EVALUATING ARGUMENTS (Chapter 3)

I. Two questions we ask when evaluating an argument
1. How well do premises support the conclusion?
2. Assuming premises support the conclusion well, are the premises in fact true?

Evaluations in deductive terms differ from evaluations in inductive terms in their formulation of, and standards for, the first question.

Evaluating in deductive terms

Formulate question #1 as a yes/no question:
• Is there any possible situation that would make the premises all true but make the conclusion false?
  Here, what would make a situation impossible is that it is self-contradictory. Conflict with laws of nature counts only if we assume as one of our premises that the actual laws of nature hold, or some consequence of those laws holds.
  Example: I will let go of my pencil. Therefore my pencil will fall.
  This argument is valid only if we interpret it as having as an unstated premise the law of gravity, or a consequence of it such as the conditional statement that if I let go of my pencil it will fall.
• Is there a way the world could have gone (even one very different from how things actually are) that would make all premises true but make the conclusion false?
• Is the combination of all true premises with a false conclusion possible (without contradiction)?

Definitions
  deductively valid answer to question #1 is NO
  No possible situation would make all premises true but make the conclusion false
  deductively invalid answer to question 1 is YES
  There is a possible situation that would make all premises true but make the conclusion false
  deductively sound deductively valid + all premises are all in fact true (actually, as the world really is)

Evaluating an argument in inductive terms

Formulate question #1 as a matter of degree:
• How likely does the truth of the premises make the truth of the conclusion?
• On the assumption that the premises are true, how likely is it that the conclusion will also be true?

Definitions
  inductively strong answer to question #1: very likely, highly probable
  inductively weak answer to question #1: not very likely, not highly probable
  inductively cogent inductively strong + all premises are all in fact true (actually, as the world really is)
II. Background: principle of charity

A. Interpret what other people say charitably
   Give the person credit for saying the most reasonable or plausible interpretation of
   what the person’s words might mean

B. Interpret other people’s arguments charitably
   1. If an argument would be deductively valid or inductively stronger if a statement
      that is common knowledge or obvious is being used as an unstated premise,
      interpret the argument as containing that premise.
   2. Give the person credit for making the strongest sort of argument in which he or
      she will succeed. (If the argument meets the standard of deductive validity,
      apply that standard, interpret it as a deductively valid argument rather than
      merely inductively strong.)

III. Interpreting arguments in 4 steps or less.

1. Identify the premises and conclusion.

2. Is the argument deductively valid?
   If no, move on to step 3.
   If yes, ask if is also deductively sound. Then STOP.
   (By putting this question before the one in step 3, we use the principle of charity as it
   applies to interpreting arguments.)

3. Is the argument inductively strong?
   If no, move on to step 4.
   If yes, ask if it is also deductively cogent. Then STOP.

4. If the argument is neither deductively valid nor inductively strong, try to determine which standard the person giving the argument was trying to meet.
   a. If it looks like one or the other because of its form, assume that is the type of
      argument the person was trying to give (the standard the person wanted the
      argument to meet and to be judged by).
   b. Use indicator words as a guide to which type of argument the person was trying
      to give, and which standard the person intended it to be judged by
         Indicators that the goal is deductive validity and soundness: necessarily
         must be it follows that it’s absolutely certain that definitely
         Indicators that the goal is inductive strength and cogency: it is likely that
         probably chances are odds are almost certainly
IV. Argument patterns (structures)

A. Some patterns give us a reason to think aim is deductive validity
(Patterns in “p4b Ch3 arg patterns”)

B. Recognizing this goal can help us find missing components.

V. More about step 1

A. Identify stated premises and conclusion
   1. Use indicator words
   2. Apply the principle of charity: Give the person credit for using each statement in the argument in the most reasonable or plausible way.

B. Filling in missing components of the argument
   1. Principle: Be guided by the principle of charity
      Interpret the argument in the strongest way you can reasonably interpret it.
   2. Applying the principle
      Fill in implicit premises (ones that seem to be assumed though unstated)
      a. Search for a credible premise that will make the argument deductively valid, choosing missing premise that a is most plausible, and b fits best with author’s intent
      b. If you can’t find a plausible premise that fits well with the author’s apparent intent and makes the argument deductively valid, look for one that fulfills (a) and (b) and will make the argument inductively as strong as possible
      c. Evaluate the modified argument with the premise(s) you’ve added. (p. 84)

      EXAMPLE 1: My car won’t start. I’m sure the battery is fully charged. There must be something wrong with the starter.
      2 reasons to evaluate this argument in deductive terms:
      a. indicator phrase: must be
      b. plausible premise(s) whose addition would make it deductively valid:
         If my car won’t start, either the battery is low or there is something wrong with the starter
         OR My car has gas in it. If my car won’t start, it’s out of gas, the battery is low, or there is something wrong with the starter

      EXAMPLE 2: Gary is all excited about yet one more of his many plans to get rich. He’s likely to be disappointed again.
      3 reasons to interpret this argument in inductive terms (see it as inductive)
      a. indicator phrase: likely
      b. There is no plausible premise that we could add that would guarantee the truth of the conclusion that he will be disappointed again
      c. There is a plausible premise or combination of premises we could add to make the argument inductively at least somewhat strong: Gary’s many previous plans to get rich led to disappointment (or at least most of them have).

C. Examine roles of premises and subsidiary conclusions
   Which components support which?
   Which support relations are independent of one another, and which work together?
   (diagramming arguments to show these relationships)