

ARGUMENTATION

ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

second edition

FRANS H. VAN EEMEREN

A. FRANCISCA SNOECK HENKEMANS

Argumentation

This book concentrates on argumentation as it emerges in ordinary discourse, whether the discourse is institutionalized or strictly informal. Crucial concepts from the theory of argumentation are systematically discussed and explained with the help of examples from real-life discourse and texts. The basic principles are explained that are instrumental in the analysis and evaluation of argumentative discourse. Methodical instruments are offered for identifying differences of opinion and analyzing and evaluating argumentation. Attention is also paid to the way in which arguers attempt to be not just reasonable, but effective as well, by maneuvering strategically. In addition, the book provides a great variety of exercises and assignments to improve the student's skill in analyzing and evaluating argumentation.

The authors begin their treatment of argumentation theory at the same juncture where argumentation also starts in practice: The difference of opinion that occasions the evolvement of the argumentation. Each chapter begins with a short summary of the essentials and ends with a number of exercises that students can use to master the material. *Argumentation* is the first introductory textbook of this kind. It is intended as a general introduction for students who are interested in a proper conduct of argumentative discourse. Suggestions for further reading are made for each topic and several extra assignments are added to the exercises.

Special features:

- A concise and complete treatment of both the theoretical backgrounds and the practice of argumentation analysis and evaluation.
- Crucial concepts from pragmatics (speech act theory, Grice's cooperative principle) presented in a non-technical way; introducing the theory of verbal communication.
- The first textbook treatment of strategic maneuvering as a way of balancing being reasonable with being effective
- Exercises and assignments based on real-life texts from a variety of contexts.

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Analysis and Evaluation

Second Edition

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Preface

Argumentation is an introduction to analyzing and evaluating argumentation as it can be found in oral and written discourse. It is based on a series of basic insights from the *pragma-dialectical* theory of argumentation developed at the University of Amsterdam by Frans H. van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst. In this theory, argumentation is viewed as aimed at resolving a difference of opinion in a reasonable way. As a consequence, argumentation is examined as part of an explicit or (in the case of a monologue) implicit discussion between two parties that have a different position with respect to the same proposition. The argumentation advanced in such a *critical discussion* is directed at resolving the difference by convincing the other party of the acceptability of a certain standpoint.

Argumentation deals with the identification of differences of opinion, the determination of unexpressed premises, the uncovering of argument schemes, the analysis of argumentation structures, the evaluation of the soundness of argumentation and the detection of fallacies as violations of rules for critical discussion. To complement the attention paid to the reasonableness dimension of argumentative discourse, by introducing the notion of strategic maneuvering due attention is also paid to its effectiveness dimension. The exposition of the pragma-dialectical method of analysis and evaluation is divided into ten separate chapters. Each of the chapters starts with a brief summary of its essentials and ends with some suggestions for further reading and a number of carefully selected exercises. Where this seems useful, some special assignments are added that can be used by students and instructors to test the progress the students have made in mastering the skills explained in the preceding chapters.

In various respects *Argumentation* is not the traditional kind of textbook. The book is in the first place meant to be a useful and inspiring starting point for those people interested in studying argumentation. It primarily aims at getting its readers interested in reflecting on the characteristics and peculiarities of argumentation as it occurs in practice. For this purpose, it provides them systematically with a conceptual framework

and terminology instrumental in doing so. The method followed in this book is to teach step by step the insights required to perform the various tasks that have to be performed well in order to analyze and evaluate argumentation advanced to resolve a difference of opinion in a reasonable way. Insights are also provided in the strategic maneuvering taking place in reconciling the pursuit of effectiveness and the maintenance of reasonableness in the various types of argumentative practices. After following the course, students should be able to reflect systematically and independently on the problems that can be encountered in dealing with argumentative discourse.

A short summary of the essentials can be found at the beginning of each chapter. After each chapter, a number of exercises are included that students can use to master the material. Also, there are references to other theoretical literature. Where it seems most suitable, more extensive exercises are added that pertain to a variety of aspects of the material previously treated. A detailed index is preceded by a list of the discussion rules, an overview of the fallacies, and a series of general references.

Earlier versions of *Argumentation* were published with Rob Grootendorst, who passed away in 2000, as our co-author. In addition to the theoretical basis he helped provide, in the revised textbook we made use of the theoretical insights concerning strategic maneuvering that were developed in collaboration with Peter Houtlosser (1956–2008). In preparing this new edition we also gratefully made use of the various suggestions from our friends in the international community of argumentation scholars and the Department of Speech Communication, Argumentation Theory and Rhetoric of the University of Amsterdam. We would like to thank in particular Fernando Leal, Corina Andone, Bart Garssen, and Eugen Popa for their helpful comments. To make sure that we keep improving the explanation of the analytical instruments we offer, we strongly encourage all users of *Argumentation*, teachers and students alike, to let us know where they think something in the book is lacking or wrong or, for that matter, really enlightening.

1 Standpoints and Differences of Opinion

Essentials

A standpoint can be positive or negative. In both cases the standpoint can lead to a difference of opinion. A difference of opinion arises when one party's standpoint meets with doubt from the other party. This is an elementary difference of opinion, which is single and nonmixed. If the other party is not only doubtful but adopts an opposing standpoint, then the difference of opinion is mixed. And if there is more than one proposition involved, the difference of opinion is multiple. An analysis of argumentation must begin by identifying the main difference of opinion, and what type of difference of opinion it is.

1.1 Discussion and Disagreement

People often disagree with each other. There's nothing special about that. It is unusual, though, for two people having an exchange about a certain topic to simply accept the fact that their opinions differ and just leave it at that. Often that would be unwise, and sometimes even impossible because they need to go on based on the one view or the other. To resolve the difference of opinion, they then need to discuss the matter and try to reach some kind of agreement. This book is about the use of argumentation as a means to achieve a resolution of a difference by coming to a reasonable agreement.

Argumentation is a verbal activity that can be performed orally and in writing. It is a social activity directed at other people. On top of that, it is also a rational activity aimed at defending an opinion in such a way that it is acceptable to a reasonable critic. A person who argues something starts – rightly or wrongly – from the assumption that there is a difference of opinion. By putting forward the propositions which constitute the argumentation, the speaker or writer attempts to convince the listener or reader. These observations can be summarized in the following definition:

Argumentation is a verbal, social, and rational activity aimed at convincing a reasonable critic of the acceptability of a certain opinion by advancing one or more propositions designed to justify that standpoint.

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This definition of argumentation not only refers to the activity of advancing reasons but also to the shorter or longer text that results from it. This process, and especially the ensuing product, is also referred to by the term *argument*. It is important that it is clearly noticed that the term argumentation (or argument) has these two different meanings, but it is even more important to realize that the study of argumentation concentrates not only on argumentation as a product of rational reasoning, as is usually the case in logic, but also incorporates the pragmatic aspects of argumentation as a developing process of verbal communication and social interaction.

In a purely logical approach to argumentation, a great number of verbal, contextual, situational, and other pragmatic factors influencing the course and outcome of the communication process of argumentative discourse are not regarded. Among them are the way in which the argumentation is phrased in ordinary language, who exactly is addressing whom, the precise situation in which this happens, and the relevant things that happened before. Logicians are not generally concerned with argumentation as it is put forward in natural circumstances by somebody who attempts to convince someone else of a certain standpoint, but with abstract “argument forms” or “patterns of reasoning” in which a conclusion is derived from a particular set of formalized premises. Their aim is to clearly distinguish between the “formally valid” argument forms underlying specific specimens of reasoning and argument forms that are not formally valid. To be able to do so, they leave crucial (“pragmatic”) aspects of argumentative reality that are indispensable for dealing adequately with argumentation outside consideration.

In argumentative discourse there is always an explicit or implicit appeal to some standard of reasonableness, but this does not, of course, mean that each argumentation is indeed reasonable. In practice, an argumentation can be lacking in all kinds of respects. It is the task of argumentation analysts evaluating argumentation to determine whether the soundness criteria are sufficiently satisfied for the argumentation to be called “reasonable.” This means that the study of argumentation has a normative dimension, relating to the ideal of reasonableness that is to be maintained, as well as a descriptive dimension pertaining to argumentative reality and its practical problems. In our method for analyzing and evaluating argumentation these two dimensions are systematically integrated. We will start our treatment of argumentation where argumentative discourse starts in practice, with the difference of opinion that is the source of disagreement.

1.2 *Explicit and Implicit Differences of Opinion*

A difference of opinion comes into being as soon as a standpoint is not fully shared by the people who communicate. This is already the case

when someone advances a view and someone else is not convinced that this standpoint is acceptable, but is in doubt about it. It need not be the case that the other person adopts the opposite standpoint.

A difference of opinion comes into the open when one party expresses doubt (or criticism) about the acceptability of the other party's standpoint. To have a difference of opinion, it is enough that the responding party is not sure about their position:

Paula: I think schools should spend more time teaching writing skills.

Jack: I don't know, I've never really thought about it.

A *difference of opinion* or disagreement always involves two parties. One party puts forward a standpoint and the other party expresses doubts about it – or, as often happens, goes a step further and rejects the standpoint:

Paula: I think schools should spend more time teaching writing skills.

Dan: That's ridiculous! More than enough time is spent on that already.

In the above example, the difference of opinion is *explicit*: both the standpoint and the rejection of it are clearly expressed. But this is not always the case. Especially in written texts, the difference of opinion often remains *implicit*, because only one party is expressing their views. The other party's skepticism or doubt is then anticipated:

Paula: Schools should spend more time teaching writing skills, because students these days have a hard time putting their thoughts on paper. Furthermore, our schools spend ridiculously little time on these skills compared to other countries.

We can be sure that Paula anticipates that her standpoint will not be immediately accepted by everyone because she goes to the trouble of giving arguments in support of it. (Of course, it is possible that she is mistaken and that there is in fact no difference of opinion between her and her readers.)

1.3 Positive and Negative Standpoints

In a difference of opinion, two different positions are taken with regard to a certain issue. In the *proposition* at issue a property or quality is ascribed to persons or things referred to. In the proposition at issue in the standpoint "In my view, Barack Obama was a great president," for instance, the quality of being a great president is ascribed to the person called Barack Obama.

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A proposition can be a description of facts or events (“Last year ticket sales at movie theaters declined by 3 percent”), a prediction (“Knowledge of foreign languages will be an increasingly important requirement in job applications”), a judgment (“Amsterdam is the cleanest city in Europe”), or advice (“You should brush your teeth with the softest possible toothbrush”).

With respect to a proposition, a positive, a negative, or a neutral position can be taken. Dan, Paula, and Alice each take a different position with respect to the proposition that UFOs are a hoax:

Dan: I think UFOs are a hoax.

Paula: I don’t think UFOs are a hoax.

Alice: I don’t know whether UFOs are a hoax or not.

In this example Dan has committed himself positively to the proposition that UFOs are a hoax. He has adopted a *positive standpoint* with respect to the proposition. Paula, who believes that UFOs are not a hoax, has committed herself negatively to the proposition; she has adopted a *negative standpoint*. Alice has not committed herself to this proposition in any way, because she is not sure about it. For the time being, she is taking a neutral position (sometimes called a “zero” standpoint).

In a difference of opinion there is always at least one person who puts forward a positive or negative standpoint with respect to some proposition, and one person who has doubts or does not wish to be tied down to any particular standpoint. It may be that the second party not only has doubts but also adopts an opposing standpoint, but then we have a more complex form of disagreement that will be discussed later.

1.4 *Standpoints and Expressions of Doubt*

Since people can have opinions on any subject whatsoever, the standpoints they adopt can relate to propositions of all kinds. A man may think his wife would look better with a different haircut, or that his tennis game will improve if he uses a lighter-weight racket, or that methadone should be covered by national health insurance.

Whether a proposition relates to a simple matter or a highly complex matter, it is always possible to adopt a standpoint on it:

I think Baudelaire is the best French poet.

Dictators are always right-wing.

It is bad manners to let an old lady stand when you are seated.

In my opinion, behaviorism is an outdated psychological theory.

We should agree that the quantum theory is confirmed by the theory of relativity.

It seems to me that her hat was green.

It's not true that an English mile is the same as two kilometers.
I don't think we should cancel our property insurance policy.

Propositions on which standpoints are adopted can vary not only in subject matter but also in *scope*. A proposition can apply to everyone, or only to certain individuals; it can apply to a whole class, or to only part of a class. The *force* of a standpoint taken on a proposition can vary as well. An opinion can be stated with total conviction, or, at the other extreme, it can be cautiously expressed as a suggestion. Standpoints can thus vary in degree of force and scope:

I'm certain that everyone knows fear.
I suspect that everyone knows fear.
It seems likely that zinc deficiency delays sexual development in some males.
It is doubtful that all words are translatable.
I assume that even intelligent people occasionally have dumb ideas.
You must have added this up wrong.
There's no doubt that everybody needs somebody.
There's no doubt that some people can get along very well by themselves.

It may be that a standpoint addresses more than one proposition at once. Usually, though, these propositions will be closely connected to each other. Their connectedness is sometimes made overt by combining them into a single sentence with conjunctions such as *and* and *but*:

It is unacceptable to me for you to go into my room without asking, take books out of my bookshelf, and then lend them to someone else.
It seems to me it is not necessary to take vitamin B complex and vitamin C pills at every meal, but that it's sufficient to take vitamins A and D once a week and vitamin B complex and vitamin C just once in a while.

When someone expresses a positive standpoint, it is sometimes difficult to separate the standpoint from the proposition to which it is related ("Rock concerts are fun"). The proposition and the standpoint taken on it are often combined in a single statement, and the positive nature of the standpoint is often not emphasized, although sometimes it is:

My standpoint is that it really is true that women are more inclined to hysteria than men are.
Like Andrew, I believe that Christianity and pessimism are irreconcilable.

Another complication is that it is often extremely difficult to differentiate between a negative standpoint and an expression of doubt (a neutral

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position). A cautiously formulated negative standpoint can sound very much like doubt. A statement that on the surface seems to express doubt may, therefore, on closer inspection, actually turn out to function as a negative standpoint. This is quite common because, out of politeness, people usually prefer not to make their disagreement too obvious. There is an inclination to present a negative standpoint as mere skepticism:

I wonder if that's really such a good idea.

Even though expressions of doubt may seem to be thinly disguised negative standpoints, their consequences are not the same. Adopting a negative standpoint leads to the obligation to defend that negative standpoint if it is called into question, whereas merely expressing doubt does not create any such commitment to defend a standpoint. Therefore in analyzing argumentation it is important to determine whether someone is only expressing doubt or may be considered to be adopting a negative standpoint.

1.5 Types of Differences of Opinion

The simplest type of difference of opinion occurs when a standpoint meets with doubt. This is the *elementary form* of differences of opinion. Since a standpoint can be either positive or negative, there are two variants of the elementary form:

- 1 *Peter:* Danish men are romantic.
Alice: Are they?
- 2 *Peter:* Danish men are not romantic.
Alice: I'm not so sure about that.

Because the elementary form of differences of opinion involves only one proposition, it is called *single*. If in a single difference of opinion only one standpoint (whether positive or negative) regarding a proposition is adopted and then called into doubt by the other party, such a difference of opinion is said to be *nonmixed* as well: there is only one party who is committed to defending a standpoint. The elementary form of differences of opinion is both single and nonmixed.

Besides single nonmixed differences of opinion, there are also mixed differences of opinion and multiple differences of opinion. And these can be combined in various ways to form multiple mixed differences of opinion. When analyzed, such complex differences of opinion must first be broken down into a series of elementary differences of opinion.

Altogether, four types of differences of opinion can be distinguished:

- 1 single nonmixed (the elementary form)

- 2 single mixed
- 3 multiple nonmixed
- 4 multiple mixed.

In a *multiple* difference of opinion, the standpoint relates to more than one proposition. A multiple difference of opinion will arise when someone brings up two or more issues at the same time, for example by giving his standpoint on a whole series of matters, or by stating an opinion about a complex theory or about a plan with numerous components.

Whenever the standpoint involves more than one proposition on which a party expresses an opinion, the difference of opinion is a multiple one:

Peter: Danish men are neither romantic nor spiritual, but at least you can depend on them.

Alice: I'm not so sure about all that.

In a *mixed* difference of opinion, opposing standpoints are adopted with respect to the same proposition. One party puts forward a positive standpoint and the other party rejects it (that is, adopts a negative standpoint), or the other way around. This means that instead of simply expressing doubt, the other party responds by adopting an opposing standpoint:

Peter: Danish men are not romantic.

Alice: I don't agree with you.

It is important to be aware that adopting an opposing standpoint always implies doubt (or lack of full agreement) with respect to the other party's standpoint. After all, if there were no doubt, then there would be full agreement with the standpoint, and putting forward the opposite standpoint would be pointless. Therefore, any complex difference of opinion can be broken down into two or more elementary differences of opinion.

The following single mixed difference of opinion can be analyzed as consisting of two elementary differences of opinion:

Peter: You always react way too fast.

Alice: I do not!

The first elementary difference of opinion consists of Peter's positive standpoint with respect to the proposition "Alice always reacts way too fast" together with Alice's doubt about this standpoint. The second elementary difference of opinion consists of Alice's negative standpoint with respect to the proposition "Alice always reacts way too fast" together with Peter's presumed doubt about that standpoint.

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1.6 Main Differences of Opinion and Subordinate Differences of Opinion

During the discussion occasioned by a difference of opinion, new disagreements often surface as the arguments brought forward in defense of a standpoint meet with doubt or rejection. In trying to identify a difference of opinion it is therefore important to distinguish between the *main* difference of opinion and any *subordinate* differences of opinion that may arise during the discussion about the main difference. Look at the following example:

Alice: Excuse me, but I think this soup is spoiled.

Waiter: Madam, that is impossible.

Alice: But look, there's mold floating around in it.

Waiter: That's not mold, those are little pieces of broccoli.

Alice: Well, I've certainly never seen such strange-looking broccoli before.

The main difference of opinion here is single mixed and relates to the proposition "This soup is spoiled." In addition, there is a multiple mixed subordinate difference of opinion relating to the propositions "There's mold floating in the soup" and "There are little pieces of broccoli floating in the soup."

Instead of being stated at the outset, the main difference of opinion often comes to light gradually, so that what the two parties actually disagree on becomes clear only in the course of the discussion. What also often happens is that the same standpoint is repeated in a somewhat different way. Due to the phrasing it may look like a totally new standpoint, but more often than not this is not the case. Sometimes the new version simply does a better job of clearly stating the standpoint at issue in the main difference of opinion than the original version did:

Alice: The French are chauvinistic. I mean, most French people are chauvinistic. I'll tell you why I think so ...

1.7 The Presentation of Standpoints and Doubt

Certain phrases allow the speaker or writer to indicate explicitly that a standpoint is being taken:

My standpoint is that socio-economic and cultural differences play a large role in the results of intelligence tests.

We are of the opinion that people should be able to smoke in public places.

Here are several more expressions that indicate that a standpoint is being taken: