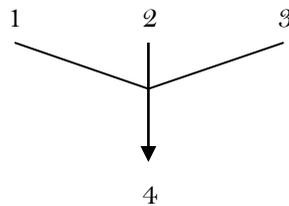


Argument by elimination

Reading (before seminar)

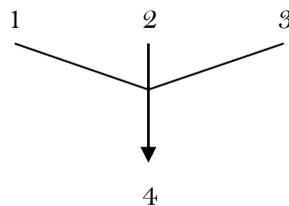
Here you will learn two basic forms of **argument by elimination**. An argument of the first form begins by identifying all possibilities. It then eliminates all possibilities but one and concludes that this remaining possibility must be actual. For example:

1. My keys are either next to my bed, on the coffee table, or in my coat pocket.
2. My keys are not next to my bed.
3. My keys are not on the coffee table.
4. My keys are in my coat pocket.



An argument of the second form begins from a supposition and then identifies every possibility given the truth of that supposition. The argument then eliminates *all* of these possibilities and concludes that the supposition is false. For example:

1. If the stolen jewel is in the thief's apartment, then it is hidden either under the carpet or in the couch cushions.
2. It is not hidden under the carpet.
3. It is not hidden in the couch cushions.
4. The stolen jewel is not in the thief's apartment.



Here the supposition is that the stolen jewel is in the thief's apartment.

Note that both forms of argument by elimination must include a premise identifying all possibilities (perhaps given some supposition). Students often neglect to include this crucial premise!

Practice (in seminar)

In 3.16 of the *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius offers this argument by elimination:

Body. Soul. Mind.

Sensations: the body.

Desires: the soul.

Reasoning: the mind.

To experience sensations: even grazing beasts do that. To let your desires control you: even wild animals do that – and rutting humans, and tyrants (from Phalaris to Nero ...).

To make your mind your guide to what seems best: even people who deny the gods do that. Even people who betray their country. Even people who do <...> behind closed doors.

If all the rest is common coin, then what is unique to the good man?

To welcome with affection what is sent by fate.

Let's diagram this argument together.

Homework (after seminar)

Exercise 1. Return to *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.5, in which Aristotle offers an argument by elimination. Diagram the argument. You will need to extrapolate from the text!

Exercise 2. What is the relationship between the second form of argument by elimination and modus tollens? Justify your answer.