

Exercises for Better Philosophical Writing: Argument Analysis

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Construct an argument analysis outlining the following passage. Ask yourself: What is the *point*, or the *conclusion*, of the passage? (What is it trying to *show*?) What are the *premisses*, or the *steps*, which it uses to reach this conclusion? What are the justifications for each of these premisses? Once you have answered these questions, map out how you would organize this information in an essay: How many paragraphs will you need? What will each paragraph accomplish? Within each paragraph, what will you need to show?

“[Consider the craft of] helmsmanship, which saves not only souls but also bodies and valuables from the utmost dangers. This expertise is unassuming and orderly, and does not make itself grand, posturing as though its accomplishment is so magnificent... And the man who possesses the craft and who has accomplished these feats, disembarks and goes for a stroll along the sea-side and beside his ship, with a modest air. For he’s enough of an expert, I suppose, to conclude that it isn’t clear which ones of his fellow voyagers he has benefited by not letting them drown in the deep, and which ones he has harmed, knowing that they were no better in either body or soul when he set them ashore than they were when they embarked. So he concludes that if a man afflicted with serious incurable physical diseases did not drown, this man is miserable for not dying and has gotten no benefit from him. But if a man has many incurable diseases in what is more valuable than his body, his soul, life for that man is not worth living, and he won’t do him any favor if he rescues him from the sea or from prison or from anywhere else. He knows that for a corrupt person it’s better not to be alive, for he necessarily lives badly. That is why it’s not the custom for the helmsman to give himself glory even though he preserves us.”