Set out logic-book style the argument that follows, saying what type of argument it is, and using the methods you were taught in the course, say whether or not you think it is a good argument, where 'good' is appropriate to the type of argument you have decided it to be. **'Every time I have played chess with James he has been so irritating that I have been unable to concentrate, and in losing to him I have lost a lot of money. Tonight I am playing chess with Tom rather than James, but Susan tells me that Tom is as irritating as James. I am probably, therefore, going to lose concentration, and therefore money tonight.'**

by Mary Ormrod

Setting out this argument logic-book style will render it easier to evaluate than in its current state. When arguments are made in daily life they are often unclear and rambling. Words can be clouded by emotions, they can be inconsistent and many beliefs underpinning our conclusions are unarticulated. The tone of voice also affects our understanding of an argument's underlying claim. For example, the speaker in this argument, whom, for convenience, I shall call William, could be worried, annoyed or resigned. Setting out his argument logic-book style will present his claim clearly, along with the reasons for his belief. It can then be evaluated more easily.

The steps in setting out an argument logic-book style are identifying the conclusion and the premises, removing any cross-references or irrelevancies, ensuring consistency of terminology and explicating any malign suppressed premises.

The conclusion is "the assertion being made on the basis of the other sentence(s)." (Talbot, 2014, loc 268). It is not always immediately obvious as it is frequently not at the end of the argument, and often has no indicator words, such as "so" or "therefore". Here it is, in fact, at the end of the argument: "I am, probably, therefore, going to lose concentration..." In logic-book style the conclusion is always placed at the end of the argument.

The premises are "the reason(s) being offered for believing the conclusion." (Talbot, 2014, loc 268). They are often indicated by words such as "because", "since" or "after all". They can appear anywhere in the argument and again there may be no indicator words. One has to establish the premises based on the part they play in the argument. In this case they are "Every time I have played chess with James he has been so irritating that I have lost concentration. In losing to him, I have lost a lot of money. I am playing chess with Tom tonight. Susan tells me that Tom is as irritating as James."

I have removed "rather than James" in the second sentence as it does not provide any additional reason for believing William's conclusion. It is irrelevant, and its removal clarifies the argument without changing its meaning. I have also removed the sentence connectors "and" and "but" in the first and second sentences respectively. There do not appear to be any cross-references, inconsistent terminology or ambiguities. However, I have replaced "him" with "James" in the second premise, for clarity.

The argument does appear to be an enthymeme, in that it contains suppressed premises. Firstly, that because William lost concentration he lost the game and secondly, that they

are playing for money. However, these premises do not appear to be malign, so I have not made them explicit in the argument set out logic-book style as follows:

Premise 1   Every time I have played chess with James he has been so irritating I have been   unable to concentrate.
Premise 2   In losing to James I have lost a lot of money.
Premise 3   Tonight I am playing Tom.
Premise 4   Susan tells me that Tom is as irritating as James.
Conclusion   I am probably, therefore, going to lose concentration and therefore money tonight.

This argument is clearly inductive. William is relying on past experience to predict a future outcome in what he believes will be a similar situation. Such arguments rely on the Principle of the Uniformity of Nature, as developed by David Hume (1711-1776). This is the belief that the future will always be like the past. William thinks that because he has lost chess games in the past to an irritating opponent he will lose again when he plays Tom, who is as irritating as James, according to Susan. Unlike a deductive argument an inductive argument can never be conclusive; it is always possible to add something more which may either strengthen or weaken its conclusion.

It is therefore non-monotonic and must be evaluated *a posteriori*. In other words, one can only evaluate it by recourse to empirical knowledge. The question is whether William's assertion follows from his premises, and the degree to which these are true will strengthen or weaken it.

The argument is one from causal generalisation, analogy and authority. Causal generalisations arise from people's experiences of specific events seemingly following other events. There are several events leading up to the claim in this case: that because James is irritating William loses concentration, because he loses concentration he plays badly, because he plays badly he loses the game and because he loses the game he loses money.

This has led William to conclude that if an opponent is irritating, he will respond in the same way and the same outcomes will occur. However, David Hume (1711-1776) says that this expectation is simply because individuals link certain effects from multiple experiences of particular event types. So one comes to expect that a second event will follow from the first. In this case, William believes that one event - James's being irritating - leads to several effects. According to the Oxford Companion to Philosophy (2005), "It has been argued that if a particular event is the effect of a combination of causes, it may be false that any of these causes necessitated the effect". It is, therefore, possibly false that James being irritating in itself led to William's losing the chess game, and this undermines his conclusion.

In addition, William's reasons for his conclusion are based on his subjective experience of playing chess with James. He has extrapolated from it that he will probably lose to another irritating opponent. However, the sample size is very small. William has clearly played James more than once as implied by the phrase "every time", but he may have played him only three times, so perhaps he is being inductively bold. It would be interesting to know whether he has played an irritating opponent and managed not to lose concentration.

It is also possible that the correlation between James being irritating and William losing concentration is accidental. There could be other reasons for this, such as being startled by something in the room. It is also possible that the causal relation runs the other way. For example, William may be irritated by James because he is a better player. In addition, simply believing that Tom is analogous to James, because, according to Susan, he is as irritating as James is unjustified.

Arguments from analogy suggest that if things are similar there will be further similarities. William is inferring that because Susan has told him she finds Tom irritating he will also find Tom irritating. In making this supposition he has made an auxiliary assumption that Susan's judgement is correct. One is then being asked to extrapolate from William's being irritated by his chess opponent James to the claim that William will find Tom as irritating as James leading, probably, to the same outcome of the chess game.

William may not find Tom irritating at all, or at least, not to the extent that he loses concentration.
Furthermore, it is possible to question the relevance of Susan's assessment of Tom to the matter, and her authority and plausibility. If an argument from authority is to succeed, the authority must be an authority, and in the relevant area. One can ask why William relies on her judgement. Why does he think that because Susan finds James irritating he will, too? However, as William clearly does not know Tom he may have to accept her assessment of him. Learning that she is William's psychologist would strengthen the claim that he will find Tom as irritating as James. However, discovering that she is also Tom's girlfriend might suggest that she is biased, which would, at the least, cast doubt on her authority and weaken the argument. She might know that William has difficulty maintaining concentration against irritating opponents and is keen for him to lose.

This argument is weak, since its premises do not raise the likelihood that William's conclusion will be true. The number of questions to be asked of this argument demonstrates its weakness. It is not persuasive. William may very well understand that he allows his concentration to be undermined by his opponents' irritating behaviour, to the extent that he loses concentration and therefore the game. However, this could also be a self-fulfilling prophecy. If he is to succeed at chess and make money he must learn to control his response to irritating people.

References
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