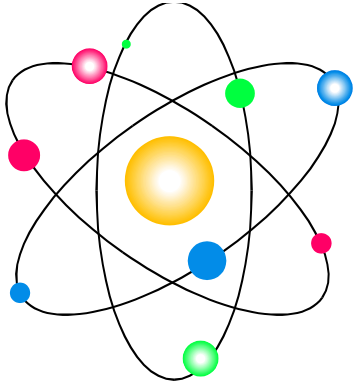


Argument in Context

Section 1: Argument Fundamentals



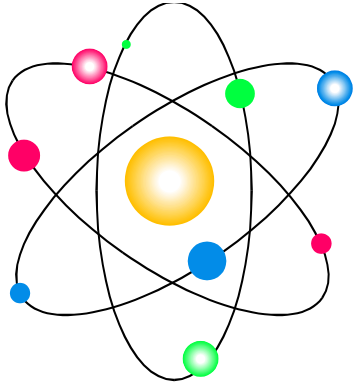
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Version 1.2a

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Argument in Context

Section 1: Argument Fundamentals



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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION TO ARGUMENTATION

Welcome to Argument. Argument is present in every aspect of life including yours. Had an argument with a friend? Wanted to support an argument with strong evidence in a paper you wrote? Had to make a decision about which side to pick in an argument? Arguments about immigration, which movie to go to, what kind of speech the government can restrict, and hundreds of other arguments are made each day. Consider this argument between two people:

Sue says: "I'm very glad they are proposing to change our immigration policy to make undocumented workers legal and provide more opportunities for those seeking to come to our country."

John responds: "I think it's a bad idea. We are already struggling with high unemployment, letting more immigrants in is only going to make it harder for Americans to find work."

Sue responds: "I disagree. The vast majority of immigrants, especially illegal immigrants, generally take lower level jobs that Americans widely refuse to consider. Our society relies on immigrants to take those jobs."

John responds: "I still think that there will be some immigrants that will compete with Americans for jobs, even if it's not true in every case. Besides, even if you're right, illegal immigrants represent a significant drain on our economy because they use social services but don't pay taxes."

Susan answers: "I think that our economy has much bigger problems than illegal immigrants, what you are describing actually has a relatively small effect. Moreover, I think that in reality, immigrants are critical for our economy. Agriculture is a key sector of the US economy, and is heavily dependent on an immigrant labor force. American farmers have actually been hurt by the recent increase in immigration restrictions."

Who made the better argument? How good of an argument was this? In this textbook, we're going to study arguments. We're going to ask:

Which arguments are most persuasive?

What makes a logical argument?

How can you argue without attacking others?

How can you make the most effective arguments?

We're going to ask other questions as we consider the many ways argument operates.

Definition of Argument

The study of argumentation looks at the way people support statements they make, how people engage in responding and defending their ideas with others, and how they resolve the many reasons and claims they encounter. Argument provides a means of reaching consensus, making decisions, exploring new ideas, and fighting against oppression. It can also, sadly, be part of conflict between people, attacks on others, using inadequate support, and a means for leaving people without a voice. That is why many people study argumentation: to improve the quality of argument including in how people

support arguments, argue with each other, and come to decisions.

Benefits of Argumentation

Argumentation has many benefits and they stem from the many situations in which we deal with argument. We argue in everyday situations to convince people to see things our way, and we attempt to use persuasion for our benefit. Argument is a (hopefully) intellectual exchange that can build on ideas, expanding them into new modes of thinking. It allows people to take a stand and make decisions that hopefully benefit society. Argument allows us to explore our own critical thinking, challenging our thoughts with the differing viewpoints of many others.



Great Way to Learn

There are many students who find themselves falling asleep when listening to a lecture or who struggle to stay engaged with a long reading assignment. Argument can act as an excellent alternative learning style that benefits many people.

First from a stylistic angle, argument is different from other methods of presenting information. Multiple speakers with different speaking styles make arguments that can be dynamic and fast

"I find that I learn best by discussing and debating (arguing) about different ideas with other people. This approach helps me to process the various perspectives on an issue and form my own opinions."

paced. The emotional attachment that stems from each speaker's connection to the position they support adds intensity and interest. Moreover, the ability to participate in the discussion and advocate for your own opinion creates personal investment. This forces you to examine and defend assumptions that might otherwise go unchecked. Finally argument is tailored to the individuals involved. Rather than a textbook that presents the same information to all readers (like this one), argument allows those involved to explore areas that they find interesting.

Improves Research Skills

The process of crafting an argument often involves research to equip you with the knowledge to defend your position. Knowing that your arguments will be scrutinized and challenged encourages you to secure the strongest supporting evidence possible. Learning to argue helps you to identify which research methods and types of information will be most useful. Research can also open up new perspectives and avenues of argument. Lawyers researching case law for legal arguments often come across precedents they did not know about that causes them to completely shift their trial strategy. But often the most beneficial aspect of argument research is the depth of understanding that you can attain. Debaters who research heavily for their competitions find that their research enables them to participate intelligently in future

"I learn a lot when I research an issue to make arguments. When I looked at stem cell research, I found out so many things I did not know before such as adult versus embryonic stem cells, diseases and illnesses that might be treated with stem cell research such as Parkinson's, and the moral arguments about using embryonic stem cells."

discussions, achieve a heightened understanding of current events, or follow a complicated political problem, even though these areas are quite unrelated to the original activity. Virtually any arguer will find the same benefits.



“Learning to argue is important in so many fields; whether you’re in business trying to persuade colleagues or investors, in politics appealing to voters, or to judges or juries in a legal setting, you need to develop the rhetorical skills to argue effectively.”

Key to Professional Goals

There are many occasions in which it is not enough to have the right idea or even to know the solution to a problem. Success frequently depends on your ability to defend the value of your theory and ultimately to persuade those around you. Learning to argue effectively will equip you with the tools to share and advance your ideas. Argument teaches you to recognize your audience and tailor your approach to make it as compelling as possible. Argument also gives you the ability to understand and evaluate multiple perspectives. This helps explain why so many lawyers also make effective businessmen and women, why they often become strong politicians, and why the most respected scientists are generally those that can best communicate their research to others. What distinguishes these kinds of people is very often the ability to make good arguments.

Learn more about the Arguments

When you argue, you can learn the weakness and strengths of an idea. This playing out of the argument equips you as an arguer with critical thinking skills. In crafting a strong argument, you’ll consider the many angles of an issue and alter the argument to accommodate differing facts and views on the issue. The entire process will make you much more knowledgeable about the issue you are arguing and help you understand better the differing sides of the issue.

“Engaging in argument helps me see weaknesses and strengths in arguments. I come away with a more knowledgeable and nuanced idea about the issue I am arguing.”

Avoid Conflict and Build Friendships

When you and another person engage in an argument, you can benefit by coming together, to achieve an agreement (even if it is an agreement to disagree). Argument does not always mean two sides divided. Sometimes the process of argumentation helps refine both sides of the argument and opens up the possibility for coalition-building. When arguments are presented as open to the possibility of change, the potential for the best of both arguments coming together to form a solution is possible.

“Argument is a critical aspect of coming together with other people. Argument is a peaceful way to resolve conflict. Indeed, I find it often leads me to work together with people that I might have seen as opposed to my positions.”

Helps me Decide

In hearing an argument, an audience member can be persuaded or educated. This offers the benefit of

finding new information and experiencing new perspectives. Even if an argument does not change the mind of the other arguer or audience member, the exposure to the other side of an argument helps the people on the opposite side to know the best points of the other side. This can help people forge a new understanding of contrasting ideas or become more convinced of their own ideas. And, if an individual is persuaded by an argument it opens up new avenues of thinking.

“Argument is the best and often the only way to determine what I think is right. You can read an entire book that carefully outlines support for a particular position, but until you hear a strong advocate present the opposing side, you cannot properly evaluate the original theory.”

Convince Others

Argument can also act as an important proving ground for opinions that you value. This is not a question of winning an argument for the sake of winning (although some people certainly argue for that reason). Often people are not content to simply accept their own beliefs without question. Instead they want to voice those ideas and examine their validity. By subjecting their opinions to the critical responses of their peers and testing them in an open argument they can observe their strengths and weaknesses and compare them with opposing viewpoints. Moreover, by learning to defend a position you often develop a much deeper

“Its similar to the reason competitive people like to play sports. For some of us it’s not enough to have an idea or an opinion on an issue, I want to convince others and I want to be able to make my case as persuasive as possible.”

understanding of how to advocate it persuasively. It’s similar to an athlete working out in the gym or on the practice field; the athlete exercises the body and the arguer exercises and strengthens the mind.



Supporting Arguments

When you engage in argument, you will want to make well supported and convincing arguments. Without support, an argument is simply an assertion and an assertion has little to no weight unless the other arguer or audience member agrees with the assertion and thus adds support on their own. An example assertion might be:

Summer is the best season.

No support is provided for this assertion. Now, many people might be persuaded by such an assertion, but it is only because they are providing their own support for the assertion. When such a person hears the assertion “summer is the best season,” they supplement the support. They might think to themselves,

“Because it is the warmest season with just the right temperature and because I like to participate in sports outside that require warmth. Since I value my comfort and my leisure activities, I agree that summer is the best season.”

So, in this case, the assertion works because the audience already agrees with the argument before it is presented. Indeed, if an arguer knows the audience will agree, then sometimes a good tactic is to leave an assertion without support because the

support may not line-up with what already exists in the mind of the audience.

However, when you argue to persuade people of different opinions or who have yet to make up their mind, sound support is a necessity. Consider someone advocating a reduction in the drinking age:

There are a variety of reasons why the drinking age in the United States should be reduced to the international standard of eighteen.

First, the drinking age in most countries around the world is at least as low as 18. Second, these countries do not report any significantly greater problems with young people drinking than the US experiences. Therefore, there is no good reason why the United States should maintain such an arbitrarily high drinking age.

Moreover, arguments in support of a high drinking age are fundamentally flawed. Some argue that a high drinking age is critical for preventing alcohol induced accidents. However, countries like France or Italy actually enjoy fewer alcohol related



deaths of youth per capita than the US. The claimed dangers of a lower drinking age are refuted by evidence that suggests that this instead places a taboo on alcohol that discourages discussion. Children in the U.S. are less likely to have important discussions about alcohol as they are growing up and consequently do not develop responsible attitudes. The prevalence of binge drinking in American college culture demonstrates the problems with our current system.

Finally, all other evidence aside, the US drinking age is clearly ridiculous. We all know plenty of 18 year olds that are more mature and more capable than people in their twenties or even thirties. The distinction at 21 years of age is not consistent from person to person. Moreover, the idea that we are willing to send our eighteen year olds to serve in our army and fight our wars and yet refuse them the right to come back and relax with a bottle of beer is not right. You don't need to be a genius or have the facts at your fingertips to recognize that the current US drinking age is nonsensical and requires reform.

This arguer has presented a variety of supporting arguments in favor of lowering the drinking age. Certainly, you can dispute this person's arguments and counter with arguments in favor of a higher drinking age, but the person has presented support. The soundness of that support is key to convincing others.

Ways to Support an Argument

Sound support for argument can come in a variety of ways. **You can frequently refer to life experiences and commonsense.** For instance, if you take the claim: Education should be a high priority for any society, you could refer to commonly held beliefs: because "children are the future." That resonates for many people. For a different argument, you could use a personal experience: "It is possible to get e coli from fast food; I once got it from a fast food chain in my neighborhood." On the other hand, if the anecdotal support is trying to prove a more universal claim, your story might be an overgeneralization. For example: "The only way people contract e coli is from fast food; I once got it from a fast food chain in my neighborhood." Your one experience doesn't

prove it for all instances nor does it make you an expert to assert such a broad claim.

Another way to support an argument is to quote or paraphrase another person's analysis. In most cases, this type of analysis comes from someone who is considered a credible source. For example: "My friend, a wine economist, told me that with warmer climate shifting north, the wine in the Walla Walla Valley will become the next Napa Valley." The friend's expertise as a wine economist gives credence to the argument.

More often, arguers cite credible sources who often have no association with the arguer. The seeming objectivity of this credible source can give more weight to the argument because it seems to remove the possibility of personal bias. In some cases, when an arguer uses external analysis, they choose to quote an expert. There are many examples of what constitutes an expert, and almost all of them are contingent on the type of argument that is being forwarded. If the arguer is making a point about US foreign policy, perhaps the expert is the Secretary of State or a journalist who specializes in the field. In a court of law, a reference to a Supreme Court decision would carry substantial weight.

Some situations do not justify reference to an expert; a person might employ personal narrative to support an argument. If you were making a point about the dangers of child slavery, you could tell the story of a young child who experienced the horrors of slavery. The story itself would make a credible argument—even without an expert on such slavery.

Argument Type 1, 2, and 0

Supporting an argument effectively is certainly a key part of what is involved in studying

argumentation but there are many ways to approach argumentation. One way is to look at argumentation in three different forms or types: 1, 2, and 0.¹

Argument Type 1 is argument in the "noun" sense—it is a claim supported by evidence. A simple example is: SUVs are dangerous because they are more likely to tip over in accidents. A more complex example comes from an argument about a police department's mishandling of crime cases.

There is desperate need for reform of the O'Fallon Missouri police department. A woman from O'Fallon recently heard the first news on a sexual assault case that she reported more than a year previous. The woman was assaulted three different times in one night by Richard Gorman while she was staying at the home of a friend. She was so emotionally unsettled by the experience that she eventually fled the home and was found by her friend running through the neighborhood sobbing. Gorman also stole her credit card and used it multiple times after the incident. She quickly reported the matter to the local police but did not hear back from them for more than two months. At that point, the woman felt so neglected and abandoned that she could not follow up with the investigation. The matter was only settled after Gorman was picked up on different charges by another police department. This example is one of 39 mishandled cases by the O'Fallon department since 2005. The O'Fallon police have consistently failed to properly file cases and have delayed investigations beyond the statute of limitations multiple times. This department clearly requires a major overhaul with drastically improved oversight to make sure that it keeps up with the critically important work with which it is entrusted. Men, women, and children are

putting their lives, their security, and their basic human dignity in the hands of these police officers. It is not too much to ask that the department be capable of meeting the expectations of the community to keep us safe.²

The argument claim clearly made is that the O'Fallon police department needs to be reformed. It is supported with arguments detailing the inadequacy and delays in their investigations.



Type 2 Argument is a dispute, a debate, an exchange of arguments.

This is where you are talking about two people having an argument; about a group discussion exchanging their ideas and

views. It is argument as a verb—engaged in action. An example might be the presidential debates between Barack Obama and John McCain. This is type 2 argument. Here's another, more detailed, example:

Student A says "I cannot believe that you cheated on me."

Student B responds by saying "You are overreacting. I broke it off before things got serious."

Student A says "That's not the point. The fact that you cheated at all shows that you don't love me, you're bored with me."

Student B says "It wasn't my fault, he was coming on to me. I tried to stop it from happening but he was all over me."

Student A responds "If you really cared about me you would have found a way to get out of the situation before anything happened."

This discussion immediately demonstrates the difference between Type 1 and 2 conceptions of argument. Student B constructs her first comment as a response to Student A's initial premise; downplaying his incredulity and suggesting that her actions were not particularly shocking. Student A then shifts the argument again by proposing the bright line that any cheating is bad no matter what scale. This back and forth, in which the framework of the argument fluctuates, shows the dynamism and fluidity of argument type 2. In her second statement, Student B attempts to respond by pointing out that she did not cause the cheating to occur. Student A responds by questioning Student B's love for him. This argument is less rational and much more emotionally charged; a common feature of personal, spontaneous argument. For those who study Type 2 Argument, examining ways to make the back and forth of arguing more rational and productive is important.

Type 0 argument as Dale Hample defined it is, "Consideration of claims, reasons, responses, etc. in your mind prior to presentation of an argument."³ Thinking in your mind how to make a persuasive argument in favor of increasing taxation is an example of Argument type 0. In the same way that expert chess players are able to mentally visualize the board many turns ahead, arguers learn to carefully consider each angle of an issue. Consider the argument for tax cuts. Proponents of tax cuts will think about the ideological values of liberty and freedom from government interference. They will reflect on how these interact with opposing values of social welfare and equality. They will also consider the practical implications of tax cuts. Will certain government programs be affected? Would private charity or investment be able to compensate? Tax cut advocates certainly will want to consider their

audience's response. They will brainstorm ways to relate to their audience and win it over. For example, a wealthy advocate for tax reform might decide to wear a cowboy hat and boots in order to fit the image of a no frills, down to earth citizen. This comprehensive thought process all occurs before the arguer opens his or her mouth or puts pen to paper. The often exhaustive amount of preparation required before a congress member makes a speech on a subject like tax cuts or a student trying to prepare for a class preparation just shows how significant consideration of Type 0 argument is.

Now that you see that argument can be thought of in these three different ways, let's take a quick look at ways to think of making better arguments in these contexts.

Constructing Arguments

When you construct arguments, you need to think through what will make a good argument. An example of a simple argument is:

College students should study, because it increases their chances of getting good grades.

In this case, the arguer wants to establish that college students should study. It may seem like a simple argument, but it might help to imagine a hostile audience, such as a group of students disillusioned by the grind of school who have decided that grades aren't all that important and that what counts is having fun experiences in college like partying with their friends. In this case, it is not enough for the arguer to simply claim that college students should study. Instead the arguer must make a strong and thoughtful case in favor of studying. This will entail considering what will

support the argument such as a correlation between studying and long term happiness.

College students should study. A variety of studies show that good study habits improve grades. I've found it true in my own experience. Studying improved my grades.

The arguer could further this argument by carefully showing how studying leads to good grades.

Logos, Pathos, Ethos

Logos, pathos, and ethos are three ways to support your arguments, taken from Aristotle and classic approaches to argument.⁴

Logos is Proof using language and logic (reasoned supported for arguments). When John pointed out that the an income tax cut would provide little help to the poor, he pointed out that it would give \$88,000 of relief to those making over \$1 million and only \$4 to those making less than \$20,000. In doing this, he was using logos. This is the form of argument that stresses support, especially analysis that is well thought out and



sound. The use of logic and reason is the logos of the argument. This is often demonstrated in syllogisms. For example:

All people are moral.

Socrates is a person.

Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

This type of formality in argumentation differs from the way an argument can appeal to audience. **Pathos is the emotional appeal of an argument to generate thoughts supportive of an argument;** it uses emotional appeal as a form of proof. An example is:

“Please, save the lives of those being tortured in prison cells in Iran. The cells are in terrible condition, and prisoners are humiliated by the guards.”

The appeal to our feelings of sympathy for the people in these cells is the use of pathos.

Ethos often applies to the context of an argument and the background of the arguer. **Ethos is the development or existence of credibility of a speaker.** This is done by a speaker having support from the audience. When that does not exist, the speaker’s arguments are discounted. For example: Tea Party activists do not trust Barack Obama; he has low ethos for them. Another way of thinking about ethos is what a speaker says and does that enhances or undermines credibility. Barack Obama is often seen as an inspirational speaker that reaches out to people in audiences. For those that see Obama in that way, he develops credibility, ethos, that makes his arguments stronger.

Logos, Pathos and Ethos work together to support arguments (or if done poorly, to undermine an argument). Logos has to do with the logical content of the argument, Pathos is located in the emotions of the audience, and Ethos is the character of the speaker.

Responding to Arguments

After an argument has been delivered it is often met with the response of another arguer. Responding to arguments evolves the idea of an argument into an interaction of ideas. Arguers need to address each others’ arguments to engage with each other effectively. There are multiple ways of responding to an argument.

Counter-arguments are one way of responding to an argument by offering support that concludes the opposite way of the claim. If the original argument states that people should become lawyers because they make a lot of money, the counter-argument could be: lawyers have to work long hours and have little free time. The counter-argument does not question the validity of the support that lawyers make a lot of money. Instead it offers a reason why people shouldn’t become lawyers.

It is also possible to make attacks against the opposing arguments themselves. This is what refutation is, challenging the worth and validity of your opponents’ arguments. You could refute the argument by arguing that many lawyers do not make much money and provide support for such a claim. For instance, many lawyers work for local governments and for non-profit organizations.

Critiquing others’ arguments is another form of response that questions the underlying assumptions in the arguments. Often critiques will approach an argument more philosophically. If the original argument made is that the United States is the most powerful country in the world due to the combination of its financial prowess, cultural influence, and military strength, the critique may not dispute the claim or the warrants of why the United States is more powerful than other countries. Instead, a critique of the argument could question the notion of valuing power over other countries in a hierarchal fashion due to the legacy of colonial power, culture wars, and wars of invasion. The end goal of the argument is problematic; thus criticism of the argument’s assumptions is in order.

You can also respond to opposing arguments by proposing an alternative that is superior. You would point out that the argument’s suggested

action or belief is not the best way to achieve the end goal. For instance, if the original argument is:



The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation should shift their funding to developing more green technology because global warming is the largest problem facing the world today.

An opponent could suggest that the Gates Foundation continue their current projects and instead, advocate that countries ratify the Kyoto Protocol to solve global warming.

Proposing an alternative adds an entire new level of consideration of arguments. Arguers can ask why not do both proposals and work best to achieve the valued end? If both arguers desire to reach a compromise and support one another's ideas they can decide that both things should be done; however, if the arguers are trying to determine which of the two proposals are better, they have to argue which is superior. Arguer A may argue that the alternate proposal is not feasible and option A should be chosen as the best goal, while arguer B may contest that option B is preferable because even if only some of the countries follow through, the benefit to stopping the exacerbation of global climate change will still be greater than if the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation diverted all of their resources to green technology.

Perspectives on argument: Logic, Dialectic and Rhetoric

Part of the issue of how to frame argumentation comes from the way you might want to think about argumentation. Do you think the effectiveness of the argument is most important? The logical soundness of the argument? Perhaps

another angle is most important to you: Is the fairness of the process in arguing most important to you? Or perhaps you view which argument is most persuasive as the most important aspect of argumentation.

Joseph Wenzel in his essay, "Three Perspectives on Argument: Rhetoric, Dialectic, Logic," noted that logic, dialectic, and rhetoric are differing points of view on arguments. Wenzel writes,

"What is a good argument?"

The rhetorician would say something like, "Good arguing consists in the production of discourse (in speech or writing) that effectively helps members of a social group solve problems or make decisions."

The dialectician might say, "Good argumentation consists in the systematic organization of interaction (e.g., a debate, discussion, trial, or the like) so as to produce the best possible decisions."

The logician might say, "A good argument is one in which a clearly stated claim is supported by acceptable, relevant and sufficient evidence."⁵

The three perspectives all have practical and theoretical understandings that are often interrelated and exist in a multiplicity of ways. In other words, sometimes logic and interaction are really important—say, in a series of scientific discussions. At other times, rhetoric and logic may be most important, for example, when applying a law to a situation unforeseen by that law. Wayne Brockreide wrote about emphasizing these (and other) differing angles on arguments.⁶

- **Rhetorical argument focuses on how arguments appeal to audiences and address specific contexts.**
E.g. How well Democrats convinced Americans to vote for them in the 2010 elections.
- **Dialectical argument focuses on how argumentation should proceed in a systematic and fair way ensuring that all sides of an issue are heard and addressed.**
E.g. Did an argument among friends let each person speak their mind, were the friends' arguments responsive of each other, and was the process of arguing fair and rational.
- **The formal logic approach to argument is concerned with discerning observable truths and using reasoning based on absolutely certain inferences.**
E.g. Examining an argument by observing the truth of its premises and that the premises logically lead to the conclusion.

The example of the 2010 BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico provides an excellent example of the differences between the various conceptions of argument. First we will provide an overview of the incident and the surrounding debate and then we will go on to examine that argument from a logical, dialectical, and then rhetorical perspective.



In April of 2010, an equipment failure on a BP oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico caused a methane explosion and triggered a continuous, high pressure leak from the well. After attempts to cap

the exposed well were unsuccessful, the leaking oil spread rapidly throughout the Gulf, creating a massive dead zone, an environmental catastrophe, and a political maelstrom. Two actors that played a major role in the debate that quickly surrounded the issue were the Obama administration and BP itself.

The Obama administration was in a particularly difficult position. Not only had Obama recently permitted increased off shore drilling, he also took almost a week to respond to the crisis, a delay reminiscent of Bush's heavily criticized response to the Katrina hurricane. Obama attempted to deflect attention away from his administration and towards BP. He argued that BP irresponsibly downplayed the magnitude of the crisis. Additionally Obama looked to focus public attention on the punishment of BP, leading to the high profile congressional hearings in which BP executives were publicly chastised.

BP tried to down play the costs of the oil spill while simultaneously maintaining that such accidents are inevitable. They did not want to incur too much individual blame, but they simultaneously wanted to protect their industry. They argued that government support is needed to oversee oil drilling, and that this support was lacking. At the same time, they highlighted their efforts to solve the problem.

A logic oriented approach might examine Obama's argument as being: "Those who negatively affect society through irresponsible decision making should be punished. The BP oil corporation



executives have made irresponsible decisions that have resulted in damages to society. Therefore, BP should be punished." This argument is clear and strong and follows a logical progression.

A rhetorical angle on the argument would examine the appeal of Obama's argument with the larger public. In the weeks and months following the oil spill, it became clear that the larger population wanted someone to blame. By focusing

attention on BP, Obama provided a focal point for their anger. By creating a single scapegoat, Obama was also able to use decisive and powerful language in order to alienate BP. He even insisted on referring to BP as “British Petroleum” even though that was no longer the name of the company, in order to create a symbolic distinction between the American government and the company at fault. This kind of argumentation greatly appealed to his audience.

However, Obama’s approach might concern those looking at it from a dialectical viewpoint. Focusing on the scapegoat distracts from understanding the underlying causes of a problem and from seeking realistic solutions. Instead, a dialectician would likely side with BP’s claims to review the issue carefully. They would recognize the possibility that many people were at fault and would want to balance out the argument with equal time and consideration for the various perspectives. They would probably prefer a legal investigation in which evidence could be weighed on either side, rather than the politically motivated congressional hearings that whet the vindictive appetites of those affected.



Ultimately the most effective approach in considering this issue could well be a combination of the three styles of argument. There is logic in claiming that those who are responsible for harm should take responsibility for that harm. This claim creates a baseline for understanding the more complex argumentation that follows. From a rhetorical standpoint, the American people’s anger and frustration at BP’s irresponsibility provides the impetus to ensure that corporations are discouraged from irresponsible practices in the future. Politicians like Obama can appeal to those sentiments in order

to create support for new regulations. But the dialectic perspective provides a dialogue for checking popular emotion and a rush to judgment. It is what provides each side a voice and ultimately redirects the conversation away from revenge and towards working together to solve a serious problem.

Argument comes in diverse forms

Studied from logical, dialectical, or rhetorical approaches, argument is still incredibly broad in its scope. It can be arguments expressed in language like most of the examples we’ve presented so far. But it can be quite subtle and not consist of a clear claim with support. Instead, some arguers construct arguments in other ways. Take the Disney movie, *Aladdin*, for example. The good characters are depicted with large eyes while the bad characters are drawn with small squinty eyes that are dark. This is not an overtly racist argument; however, the subtleties can often be grouped with other forms of imaging that eventually develop a notion of what good people look like and what bad people look like, which can be subconsciously race-driven. As such, the visual images construct a racial argument to society.

There are many arguments that extend outside the conventional paradigm of written and spoken word. A good example of this is the Buddhist monks who burned themselves in Saigon to protest the Ngo Dinh Diem administration and the Vietnam War. Their argument did not use language (at least in the fires themselves) and yet it was considered to be highly effective and articulate. The dramatic and intense nature of the protest drew widespread attention and aroused sympathy for the monk’s cause. The act of suicide effectively communicated a sense of desperation

and established the gravity of the situation. The act also created a clear contrast between other contemporary forms of protest. The argument was strategic in that it avoided many of the criticisms that had been leveled against other anti-war protesters. Because the monks died, their opponents could not suggest that they were afraid of going to war, an accusation that was made of college student peace groups. Moreover, the fact that the act was not violent towards anyone else meant that observers could not criticize the monks as they had criticized groups like the Weathermen (who blew up buildings as a form of protest). Ultimately the argument of the monks relied on symbols to communicate their idea. The image of the fire consuming the monk's body reflected their perception of the war's effect on their country. Despite its unconventional approach, this act of argument quickly became a focal point for the antiwar movement and inspired people all over the world to advocate for peace.

Beyond protests such as the monks, there is poetry, music, film, silence, counseling sessions, teaching, pictures, graffiti, and many, many more ways in which arguments are expressed. The film "Sound of Music" uses its family's story and music to tell a tale of impending Nazi danger.⁷ Bruce Springsteen's *Born to Run* musically expresses a desire to transcend the frustrations and stagnation of working class life.⁸ Robert Mapplethorpe's art attempted to bring homoeroticism into the public eye.⁹ Banksy's graffiti shows visual ways in which to challenge accepted norms in society.¹⁰ In each of these means of expression, the artists involved are part of a broader societal engagement in argumentation.



Conclusion

Hopefully over the course of this textbook, you will find a plethora of ways to think about argument. You'll learn ways to become a better arguer—a more effective advocate for the things you believe in. You'll see how argument can be viewed from a variety of perspectives. You'll see how to argue in differing contexts.



¹ Daniel J. O'Keefe, "Two Concepts of Argument," *Journal of the American Forensic Association* 13, no. 3 (1977): 121-28.

² Based on an article by Joel Currier, "Assault case is among 39 mishandled by O'Fallon, Mo., police," *StIToday*, February 28, 2010, http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/stcharles/article_e0d20c69-fbc0-5bff-a854-1905ee467467.html (accessed 5/12/12).

³ Dale Hample, "Teaching the cognitive context of argument," *Communication Education* 34, no. 3 (1985): 196-204.

⁴ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. George Kennedy (New York: Wilder Publications, 2009).

⁵ Joseph W. Wenzel, "Three Perspectives on Argument: Rhetoric, Dialectic, Logic," in Robert Trapp and Janice Scheutz, eds., *Perspectives on Argumentation: Essays in Honor of Wayne Brockriede* (New York: International Debate Education Association, 2006), 9-27.

⁶ Wayne Brockriede, "Constructs, Experience, and Argument," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 71 (1985): 151-63.

⁷ *The Sound of Music*, dir. by Robert Wise (1965; Twentieth Century Fox).

⁸ Bruce Springsteen, *Born to Run*, on *Born to Run* (Columbia Records 1975).

⁹ See, for example, Richard Meyer, "Imaging Sadomasochism: Robert Mapplethorpe and the Masquerade of Photography" <http://www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/Mappleth/MappPg1.html> (accessed 5/21/12).

¹⁰ See Banksy's official website <http://www.banksy.co.uk/> (accessed 5/21/12).

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