

6

General arguments: it's unnatural, it's disgusting, risky, it's only opinion



Box 6.1 Activity: Analysing arguments

Consider the argument above about IVF being unnatural. Can you set it out logic-book style? (See pp. 64–67 for how to set out an argument in this way.) Is the result a deductive or an inductive argument?

Answer:

The 'naturalness' argument above can be analysed as follows:

Premise one: IVF is unnatural.

Premise two: If something is unnatural then it is immoral.

Conclusion: IVF is immoral.

This is a deductive argument.



Box 6.2 Activity: Analysing arguments

The word 'unnatural' is clearly ambiguous. This means that there are different ways of interpreting the argument we analysed in Box 6.1. Each of these different arguments has to be evaluated separately.

Can you identify at least two meanings of the word 'unnatural' from the discussion above, and set out logic-book style each of these arguments so the difference between them is clear?

Answer:

1. Premise one: IVF is artificial.

Premise two: If something is artificial then it is immoral.

Conclusion: IVF is immoral.

2. Premise one: IVF violates the laws of nature.

Premise two: If something violates the laws of nature then it is immoral.

Conclusion: IVF is immoral.

3. Premise one: IVF is man-made.

Premise two: If something is man-made then it is immoral.

Conclusion: IVF is immoral.



Box 6.5 Activity: Setting out arguments logic-book style

In the context of xenotransplantation (the transplantation of, say, a pig's liver into a human being, see Chapter 19), set out logic-book style (see Chapter 5, pp. 64–67) the argument that someone who believes the boo/hooray theory might make (which will be to do with a claim to the effect that xenotransplantation is disgusting).

Answer:

Premise one: If something is disgusting it is morally wrong.

Premise two: Xenotransplantation is disgusting.

Conclusion: Xenotransplantation is morally wrong.



Box 6.6 Activity: Evaluating arguments

Once you have set out logic-book style the 'it's disgusting' argument against xenotransplantation (see Box 6.5):

- (i) decide whether the argument is valid or not (such that if its premises are true its conclusion *must* be true);
- (ii) decide whether its premises are true.

Answer: The argument is again valid. The truth of premise two is a matter of opinion and not obviously a matter of *truth* at all. Arguments can be given for or against the truth of premise one, which could form the basis of an interesting class discussion. The fact that one of the premises is questionable means we can rationally reject this argument even though it is valid.



Box 6.8 Activity: Small group discussion

Ask participants to read this section of this chapter, then conduct some research into the thalidomide disaster. Divide them into groups and ask each group to discuss the following questions:

Q1: Would the precautionary approach have prevented the thalidomide tragedy?

Q2: Could the tragedy have been prevented by traditional means?

Ask each group to present their findings to the rest of the group before holding a whole-group discussion.



Box 6.11 Activity: Playing devil's advocate

'The risks we run in the twenty-first century are of a quite different kind to the risks run by prehistoric human beings. The precautionary response is the only sensible response to such risks.'

Divide into two groups. One group should argue *for* this claim irrespective of the actual positions of its members. The other should argue *against* again irrespective of the actual positions of members.

Questions to help prepare:

Q: Are modern risks more worrying? Why?

Q: Is the precautionary approach the only way to manage such risks? If not how else might they be managed?

Q: Are there any drawbacks to adopting the precautionary approach?



Box 6.12 Activity: Analysing arguments

Jane and Troy are having an argument and getting very frustrated with each other.

Jane: I would never have an abortion, I think abortion is wrong

Troy: Abortion may be wrong for you but that doesn't mean it's wrong for anyone else.

Jane: But I don't believe abortion is right for *anyone*.

Troy: Who are you to say that someone else is wrong?

Jane: If you believe that it is wrong to kill a human being, and you believe that abortion involves killing a human being, then how could you not believe that abortion is wrong quite generally?

Troy: But other people do not believe that abortion involves killing a human being, and why should you impose *your* beliefs on them?

Can you find a way of suggesting to Jane and Troy that they are not arguing about the same thing?

Hint: Could Jane agree that Troy is right without agreeing that she is wrong? How? Could Troy agree that Jane is right to believe that if abortion is wrong it *is* wrong for everyone, without agreeing that abortion is wrong? How?