

Logic Reading 2.06 Enthymemes

"Logic: The art of thinking and reasoning in strict accordance with the limitations and incapacities of the human misunderstanding."

-Ambrose Bierce

_____ **Introduction.** When we encounter arguments in the normal course of conversation, we very rarely encounter them in the form of syllogisms as we have been studying them. Instead, we find arguments stated in a different form, requiring us to translate them into syllogisms ourselves-or to ask our opponent to do it in order to further explain himself.

In the last reading, we discussed various ways to convert statements as we might hear them in normal conversation into logical propositions. In this chapter, we will discuss the most common way in which arguments are stated in ordinary conversation and how to convert such arguments into regular syllogisms. Doing this will allow us better to assess the arguments of our opponents.

_____ **What is an Enthymeme?** The most common way to express an argument is in the form of an *enthymeme* (pronounced, *en' thuh meem*). An enthymeme is a syllogism that does not contain both of the necessary premises-or contains both of its premises but is missing a conclusion. The missing premise or conclusion is implied, but not stated. For example, let's take the following syllogism:

Atheists are people who disbelieve in God
John is an atheist
Therefore, John disbelieves in God

If we were to use this argument in ordinary conversation, we would probably say it this way:

John is an atheist
Therefore, John disbelieves in God

We would say it this way because we would naturally assume that whoever we were talking to would know what an atheist is: namely, a person who does not believe in God. Therefore, we would not bother to use the first (or major) premise.

This is the most common reason for using enthymemes: that it is unnecessary to use one of the premises because we assume that one of the premises is common knowledge, eliminating the need to state it.

_____ **Three Kinds of Enthymemes.** There are three kinds of enthymemes, as follows:

- ✓ **First Order** enthymemes
- ✓ **Second Order** enthymemes
- ✓ **Third Order** enthymemes

These different kinds of enthymemes are distinguished on the basis of which proposition they are missing.

_____ **First Order Enthymemes.** Enthymemes of the **First Order** are distinguished by the fact that they are missing the **major premise**. The syllogism on the previous page is an example of a First Order enthymeme. In this argument:

All atheists^M are people who disbelieve in God^P
John^S is an atheist^M
Therefore, John^S disbelieves in God^P

we see that ***All atheists are people who disbelieve in God*** is the major premise (because it contains the major term). Therefore, the enthymeme:

John is an atheist
Therefore, John disbelieves in God

is an enthymeme of the First Order. It eliminates the major premise because it assumes that the hearer already knows it.

_____ **Second Order Enthymemes.** Enthymemes of the **Second Order** are distinguished by the fact that they are missing the **minor premise**. An example of this would be the following enthymeme:

Greek generals are people who are skilled in battle
Therefore, Alexander (the Great) is skilled in battle

What is missing here? What is missing is the premise, ***Alexander***

the Great is a Greek general. This is the minor premise (because it contains the minor term). We didn't include it because we assumed that the person we were talking to would know that Alexander was a Greek general. The complete syllogism would look like this:

Greek generals^M are people who are skilled in battle^P
Alexander the Great^S is a Greek general^M
Therefore, Alexander the Great^S is a person who is skilled in battle^P

_____ **Third Order Enthymemes.** Enthymemes of the ***Third Order*** are enthymemes in which the conclusion, rather than either of the two premises, is missing. There are two reasons for enthymemes of the Third Order The first is the use of the rhetorical device called ***innuendo***. Innuendo is when you want your listener to see the force of a logical conclusion by stating the premises for him and letting him draw the obvious conclusion.

The second reason involves logical exercises by which you want a student to be able to practice his logical skills by drawing a logical conclusion from two premises.

An example of a Third Order enthymeme for the purpose of innuendo would be the following:

Homework is due on Monday
And today is Monday

The conclusion the hearer is obviously supposed to draw is ***Therefore, homework is due today.***

_____ **How to Use Enthymemes.** When encountering enthymemes of the First and Second Order in arguments with another person, there are two things you can do:

- ✓ Point out the missing premise yourself; or
- ✓ Ask your opponent to state the missing premise

If your opponent uses an enthymeme to hide a faulty premise, you can state what the missing premise is, and point out that either the premise is false, or that the complete syllogism is invalid.

You can also ask your opponent to state the missing premise. This is useful when the argument is so clearly fallacious or the missing premise so clearly false that your opponent will be embarrassed to say it himself.

_____ **Summary.** An **enthymeme** is the most common form of an argument. An enthymeme is an argument that does not contain one of its premises, or which is missing the conclusion. There are three kinds or **orders** of enthymemes. In **First Order** enthymemes, the major premise is missing. In **Second Order** enthymemes, the minor premise is missing. In **Third Order** enthymemes, the conclusion is missing.

Premises (and conclusions) are sometimes dropped from arguments because it is assumed the hearers already know them and that it is therefore, unnecessary to state them.

In actual argument you can either point out the missing premise or conclusion yourself or ask your opponent to state it himself.

Enthymemes

Order:

First

Second

Third

Characteristic:

Missing **major** premise

Missing **minor** premise

Missing **conclusion**

How to Use Enthymemes:

- ✓ Point out the missing premise yourself
- ✓ Ask your opponent to state the missing premise