

Argument: An Introduction

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What you will learn in this chapter:

- 1.1 To explain common misconceptions about the meaning of argument
- 1.2 To describe defining features of argument
- 1.3 To understand the relationship of argument to the problem of truth

At the outset of a book on argument, you might expect us to provide a simple definition of argument. Instead, we're going to explain why no universally accepted definition is possible. Over the centuries, philosophers and rhetoricians have disagreed about the meaning of the term and about the goals that arguers should set for themselves. This opening chapter introduces you to some of these controversies.

We begin by showing some common misconceptions about argument while also explaining how arguments can be either implicit or explicit. We then proceed to three defining features of argument: it requires writers or speakers to justify their claims; it is both a product and a process; and it combines elements of truth seeking and persuasion. Finally, we explore more fully the relationship between truth seeking and persuasion by asking questions about the nature of "truth" that arguments seek.

What Do We Mean by Argument?

- 1.1 To explain common misconceptions about the meaning of argument

Let's begin by examining the inadequacies of two popular images of argument—fight and debate.

Argument Is Not a Fight or a Quarrel

To many, the word *argument* connotes anger and hostility, as when we say, "I just got in a huge argument with my roommate," or "My mother and I argue all the time." What we picture here is heated disagreement, rising pulse rates, and an urge to slam doors. Argument imagined as fight conjures images of shouting talk-show guests, flaming bloggers, or fist-banging speakers.

But to our way of thinking, argument doesn't imply anger. In fact, arguing is often pleasurable. It is a creative and productive activity that

engages us at high levels of inquiry and critical thinking, often in conversation with people we like and respect. For your primary image of argument, we invite you to think not of a shouting match on cable news but of a small group of reasonable people seeking the best solution to a problem. We will return to this image throughout the chapter.

Argument Is Not Pro-Con Debate

Another popular image of argument is debate—a presidential debate, perhaps, or a high school or college debate tournament. According to one popular dictionary, *debate* is “a formal contest of argumentation in which two opposing teams defend and attack a given proposition.” Although formal debate can develop critical thinking, its weakness is that it can turn argument into a game of winners and losers rather than a process of cooperative inquiry.

For an illustration of this weakness, consider one of our former students, a champion high school debater who spent his senior year debating the issue of prison reform. Throughout the year he argued for and against propositions such as “The United States should build more prisons” and “Innovative alternatives to prison should replace prison sentences for most crimes.” We asked him, “What do you personally think is the best way to reform prisons?” He replied, “I don’t know. I haven’t thought about what I would actually choose.”

Here was a bright, articulate student who had studied prisons extensively for a year. Yet nothing in the atmosphere of pro-con debate had engaged him in truth-seeking inquiry. He could argue for and against a proposition, but he hadn’t experienced the wrenching process of clarifying his own values and taking a personal stand. As we explain throughout this text, argument entails a desire for truth; it aims to find the best solutions to complex problems. We don’t mean that arguers don’t passionately support their own points of view or expose weaknesses in views they find faulty. Instead, we mean that their goal isn’t to win a game but to find and promote the best belief or course of action.

Arguments Can Be Explicit or Implicit

Before proceeding to some defining features of argument, we should note also that arguments can be either explicit or implicit. An *explicit* argument directly states its controversial claim and supports it with reasons and evidence. An *implicit* argument, in contrast, may not look like an argument at all. It may be a bumper sticker, a billboard, a poster, a photograph, a cartoon, a vanity license plate, a slogan on a T-shirt, an advertisement, a poem, or a song lyric. But like an explicit argument, it persuades its audience toward a certain point of view.

Consider the striking photograph in Figure 1.1—a baby wearing a bib labeled “POISON.” This photograph enters a conversation about the safety of toys and other baby products sold in the United States. In recent years, fears about toy safety have

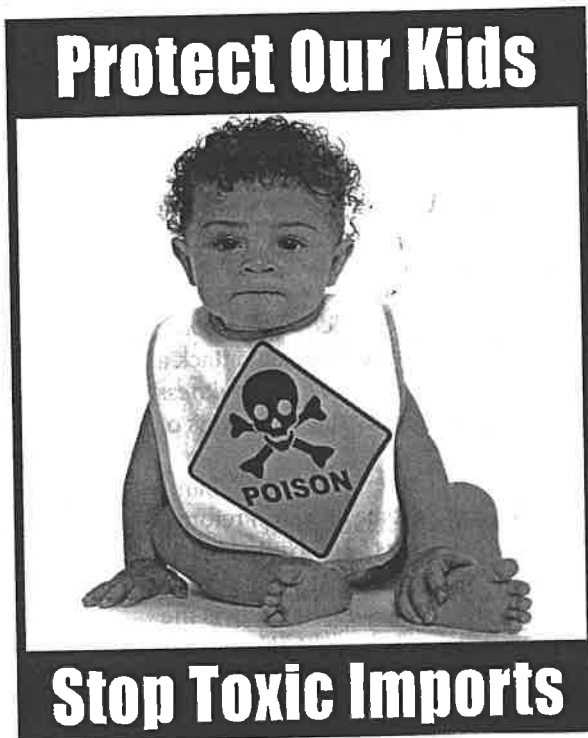


FIGURE 1.1 An implicit argument against phthalates

of the toy industry. At issue were a number of scientific questions about the risk posed by phthalates. To what extent do studies on rats apply to humans? How much exposure to phthalates should be considered dangerous? (Experiments on rats used large amounts of phthalates—amounts that, according to many scientists, far exceed anything a baby could absorb by chewing on a toy.) Also at issue is the level of health risks a free market society should be willing to tolerate. The European Union, operating on the “precautionary principle,” and citing evidence that such toys *might* be dangerous, has banned toys containing phthalates. The U.S. government sets less strict standards than does the European Union. A federal agency generally doesn’t ban a substance unless it has been *proven* harmful to humans, not merely suspected of being harmful. In defense of free markets, the toy and chemical industries accused opponents of phthalates of using “junk science” to produce scary but inaccurate data.

Our point in summarizing the toxic toy controversy is to demonstrate the persuasive roles of both implicit and explicit arguments.

In contrast to the implicit argument made in Figure 1.1, consider the following explicit argument posted by student writer Juan Lucas on a blog site. As an explicit argument, it states its claim directly and supports it with reasons and evidence.

come mostly from two sources: the discovery that many toys imported from China contained lead paint and the discovery that a substance used to make plastics pliable and soft—called *phthalates* (pronounced “thalates”)—may be harmful. Phthalates have been shown to interfere with hormone production in rat fetuses and, based on other rodent studies, may produce some kinds of cancers and other ailments. Because many baby products contain phthalates—bibs, edges of cribs, rubber duckies, and any number of other soft, rubbery toys—parents worry that babies can ingest phthalates by chewing on these toys.

The photograph of the baby and bib makes the argumentative claim that baby products are poisonous; the photograph implicitly urges viewers to take action against phthalates. But this photograph is just one voice in a surprisingly complex conversation. Is the bib in fact poisonous? Such questions were debated during a recent campaign to ban the sale of toys containing phthalates in California. A legislative initiative sparked intense lobbying from both child-advocacy groups and representatives

An Argument Against Banning Phthalates

(BLOG POST BY STUDENT JUAN LUCAS)

The campaign to ban phthalates from children's toys uses scare tactics that aren't grounded in good science. The anti-phthalate campaign shocks us with photos of baby bibs labeled "poison." It arouses fear by linking phthalates to possible cancers or abnormalities in hormone production. In contrast, the scientific literature about phthalates is much more guarded and cautious. Political pressure has already led to a 2009 federal ban on phthalates used in toys that can be put in a baby's mouth, such as bottle nipples and teething rings. But based on the scientific evidence, I argue that further banning of phthalates from children's toys is a mistake.

Despite the warnings from the anti-phthalates campaign, the federal Consumer Product Safety Commission, after extensive tests and review of the scientific literature, says that the level of phthalates absorbed from toys is too low to be harmful. No scientific study has yet demonstrated harm to humans. Moreover, humans are exposed to phthalates daily, especially from food packaging, plastic bottles, shower curtains, personal care products, and elsewhere. Banning phthalates in children's toys wouldn't significantly reduce human exposure to phthalates from other sources.

Banning substances on emotional rather than scientific grounds has its own negative consequences. If we try to ban all potentially harmful substances before they have been proven harmful, we will be less watchful against scientifically proven dangers such as lead, coal dust, sulfur dioxide, or mercury in fish. We should place phthalates in the same category as other possible-but-not-proven threats that are part of living in the industrial world: artificial sweeteners, electromagnetic waves, non-organic foods (because of possible pesticide residue), GMO corn and soy beans, and radon in our walls. We should demand rigorous testing of all these threats, but not try to ban them until evidence-based science proves their harmfulness.

We should also keep in mind the impact of too much regulation on people's jobs and the economy in general. The toy industry, a vibrant and important one in our economy (just ask Santa Claus), provides thousands of jobs, and is already highly regulated with safety standards. The use of phthalates, in fact, might make many toys safer by making them softer and less brittle. Ensuring toy safety through strong testing and regulation is absolutely necessary. But let's base our regulations on good science.

■■■ FOR WRITING AND DISCUSSION Implicit and Explicit Arguments MyWritingLab™

Any argument, whether implicit or explicit, tries to influence the audience's stance on an issue, moving the audience toward the arguer's claim. Arguments work on us psychologically as well as cognitively, triggering emotions as well as thoughts and ideas. Each of the implicit arguments in Figures 1.2–1.4 makes a claim on its audience, trying to get viewers to adopt its position, perspective, belief, or point of view on an issue.

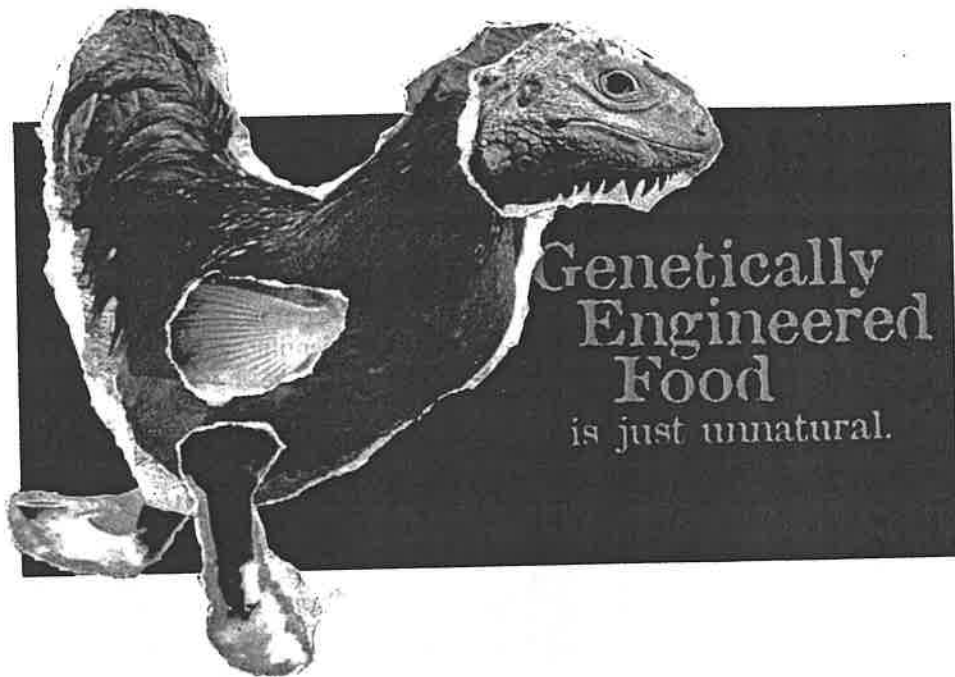


FIGURE 1.2 Poster related to the GMO controversy

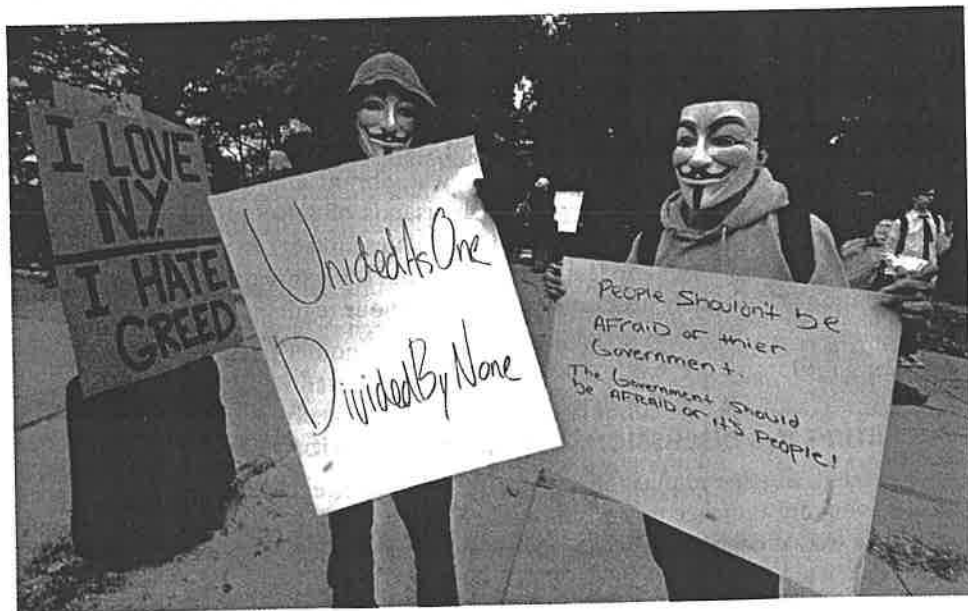


FIGURE 1.3 Photograph of protestors at a New York State Occupy Wall Street Rally



"Do you John promise that your schedule, please put your iPhone away, will never be more important than your times together?"

FIGURE 1.4 Cartoon on social etiquette and digital media

Individual task: For each argument, answer the following questions:

1. What conversation does this argument join? What is the issue or controversy? What is at stake? (Sometimes "insider knowledge" might be required to understand the argument. In such cases, explain to an outsider the needed background information or cultural context.)
2. What is the argument's claim? That is, what value, perspective, belief, or position does the argument ask its viewers to adopt?
3. What is an opposing or alternative view? What views is the argument pushing against?
4. Convert the implicit argument into an explicit argument by stating its claim and supporting reasons in words. How do implicit and explicit arguments work differently on the brains or hearts of the audience?

Group task: Working in pairs or as a whole class, share your answers with classmates. ■ ■ ■

The Defining Features of Argument

1.2 To describe defining features of argument

We turn now to examine arguments in more detail. (Unless we say otherwise, by *argument* we mean explicit arguments that attempt to supply reasons and evidence to support their claims.) This section examines three defining features of such arguments.

Argument Requires Justification of Its Claims

To begin defining argument, let's turn to a humble but universal site of disagreement: the conflict between a parent and a teenager over rules. In what way and in what circumstances do such conflicts constitute arguments?

Consider the following dialogue:

YOUNG PERSON (*racing for the front door while putting coat on*): Bye. See you later.

PARENT: Whoa! What time are you planning on coming home?

YOUNG PERSON (*coolly, hand still on doorknob*): I'm sure we discussed this earlier. I'll be home around 2 A.M. (*The second sentence, spoken very rapidly, is barely audible.*)

PARENT (*mouth tightening*): We did *not* discuss this earlier and you're *not* staying out till two in the morning. You'll be home at twelve.

At this point in the exchange, we have a quarrel, not an argument. Quarrelers exchange antagonistic assertions without any attempt to support them rationally. If the dialogue never gets past the "Yes-you-will/No-I-won't" stage, it either remains a quarrel or degenerates into a fight.

Let us say, however, that the dialogue takes the following turn:

YOUNG PERSON (*tragically*): But I'm *sixteen years old!*

Now we're moving toward argument. Not, to be sure, a particularly well-developed or cogent one, but an argument all the same. It's now an argument because one of the quarrelers has offered a reason for her assertion. Her choice of curfew is satisfactory, she says, *because* she is sixteen years old, an argument that depends on the unstated assumption that sixteen-year-olds are old enough to make decisions about such matters.

The parent can now respond in one of several ways that will either advance the argument or turn it back into a quarrel. The parent can simply invoke parental authority ("I don't care—you're still coming home at twelve"), in which case argument ceases. Or the parent can provide a reason for his or her view ("You will be home at twelve because your dad and I pay the bills around here!"), in which case the argument takes a new turn.

So far we've established two necessary conditions that must be met before we're willing to call something an argument: (1) a set of two or more conflicting assertions and (2) the attempt to resolve the conflict through an appeal to reason.

But good argument demands more than meeting these two formal requirements. For the argument to be effective, an arguer is obligated to clarify and support the reasons presented. For example, "But I'm sixteen years old!" is not yet a clear support for the assertion "I should be allowed to set my own curfew." On the surface, Young Person's argument seems absurd. Her parent, of all people, knows precisely how old she is. What makes it an argument is that behind her claim lies an unstated assumption—all sixteen-year-olds are old enough to set their own curfews. What Young Person needs

to do now is to support that assumption.* In doing so, she must anticipate the sorts of questions the assumption will raise in the mind of her parent: What is the legal status of sixteen-year-olds? How psychologically mature, as opposed to chronologically mature, is Young Person? What is the actual track record of Young Person in being responsible? and so forth. Each of these questions will force Young Person to reexamine and clarify her assumptions about the proper degree of autonomy for sixteen-year-olds. And her responses to those questions should in turn force the parent to reexamine his or her assumptions about the dependence of sixteen-year-olds on parental guidance and wisdom. (Likewise, the parent will need to show why “paying the bills around here” automatically gives the right to set Young Person’s curfew.)

As the argument continues, Young Person and Parent may shift to a different line of reasoning. For example, Young Person might say: “I should be allowed to stay out until 2 A.M. because all my friends get to stay out that late.” (Here the unstated assumption is that the rules in this family ought to be based on the rules in other families.) The parent might in turn respond, “But I certainly never stayed out that late when I was your age”—an argument assuming that the rules in this family should follow the rules of an earlier generation.

As Young Person and Parent listen to each other’s points of view (and begin realizing why their initial arguments have not persuaded their intended audience), both parties find themselves in the uncomfortable position of having to examine their own beliefs and to justify assumptions that they have taken for granted. Here we encounter one of the earliest meanings of the term *to argue*, which is “to clarify.” As an arguer begins to clarify her own position on an issue, she also begins to clarify her audience’s position. Such clarification helps the arguer see how she might accommodate her audience’s views, perhaps by adjusting her own position or by developing reasons that appeal to her audience’s values. Thus Young Person might suggest an argument like this:

I should be allowed to stay out until two on a trial basis because I need enough freedom to demonstrate my maturity and show you I won’t get into trouble.

The assumption underlying this argument is that it is good to give teenagers freedom to demonstrate their maturity. Because this reason is likely to appeal to her parent’s own values (the parent wants to see his or her daughter grow in maturity) and because it is tempered by the qualifier “on a trial basis” (which reduces some of the threat of Young Person’s initial demands), it may prompt productive discussion.

Whether or not Young Person and Parent can work out a best solution, the preceding scenario illustrates how argument leads people to clarify their reasons and provide justifications that can be examined rationally. The scenario also illustrates two specific aspects of argument that we will explore in detail in the next sections: (1) Argument is both a process and a product. (2) Argument combines truth seeking and persuasion.

*Later in this text we will call the assumption underlying a line of reasoning its *warrant* (see Chapter 4).

Argument Is Both a Process and a Product

As the preceding scenario revealed, argument can be viewed as a *process* in which two or more parties seek the best solution to a question or problem. Argument can also be viewed as a *product*, each product being any person's contribution to the conversation at a given moment. In an informal discussion, the products are usually short, whatever time a person uses during his or her turns in the conversation. Under more formal settings, an orally delivered product might be a short, impromptu speech (say, during an open-mike discussion of a campus issue) or a longer, carefully prepared formal speech (as in a PowerPoint presentation at a business meeting or an argument at a public hearing for or against a proposed city project).

Similar conversations occur in writing. Roughly analogous to a small-group discussion is an exchange of the kind that occurs regularly online through informal chat groups or more formal blog sites. In an online discussion, participants have more thinking time to shape their messages than they do in a real-time oral discussion. Nevertheless, messages are usually short and informal, making it possible over the course of several days to see participants' ideas shift and evolve as conversants modify their initial views in response to others' views.

Roughly equivalent to a formal speech would be a formal written argument, which may take the form of an academic argument for a college course; a grant proposal; an online posting; a guest column for the op-ed* section of a newspaper; a legal brief; a letter to a member of Congress; or an article for an organizational newsletter, popular magazine, or professional journal. In each of these instances, the written argument (a product) enters a conversation (a process)—in this case, a conversation of readers, many of whom will carry on the conversation by writing their own responses or by discussing the writer's views with others. The goal of the community of writers and readers is to find the best solution to the problem or issue under discussion.

Argument Combines Truth Seeking and Persuasion

In thinking about argument as a product, the writer will find herself continually moving back and forth between truth seeking and persuasion—that is, between questions about the subject matter (What is the best solution to this problem?) and about audience (What do my readers already believe or value? What reasons and evidence will most persuade them?). Back and forth she'll weave, alternately absorbed in the subject of her argument and in the audience for that argument.

Neither of the two focuses is ever completely out of mind, but their relative importance shifts during different phases of the development of a paper. Moreover, different rhetorical situations place different emphases on truth seeking versus persuasion.

**Op-ed* stands for "opposite-editorial." It is the generic name in journalism for a signed argument that voices the writer's opinion on an issue, as opposed to a news story that is supposed to report events objectively, uncolored by the writer's personal views. Op-ed pieces appear in the editorial-opinion section of newspapers, which generally features editorials by the resident staff, opinion pieces by syndicated columnists, and letters to the editor from readers. The term *op-ed* is often extended to syndicated columns appearing in newsmagazines, advocacy Web sites, and online news services.

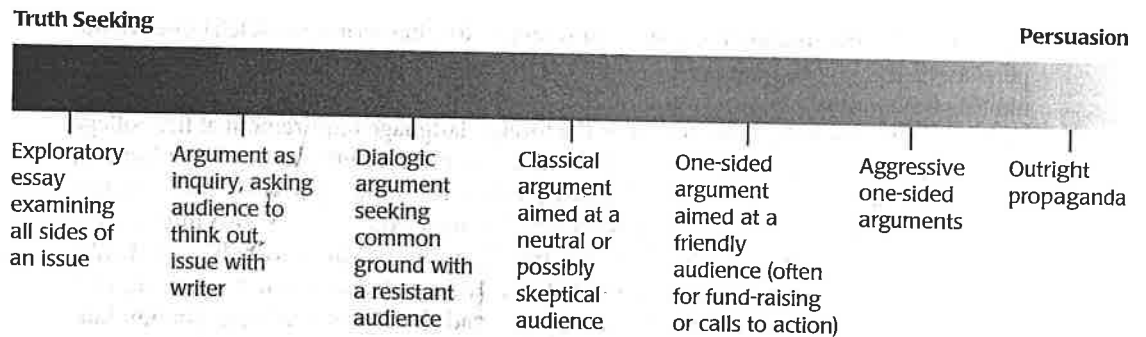


FIGURE 1.5 Continuum of arguments from truth seeking to persuasion

We could thus place arguments on a kind of continuum that measures the degree of attention a writer gives to subject matter versus audience. (See Figure 1.5.) At the far truth-seeking end of the continuum might be an exploratory piece that lays out several alternative approaches to a problem and weighs the strengths and weaknesses of each with no concern for persuasion. At the other end of the continuum would be outright propaganda, such as a political campaign advertisement that reduces a complex issue to sound bites and distorts an opponent's position through out-of-context quotations or misleading use of data. (At its most blatant, propaganda obliterates truth seeking; it will do anything, including the knowing use of bogus evidence, distorted assertions, and outright lies, to win over an audience.) In the middle ranges of the continuum, writers shift their focuses back and forth between truth seeking and persuasion but with varying degrees of emphasis.

As an example of a writer focusing primarily on truth seeking, consider the case of Kathleen, who, in her college argument course, addressed the definitional question "Is American Sign Language (ASL) a 'foreign language' for purposes of meeting the university's foreign language requirement?" Kathleen had taken two years of ASL at a community college. When she transferred to a four-year college, the chair of the foreign languages department at her new college would not allow her ASL proficiency to count for the foreign language requirement. ASL isn't a "language," the chair said summarily. "It's not equivalent to learning French, German, or Japanese."

Kathleen disagreed, so she immersed herself in developing her argument. While doing research, she focused almost entirely on subject matter, searching for what linguists, neurologists, cognitive psychologists, and sociologists had said about the language of deaf people. Immersed in her subject matter, she was only tacitly concerned with her audience, whom she thought of primarily as her classmates and the professor of her argument class—people who were friendly to her views and interested in her experiences with the deaf community. She wrote a well-documented paper, citing several scholarly articles, that made a good case to her classmates (and the professor) that ASL is indeed a distinct language.

Proud of the big red A the professor had placed on her paper, Kathleen decided for a subsequent assignment to write a second paper on ASL—but this time aiming it directly at the chair of foreign languages and petitioning him to accept her ASL

proficiency for the foreign language requirement. Now her writing task fell closer to the persuasive end of our continuum. Kathleen once again immersed herself in research, but this time focused not on subject matter (whether ASL is a distinct language) but on audience. She researched the history of the foreign language requirement at her college and discovered some of the politics behind it (an old foreign language requirement had been dropped in the 1970s and reinstated in the 1990s, partly—a math professor told her—to boost enrollments in foreign language courses). She also interviewed foreign language teachers to find out what they knew and didn't know about ASL. She discovered that many teachers thought ASL was “easy to learn,” so that accepting ASL would allow students a Mickey Mouse way to avoid the rigors of a “real” foreign language class. Additionally, she learned that foreign language teachers valued immersing students in a foreign culture; in fact, the foreign language requirement was part of her college's effort to create a multicultural curriculum.

This new understanding of her target audience helped Kathleen reconceptualize her argument. Her claim that ASL is a real language (the subject of her first paper) became only one section of her second paper, much condensed and abridged. She added sections showing the difficulty of learning ASL (to counter her audience's belief that learning ASL is easy), showing how the deaf community forms a distinct culture with its own customs and literature (to show how ASL would meet the goals of multiculturalism), and showing that the number of transfer students with ASL credits would be negligibly small (to allay fears that accepting ASL would threaten enrollments in language classes). She ended her argument with an appeal to her college's public emphasis (declared boldly in its mission statement) on eradicating social injustice and reaching out to the oppressed. She described the isolation of deaf people in a world where almost no hearing people learn ASL, and she argued that the deaf community on her campus could be integrated more fully into campus life if more students could “talk” with them. Thus the ideas included in her new argument—the reasons selected, the evidence used, the arrangement and tone—all were determined by her primary focus on persuasion.

Our point, then, is that all along the continuum, writers attempt both to seek truth and to persuade, but not necessarily with equal balance. Kathleen could not have written her second paper, aimed specifically at persuading the chair of foreign languages, if she hadn't first immersed herself in truth-seeking research that convinced her that ASL is indeed a distinct language. Nor are we saying that her second argument was better than her first. Both fulfilled their purposes and met the needs of their intended audiences. Both involved truth seeking and persuasion, but the first focused primarily on subject matter whereas the second focused primarily on audience.

Argument and the Problem of Truth

1.3 To understand the relationship of argument to the problem of truth

The tension that we have just examined between truth seeking and persuasion raises an ancient issue in the field of argument: Is the arguer's first obligation to truth or to winning the argument? And just what is the nature of the truth to which arguers are supposed to be obligated?

In Plato's famous dialogues from ancient Greek philosophy, these questions were at the heart of Socrates' disagreement with the Sophists. The Sophists were

professional rhetoricians who specialized in training orators to win arguments. Socrates, who valued truth seeking over persuasion and believed that truth could be discovered through philosophic inquiry, opposed the Sophists. For Socrates, Truth resided in the ideal world of forms, and through philosophic rigor humans could transcend the changing, shadowlike world of everyday reality to perceive the world of universals where Truth, Beauty, and Goodness resided. Through his method of questioning his interlocutors, Socrates would gradually peel away layer after layer of false views until Truth was revealed. The good person's duty, Socrates believed, was not to win an argument but to pursue this higher Truth. Socrates distrusted rhetoricians because they were interested only in the temporal power and wealth that came from persuading audiences to the orator's views.

Let's apply Socrates' disagreement with the Sophists to a modern instance. Suppose your community is divided over the issue of raising environmental standards versus keeping open a job-producing factory that doesn't meet new guidelines for waste discharge. The Sophists would train you to argue any side of this issue on behalf of any lobbying group willing to pay for your services. If, however, you followed the spirit of Socrates, you would be inspired to listen to all sides of the dispute, peel away false arguments, discover the Truth through reasonable inquiry, and commit yourself to a Right Course of Action.

But what is the nature of Truth or Right Action in a dispute between jobs and the environment? The Sophists believed that truth was determined by those in power; thus they could enter an argument unconstrained by any transcendent beliefs or assumptions. When Socrates talked about justice and virtue, the Sophists could reply contemptuously that these were fictitious concepts invented by the weak to protect themselves from the strong. Over the years, the Sophists' relativist beliefs became so repugnant to people that the term *sophistry* became synonymous with trickery in argument.

However, in recent years the Sophists' critique of a transcendent Universal Truth has been taken seriously by many philosophers, sociologists, and other thinkers who doubt Socrates' confident belief that arguments, properly conducted, necessarily arrive at a single Truth. For these thinkers, as for the Sophists, there are often different degrees of truth and different kinds of truths for different situations or cultures. From this perspective, when we consider questions of interpretation or value, we can never demonstrate that a belief or assumption is true—not through scientific observation, not through reason, and not through religious revelation. We get our beliefs, according to these contemporary thinkers, from the shared assumptions of our particular cultures. We are condemned (or liberated) to live in a pluralistic, multicultural world with competing visions of truth.

If we accept this pluralistic view of the world, do we then endorse the Sophists' radical relativism, freeing us to argue any side of any issue? Or do we doggedly pursue some modern equivalent of Socrates' truth?

Our own sympathies are with Socrates, but we admit to a view of truth that is more tentative, cautious, and conflicted than his. For us, truth seeking does not mean finding the "Right Answer" to a disputed question, but neither does it mean a valueless relativism in which all answers are equally good. For us, truth seeking means taking

responsibility for determining the “best answer” or “best solution” to the question for the good of the whole community when taking into consideration the interests of all stakeholders. It means making hard decisions in the face of uncertainty. This more tentative view of truth means that you cannot use argument to “prove” your claim, but only to make a reasonable case for your claim. One contemporary philosopher says that argument can hope only to “increase adherence” to ideas, not absolutely convince an audience of the necessary truth of ideas. Even though you can’t be certain, in a Socratic sense, that your solution to the problem is the best one available, you must ethically take responsibility for the consequences of your claim and you must seek justice for stakeholders beyond yourself. You must, in other words, forge a personal stance based on your examination of all the evidence and your articulation of values that you can make public and defend.

To seek truth, then, means to seek the best or most just solution to a problem while observing all available evidence, listening with an open mind to the views of all stakeholders, clarifying and attempting to justify your own values and assumptions, and taking responsibility for your argument. It follows that truth seeking often means delaying closure on an issue, acknowledging the pressure of alternative views, and being willing to change one’s mind. Seen in this way, learning to argue effectively has the deepest sort of social value: It helps communities settle conflicts in a rational and humane way by finding, through the dialectic exchange of ideas, the best solutions to problems without resorting to violence or to other assertions of raw power.

■ ■ ■ FOR CLASS DISCUSSION Role-Playing Arguments

On any given day, the media provides evidence of the complexity of living in a pluralistic culture. Issues that could be readily decided in a completely homogeneous culture raise questions in a society that has fewer shared assumptions. Choose one of the following cases as the subject for a “simulation game” in which class members present the points of view of the people involved.

Case 1: Political Asylum for German Family Seeking Right to Homeschool Their Children

In 2010 an Evangelical Christian family from Germany, Uwe and Hannelore Romeike and their five children, moved to the United States seeking asylum from political persecution. At the U.S. immigration hearings, the couple argued that if they remained in Germany their decision to homeschool their children would result in fines, possible arrest, and even forced separation from their children. German law forbids homeschooling on the grounds that failure to attend recognized schools will create “parallel societies” whose members will fail to integrate into Germany’s open and pluralistic culture. In early 2011, a U.S. federal immigration judge granted political asylum to the family, denouncing the German government’s policy against homeschooling. He called it “utterly repellent to everything we believe as Americans.” However, in 2013 the Sixth Circuit Court unanimously overturned the original decision and revoked the family’s status as political refugees. Stating that the United States cannot give political asylum to every victim of perceived unfairness in another country’s laws, the court declared that Germany’s ban on homeschooling did

not constitute political persecution. The decision led to international debate about the role of homeschooling in a pluralistic society and about the definition of political persecution. In the United States, the Homeschooling Legal Defense Association urged that the case be heard by the United States Supreme Court and sponsored a petition drive supporting the Romeike family.

Your task: Imagine a public hearing on this issue where all stakeholders are invited to present their points of view. The U.S. Immigration Web site offers the following definition of refugee status:

Refugee status or asylum may be granted to people who have been persecuted or fear they will be persecuted on account of race, religion, nationality, and/or membership in a particular social group or political opinion

Your goal isn't to make your own decision about this case but to bring to imaginative life all the points of view in the controversy. Hold a mock public hearing in which classmates play the following roles: (a) An American parent advocating homeschooling; (b) an American teacher's union representative opposing homeschooling; (c) an attorney arguing that the Romeike family meets the criteria for "refugee status"; (d) an attorney arguing that the Romeike family does not meet the criteria for refugee status; (e) a German citizen supporting the German law against homeschooling; (f) a Romeike parent arguing that they would be persecuted if they returned to Germany; (g) other roles that your class thinks are relevant to this case.

Case 2: HPV Vaccines for Sixth Grade Girls (and Boys)

In 2007 the pharmaceutical company Merck developed a vaccine against the sexually transmitted HPV virus (human papillomavirus), some strains of which can cause cervical cancer as well as genital warts. They launched an extensive television campaign promoting the vaccine (which would bring substantial profits to Merck) and advised that girls should get the vaccine before they reached puberty. Following recommendations from doctors and medical researchers, several states passed laws mandating that the HPV vaccine be included for girls among the other vaccinations required of all children for entry into the sixth or seventh grades (depending on the state). These laws sparked public debate about the benefits versus potential adverse effects of vaccines, and about the state's versus parents' role in determining what vaccines a child should get.

Your task: Imagine a public hearing addressing what your state's laws should be concerning HPV vaccinations for pre-pubescent children. Your goal isn't to make your own decision about this case but to bring to imaginative life all the points of view in the controversy. Hold a mock hearing in which classmates play the following roles: (a) a cancer specialist who supports mandatory HPV vaccination for girls; (b) a public health specialist who also supports expanding the requirement to include boys; (c) a skeptical person concerned about the potential adverse effects of vaccines in general; (d) a religiously conservative parent who believes in abstinence and monogamy and opposes the cultural message of the HPV vaccination.



Conclusion

In this chapter we have explored some of the complexities of argument, showing you why we believe that argument is a matter not of fist banging or of win-lose debate but of finding, through a process of rational inquiry, the best solution to a problem or issue. Good argument requires justification of its claim, is both a process and product, and combines truth seeking with persuasion. We particularly want to emphasize its truth-seeking dimension. We suggest that when you enter an argument you seek out a wide range of views, that you especially welcome views different from your own, that you treat these views respectfully, and that you see them as intelligent and rationally defensible. Although like the Sophists you can use the skills of argument to support any side of any issue, we hope you won't. We hope that, like Socrates, you will use argument for truth seeking and that you will consequently find yourself, on at least some occasions, changing your position on an issue while writing a rough draft (a sure sign that the process of arguing has complicated your views).

At the deepest level, we believe that the skills of reason and inquiry developed through writing arguments can help you get a clearer sense of who you are. If our culture sets you adrift in pluralism, argument can help you take a stand, to say, "These things I believe." In this text we will not pretend to tell you what position to take on any given issue. But as a responsible being, you will often need to take a stand, to define yourself, to say, "Here are the reasons that choice A is better than choice B, not just for me but for you also." If this text helps you base your commitments and actions on reasonable grounds, then it will have been successful.

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