1

Argument as reasoned dialogue

The goal of this book is to help the reader use critical methods to evaluate impartially and reasonably the strengths and weaknesses of arguments. The many examples of arguments studied in this text are familiar, yet controversial specimens from such sources as political debates, legal arguments, international disputes of foreign policy, scientific controversies, consumer decision-making questions, ethical problems, and health issues. Any argument, including contexts of lively debate, conflict of opinion, reasoned persuasion, questioning, criticism, or cross-examination, can be usefully analyzed by the methods that follow.

It is to be emphasized that the methods of this undertaking are essentially practical. They come as much or more under the topic of what is properly called logical pragmatics, as opposed to (semantical) logical theory. Logical theory traditionally has tended to emphasize semantic relationships, that is, relationships between sets of true or false propositions (the subject matter of Chapter 2 in this book). Logical pragmatics has to do with the use of these propositions by an arguer to carry out a goal of dialogue in reasoning with a second participant in the dialogue. One common and important type of goal is to convince or persuade another arguer with whom the first arguer is engaged in reasoned dialogue. In logical theory, an argument is a set of propositions, nothing more or less. And all that matters is the truth or falsehood of these propositions. The wider context of dialogue is not taken into account. In logical pragmatics, an argument is a claim that, according to appropriate procedures of reasonable dialogue, should be relevant to proving or establishing the arguer's conclusion at issue.

Logical theory, then, is centrally concerned with the propositions that make up an argument. Logical pragmatics is concerned with the reasoned use of those propositions in dialogue to carry out a goal, for example, to build or refute a case to support one's side of a contentious issue in a context of dialogue. It is concerned with

what is done with those propositions in a context of dialogue, what use is made of them, to convince another arguer. Logical pragmatics is a practical discipline, an applied art.

The distinction between semantics and pragmatics can be picturesquely illustrated by the following anecdote:

Example 1.0

A seaman drafted to our ship just before we sailed from Halifax had never seen his new captain, who at sea often went hatless and wore a nondescript jacket.

The new man had just begun a forenoon watch on the gun deck when the captain came along. The skipper suddenly stooped and picked up a butted cigarette. He thrust the butt at the seaman and demanded: "I want to know who the hell owns this damned thing."

The new hand considered for a moment, then said slowly to the rankless, hatless officer: "I'd say you do, mate. You found it."[1]

In this case, the seaman's answer to the other man's question was perfectly reasonable and appropriate, except that the context of dialogue was wrong. In this instance, the questioner happened to be the captain. And the acceptable procedures of dialogue for responding to questions from the captain can be very different from responses appropriate for replying to a fellow shipmate. From what the seaman took to be the context of dialogue, his answer was semantically appropriate. But the context of dispute was not that of ownership of the cigarette butt as found property. From the pragmatic point of view, therefore, the seaman's response was highly inappropriate, and he misunderstood the purpose of the question entirely. Had he known that his questioner was the captain, he would of course have known at once that the context of dialogue required the question to have a very different meaning. The captain wanted to know who was responsible for dropping a cigarette butt on deck. And the seaman would have known that an affirmative answer in this context of dialogue was an admission of guilt for a culpable offense.

The problem here was to know what the argument was about. The captain thought it was about the issue of keeping the ship clean.

1 Jack Wilson, as told to Dave McIntosh in *Legion Magazine*. Reprinted in *Readers Digest*, November 1986, p. 39.

The seaman thought the argument was about ownership of a found object. The misunderstanding posed a pragmatic problem.

A typical problem of logical pragmatics is that in a given argument various important factors of the context of dialogue can be unclear, vague, ambiguous, and generally problematic to pin down. It may not be clear what the real issue is supposed to be. It may not even be clear what the argument is. But before an argument, or what looks like an argument, can be evaluated as strong or weak, good or bad, it may be a nontrivial job to pin down just what the argument is or may be taken to be. Much of the work of logical pragmatics lies in this preliminary phase of clearing up or clarifying what the argument is.

Of course, it is well known that applying any theory to real, complex objects as they occur in ordinary experience and issue is a project that has certain problems unique to this type of practical endeavor. And so it is with practical logic. Each raw, given argument must be approached with care, and the best use made of the evidence that is given, if it is to be reasonably evaluated. From the pragmatic point of view, any particular argument should be seen as being advanced in the context of a particular dialogue setting. Sensitivity to the special features of different contexts of dialogue is a requirement for the reasoned analysis of an argument.

1.1 TYPES OF ARGUMENTATIVE DIALOGUE

Dialogue is a sequence of exchanges of messages or speech acts between two (or more) participants. Typically, however, dialogue is an exchange of questions and replies between two parties. Every dialogue has a goal and requires cooperation between the participants to fulfill the goal. This means that each participant has an obligation to work toward fulfilling his own goal in the dialogue and also an obligation to cooperate with the other participant's fulfillment of his goal. The basic reason that any argument can be criticized as a bad argument always comes down to a failure to meet one of these basic obligations.

One context of dialogue is the *personal quarrel,* characterized by aggressive personal attack, heightened appeal to emotions, and a desire to win the argument at all costs. The quarrel is characterized by bitter recriminations, a loss of balanced perspective, and, after-

wards, most often a regret for excessive personal attacks that were not meant or deserved. The quarrel is no friend of logic and frequently represents argument at its worst. The goal of the quarrel is for each arguer to attack or "hit" his opponent at all costs, using any means, whether reasonable, fair, or not. Thus the quarrel is characterized by the fallacious *ad hominem* attack (attack against the person, rather than the argument) and by emotional arguments that would not be judged relevant by more reasonable standards of argument.

The quarrel represents the lowest level of argument. Reasonable standards of good argument should be designed to prevent argument from deteriorating into the personal quarrel. Most of the logical lessons to be drawn from the quarrel turn out to be pathological. The quarrel too often represents the bad argument, the heated argument, the medium of fallacies, vicious attacks, and one-sided criticisms that should be avoided or discouraged by reasonable dialogue. When an argument descends to the level of the quarrel, it is usually in deep trouble.

Another context of dialogue is the *(forensic) debate*. The forensic debate is more regulated than the quarrel. In a debate there are judges or referees who determine, perhaps by voting, which side had the better argument. The debate is regulated by rules of procedure that determine when each arguer may speak, and how long each may speak. In some cases, a debate may be judged by an audience who may take a vote at the conclusion of the debate, and the majority of voters then determines who won the debate.

The forensic debate is more congenial to logical reasoning than the personal quarrel is, because the outcome is decided by a third party who is not subject to the personal attacks that may be contained in the arguments. Also, some debates are controlled by rules that disallow the more severe forms of personal attack and other aggressive or fallacious tactics. But the rules of the forensic debate are often very permissive and may allow all kinds of fallacious arguments. Sometimes very damaging personal allegations are allowed in questions, and the answerer may be hard pressed to respond to extremely aggressive questions while still answering the question. Such fallacious moves may not only be tolerated, but even be praised as good tactics of debating.

Clearly, the debate is a step above the personal quarrel, from the

point of view of logic.[2] However, the basic purpose of the forensic debate is to win a verbal victory against your opponent by impressing the audience (or referee) of the debate. This means that fallacious arguments and personal attacks are a good idea if they help you to win the argument. In other words, a successful argument, in the context of a debate, is not necessarily a reasonable argument from the standpoint of logic. It may be good strategy to *appear* to have a reasonable argument, but really having a reasonable argument is not the main thing. The main thing is to win the debate. Consequently, the standards of good forensic debate do not necessarily or reliably represent good standards of reasonable argument.

A third context of argument is that of *persuasion dialogue,*[3] also sometimes called *critical discussion*. In this type of dialogue, there are two participants, each of whom has a thesis (conclusion) to prove. The main method of persuasion dialogue is for each participant to prove his own thesis by the rules of inference from the concessions of the other participant.[4] If you and I are engaged in persuasion dialogue, my goal is to persuade you of my thesis. And hence my obligation should be to prove that thesis from premises that you accept or are committed to. Your obligation is to prove your thesis from premises that I accept or am committed to (Figure 1.0).[5]

The goal of persuasion dialogue (critical discussion) is to persuade the other party of your thesis (conclusion, point of view), and the method is to prove your thesis.[6] However, two kinds of proof may be involved. *Internal proof* by a participant means proof by inferring a proposition from the other participant's concessions in the dialogue. This is the primary method of persuasion dialogue.

Persuasion dialogue can also be facilitated by bringing in external scientific evidence. *External proof* entails the introduction of "new

2 For more on the quarrel and debate as models of argument, see Woods and Walton (1982, ch. 1).
3 See Walton (1984). The notion of reasonable dialogue as a regulated game was first systematically analyzed by Lorenzen (1969) and Hamblin (1970).
4 Proving from the concessions of the other participant is not the only type of reasonable dialogue. However, it is a very important one for the purposes of practical logic. Theoretical models of this type of dialogue in reasoned argument are outlined in Hintikka (1981) and Barth and Krabbe (1982).
5 See Krabbe (1985).
6 The concept of a critical discussion is outlined in van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984).

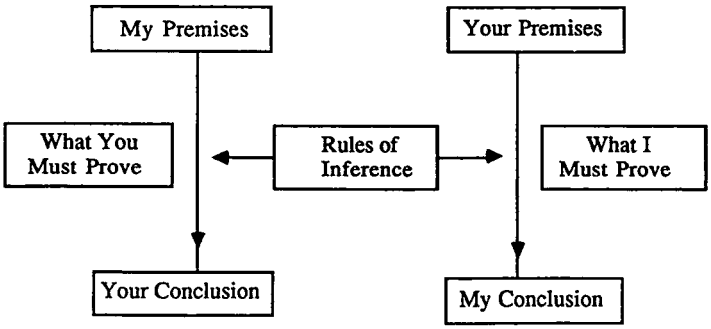

Figure 1.0. Obligations of persuasion dialogue (critical discussion).

facts" into the argument by appealing to scientific evidence or the expert opinion of a third party or group of expert sources.[7] Guidelines for the use of external proof in persuasion dialogue are studied in Chapters 7 and 8. Once a proposition is advanced by one participant on the basis of external proof and accepted by the other participant, it can then be appealed to as a premise suitable for an internal proof.

Although the primary obligation of a participant in persuasion dialogue is to prove his thesis from the other participant's concessions, a secondary obligation to cooperate with the other participant's attempts to prove his thesis also exists. This obligation requires giving helpful and honest replies to the other participant's questions, in order to allow him to extract commitments from the first participant in dialogue that can then be used as premises in his arguments.[8]

Argument in persuasion dialogue is based on the concessions of the other party, and a participant is free to concede any proposition he cares to. But in another type of dialogue, called the *inquiry*, premises can only be propositions that are known to be true, that have been established as reliable knowledge to the satisfaction of all parties to the inquiry.

7 Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984, p. 167) refer to an intersubjective testing procedure in dialogue as a method whereby the participants agree on how they will determine what is acceptable as evidence in an argument.

8 This idea is brought out very clearly in the model of dialogue analyzed by Hintikka (1981).

An example of an inquiry would be the Warren Commission Report on the death of John F. Kennedy, which attempted to determine the known facts relevant to the assassination and thereby produce a proof of an established conclusion. By contrast, a persuasion dialogue might typically be on an issue like "Is socialism the best form of government?" in which the goal is not conclusive proof of one side of the issue or the other, but an evaluation of the persuasiveness of the arguments on both sides.[9] Such arguments can reveal important convictions and reasons for personal commitments on an issue, even if the goal is not to establish conclusive proof based on premises known to be true.

The basic goal of the inquiry is to acquire increments of knowledge, and therefore the inquiry is an essentially *cumulative* type of dialogue, meaning that retraction of commitment is not anticipated. The inquiry, too, is based on an initial position, but the position here is a certain degree of lack of knowledge that must be overcome. Thus the inquiry seeks out *proof,* or the establishment of as much certainty as can be obtained by the given evidence. Evidential priority is the key feature of the inquiry, for the inquiry is strongly directed toward deriving conclusions from premises that can be well established on solid evidence. This contrasts with persuasive dialogue, in which the best one can hope for is plausible commitment to an opinion based on reasoned (but not conclusive) evidence.

In the inquiry, the participants are supposed to be neutral investigators of an objective truth, to the extent that this is possible. The inquiry is a cooperative rather than an adversarial context of dialogue.[10] Logical proof is important in the inquiry, but the method may vary with the subject matter or area of the inquiry. Inquiry most often purports to be "scientific" and "factual" in its methods and standards.

In *negotiation dialogue,* the primary goal is self-interest and the method is to bargain. Bargaining makes no pretensions to be an objective inquiry into the truth of a matter. Indeed, negotiation, in

9 This function of dialogue that reveals concealed commitments is brought out in the analysis of Walton (1984, ch. 5).

10 Reasonable evaluation of any argument always involves the given data of a text of discourse to be analyzed. Common but unstated presumptions of the arguer and the evaluator also play a role in the evaluation. A theory of discourse analysis that shows the relation of the dialogue to the text is given in van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984).

contrast to persuasive dialogue, need not involve commitment to the truth of propositions, or convictions that ideals are based on strong arguments. In negotiation, opinions about what is true, or convictions about what is believable, are not centrally at stake and may even be contravened by a good negotiator. The concessions in bargaining are not commitments in the same sense as they are in persuasive dialogue, but trade-offs that can be sacrificed for gains elsewhere. The position now becomes a bargaining position. Logical proof is not important in bargaining dialogue, for this type of dialogue is completely adversarial. This type of dialogue is frankly based on personal gain and makes no pretense of being neutral or objective, or of being an inquiry into truth. Coalitions may be made with partners, but the objective is always self-interest in "making a good deal."

The negotiation type of dialogue is called the *interest-based conflict* by Moore (1986, p. 74), who describes it as "competitive cooperation" where "the disputants are collaborating to compete for the same set of goods or benefits" in conditions of "perceived or actual scarcity." In this situation, gains for one participant may mean losses for another. The dialogue is a kind of trading of concessions to the satisfaction of both participants.

Some cases of argumentative discourse combine two or more of these types of dialogue. For example, a divorce dispute may begin as a competition to determine which party is to obtain custody of the children. However, if the dialogue turns to a consideration of the issue of which party is best suited to look after the children, the dialogue may cease to be an interest-based bargaining dialogue and become a persuasion dialogue. This shift in the context of dialogue could be highly constructive and beneficial. It may betoken a shift from the individual interests of the husband and wife to a wider consideration of what is best for everyone, including the children. Often a shift from the negotiation model to the persuasion model is a good step.

Although the persuasion, inquiry, and bargaining types of dialogues are the most basic for the purpose of studying the fundamental kinds of reasoned criticism in argumentation, there are many other types of dialogue. One is the *information-seeking* type of dialogue, in which one party has the goal of finding information that the other party is believed to possess. Another is the *action-seeking*

type of dialogue recognized by Mann (1988), in which the goal of one party is to bring about a specific course of action by the other party. Yet another type is the *educational dialogue,* in which one party (the teacher) has the goal of imparting knowledge to the other party (the student). Each of these models of dialogue has a different initial situation and different rules of procedure for arriving at the goal from the initial situation. These eight types of dialogue are summarized in Table 1.0.

From the point of view of critical argumentation taken in this book, persuasion dialogue (critical discussion) is the single most significant type of dialogue. It represents an ideal, or normative, model of good dialogue because it has normative rules that, taken together, set a standard of how good persuasion dialogue should take place. However, it is important to be able to recognize other types of dialogue indicated above, because significant errors and misunderstandings may occur when there is a dialogue shift (dialectical shift) from one type of dialogue to another. If such a shift goes unnoticed, it can lead to misinterpretations, errors, and fallacies of argumentation.

1.2 COMPONENTS OF ARGUMENTATIVE DIALOGUE

Any sequence of argumentative dialogue can be broken down into four stages.[11] In the *opening stage,* the type of dialogue should be specified. At this stage, the participants should agree to engage in a specific type of dialogue, or at least indicate their willingness to take part in a certain type of dialogue. All good dialogue has procedural rules, and the rules of the dialogue should be as clear as possible to the participants as part of the opening stage of the dialogue. In some cases, these rules are explicitly stated or codified, for example, in a criminal trial. In conversation, these rules are usually matters of custom and politeness that set normal expectations of dialogue conduct (rules of Gricean[12] implicature). Nevertheless,

11 The concept of the four stages of dialogue is from van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984).
12 Grice (1975).

Table 1.0. *Types of Dialogue*

Dialogue	Initial situation	Method	Goal
Quarrel	Emotional disquiet	Personal attack	"Hit" out at other
Debate	Forensic contest	Verbal victory	Impress audience
Persuasion (critical discussion)	Difference of opinion	Internal and external proof	Persuade other
Inquiry	Lack of proof	Knowledge-based argumentation	Establish proof
Negotiation	Difference of interests	Bargaining	Personal gain
Information-seeking	Lacking information	Questioning	Find information
Action-seeking	Need for action	Issue imperatives	Produce action
Educational	Ignorance	Teaching	Imparting knowledge

the rules can be explicitly stated, and agreed to by the participants, where it is useful and necessary, at the opening stage.

There are four kinds of dialogue rules. The *locution rules* state the kinds of speech acts or locutions that are allowed. For example, typically in persuasion dialogue, questions and assertions are permissible locutions. The *dialogue rules* specify turn taking and other guidelines for when and who is allowed or required to advance locutions. The *commitment rules* specify how each type of locution leads to commitments on the part of a participant. For example, an assertion of a proposition by a participant normally implies that this participant now has this proposition in his store of commitments. Finally, the *strategic (win–loss) rules* determine what sequence of locutions constitutes fulfillment of the goal of the dialogue.

All dialogue arises from a problem, difference of opinion, or question to be resolved that has two sides. The two sides constitute the *issue* of the dialogue. The *confrontation stage* is the stage where the issue of the dialogue must be announced, agreed upon, or clarified, so that the goal of the dialogue is clear.

The *argumentation stage* is the stage where the obligation of each party in contributing to or fulfilling the goal of the dialogue must