Practice identifying premises and conclusions

By James Gray © March 12, 2012

I will present 10 passages containing arguments. You can then figure out what the premises and conclusions are, and reconstruct the arguments in the form of an argument map. I will then give my answers. Keep in mind that there can be some legitimate differences in our answers given that some interpretation is required.

Practice 1

I have done a great deal of work; as much as a man, but did not get so much pay. I used to work in the field and bind grain, keeping up with the cradler; but men doing no more, got twice as much pay; so with the German women. They work in the field and do as much work, but do not get the pay. We do as much, we eat as much, we want as much. I suppose I am about the only colored woman that goes about to speak for the rights of the colored women. I want to keep the thing stirring, now that the ice is cracked. What we want is a little money. You men know that you get as much again as women when you write, or for what you do. When we get our rights we shall not have to come to you for money, for then we shall have money enough in our own pockets; and may be you will ask us for money. (Truth)

The premise and conclusion are the following:

1. Not all women work less, eat less, or want less than men. (premise)
2. Therefore, there is no reason to pay women less than men. (conclusion)

The argument map for this argument is the following:

---

Practice 2

[A] woman should have every honorable motive of exertion which is enjoyed by man, to the full extent of her capacities and endowments. The case is too plain for argument. Nature has given woman the same powers, and subjected her to the same earth, breathes the same air, subsists on the same food, physical, moral, mental, and spiritual. She has, therefore, an equal right with man, in all efforts to obtain and maintain a perfect existence. (Douglass, “Some Thoughts”)²

The premise and conclusion are the following:

1. Women have equal capacities and endowments as men. (premise)
2. Therefore, women should have equal rights as men. (conclusion)

The argument map for this argument is the following:

---

Practice 3

I may here express a general remark, which the history of slavery seems to justify, that it is not founded solely on the avarice of the planter. We sometimes say, the planter does not want slaves, he only wants the immunities and the luxuries which the slaves yield him; give him money, give him a machine that will yield him as much money as the slaves, and he will thankfully let them go. He has no love of slavery, he wants luxury, and he will pay even this price of crime and danger for it. But I think experience does not warrant this favorable distinction, but shows the existence, beside the covetousness, of a bitterer element, the love of

---

power, the voluptuousness of holding a human being in his absolute control. We sometimes observe that spoiled children contract a habit of annoying quite wantonly those who have charge of them, and seem to measure their own sense of well-being, not by what they do, but by the degree of reaction they can cause. It is vain to get rid of them by not minding them: if purring and humming is not noticed, they squeal and screech; then if you chide and console them, they find the experiment succeeds, and they begin again. The child will sit in your arms contented, provided you do nothing. If you take a book and read, he commences hostile operations. The planter is the spoiled child of his unnatural habits, and has contracted in his indolent and luxurious climate the need of excitement by irritating and tormenting his slave. (Emerson)  

The premises and conclusion are the following:

1. Children enjoy torturing people. (premise)
2. Many slaves are tormented by their slave owners. (premise)
3. Therefore, it seems likely that many slave owners enjoy tormenting their slaves. (conclusion)

The argument map for this argument is the following:

---

**Practice 4**

All men recognize the right of revolution; that is, the right to refuse allegiance to, and to resist, the government, when its tyranny or its inefficiency are great and unendurable. But almost all say that such is not the case now. But such was the case, they think, in the Revolution of '75. If one were to tell me that this was a bad government because it taxed certain foreign commodities brought to its ports, it is most probable that I should not make an ado about it, for I can do without them. All machines have their friction; and possibly this does enough good to counter-

---

balance the evil. At any rate, it is a great evil to make a stir about it. But when the friction comes to have its machine, and oppression and robbery are organized, I say, let us not have such a machine any longer. In other words, when a sixth of the population of a nation which has undertaken to be the refuge of liberty are slaves, and a whole country is unjustly overrun and conquered by a foreign army, and subjected to military law, I think that it is not too soon for honest men to rebel and revolutionize. What makes this duty the more urgent is that fact that the country so overrun is not our own, but ours is the invading army. (Thoreau)¹

The premises and conclusion of the argument is the following:

1. We have a right to resist the government when it taxes us for bringing us foreign commodities. (premise)
2. If we have a right to resist the government when it taxes us for bringing us foreign commodities; then we also have a right to resist the government when a sixth of the population of a nation are slaves, a whole country is unjustly conquered by a foreign army, and we are subjected to military law. (premise)
3. A sixth of the population of a nation are slaves, a whole country is unjustly conquered, and we are subjected to military law. (premise)
4. Therefore, it is false that we don't currently have a right to resist the government. (conclusion)

The argument map for this argument is the following:

---

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security. — Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world. ...

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these united Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States, that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. — And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor. (Jefferson)

The premises and conclusions of the argument are the following:

1. Governments derive their power from the consent of the people to protect our interests in life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. (premise)
2. If a government becomes destructive to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; then people have a right to break free from that government. (premise)
3. The King of Great Britain has power over the United States and it has become destructive to the life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness of those living in the United States. (premise)
4. Therefore, people of the United States have a right to break free of the British government. (conclusion)

The argument map for this argument is the following:

---

CONCLUSION

People of the United States have a right to break free of the British government.

PREMISE

Governments derive their power from the consent of the people to protect our interests in life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

PREMISE

If a government becomes destructive to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; then people have a right to break free from that government.

PREMISE

The King of Great Britian has power over the United States and it has become destructive to the life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness of those living in the United States.