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FUNDAMENTALS OF CRITICAL ARGUMENTATION

Fundamentals of Critical Argumentation presents the basic tools for the identification, analysis, and evaluation of common arguments for beginners. The book teaches by using examples of arguments in dialogues, both in the text itself and in the exercises. Examples of controversial legal, political, and ethical arguments are analyzed. Illustrating the most common kinds of arguments, the book also explains how to evaluate each kind by critical questioning. Douglas Walton shows how arguments can be reasonable under the right dialogue conditions by using critical questions to evaluate them. The book teaches by example, both in the text itself and in exercises, but it is based on methods that have been developed through the author's thirty years of research in argumentation studies.

- Represents the state of the art in the methods and techniques of argumental and informal logic.
- Uses realistic dialogues featuring examples from political, scientific, and legal argument that will be familiar to students from their university and everyday experiences.
- Draws students into thinking and arguing.
- Offers objective guidelines for evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of an argument by critical questioning.
- Clear writing style and use of everyday examples make the subject easily understandable for students and makes evident the importance of the subject.

Douglas Walton is professor of philosophy at the University of Winnipeg. He is the author of thirty-three books and many articles on aspects of critical argumentation. He received the ISSA Prize from the International Society for the Study of Argumentation for his contributions to research on fallacies, argumentation, and informal logic.

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For Karen, with love

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CRITICAL REASONING AND ARGUMENTATION

General Editors
Douglas Walton, *University of Winnipeg*
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This series is aimed at introductory students in the field of argumentation, informal logic, and critical thinking. Informed by research in linguistics, communication, artificial intelligence, and pragmatics, as well as philosophy, books in this series are up to date in method and presentation, particularly in their emphasis on dialogue and rhetoric, which contrasts with the traditional "go it alone" approach. Each book is designed for use in a one-semester course and includes exercises.

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Preface

Critical argumentation is a practical skill that needs to be taught, from the very beginning, through the use of real or realistic examples of arguments of the kind that the user encounters in everyday life. In this introductory textbook of critical argumentation an example-based method of teaching is therefore used. All points covered are introduced and illustrated through the use of examples representing arguments, or problems of various kinds that arise in argumentation, of a kind that will be quite familiar to readers from their own personal experiences. Exercises appended to each section of the book are designed to give practice in putting these skills to work.

As well as being a skill, critical argumentation is an attitude. It is an attitude that is useful in working your way through a problem or making a thoughtful decision. But it is most useful when you are confronted by an argument and you need to arrive at some reasoned evaluation of it on a balance of considerations in a situation where there are arguments on both sides of an issue. A purpose of this book therefore is to sharpen this critical attitude, which we all already have to some degree, to focus and heighten it in a constructive way, by providing an introduction to its basic methods. The methods presented are based on the latest state-of-the-art techniques developed in argumentation theory and informal logic. This book is meant to be an advance over the many other textbooks on the market today that lack the kind of depth needed by a textbook that is based on an established scholarly discipline.

Since this textbook is meant to be a basic entry-level introduction to fundamentals, it concentrates primarily on argument identification and analysis, confining argument evaluation mainly to identifying missing or weak points in an argument that calls for the asking of critical questions. Subsequent textbooks in the series, especially the one on fallacies, will go

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more deeply into argument evaluation. The perspective of this foundational first volume is that before any argument can be evaluated as strong or weak, reasonable or fallacious, it has to be identified. One needs to know how to classify it as type of argument and how to identify its premises and conclusion. And it has to be analyzed. One needs to know what its nonexplicit premises are and how it fits into other arguments it is connected to in a given case. Thus identifying and analyzing the most common kinds of arguments are the tasks that will take up most of this book. However, from time to time, comments are made on evaluation. For example, it is helpful to the reader even at this early point to have some idea of how a given type of argument that is often reasonable can sometimes be used fallaciously.

The approach to argument analysis presented in this book makes the assessment of any argument turn on three factors. The first factor is the structure of the reasoning on which the argument is based. Three kinds of reasoning are studied in chapters 2, 3, and 4, respectively: deductive reasoning, inductive reasoning, and defeasible reasoning. The structure represents the link between the premises and the conclusion. The second factor is the acceptability of the premises. This factor is judged in relation to the commitments of the two parties – the proponent and the respondent – who are involved in the argument. The third factor is the relevance of the argument. Relevance is seen as a matter of where the argument is leading in a dialogue. To be relevant it must be a chain of reasoning that leads toward the ultimate conclusion at issue in a dialogue. The second and third factors are explicitly dialectical, meaning that they involve a dialogue between two parties (in the simplest case) called the proponent and the respondent. The line of exposition of this approach in the book is divided into stages. The first stage starts from the basic building block of inference, where a conclusion is drawn from a given set of propositions called premises. Then reasoning is defined as a chaining together of inferences. This approach, while somewhat novel from the point of view of traditional logic, fits in with the view of reasoning that has been adopted in recent work in computer science, and especially in artificial intelligence. Readers taking courses in computer-related subjects will be familiar with this view of reasoning. The next stage is on arguments. Argument is defined as the use of reasoning in different types of goal-directed conversational exchanges called dialogues. The dialectical nature of the approach to critical argumentation advanced in this book becomes evident when the distinction between reasoning and argument is explicitly based on the purpose that reasoning is used for in

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a dialogue exchange between two parties. This new dialectical approach enables students to handle problems of argument evaluation in a way that they will not find confusing or simply unbelievable, as has been the case with previous textbooks in logic. The new dialectical approach provides a much more useful tool for identifying, analyzing, and evaluating common arguments than has been possible in the past.

A striking asset of the new dialectical approach to critical argumentation used in this book is that relevance can be defined with respect to how an argument has been used in a given case. Relevance is judged in relation to the type of dialogue the participants are supposed to be engaged in, and the issue they are supposed to be arguing about in that dialogue. Thus, for the first time, an account of relevance is presented in a critical argumentation textbook that really is helpful in giving practically useful guidance to students on how to judge whether something is relevant or not, in a conversational argument exchange, judging by the context (as known) for the case. Other chapters deal with the familiar topics of critical argumentation by showing how to deal with the use of plausible reasoning in an argument and how to evaluate certain common kinds of arguments, such as argument from analogy, appeal to expert opinion, appeal to popular opinion, use of personal attack in argument, and the slippery slope argument. This book teaches a range of other important skills of critical argumentation needed to evaluate an argument contextually, as it is given in a particular case, based on the textual evidence supplied in the case. As the book proceeds, it focuses less on individual inferences or types of arguments and more on how to evaluate critically certain properties of how a line of argumentation needs to be judged in a global perspective, in a case as a whole. One of these important properties is bias or slanting in an argument. Another skill is how to identify and reconstruct a longer chain of argumentation as used in a given case, identifying the "missing" premises and conclusions that have not been stated explicitly. Other skills taught in this part are how to deal with problems in arguments that arise from language, such as ambiguity and the use of definitions, and how to learn critical argumentation skills of questioning and answering.

The material in this book is meant to be flexible, so that it can be used alongside other textbooks in the series that go into more detailed treatments of different aspects of critical argumentation. Each chapter is based on the presumption that the student's comprehension will be sharpened through having mastered the material in the previous chapters. All the material is easily readable, and examples are freely used to illustrate every point. Thus chapters can be skipped by an instructor who wants

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only to cover selected topics. I would recommend covering at least the first chapter, and then picking out other chapters according to interest. The use of examples throughout the book is meant to make the material easier to grasp and more interesting for students. But the instructor can also use these cases to generate discussion in the classroom or in a seminar. It may be a good strategy of teaching to make the cases focal points of a lecture, as well. Also, the cases, along with the exercises at the end of each section, can be used to generate further assignments or test questions, in what should essentially be a hands-on learning experience for the students.

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