

Guidance on describing how an argument is supposed to work

Consider the following argument:

“We have recently observed a growing number of imports of a new synthetic drug called ‘Brimstone.’ The bulk of Brimstone production occurs in Brabania, a small European nation which has the conditions that can support the growth of leph-box plants, a key ingredient of Brimstone. There are few other countries that have areas that meet the precise conditions to grow Brimstone. The number of importations of ‘Brimstone’ detected by law enforcement in the last 12 months have increased by 28%. People aged between 15 and 19 comprise the primary demand group for Brimstone, with no expectation of reduced demand. We therefore assess that the importation of Brimstone will continue along this upward trajectory for the foreseeable future.”

A description of how this argument is supposed to work might look like this:

“This argument extrapolates a trend to conclude that Brimstone imports will continue to rise. For these types of arguments to work, you need to establish that the trend is genuine and will indeed continue uninterrupted. For imports, you would need to consider if both supply and demand would continue on their current trajectory.”

Here’s another simple example:

“The Empire is not planning to invade Endor. It would not be in their interests to do so. This is because it would result in an expensive and costly war that would be opposed by the local population of Ewoks who are experts at guerilla warfare. It would be much better for The Empire to negotiate, which is very likely to achieve a satisfactory outcome without the risk of an embarrassing defeat for the galactic superpower at the hands of an adorable, albeit ruthless enemy.”

A description of how this argument is supposed to work might look like this:

“This argument tries to infer the intentions of The Empire by considering the pros and cons of their various options. When trying to approximate the strategic calculus of an adversary you need to make sure you have considered their viable options, what their interests and goals are, how they make decisions, and what pressures could lead them to making poor choices. Importantly, you don’t want to fall into the trap of mirror-imagining - where we project our interests and risk appetite onto the actor when considering what would be rationale for them to do.”

[Please note “extrapolating a trend” & “trying to approximate the strategic calculus of an adversary” are not types of arguments used in the example arguments you are evaluating. This is because we want you to describe the types of arguments in your own words.]