

## Types Of Arguments

An argument is a set of statements which is such that one of them (the conclusion) is supported or implied by the others (the premises).

For example:

The Louvre Museum is in Paris  
Paris is in France  
Therefore the Louvre Museum is in France.

The first two statements are the premises, and the third is the conclusion.

How is the following argument (i) similar (ii) different?

The Louvre Museum is in Worthing  
Worthing is in England  
Therefore the Louvre Museum is in England.

Similar:

- Both have the same structure – two premises and a conclusion
- The conclusion follows logically from the premises in both

Different:

- The premises are true and the conclusion is true in the first argument. BUT the first premise and the conclusion are untrue in the second argument.

There is another structure of argument possible – where even if the premises are all true the conclusion does not necessarily follow. Consider the following:

If it rains, I shall get wet  
I get wet  
Therefore it rained.

(Get the student to try to give a case where the premises given above are true but conclusion is not. Then give them a possible answer e.g I did not get wet because of the rain but because someone turned a hose pipe on me!)

Philosophy distinguishes between these two types of argument. The first (where the conclusion necessarily follows from the premises) is called a deductive argument. The second (where the conclusion does not necessarily follow from the premises) is called an inductive argument.

It is the deductive argument that offers philosophical proof, whilst the inductive argument can only offer probabilities. (Maybe get student to explain why?)

Now use the digital resource 'Which argument?'

## Testing premises – A priori and a posteriori

Identifying the type of argument (i.e. deciding whether it is deductive or inductive) does not, in itself, prove whether the conclusion is true or false. It is necessary to decide whether the individual premises are true or false.

Consider the following 2 premises:

1. The circle is square.
2. Carmel gains a grade B at A level Religious Studies.

What is the difference in the way that you would go about finding out if the premise is true or false?

(Answer – in premise 1 you would know immediately, often by definition as here. In premise 2 you would need to see the certificate or look at a list of published results. It would require some kind of investigation and the truth value (true or false) only decided in the light of some experience (eg seeing the certificate).)

The first type of premise whose truth value can be determined without reference to any investigation is called a priori (prior to experience), whilst the second is called a posteriori (from or after experience/investigation).

Now use the digital resource 'A priori or a posteriori'

## Foundational beliefs

A posteriori premises can be problematic. Something that is convincing to one person often carries no weight with another. We need to be conscious of the various presuppositions that each of us holds, and how these affect the way we interpret the evidence.

Also, most of our beliefs are derived from other beliefs, which in turn are derived from still other beliefs, and so on. It is important that each of our beliefs is itself based on a justifiable belief.

For example, consider the belief that it will rain tomorrow. Identify the series of beliefs from which this belief may arise.

(Possible answer – believing the weather forecast; believing that the data the meteorological office is working with is correct, believing that the data necessarily leads to certain weather patterns, believing that weather conditions work to certain patterns, etc )

The question arises as to whether there are any beliefs that are self-justifying such that there is no requirement to appeal to a further belief to justify it. These self-justifying beliefs are referred to as foundational beliefs or basic beliefs.

These foundational beliefs are beliefs that we feel compelled to agree with, without the need to appeal to further beliefs to justify them.

Explain why “I am in pain” has been regarded by some as a foundational belief.

(answer – evident to the senses, even if there is no medical evidence of pain it does not annul the belief that I am in pain, I have access to my pain that no-one else has)

Controversially, Alvin Plantinga argued that belief in God is a foundational belief since it has the feature of an unfounded belief which provides the foundation for other beliefs. William Alston argued that belief in God is reasonable, not because its truth is entailed by the conclusion of a set of premises, but because God could somehow be directly encountered or immediately perceived. In other words it is a foundational belief.