

## Answers to Practice 4: Finding flaws in the argument

Prompts	Example found	There is no example	See page
1 False premises	✓		79
2 Two wrongs don't make a right		✓	104
3 Stereotyping	✓		84
4 Lack of consistency in the argument	✓ (3)		59, 61
5 Unnecessary background information	✓ (2)		52, 150
6 Lack of precision	✓		59
7 Assumption that is not supported by the evidence	✓ (3)		74–8
8 Incorrectly assuming a causal link	✓		90
9 False correlation	✓		91
10 Meeting necessary conditions	✓		93
11 Meeting sufficient conditions			94
12 False analogy	✓		96
13 Deflection	✓		98
14 Complicity	✓		98
15 Exclusion		✓	98
16 Unwarranted leaps (e.g. castle of cards; sleight of hand)	✓ (2)		100
17 Emotive language	✓		101
18 Attacking the person	✓		101
19 Misrepresentation	✓		103
20 Trivialisation		✓	103
21 Tautology	✓		104
22 Poor referencing	✓		144–5 167–8

## Answers to Practice 4: Finding flaws in the argument

### The Great Chain of Being (Text 6)

*'Notions of a "Great Chain of Being" and of a natural order to the universe continued to exert ideological significance during the eighteenth century and beyond.' Discuss.*

The concept of the 'Great Chain of Being' dominated thinking and writing for many centuries before the eighteenth century. Indeed, Shakespeare and other great writers of the seventeenth century drew on the idea for inspiration. By the eighteenth century, things had started to change radically. This was a period of expansion intellectually and geographically for European states, including Britain. Old ideas were dying out as soldiers travelled the world during the wars against the American colonies and the expanding empire (Colley, 2003), and merchants traded more extensively with the East. Barking (1957) and Madison (1967) argue that enlightenment ideas and scientific observation replaced more traditional ideas. A revolution in taste took place as the homes of the rich filled with *chinoiserie*, art from China. Young people came of age through making a 'Grand Tour' of Europe.<sup>5</sup> The concept of the chain of being was being supplanted by other ideas more familiar to our modern world.<sup>4</sup>

In this period of exploration and change, the ongoing wars between England and revolutionary France led to an unusually large production of political propaganda. Pendleton's<sup>22</sup> analysis of this showed that many<sup>6</sup> pamphlets used the concept of the 'chain of being' to encourage the population to support the war.<sup>4</sup> There were many ways that publicists referred to the idea of a natural order to encourage people to refuse the revolutionary ideologies espoused by the French and to encourage them to defend England in the event of an invasion. Those producing pamphlets and other pro-war literature referred to the notion of a natural order to decry French theories of liberty and equality and to argue that English people should take on a patriotic defence of the realm.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>5</sup>The propaganda was very insulting about the French and their new ideas and could easily have caused a diplomatic incident and an earlier outbreak of war. Fortunately, England and France are hundreds of miles apart, and such distances were more significant in the eighteenth century.

### Comments

- 5 Unnecessary background information, especially as this is not used to look specifically at the idea of the chain of being. On the other hand, important background information, such as explaining what is meant by the 'chain of being', is not provided.
- 4 Inconsistency. This paragraph suggests the concept of the chain of being was waning. The next paragraph suggests it was still widely used (see <sup>4</sup> below). The author doesn't show how these two apparently contradictory ideas could both be true. For example, the idea could have been used in the propaganda for political purposes even if many people no longer believed in it. Apparent contradictions such as this need to be explained and resolved.
- 22 Poor reference. No date is provided here and Pendleton is not fully detailed in the references, so it would be hard for the reader to check this source of information for themselves.
- 6 Lack of precision. 'Many' is a vague term. The reader needs to know how many? What proportion?
- 21 Tautology. This paragraph repeats the same basic idea three times but in different words: i.e. that publicists used the idea of natural order to encourage a pro-war patriotic stance rather than support France and its ideas of liberty and equality. The final sentence, for example, does not take the argument forward or provide any new information for the reader.
- 5 This paragraph provides unnecessary background about the impact of the propaganda on the conduct of the war by the French, which is not what the question asks.

## Answers to Practice 6: Finding flaws in the argument

This means that the French leader, Buonaparte, wouldn't have seen the propaganda and so didn't launch a full-scale invasion.<sup>1,7,16</sup>

The idea of a natural order was used to bolster the authority of those with social and economic power. Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) argued that the concept of a natural order was used to justify all kinds of injustice. She argued that people who were cruel to animals and children, were also likely to agree with the slave trade, and the oppression of women, which she opposed. However, she clearly thought it was acceptable to lump humans who lacked money and power into the same bracket as animals. As animals were lower down the chain of being at that time, her comparison of animals with humans who lacked power shows she thought of poor people and slaves as being lower types of being.<sup>19</sup> Her prejudices are typical of ruling class women from that period.<sup>3</sup>

Clearly, rich people in the eighteenth century found the idea of a natural order beneficial.<sup>13</sup> This is particularly outrageous when one considers how vulnerable the poor were at the time, how sad their lives and how dependent on a kind word from their social betters.<sup>17</sup> People were taught to regard those richer than themselves as their 'betters' and to refer to them as their masters. People were meant to accept that they must regard others as superior by virtue of their birth, and to defer to them in all things.

### Comments

- 1 False premises. The argument proposed for the lack of an invasion is based on false premises: it is factually inaccurate that England and France are hundreds of miles apart so this would not be a reason for the propaganda not being seen in France. The first paragraph of this piece suggests there was a lot of travel and exchange of ideas, which, if true, would make it more likely that the propaganda would have been seen in France.
- 7 Unsupported assumption about why Buonaparte didn't launch a full-scale invasion.
- 16 Unwarranted leaps. The author jumps from an unsubstantiated point (that the propaganda could have resulted in invasion – we don't know this) to another (that Buonaparte couldn't have seen it), to an unsubstantiated conclusion about why a full-scale invasion didn't happen.
- 19 Misrepresentation. Mary Wollstonecraft draws a comparison between different kinds of oppression, because she saw a common pattern of cruelty, which she opposed. The author misrepresents her intentions by claiming she regarded the poor and slaves as more animal like, simply because the idea of the chain of being was used by others at that time.
- 3 Stereotyping. Although many women of her class may have held such prejudiced opinions, the author stereotypes Mary Wollstonecraft by assuming she held the same ideas, without giving any evidence of this.
- 13 Deflection. The word 'clearly' suggests that the author has established how the rich people used the idea of natural order. This can deflect the reader from noticing that sufficient evidence has not yet been provided to prove the argument.
- 17 Emotive language. Use of words such as 'outrageous' and phrases such as 'sad lives' and 'dependent on a kind word' appeal to the emotions rather than relying on facts and reasons to advance the argument.

## Answers to Practice 4: Finding flaws in the argument

The idea of a natural order was strong even in the beginning of the twentieth century. After the Great War of 1914–18, working men and women gained the vote and social mobility increased. Far fewer people worked as domestic servants after the war. Having a vote on equal terms made people realise that democracy was a good thing and seems to have made them less keen to do jobs as servants.<sup>8,9</sup> If everyone had the vote, then they were equal before the law, and if they were all equal, then there evidently wasn't a natural order, so the idea of a natural order was bound to die out and the vote would bring about the end of social hierarchies.<sup>16,7</sup>

Such change would be welcomed. Many judges, priests, politicians and educators, argued that the chain of being was part of God's plan and this effectively frightened people into compliance with the way the country was run. Clerics such as Watson, the Bishop of Llandaff,<sup>22</sup> wrote that it was God who let people get rich and powerful, signs of his favour and proof of their superiority. Other writers said similar things. For example, a poster in 1802 wrote about it being 'the ordinance of God' that the world was graded into different levels of being. Another, a pamphleteer (Pratt, 1803), argued that changing the order established by God would 'unsettle the whole system of the spheres; the planets would rush on each other ... and the earth be shrivelled, like a scroll, by a spark from the sun'. However, Pratt was obviously not very bright and had a very poor grasp of science so was not likely to be taken seriously by his contemporaries.<sup>7,18,4</sup>

### Comments

- 8 Incorrectly assuming a causal link. The author assumes a causal link between the extension of voting rights and the reduction in the number of domestic servants. However, there is no obvious reason why having a vote should create a different set of work opportunities for people. The reduction in the number of servants is more likely to be the result of economic changes, such as new kinds of job with better wages becoming available, or families no longer being able to afford to pay competitive wages.
- 9 This is also an example of a false correlation: mistaking the indirect correlation of increased suffrage (more people having the vote) and decreasing numbers of servants as directly connected.
- 16 and 7 Unwarranted leaps (castle of cards) and assumptions. The last sentence is another example of the author jumping from one unsubstantiated claim to another, such as that equality before the law automatically brings about equality of other kinds, such as social equality. However, social hierarchies are usually related to other things such as attitudes to ancestry, occupation, income, geography and ethnicity rather than depending on whether someone has the vote. Therefore, the author is wrong to draw the conclusion that the vote brought about the end of social hierarchies.
- 22 Poor referencing. No date and no reference given below so the reader can't check this for accuracy.
- 7 Unsupported assumption. The author makes an assumption here that Pratt's contemporaries would not take him seriously but does not provide any evidence to support this. Pratt's views might have been shared by others at that time. (See next page.)
- 18 This amounts to a personal attack on Pratt rather than a reasoned analysis of his views.
- 4 Inconsistency. The evidence is presented in a confusing, inconsistent way. The paragraph opens by arguing that references to God were effective. The author seems to cite Pratt as evidence of this effectiveness, but then states that nobody was likely to believe Pratt.

## Answers to Practice 4: Finding flaws in the argument

One person who contributed most to perpetuating ideas of a natural order was the Swiss scientist Kaspar Lavater. His work was translated into many languages and used as a manual by the educated classes when they were employing new servants or making judgements about new acquaintances. Lavater invented a new science known as physiognomy which set out to prove that a person's character could be read from their facial features and the shape of the skull. Lavater (1797) argued that certain features were typical of a higher class of people, who were more moral and typical of the European ruling classes. He argued that other features, such as those shared by poorer people, and people with darker skins, were signs of an inferior nature, closer to the animals. Obviously, this was nonsense and no right-minded person would believe that your physical features such as your skull would reflect your morals or worth.<sup>14</sup> This would be like assuming that the way people walk tells you how healthy they are.<sup>12</sup> However, many people at that time believed strongly in this method of working out who was superior and who inferior.

In the eighteenth century, people were more likely to believe in progress and change in the surrounding world, rather than a static concept such as the natural order.<sup>7</sup> There were people who used the concept of the chain of being in an instrumental way, to frighten or coerce people into accepting that there was nothing they could do to change their lot. Certain applications of the idea of 'natural order' were adopted by richer people, but this practice was likely to have been a fad or fashion, like doing a quiz in a magazine today.<sup>6,10</sup> Others used the idea to bolster their own sense of superiority. However, it is not likely that most people took such ideas seriously in the way they led their lives and made choices.<sup>5</sup> In this respect, notions of the great chain of being and the natural order were not significant by the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>11</sup>

### Comments

- 14 The author relies on complicity here, writing as if the audience would automatically agree. If the author thinks this is so obvious, then there is no need to state that it is obvious. If the author thinks the audience might not find this approach to be nonsense, then reasons for not accepting it are needed.
- 12 False analogy. The analogy is not useful as the writer argues that Lavater's system is nonsense, whereas the way a person walks can tell you a great deal about some illnesses.
- 7 This paragraph contains unsupported assumptions about what people believed. Not enough evidence has been included to support these assumptions. The assumptions are then used as reasons to support the conclusion proposed in the final sentence.
- 6 Lack of precision. Not enough detail provided.
- 10 Meeting necessary conditions. The necessary conditions for establishing this interim conclusion are not met. To substantiate that the idea of a natural order was used only as a fashionable pursuit, the author would have to do the following:
  - provide evidence that the idea was widely used amongst a certain group, and therefore constituted a 'fashion';
  - provide evidence that the idea was used in a particular way only for a certain time (as fashions are time-bound);
  - provide evidence that those who did use the concept of natural order in one aspect of their life, then acted in a contrary way in other aspects: that is, that the notion was not core to their belief system to such an extent that it ruled their behaviour.
- 11 The conclusion does not meet sufficient conditions as the evidence provided does not adequately support it. (See previous page.)

## Answers to Practice 4: Finding flaws in the argument

### References [compare with p. 257]<sup>22</sup>

#### Primary sources

- Anon (1802) *Such is Buonaparte*, London.<sup>c</sup>  
Kaspar Lavater<sup>a</sup> *Essays on Physiognomy*, Translated by Rev. C. Moore and illustrated after Lavater by Barlow, London, 1797.  
Pratt, *Pratt's Address to His Countrymen or the True Born Englishman's Castle*. London.  
Bishop of Llandaff<sup>d,e,f</sup>  
Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) *Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Middlesex.<sup>a,f</sup>  
White, C. *An Account of the Infinite Gradations in Man* (Read to the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester at Different Meetings) 1779.<sup>a,c,e</sup>

#### Secondary sources

- Madison.<sup>d,e,f</sup> (1967) 'The end of the Chain of Being: the impact of Descartian. *Journal of Medieval and Enlightenment Studies*, 66; 7.\*  
Barking, J.K. (1957) *Changes in Conceptions of the Universe*. Cotteridge: Poltergeist Press\*  
Linda Colley (2003) *Captives*.<sup>a,d,e</sup>  
Holmes, Geoffrey. (1977) 'Gregory King and the social structure of pre-industrial England' *Transactions of the Royal History Society*, 27 <sup>a,c</sup>  
Pendleton<sup>d,e</sup>  
E.P. Thompson *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) Middlesex: Penguin<sup>a,c</sup>

\* These two sources are hypothetical and provided for the purpose of the practice activity; the other sources are genuine.

#### Comments

- 22 Compare the details of these references with those for Practice 3. Note:
- (a) The order of items within each reference is not consistent from one reference to another, such as the order of the date, and whether initials or names are used.
  - (b) Not all the references used in the text are detailed in this list of references.
  - (c) Some items in the reference list do not appear in the text so should not appear here. It is possible that the author has used this source but not referenced it properly in the text.
  - (d) The information about the author is incomplete for some references so the reader cannot look these up.
  - (e) Some titles are not written in full (see list of references from Practice 3).
  - (f) Items are not in alphabetical order.