

ONE Arguments and Dialogues

The three goals of critical argumentation are to identify, analyze, and evaluate arguments. The term “argument” is used in a special sense, referring to the giving of reasons to support or criticize a claim that is questionable, or open to doubt. To say something is a successful argument in this sense means that it gives a good reason, or several reasons, to support or criticize a claim. But why should one ever have to give a reason to support a claim? One might have to because the claim is open to doubt. This observation implies that there are always two sides to an argument, and thus that an argument takes the form of a dialogue. On the one side, the argument is put forward as a reason in support of a claim. On the other side, that claim is seen as open to doubt, and the reason for giving the reason is to remove that doubt. In other words, the offering of an argument presupposes a dialogue between two sides. The notion of an argument is best elucidated in terms of its purpose when used in a dialogue. At risk of repetition, the following general statement about arguments is worth remembering throughout chapter 1 and the rest of this book. The basic purpose of offering an argument is to give a reason (or more than one) to support a claim that is subject to doubt, and thereby remove that doubt.

Chapter 1 presents several key examples of dialogues in which one side makes a claim and the other expresses doubts about it. In this chapter it is shown how argument is based on a dialogue framework. In the dialogues, there are many specific arguments, and they are connected together with other arguments. The examples will show how argumentation takes the form of a chain made up by linking several specific arguments together. The word “argumentation” denotes this dynamic process of connecting arguments together for some purpose in a dialogue. The

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internal core of an argument is a reason, or set of reasons, offered to support a claim, called the conclusion of the argument. This set of statements is the internal core of the argument. But around this core there is also a framework of argument use, in which argumentation is used for some purpose in a dialogue. Chapter 1 fits the internal core into the framework of dialogue, giving the reader an integrated introduction to the notion of argument that fits both components together, gaining an integrated perspective, that helps him or her to grasp the concept of reasonable argument at the core of critical argumentation.

ONE Dialogues

A dialogue is a type of goal-directed conversation in which two participants (in the minimal case) are participating by taking turns. At each move one party responds to the previous move of the other party. Thus each dialogue is a connected sequence of moves (speech acts) that has a direction of flow. Dialogues are conventional frameworks that make rational argumentation possible. Dialogues do not contain only arguments. They can also contain explanations, instructions on how to do something, and so forth. But often they do contain argumentation. And when they do, if the argumentation is to be successful, it is important that the participants take turns, each giving the other party a fair chance to state his or her argument. If a participant, for example, uses force to shut the other party up, that kind of move is an obstruction to the success of the dialogue. To present a typical example of argumentation, consider a situation where two people, Helen and Bob, have a difference of opinion during a dinner party. Helen is against tipping. She has had difficulties with tipping in restaurants in the past and thinks that tipping is generally a bad kind of practice that should not be continued. Bob, on the other hand, thinks that tipping is a good practice that should be retained. The group decides that Bob and Helen should try to resolve their difference of opinion by having a discussion about it after dinner. To help us keep track of what was said at each move, for later discussion, the moves are numbered below.

The Dialogue on Tipping

Helen (1): A problem with tipping is that sometimes it's very difficult to know how much to tip taxi drivers, hotel bellhops, or waiters or waitresses in restaurants.

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Bob (1): It's not so difficult. If you got excellent service, give a tip. Otherwise don't give a tip at all.

Helen (2): But how much should one give? And how can you judge whether service is excellent?

Bob (2): You just have to use common sense.

Helen (3): Come on Bob, that's no answer! Common sense is often wrong, isn't it? What kind of criterion for good judgment is that?

Bob (3): Like most things in life, if you want to do something good, like reward excellence of service, you have to use common sense.

Helen (4): With tipping, common sense leaves too much open to uncertainty. Because of this uncertainty, both individuals involved can be offended. If the tipper gives too little, the receiver is embarrassed and uncomfortable. If the tipper gives too much, she can be embarrassed and uncomfortable. Thus the practice of tipping leads to embarrassment and discomfort.

Bob (4): A lot of students depend on tips to help pay their tuition costs. University education is a good thing. Discontinuing tipping would mean that fewer students could afford it.

Helen (5): That's no problem. All we need to do is to raise the minimum wage.

Bob (5): That might just put a lot of restaurants out of business, with a resulting job loss for students and others.

The dialogue might have gone on much longer, but we will only consider the five moves above, in the discussion that follows. First of all, let's look over the dialogue as a whole. If we examine the tipping dialogue given above, we can identify its five main characteristics as a type of dialogue containing argumentation.

1. **The Issue.** There is a central pair of propositions at issue here. The dialogue above is on the issue of whether tipping is a good practice that should be continued. The issue is made up of two statements called theses. One thesis is the statement that tipping is a good practice of the kind that should be continued. The other is that tipping is a bad practice that should not be continued. It is unsettled which is true and which is false.
2. **The Viewpoints of the Participants.** There are two key participants, called the proponent and the respondent. Each has a point of view (viewpoint) on the issue. Bob is for tipping. His could be called the pro point of view on tipping. Helen is against tipping. Hers could be called the contra point of view on tipping.

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3. **The Characteristic of Civility.** The two participants take turns, and neither tries to prevent the other from expressing his or her point of view by dominating the dialogue or attacking the other party either verbally or physically. This characteristic could be called civility or politeness.
4. **The Opposition of Viewpoints.** The two points of view are opposed, resulting in a conflict of opinions about the issue. In the dialogue on tipping, Bob's thesis is the opposite, or negation of Helen's. This means that the one thesis can be true only if the other is not.
5. **The Use of Arguments.** The two participants make various kinds of moves. For example, they ask questions, and then at the next move, the other party is expected to answer, or at least reply to the question. But one of the most important kinds of move is the putting forward of an argument. The purpose of making such a move is to get the other party to change his or her point of view and come to accept the arguer's point of view instead of the one previously accepted.

As far as we can tell from the conversation recorded in the dialogue on tipping, neither participant was successful in using argumentation to get the other side to change his or her viewpoint. This would be the goal of both in the dialogue. But even though neither achieved that goal, and there was no winner or loser, the dialogue still had benefits. The participants themselves could learn something about their opposed viewpoints. Each could deepen his or her viewpoint on the issue. This can be achieved in several ways. Helen had to articulate her reasons supporting her own viewpoint more clearly, in response to questions and objections. This made her supporting arguments stronger. She could have to take the counterarguments of the other side into account. This could not only strengthen her arguments, but might even make her refine her viewpoint, by adding qualifications and clarifications to it. And most importantly, by coming to understand the reasons given in the arguments of the other side, she might deepen her own understanding of the issue and its ramifications. This deepens her viewpoint and sharpens the argumentation supporting it. And anyone who reads the dialogue learns more about the tipping controversy, especially if he or she hadn't thought very deeply about it before or seen it as an issue. Thus as a venue for expressing arguments, and allowing them to interact with opposed arguments, the dialogue can have significant benefits, even if the conflict of opinions is not resolved decisively, one way or the other. It all depends on how the arguments are put forward, and how the other side reacts to them.

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Consider the last part of the dialogue on tipping once again as a sequence of moves where Bob and Helen exchanged opposed arguments.

Bob (4): A lot of students depend on tips to help pay their tuition costs. University education is a good thing. Discontinuing tipping would mean that fewer students can afford it.

Helen (5): That's no problem. All we need to do is to raise the minimum wage.

Bob (5): That might just put a lot of restaurants out of business, with a resulting job loss for students and others.

Here Bob began the exchange by putting forward an argument. As shown above, his argument can be expressed as a set of premises that support a conclusion that he is arguing for. Bob made a statement when he said that a lot of students depend on tips to help pay their tuition costs. Then he made two more statements. First he said that university education is a good thing. And then he stated that discontinuing tipping would mean that fewer students could afford it. To structure Bob's statements as an argument, we could paraphrase it by stating the general premise first. His first premise is the statement that university education is a good thing. His next two statements are additional premises. Bob uses these three premises to support a conclusion. Let's set out the premises and conclusion of his argument.

PREMISE: University education is a good thing.

PREMISE: A lot of students depend on tips to help pay their tuition costs.

PREMISE: Discontinuing tipping would mean that fewer students could afford a university education.

CONCLUSION: Therefore, tipping is a good practice that should be continued.

Helen replied with another argument, saying, "That's no problem. All we need to do is to raise the minimum wage." The problem Bob posed in his argument is that discontinuation of tipping would interfere with students' being able to afford a university education. Helen's argument addresses this problem. Her solution is to raise the minimum wage. Presumably, this would solve the problem, because students would no longer have

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to depend on tips. Let's express Helen's argument in the form of a set of premises and a conclusion.

PREMISE: If we raise the minimum wage, students would not have to depend on tips to afford tuition costs.

PREMISE: If students wouldn't have to depend on tips to afford tuition costs, it would not be necessary for them to rely on tips to afford a university education.

CONCLUSION: Students would be able to afford a university education even if the practice of tipping were to be discontinued.

Her first premise introduces a new assumption into the argumentation in the dialogue. Based on this assumption as a premise, and also on the other premise stated above, Helen arrived at a conclusion. Her conclusion supports her viewpoint that tipping should be discontinued. She agrees with Bob's statement that a university education is a good thing, or at any rate, she does not want to dispute it. But even so, she can now argue that her viewpoint in the dialogue on tipping is not in conflict with this statement.

Bob's argumentation fits in with his viewpoint in the dialogue on tipping. If students couldn't afford to pay tuition costs that would be a bad thing, because it would mean that they couldn't go to university. And since university education is a good thing, it follows that discontinuing tipping is a bad thing. So we can see how Bob's argument links up with his ultimate thesis in the dialogue, the proposition that tipping is a good practice that ought to be continued. Thus his argumentation is relevant to the issue that Bob and Helen are discussing. Because Bob's argument above is relevant, it offers reasons to support the claim that tipping is a good practice, and thus it has some value in the dialogue. Similarly, Helen's argument is relevant to her viewpoint.

Arguments like Bob's are made up of statements called premises and conclusions. A statement, or proposition (we will use the terms interchangeably), is a sentence that is true or false. Premises are statements that offer reasons to support a conclusion. A conclusion is a statement that expresses a claim made by one party in a dialogue in response to doubt about the claim made by the other party. The conclusion of an argument can often be identified by an expression such as 'therefore' or 'thus'. Such words are called conclusion indicator words. They include the following.

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Conclusion Indicators

therefore
 thus
 hence
 consequently
 we may conclude that
 so
 it follows that
 accordingly

Premises can often be identified by expressions in the following list.

Premise Indicators

since
 for
 because
 given that
 for the reason that
 seeing that

The ability to identify an argument by stating its premises and conclusions is a very valuable skill of critical argumentation. Only when an argument has been thus identified can it be critically examined in a clear and objective fashion. However, the list of premise and conclusion indicators given above is not complete, and such indicators are not sufficient as means to identify premises, conclusions, and arguments in natural language discourse. One sometimes has to recognize the kind of argument involved, and this ability will increase as we identify many kinds of arguments in this book.

EXERCISE 1.2

1. Find two more examples where an argument was put forward in the dialogue on tipping. Identify the premises and conclusion in each argument.
2. Show how Helen's argument on page 6 is relevant to her viewpoint in the dialogue on tipping.

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In the dialogues above, it was shown how the dialogue is held together by the sequence of moves. Each party takes turns making a move that responds to the previous move of the other. To respond to another party's

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argument in a dialogue, an arguer needs to do more than put forward more arguments. She also needs to ask questions that express doubts. Arguments are made up of premises and conclusions, as we saw, and these are statements. But asking a question is different from making a statement. When you make a statement, you are committed to that statement. You have gone on record as stating it. But when you ask a question, you may not be committed to anything, in the way you are when you make a statement. When you ask a question, you are merely expressing your doubt that something is true or asking for a clarification of it. This kind of move is different from that of putting forward an argument made up of statements.

Speech acts are forms of expression representing the various kinds of moves made in a dialogue. One kind of speech act that is very important is the making of a statement. In this book, as indicated above, we will take the terms ‘proposition’ and ‘statement’ to be equivalent. A proposition (statement) is something that is true or false. For example, if I say, “Madrid is in Spain,” I am making the statement that Madrid is in Spain. Another way to put it is that I am asserting that the proposition, ‘Madrid is in Spain’ is true. We will take all the following speech acts as equivalent.

Saying that Madrid is in Spain.

Asserting that Madrid is in Spain.

Asserting the proposition that Madrid is in Spain.

Asserting the proposition that Madrid is in Spain is true.

Making the statement that Madrid is in Spain.

Making a statement is a bold move in a dialogue, because you are claiming that the statement is true, and thus incurring a commitment to that statement. Another type of speech act that is very important is the asking of a question. If I say, “Is Madrid in Spain?” I am asking a question. Asking a question is different from making a statement. When I make a statement, as indicated above, I am making a claim that it is true. Such a claim has a burden of proof attached to it, meaning that if I am challenged, I must either support the claim by an argument or give it up. This notion of burden of proof will be taken up in chapters 5 and 6. For the moment, we need only to recognize that when somebody makes a claim in argumentation, by stating that a proposition is true, she should be held to be putting forward an argument that gives evidence for the claim, meaning an argument that supports it. If her claim is questioned by a respondent,

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and she cannot give an argument to support it, she should give up the claim. This need to give evidence to support one's claims is an important requirement of critical argumentation.

Another type of speech act is a directive – such as “Pass the salt!” – which directs the listener to carry out an action. A directive is expressed in an imperative sentence, one that has the form of a command. An imperative sentence does not assert a proposition that is true or false. If I express the imperative sentence, “Shut the door!” to you, it would not be appropriate for you to reply, “That’s true” or “That’s false.” You might reply, for example, “There’s no need – the door is already closed.” But that would be different from saying, “The directive ‘Shut the door!’ is false” – a reply that would make no sense. On the other hand, a directive can be associated with a proposition that asserts that carrying out an action imperative is recommended. Associated with the imperative “Shut the door!” is the proposition, ‘Shutting the door is a recommended action.’ Thus although directives are associated with, and could be said to contain, propositions of a sort, they do not express propositions in the same direct way that assertions do. More lessons about directives containing practical recommendations for action will be learned in the chapter on practical reasoning. In the present chapter, our primary concern is with propositions of the kind contained in assertions.

The concept of a proposition is fundamental to critical argumentation, because arguments are made up of premises and conclusions that are propositions. A proposition has two defining characteristics. First, it is something that is, in principle, true or false. But something can be a proposition even if we do not know whether it is true or false. For example, the sentence, ‘Hannibal wore a beard on the day of the Battle of the Trasimene Lake’ is a proposition. It expresses a claim that is true or false, even though we do not know, in fact, whether it is true or false. No reliable pictures or visual representations of Hannibal survive, and it is not known whether he wore a beard or not on that day. So although propositions have the identifying characteristic of being true or false, we may not in fact know whether a proposition is true or false.

A second characteristic of a proposition, as noted above, is that it is typically contained in a special kind of speech act. It is contained in a sentence that makes an assertion. For example, if I assert that Madrid is in Spain, then the proposition ‘Madrid is in Spain’ is contained in my assertion. But there is a difference between a sentence and a proposition. Two different sentences can contain the same proposition. For

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example, ‘Snow is white’ and ‘Schnee ist weiss’, the one in English, the other in German, are different sentences, but both (we can presume) express the same proposition. Ambiguous sentences are not propositions. An ambiguous sentence such as “Elizabeth Taylor Loses Appeal” (a headline found in a tabloid) is that it could express either of two propositions.

1. Elizabeth Taylor appealed a court ruling, and the appeal court ruled against her.
2. Elizabeth Taylor has a less attractive appearance than she did at some previous time.

One cannot tell from the headline sentence by itself which one of these two propositions represents the meaning of the sentence. Thus one cannot tell whether this sentence is true or false. Indeed, the sentence itself is not true or false. Once its meaning has been disambiguated, then one can perhaps see whether the contained proposition meant to be asserted is true or false.

Ambiguous sentences do contain propositions. But an ambiguous sentence is not itself a proposition. The reason is that it does not have the property, by itself, of being true or false. The problem with an ambiguous sentence is that it contains more than one proposition. Hence one of these contained propositions might be true, while the other is false. Thus for purposes of critical argumentation, it is important to distinguish between sentences and propositions. Propositions are contained in sentences, but they are not the same as sentences. The notion of a proposition is a kind of philosophical abstraction. It represents the meaning contained in a sentence, especially a sentence making an assertion. Of course the concept of meaning is hard to define, and philosophical theories disagree about what meaning is or where it is. Nevertheless, the concept of a proposition is very useful in critical argumentation, and we will often refer to it.

Sentences containing incomplete referring expressions do not express propositions. For example, the sentence ‘She wore jelly shoes during the Folk Festival, for the whole month of July, 1993’ contains the incomplete referring expression ‘she’. This expression is incomplete because, although it refers to a female person, it is not specified which female person the property of wearing jelly shoes during the whole month of July, 1993, refers to. The sentence is (presumably) true of one such individual.