Dona Warren, "Thinking Well: Uncovering Our Hidden Assumptions"

**Thinking Well:** Uncovering Our Hidden Assumptions

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**A (Very Little) Bit About Cognitive Therapy**

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**Cognitive Therapy**

Thought: I’ll never get this done on time.

Emotion: Anxiety

Behavior: Procrastination

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**Cognitive Therapy**

Thought: I’ll work a bit each day and get it done.

Emotion: Enthusiasm

Behavior: Getting to work

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**Cognitive Therapy**

By thinking better…

we can feel better…

and act better.

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“Psychological Problems … may result from commonplace processes such as faulty learning, making incorrect inferences on the basis of inadequate or incorrect information, and not distinguishing adequately between imagination and reality. Moreover, thinking can be unrealistic because it is derived from erroneous premises…” (Beck, *Cognitive Therapy*, pp. 20-21)

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Cognitive Therapy

What are you feeling?

What are you thinking?

Should you think that way?

Better feeling

Better thoughts

What are some better ways to think?

This is psychology, not philosophy, but philosophy (critical thinking) can help out here.

A (Very Little) Bit About Critical Thinking

Reasons for Belief

I believe that we have moral obligations toward animals because my parents were animal rights activists.

Causal Reason

- Doesn't try to provide reason to think that the belief is true

Reasons for Belief

I believe that we have moral obligations toward animals because animals can experience pleasure and pain.

Justifying Reason

- Does try to provide reason to think that the belief is true
  - An argument is a unit of reasoning that attempts to establish that one idea is true by citing other ideas as evidence.

An Argument

We have moral obligations toward animals because animals can experience pleasure and pain. I know this because animals exhibit behaviors similar to behaviors that humans exhibit. I think it's clear that we're obligated to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. Besides, our ecosystem is essential to our survival and we have a moral obligation to ensure our own survival so we have moral obligations toward things that constitute an important part of our ecosystem. Animals constitute an important part of our ecosystem.

An Argument Diagrammed

- Animals exhibit behaviors similar to behaviors that humans exhibit.
- Our ecosystem is essential to our survival.
- We have moral obligations toward things that constitute an important part of our ecosystem. Animals constitute an important part of our ecosystem.
- We're obligated to maximize pleasure and minimize pain.
- We have moral obligations toward animals.
Argument Parts

We have moral obligations toward animals.

Animals can experience pleasure and pain.

Animals exhibit behaviors similar to behaviors that humans exhibit.

Ultimate Conclusion

Argument Parts

We have moral obligations toward animals.

Animals can experience pleasure and pain.

Animals exhibit behaviors similar to behaviors that humans exhibit.

Argument Evaluation

A good argument = An argument that gives us good reason to think that the ultimate conclusion is true.

• An argument is good if and only if it has at least one good line of reasoning.
• A line of reasoning is good if and only if all of its premises are good and all of its inferences are good.
• A premise is good only if it’s true.
• An inference is good only if should the ideas on “top” of the inference be true then the idea on the “bottom” of the inference will be true as well.
Argument Evaluation
Evaluating Inferences: Implicit Premise Technique

1. Find the implicit premise needed to perfect the inference.
   Often this involves
   a. Identifying the “common concepts” between the top idea and the bottom idea,
   b. Identifying the “left-over” concepts from the top idea and the bottom idea, and
   c. Constructing a missing premise of the form “If [left-over concept from top idea] then [left-over concept from bottom idea]” (or equivalent).
2. Evaluate this implicit premise.

Argument Evaluation

We don’t have moral obligations toward animals.
Animals are nothing but little machines.
Animals can’t sue us.

Evaluating Inferences: Implicit Premise Technique

If something can’t sue us then we don’t have moral obligations toward it.

Argument Evaluation

• An argument is good if and only if it has at least one good line of reasoning.
• A line of reasoning is good if and only if all of its explicit and implicit premises are good and all of its inferences are good.
• A premise is good only if it’s true.
• An inference is good only if should the ideas on “top” of the inference be true, then the idea on the “bottom” of the inference will be true as well.

Cognitive Therapy & Critical Thinking

Cognitive Therapy and Critical Thinking

What are you feeling?
What are you thinking?
Should you think that way?
If not
Better feelings
Better thoughts
What are some better ways to think?
Anxiety

I'm going to fail this test.

Visible Belief

Hidden Beliefs are

• Reasons for the Visible Belief
• Subconclusions between the Visible Belief and the emotion
• Implicit Premises presupposed by the various inferences

I don't know the answer to the first question on this test.

Why should I think that's true?

I'm going to fail this test.

• Smart people never fail tests.
• Only smart people are likeable.

Why should I think that's true?

If I don't know one answer then I won't know any answers.

Smart people can and do fail tests sometimes.

Being smart isn't what makes someone likeable.

Should you Think this Way? What are Some Better Ways to Think?

If I know something, I should be able to think of it right away.

There are lots of things I know that I can't think of right away.

I might know lots of other answers even if I don't know this one.

Smart people can and do fail tests sometimes.

Being smart isn't what makes someone likeable.

Inferences Implicit Premises

The exam that I wrote contained an error, so the exam I wrote was terrible.

Fact f is of definitive importance.

If a few x are P then almost all x are P.

Fact f is of almost no importance.

I already have an A in the class.

I know the future.

My feelings are accurate.

If x is a good thing then I should do it.

Fact f is of definitive importance.

Fact f is of almost no importance.

I know what people are thinking.

I know what people are thinking.

I know what people are thinking.

If something bad happens then it's my fault.

But it's important to take the arguments on a case-by-case basis.
In General…

- Is it true?
- Why should I think that’s true?
- What’s so bad about that? If this were true, then what?
- Why should I think that’s true?
- What’s so bad about that? If this were true, then what?

Messy reasoning
- Lots of false assumptions

Organized reasoning
- More true assumptions

Bibliography