

## Argument reconstruction and commentary

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-u6Ss640-kU>

This video is an interesting one to reconstruct because it clearly forms an argument, but the pictures do much of the work. The points that the arguer wishes to make are clarified by text, but the text is intermittent and incomplete, and requires filling out.

This 2 minute 35 second YouTube clip presents an argument that sometimes cycle lanes are not safe to use. This is presented explicitly at 0.03. There is a further implicit conclusion to draw from this, which is that when a cycle lane is not safe to use, it should not be used. While the cyclist does not make this point explicit, that further conclusion is clear from the way the cyclist behaves. The point of the clip is for the cyclist to justify the fact that he or she is not riding in the cycle lane. Thus the final conclusion of the argument is 'Sometimes cycle lanes should not be used by cyclists'.

In terms of the wider context of the argument, it is common for motorists to complain that cyclists do not use cycle lanes provided, and the cyclist is likely to be responding to such comments.

The cyclist gives us five reasons to think that sometimes cycle lanes are not safe to use.

1. At 0.22 the cyclist identifies the way the bus has crept into the cycle lane.
2. At 0.29 the cyclist notes that the cycle stencil marking on the road does not fit in the cycle lane.
3. At 0.50 our attention is drawn to the way cycle lanes stop and start.
4. At 1.40 the cyclist notes that the risk of the doors of parked cars opening requires the cyclist to move out into the road.
5. At 2.19 the cyclist notes the risk posed by cycle lanes around roundabouts.

Reasons 1 and 2 are evidence for the single claim that sometimes cycle lanes are too narrow to use safely.

The preliminary conclusion is:

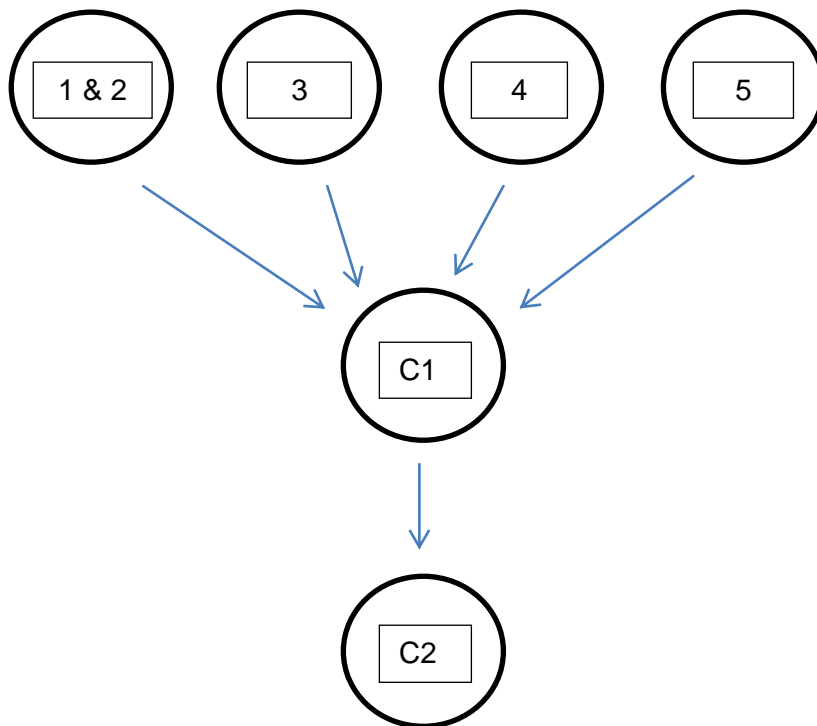
C1: Sometimes it is not safe to use the cycle lane,

and the final conclusion is:

C2: Sometimes the cycle lane should not be used by cyclists.

The basic structure of the argument is as follows:

Figure 1



### Reconstruction:

- P1) Sometimes the cycle lane is too narrow to be safely used by cyclists.
- P2) If the cycle lane is too narrow to be safely used by cyclists, it is usually safer for cyclists to use the main road lane than the cycle lane.
- P3) Sometimes cycle lanes stop and start.
- P4) If a cycle lane stops and starts, it is usually safer for a cyclist to use the main road lane than the cycle lane.
- P5) Sometimes there is a risk for cyclists being hit by suddenly opening doors from parked cars.
- P6) If there is a risk for cyclists being hit by suddenly opening doors from parked cars, it is usually safer for a cyclist to use the main road lane than the cycle lane.
- P7) Cycle lanes on roundabouts are not safe.
- P8) If there is a cycle lane on a roundabout it is usually safer to use the main road lane than the cycle lane.

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C1) Probably, sometimes it is safer for cyclists to use the main road lane than the cycle lane.

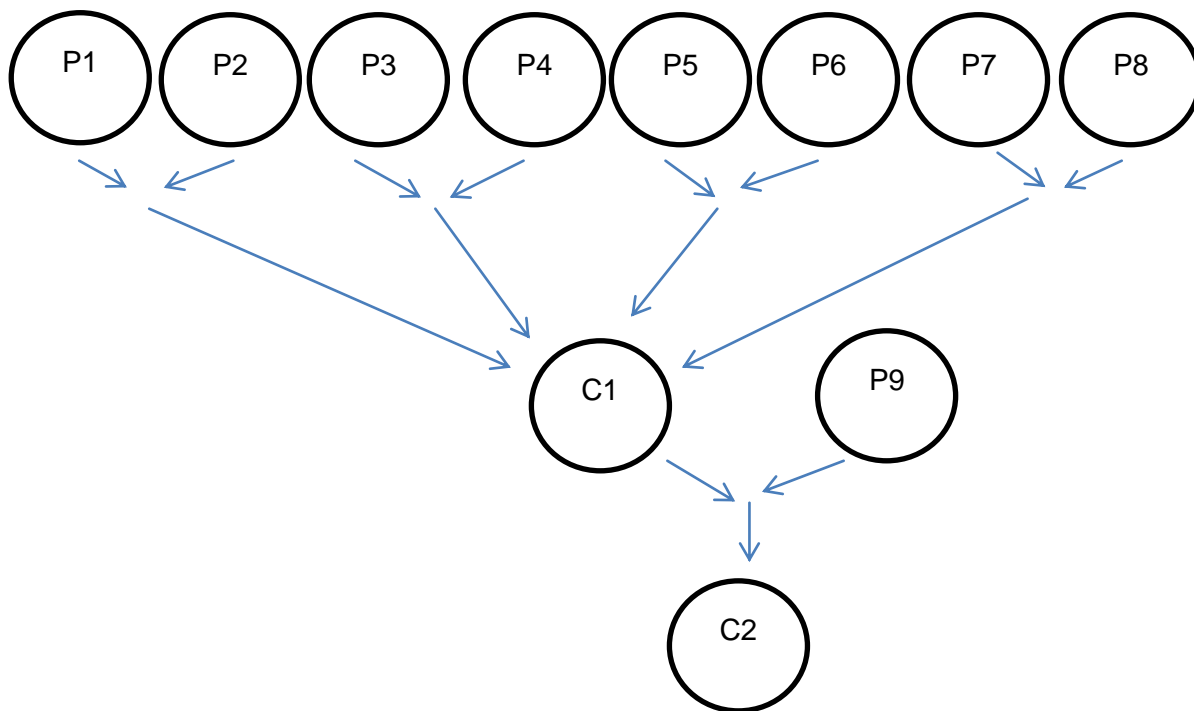
P9) If it is sometimes safer for cyclists to use the main road lane than the cycle lane then at those times cyclists should use the main road lane.

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C2) Probably, sometimes cyclists should use the main road lane.

This reconstruction can be diagrammed as follows:

Figure 2



At 0.03 the arguer presents the claim that cycle lanes are sometimes good to use, and at 1.09 it is pointed out that they are okay to use when they are wider. It would be possible to reconstruct a further argument for this. However, the fact that cycle lanes are sometimes safe to use doesn't support the main conclusion, so I have treated it as extraneous material.

At 2.26 the arguer suggests blaming cars for the door zone problem. Once again this is extraneous because it does not support the main conclusion.

The original reasons given by the arguer have been converted into propositions. The use of 'too narrow' in P1 is vague, but it is difficult to replace it with anything more useful. It is clearly a claim about safety, but as that is brought out in the rest of the premise, the vagueness does not present a huge problem. That vagueness will be returned to when the truth of the premise is discussed below.

Premises P1, P3, P5 and P7 all give reasons why cycle lanes may be unsafe to use. The point, however, is not just that cycle lanes may be unsafe, it is that the type of safety problem involved means that the cyclist will be safer using the main road. This has been brought out in C1. Why do we need to say that the cyclist will be safer rather than safe? It is clear that there are also safety risks in the main road lane. Cyclists can still be hit by traffic there. The point must therefore be one of comparative safety.

In seeking a connecting premise to get from P1, P3, P5 and P7, a single generalisation could have been used, but this option was rejected. So, a connecting premise which would render the argument valid is 'If a cycle lane is not safe, the cyclist will be safer in the main road lane'. However, something this general is clearly false, and is therefore uncharitable. If the entire road were flooded (or awash with lava), the cycle lane would be unsafe, but the main road would be no safer. The comparative safety of the main road is dependent on these specific safety concerns, which the arguer thinks the main road will avoid. Thus I have added a separate connecting premise for each reason, rather than a single generalisation.

A cyclist can still be killed or hurt on the main road, even when one of the hazards mentioned occurs in the cycle lane. Each connecting premise has therefore been softened to the claim that in such circumstances the main road is *usually* safer.

The inference from C1 to C2 has been presented as if it is free from exceptions. The arguer is attempting to justify the claim that there are occasions when a cyclist should be on the main road and not in the cycle lane. It is reasonable to suppose that the arguer thinks that such an argument will apply whenever these safety concerns arise.

### **Assessing the force/validity**

P2, P4, P6 and P8 employ conditionals where the consequent *usually* follows. Conclusion C1 therefore does not follow from the premises with complete certainty, and the argument is not valid.

The argument is forceful, however. If premises P1–P8 are true, C1 is more likely to be true than not. Further, because there are four independent reasons for accepting C1, C1 follows with a very high degree of probability.

The inference from C1 and P9 is a valid one: the probability is not any further diluted by this inference.

This is therefore an inductively forceful argument.

### **Assessing the soundness**

It seems unlikely that the video has been doctored, and it seems unlikely that any of the situations have been set up for the purposes of making a misleading video. In fact, my experience of road use tells me that the situations videoed are not unusual.

P3 is demonstrated as true by the evidence on the video: we see this happen. So, supposing the video is authentic, as argued for above, these premises are true.

P5 is not demonstrated on the video itself, as no car doors open while the cyclist is passing them. However, the risk that this could happen is clear, and there are sometimes reports in the newspapers of cyclists being hurt or killed by car doors opening. So it seems reasonable to suppose that P5 is true.

P7 is not argued for here, but I think it is true. The danger for a cyclist on a roundabout is that if the cyclist goes around the outside of the roundabout, a motorist approaching the cyclist from behind and trying to leave the roundabout may fail to give way to the cyclist. The danger is that roundabouts are not

designed to deal with multiple lanes, especially for traffic travelling at different speeds. So I think P7 is true.

The truth of P1 is difficult to assess because 'too narrow' is a little vague. There is a suggestion on the video for how to determine what counts as 'too narrow', in that if the cycle stencil does not fit, the arguer thinks that indicates that the lane is too narrow. It is clearly possible to make a cycle lane which is 'too narrow', in the sense that it can be narrow enough to be unsafe. And the arguer has given us an example to show where that causes a safety problem, in the form of the video showing the bus encroaching on part of the lane. So P1 is likely true.

P2, P4, P6 and P8 all make a connection between the reasons offered by the arguer and the conclusion he or she wishes to draw about the main road lane sometimes being safer than the cycle lane.

They all rest on an assumption that when certain kinds of dangers are presented by the cycle lane, the main road lane will be safer. It is true that when in the main road lane the cyclist will avoid the dangers of car doors, and will avoid the danger posed by being cut off on a roundabout.

The danger of a lane which stops and starts is probably caused by the danger of merging with traffic which is not expecting cyclists to merge. That danger can be avoided by remaining in the main lane, for then no merging occurs. The danger of narrow lanes presumably lies in the way that traffic may be tempted to pass when there is not in fact enough room to do so. Once again, that temptation would be avoided if the cyclists were in the main road lane, for then there would clearly not be room to pass.

The difficulty with assessing P2, P4, P6 and P8 is that they all claim that the main road lane will be safer. This is harder to assess, because there are also some safety risks there. Perhaps the only way to assess whether it is really safer would be to collect traffic accident statistics to find out whether cyclists are more often hurt, or more badly hurt, when in the main lane to avoid cycle lane hazards, or when in the cycle lane containing those hazards.

However, as C1 makes the moderate claim that *sometimes* it is safer to be in the main lane, it seems that we have been given a good enough reason to accept that. Further, although each of P2, P4, P6 and P8 make the softened claim that the main road lane is usually safer in their respective circumstances, they each provide support to C1, making the moderate claim made in C1 extremely likely to follow. So C1 is very likely true on the basis of the evidence presented.

It is more difficult to be confident of the truth of P9. P9 claims that if the main road lane is safer, then that is where a cyclist should ride. However, someone could argue that safety should not be the main consideration here. The convenience of other road users is also important. So P9 is at least controversial. P9 is the support needed for the main conclusion, and it would really need an additional argument to support it. However, as it doesn't occur explicitly, it is not surprising that no support is offered for it.

So, the inference to C1 is inductively sound, but the further step to C2 requires further investigation to establish the truth or falsity of P9.