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## A Theory of Argument

*A Theory of Argument* is an advanced textbook intended for students in philosophy, communication studies, and linguistics who have completed at least one course in argumentation theory, informal logic, critical thinking, or formal logic. The text contains 400 exercises.

In this book, Mark Vorobej develops a novel approach to argument interpretation and evaluation that synthesizes subjective concerns about the personal points of view of individual arguers, with objective concerns about the structural properties of arguments. One of the key themes of the book is that we cannot succeed in distinguishing good arguments from bad ones until we learn to listen carefully to others.

Part One develops a relativistic account of argument cogency that allows for rational disagreement. An argument can be cogent for one person without being cogent for someone else, provided we grant that it can be rational for individuals to hold different beliefs about the objective properties of the argument in question.

Part Two offers a comprehensive and rigorous account of argument diagramming. An argument diagram represents the evidential structure of an argument as conceived by its author. Hybrid arguments are contrasted with linked and convergent ones, and a novel technique is introduced for graphically recording disagreements with authorial claims.

Mark Vorobej is associate professor of philosophy and director of the Centre for Peace Studies at McMaster University in Canada.

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MARK VOROBEJ

*McMaster University*



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*To my mother*

*Francka Vorobej (née Rujar)*

*August 25, 1929–November 4, 1998*

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Listening is the beginning of peace.  
– Elise Boulding

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## Preface

This textbook is written for upper-level undergraduate students who have completed at least one prior course in argumentation theory, critical thinking, informal logic, formal logic, or some other related discipline. Part One develops a theory of argument interpretation and evaluation, according to which arguments are viewed as instruments of rational persuasion. Part Two explores how different patterns of evidential support can be identified within a body of information that has been employed argumentatively to secure rational belief.

By devoting two weeks to each chapter, the entire text can be covered, at a reasonable pace, within a single semester. There are 400 exercises within this text. Students who attempt a significant number of these exercises will be rewarded with a substantially deeper understanding of the theory and practice of argumentation.

I am grateful to two anonymous readers, commissioned by Cambridge University Press, for their favorable reviews of a manuscript entitled *Normal Arguments*.

Lyrics from “Paradise by the Dashboard Light” by James Steinman are reproduced in Exercise 4.68(b) on page 220 by permission of the Edward B. Marks Music Company – © 1977.

Most of the material within this text was first explored, in a classroom setting, in conversation with the exceptionally talented students enrolled in McMaster University’s Arts and Science program. I thank these kind souls for their insight, their enthusiasm, and their



unparalleled magnanimity. They have shaped my thoughts in ways that, I am sure, lie far beyond my comprehension. Accordingly, this text is written in a style designed to create the happy illusion of an instructor addressing a class of engaged students.

I have also been blessed with an extraordinarily supportive, patient, and forgiving family. My parents, my sister, my wife, and my three daughters sustain my spirit and are reflected in every aspect of my being – including this humble offering. I thank them for sharing a love that has endured my various abnormalities.