

To determine the accuracy of the conclusion, we must determine the accuracy of the premises. If they are true, then the conclusion must be true.

Review the dialogue at the beginning of this chapter and see if you can identify any deductive arguments that use this reasoning form.

All these basic argument forms—application of a general rule, *modus ponens*, *modus tollens*, and disjunctive syllogism—are found not only in informal, everyday conversations but also at more formal levels of thinking. They appear in academic disciplines, in scientific inquiry, in debates on social issues, and elsewhere. Many other argument forms—both deductive and inductive—also constitute human reasoning. By sharpening your understanding of these ways of thinking, you will be better able to make sense of the world by constructing and evaluating effective arguments.

**Thinking Activity 10.3**

**EVALUATING ARGUMENTS**

Analyze the following arguments by completing these steps:

1. Summarize the reasons and conclusions given.
2. Identify which, if any, of the following deductive argument forms are used:
  - of a general rule
  - *modus ponens* (affirming the antecedent)
  - *modus tollens* (denying the consequence)
  - disjunctive syllogism
3. Evaluate the truth of the reasons that support the conclusion.

① For if the brain is a machine of ten billion nerve cells and the mind can somehow be explained as the summed activity of a finite number of chemical and electrical reactions, [then] boundaries limit the human prospect—we are biological and our souls cannot fly free.

—Edward O. Wilson, *On Human Nature*

② The state is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part.

—Aristotle, *Politics*

③ There now is sophisticated research that strongly suggests a deterrent effect [of capital punishment]. Furthermore, the principal argument against the deterrent effect is weak. The argument is that in most jurisdictions where capital punishment has been abolished there has been no immediate, sharp increase in what had been capital crimes. But in those jurisdictions, the actual act of abolition was an insignificant event because for years the death penalty had been imposed

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rarely, if at all. Common sense—which deserves deference until it is refuted—suggests that the fear of death can deter some premeditated crimes, including some murders.

—George F. Will, *Cleveland Plain-Dealer*, March 13, 1981

④ If the increased power which science has conferred upon human volitions is to be a boon and not a curse, the ends to which these volitions are directed must grow commensurately with the growth of power to carry them out. Hitherto, although we have been told on Sundays to love our neighbor, we have been told on weekdays to hate him, and there are six times as many weekdays as Sundays. Hitherto, the harm that we could do to our neighbor by hating him was limited by our incompetence, but in the new world upon which we are entering there will be no such limit, and the indulgence of hatred can lead only to ultimate and complete disaster.

—Bertrand Russell, *The Expanding Mental Universe*

⑤ The extreme vulnerability of a complex industrial society to intelligent, targeted terrorism by a very small number of people may prove the fatal challenge to which Western states have no adequate response. Counterforce alone will never suffice. The real challenge of the true terrorist is to the basic values of a society. If there is no commitment to shared values in Western society—and if none are imparted in our amoral institutions of higher learning—no increase in police and burglar alarms will suffice to preserve our society from the specter that haunts us—not a bomb from above but a gun from within.

—James Billington, *The Gun Within*

⑥ To fully believe in something, to truly understand something, one must be intimately acquainted with its opposite. One should not adopt a creed by default, because no alternative is known. Education should prepare students for the “real world” not by segregating them from evil but by urging full confrontation to test and modify the validity of the good.

—Robert Baron, *In Defense of ‘Teaching’ Racism, Sexism, and Fascism*

⑦ The inescapable conclusion is that society secretly *wants* crime, *needs* crime, and gains definite satisfactions from the present mishandling of it! We condemn crime; we punish offenders for it; but we need it. The crime and punishment ritual is a part of our lives. We need crimes to wonder at, to enjoy vicariously, to discuss and speculate about, and to publicly deplore. We need criminals to identify ourselves with, to envy secretly, and to punish stoutly. They do for us the forbidden, illegal things we *wish* to do and, like scapegoats of old, they bear the burdens of our displaced guilt and punishment—“the iniquities of us all.”

—Karl Menninger, *The Crime of Punishment*