivocation. To whom does the word “us” refer? There may be a surreptitious conflation (combination) of “us” with the tobacco companies. If “us” refers to the public in general then it appeals to general considerations such as freedom of choice which can still be exercised even if tobacco advertising is banned. But the argument throughout has been directed toward the right of tobacco companies to advertise freely, so there is a suggestion that our rights and the tobacco companies’ rights are being conflated. But there is no reason to believe these rights to be identical.
- (iii) Furthermore, whether people feel good about promoting the public good is irrelevant. What is relevant is whether the public good is served by banning tobacco advertising.

- (d) It is of no more practical value to ban tobacco advertising than the practices of the Hare Krishna movement are a practical means to world peace.

**Counterargument:**

Here a false analogy is drawn. Devotees of the Hare Krishna movement attempt to revise general attitudes among people, which is an extremely ambitious undertaking and it is in principle impossible to quantify the effect of their actions — whereas the effects of the anti-advertising lobby can be quantified.

- (e) It is “selfish” and duplicitous to interfere with the freedom of tobacco companies to advertise.

**Counterargument:**

If it is conceded that the use of tobacco is itself harmful, then any means which can be shown to discourage its use and which thereby “interferes with other people’s (tobacco companies’) freedom” may, arguably, be legitimate. It can, most definitely, not be regarded as “selfish”.

- (5) Is this a good argument? Explain.

This is a chain argument. Of its three substantive claims only the second, namely the view that a ban on advertising will actively promote the interests of currently existing tobacco companies, can stand up to examination. Since this view is only a side issue, one has to conclude that the argument is not a good one.

One reason why the argument is not good is that it fails to specify what is meant by “restrictions”. Restrictions on advertising include such items as warnings against the effects of using tobacco, which may very well have the effect of discouraging the use of tobacco. It need not be the case that banning tobacco advertisements also entails fewer visible warnings about the detrimental effects of smoking, but this issue is not considered. This suggests that Fletcher’s article covertly supports the efforts of tobacco companies to transmit their message, irrespective of the possible dangers of smoking to the public at large. His use of statistics clearly suggests that he ought to be aware of the correlation between the effects of “restrictions” as opposed to the effects of “banning”. If nothing else, his failure to draw the distinction convicts him at best of gross oversight — and at worst of cunning and deliberate partiality.

## In summary

In this topic you had the opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills you have gained from all our previous discussions, explanations and activities to evaluating the arguments of others. In the next topic you will have the chance to construct your own philosophical arguments. See this as an adventure and a challenge, rather than a dull and painful experience. Writing is fun! Mastering the skill to express your thoughts in writing by constructing arguments is empowering — writing effectively and clearly enables you to make your voice heard by defending your own ideas and insights.