

Arguments Philosophy 150: Handout 1

1. **ARGUMENT:** An argument (in the relevant, philosophical sense) is a connected series of statements, which are called **PREMISES**, that are intended to establish yet another claim, which is called the **CONCLUSION**.

Example: All superheroes are strong.
 Spiderman is a superhero.
 Therefore, Spiderman is strong.

2. **GOOD ARGUMENT:** A good argument is one that meets the following two criteria: (1) It is a valid argument, and (2) each and every one of its premises is true. If an argument fails to meet either criterion (1), criterion (2), or both criteria (1) and (2), then it is a **BAD ARGUMENT**. That is, an argument is bad if it is not valid, if at least one of its premises is false, or if it both is not valid and has at least one false premise.

3. **VALID ARGUMENT:** An argument is valid when its conclusion is adequately supported by its premises. Unfortunately, what counts as adequate support is tricky, but we can give the following equivalent formulations of the definition of validity.

An argument is valid when its conclusion *must* be true given that its premises are true.

Or, to put it another way,

an argument is valid when, given that its premises are true, it is *impossible* that its conclusion is false.

Or, to put it yet another way,

an argument is valid when the truth of its premises *guarantees* the truth of its conclusion.

How can we tell whether an argument is valid? First, assume that the premises are true. Second, given that the premises are true, try to devise a scenario in which the conclusion is false.

- If you *can* devise such a scenario, then the argument is *not* valid.
- If you can devise no such scenario, then the argument is valid.