

Complex conditionals

If A or B, then x is wrong.

If neither A nor B, then x is permissible.

If A and B, then x is wrong.

If either A is not true, or B is not true, then x is permissible.

Making an argument for a claim by giving evidence that directly supports it

1. Give clear, compelling examples of relevant things that are wrong/permissible [or whatever it is that you are discussing]
 - a. If your examples are implausible or unclear, your argument will be weak.
 - b. Be careful: the fewer examples you use, the harder it is to generalize, and the more objections there will be.
2. Show that your claim gives the best explanation of why these things are wrong/permissible
 - a. This will require showing that the examples fit your thesis.
 - b. This typically requires showing that they would not fit alternative views. So pick examples that allow you to rule out alternative views.

For example:

Thesis: All species have a moral right to continue exist.

Evidence:

- It is morally wrong to hunt members of animal species that are close to extinction (look at how upset people get when they learn about lion or elephant hunting).
- It seems less wrong to hunt members of species that are thriving.
- Giant tree frogs are close to extinction. They are also very unattractive. Fred is walking through a jungle, and stumbles. He is going to fall, and can only guide which direction. If he falls in one direction, he will squash a giant tree frog. If he falls in the other direction, he will squash a beautiful lemur, that many people come to the jungle to look at and enjoy. It is wrong for him to squash the frog rather than the lemur.

How the thesis fit the evidence:

- The lion hunting and tree frog cases fit the claim that species have a right to exist, because in each, and action is wrong that threatens the existence of a species.
- The fact that it seems (more) permissible to hunt thriving animals than animals close to extinction suggests the following: hunting animals close to extinction is not *just* wrong because it kills the animal, but also because it threatens the species.

Why the evidence does not fit alternative views:

- Alternative: it is bad to kill species, but they don't have rights.
 - The tree frog example is supposed to be a counterexample. It might be overall better to kill the tree frog, because so many people enjoy seeing the lemur. But it is still wrong to kill the frog. This suggests that the wrongness of extinction is not

just based on its overall goodness or badness. This would mean that species have rights.

- Alternative: species have no rights, but making species go extinct is extremely intrinsically bad (because of the harm to ecosystems).
 - You would need more evidence to address this...
- Alternative: only animal species have rights, not plant species (or other kind of species).
 - You would need more evidence to address this...

A related approach (argument by elimination):

1. Start by discussing a very intuitive/plausible/common-sensical view.
2. Show why it can't be true, using strong counterexamples.
3. Show how the counterexamples mean we have to adopt a different view.
4. Do this until you end up with your thesis. Summarize how it fits all the evidence given.

For example:

Regan wants to argue that certain animals have moral rights. This is not the common sense view, so he can't just give evidence (that others will agree with) of animals who have rights.

- So he considers alternative views (that there are not rights and only animal welfare matters, that only things that can reason or form contracts have rights, etc.).
- He shows why each cannot be true.
- Once he's gone through the alternatives, he has evidence that shows that his view is correct.

Another example:

Thesis: If sentient animals who live in a country do not have a legal right to vote (or be represented by legal guardians that vote for them), this is morally unjust.

- Initially, we might say that justice requires votes be given to only legal citizens.
 - Counterexample: Slaves (or non white people more generally) were not considered citizens at one point in history, but it was unjust that they not be allowed to vote.
- So, we might say that all human adults (living in a country) should be allowed to vote.
 - If there were aliens who were intellectually and emotionally no different from us, and lived with us, it would be unjust to not allow them to vote.
 - So, species is not what is relevant; perhaps it is intelligence...
- We might say that all sufficiently rational beings should be allowed to vote.
 - It would be unjust to prevent adult humans from voting by giving intelligence tests.
- We might say that only people who understand what voting is should be allowed to vote.
 - This is where the discussion of legal guardians that vote for them would come in...

Arguing for your thesis by arguing for something else first

1. Find a general idea that, if true, would allow you to show that your thesis is true.
 - a. You might do this because your thesis is surprising, or does not clearly or obviously fit examples that others are inclined to accept.
2. Argue for that principle (see above):
 - a. This involves giving evidence.
 - b. And showing how alternative principles are actually false.
3. Then show how the principle leads to your thesis.
 - a. This won't always be obvious to your reader, so be sure to explain (and give evidence for) this.

For example:

- Kymlicka and Donaldson want to argue that domesticated animals should be citizens.
 - This is a surprising view, and they aren't going to find examples where people do think animals should be seen as citizens.
 - Instead, they argue for certain general claims about animals (that they can be citizens, that they have been made dependent on us).
 - This requires giving evidence.
 - And they show why these claims are relevant to citizenship.
 - This also requires giving evidence (cases in which beings have been made dependent on a society against their will, and can be made citizens, and in which it is clear that justice requires making them citizens).