Debate is a process in which individuals exchange arguments about controversial topics. Debate could not exist without arguments. Arguments are the substance of debate. Of course, debates can include more than arguments. Some debates also include humor, stories, and appeals to emotion. In some unfortunate cases, debates may even include verbal aggression and threats. The aim of this text is to support substantive debate, focused primarily on argumentation.

A description of argumentation should account for the elements of argument and how those elements relate to one another. The next three chapters will focus on four elements of argument: claims, evidence, links, and exceptions.¹ This chapter will consider claims and exceptions. Chapter 16 will focus on evidence. Chapter 17 will discuss links between evidence and claims. Later, Chapter 18 will focus on the relationships among the four elements.

Some beginning students of argumentation mistakenly believe that the elements of argument must be presented in a particular order. However, the arrangement of elements into a particular structure does not dictate the order in which each of the elements must be presented. Sometimes, presenting the claim and following it with supporting reasons and evidence is the most persuasive way to present an argument. At other times, an argument may be persuasively presented by starting with evidence then leading up to the claim. The following is a discussion of the structure of an argument, although not necessarily in the order in which the elements should be organized.

¹ These four elements emerge from the work of philosopher Stephen Toulmin who initially generated six elements of argument in his book, *The Uses of Argument*. Toulmin has since revisited and refined his model, most recently publishing a revised version with Albert R. Jonsen *The Abuse of Casuistry*. This chapter will describe those same four elements except that, for the sake of simplicity, it will use different titles to describe them. The names used in this text to describe the four elements are claim, evidence, link, and exception.
Chapter Outline

Claims
Kinds of Claims
- Claims of Description and Definition
- Claims of Association
- Claims of Evaluation
A Taxonomy of Claims
Exceptions
Summary
Terms and Concepts From Chapter 15
Discussion Questions For Chapter 15
Exercises for Chapter 15

Claims

A claim is the main point or the thesis of an argument. A claim is based on or supported by explicit evidence. As people argue, they present evidence designed to persuade their audiences or judges to accept their claim. A claim can either be the conclusion that the debater wishes the audience or judge to accept, or it can be evidence for a subsequent claim.

Sometimes, a claim involves simply a movement from evidence to a conclusion, as illustrated in the following diagram:

![Evidence to Claim Diagram]

In this case, evidence is used to convince an audience to accept a claim; audience acceptance of the claim is the primary goal of the debater. An example of evidence being used to produce a claim is presented in the following diagram:

![Evidence to Claim Example Diagram]

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2 The concept of evidence will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 16, however it will be introduced in this chapter because it is essential to explaining how a claim functions.
Here, the claim that the debater wants the audience to accept is, “Smoking should be banned in public places.” That claim is supported by evidence suggesting “second-hand smoke contributes to health problems for children.”

In other instances, claims are used to produce other claims. For example, evidence is used to produce Claim 1, then Claim 1 is used to convince an audience or judge to accept yet another claim. Thus, Claim 1 produced by the evidence was not the debater’s ultimate goal. Here, Claim 2 is the ultimate goal, but Claim 1 was necessary to convince the audience of Claim 2. For example:

The above example demonstrates how one piece of evidence can be used to produce one claim, and how that claim can be used to produce yet a second claim. Of course, many different combinations exist where claims are used to convince an audience of subsequent claims. The following is another example:
In this example, evidence is used to produce Claim 1 and Claim 2. Then the two claims are used to convince the audience to accept Claim 3. Using an example of wireless cities can clarify how this combination of evidence and claims works:

Three pieces of evidence about wireless cities are produced. One suggests that a wireless city would relieve traffic, a second that traffic relief and bill paying are important to local government, and a third that wireless cities will simplify bill paying. The combination of Evidence 1 and Evidence 2 are used to create Claim 1, that “Relieving traffic will improve management of local governments.” Then, the combination of Evidence 2 and Evidence 3 are used to produce Claim 2 that “Simplifying the bill paying process will improve management of local governments.” Then, Claims 1 and 2 lead to Claim 3 that a “wireless city is desirable”—which is precisely the claim that the debater wants the audience to accept. To attain this goal, the arguer uses 3 pieces of evidence and 2 other claims in combination with one another. Therefore, from the perspective of the arguer, Claim 1 and Claim 2 are important only because they can be used to convince the audience to accept Claim 3.

Convincing an audience to accept a claim may be the ultimate objective of the debater, or, that objective may be to create a claim that is to be used to convince the audience of a subsequent claim. The process of combining claims to produce subsequent claims will be considered further in Chapter 20. Understanding that process requires understanding the different types of claims.
Kinds of Claims

A number of authors writing about argumentation and debate have proposed various taxonomies of claims. The most traditional method of classifying claims is by classic categories of “fact,” “value,” and “policy.” David Zarefsky has added a fourth category of “definition” (Zarefsky, Lecture 5). Bill Hill and Richard Leeman, while following the traditional categories of fact, value, and policy, subdivided fact into being, designation, and relationship. The viewpoint advocated here is not to accept or reject any particular category system, but rather to suggest that no single system is capable of providing a list of categories that are exhaustive and mutually exclusive.

Claims can be made about a nearly endless number of concepts. However, creating a taxonomy for discussing claims is important for a variety of reasons. One reason is that different kinds of claims require different kinds of support. Thus, a taxonomy that distinguishes different types of claims from one another allows students of argumentation and debate to learn how to support various types of claims. A second reason that taxonomies are useful is a functional one. As discussed earlier, claims can be combined to create other claims. As will be discussed in Chapter 20, certain types of claims can be created by a combination of other kinds of claims. Thus, a taxonomy of claims is useful because different kinds of claims require different kinds of support and because certain kinds of claims can be combined to produce other kinds of claims.

In this section, a taxonomy of claims will be created and compared to more traditional taxonomies. As stated earlier, no taxonomy is perfect. The one suggested in this text is, in many respects, no better or worse than others. It is chosen because it is more functional for the purposes of this text. This taxonomy includes descriptive, definitional, associational, and evaluative claims.

Claims of Description and Definition

Claims of description and of definition are used in this text as a replacement for the traditional category of claims of fact. Some argue that, in addition to their factual dimension, claims about description and definition also carry value implications In Schiappa’s words, “The primary thesis of this book [Defining Reality] is that definitional disputes should be treated less as philosophical or scientific questions of ‘is’ and more of sociopolitical and pragmatic questions of ‘ought.’” (Schiappa, p. 3). In other words, Schiappa is arguing that claims of definition and description ultimately are more about values than about facts. In order to explain the reasons that descriptions and definitions are appropriate replacements for the fact category, a few words about facts are in order. Linguist John Searle distinguishes between what he calls institutional and brute facts. Institutional facts are those that are most clearly human creations. What is marriage? What is the difference in a ball and a strike in baseball? Brute facts, on the other hand, are about those things that would continue to exist should humans completely vanish. What is a giraffe? What is water?
Definitions and descriptions are human creations about both institutional and brute facts. The difference is that, supposedly, a brute fact would be the same whether or not humans were around to describe it. Giraffes would be on the earth even if they were never defined or described by human beings. Institutional facts, on the other hand, would be nothing if humans did not define and describe them. Marriage for instance, would not exist if not defined and described as a human institution.

Definitions and descriptions of brute facts and institutional facts work somewhat differently. A definition or a description of a brute fact is a good one to the extent that the definition or description conforms to some empirical, observed reality. A description of a giraffe is a good description to the extent it conforms to the characteristics of an actual giraffe. A giraffe might be described as the tallest living terrestrial animal on earth. This is a good description to the extent that the description actually matches the features of a real giraffe. The criterion for a good definition or description of an institutional fact is different. A definition or a description of an institutional fact is good to the extent that it serves the needs and interests of the community (Richard Rorty). So with respect to the definition of marriage, the question is whether, it serves the interests of the community to define marriage as a union between one man and one woman, or does it serve community interests to define marriage as a union between any two persons? Certain religious communities insist that marriage should be defined only as a union between one man and one woman. Others say that marriage should be defined as a union between one man and one or more women. Still others believe that marriage is legitimately defined as a union of any two persons, regardless of biological sex. The point is that each of those groups would point to their own community interests to support their definition of the concept of marriage. Marriage, they would insist, is defined as they say because it supports their own religious or community beliefs.

Of course, the distinction between brute and institutional facts is not always a clear-cut one. Some things exist on the border of each kind. In other words, some kinds of facts are judged both by whether or not they conform to empirical, observed reality, and by whether or not they serve the needs and interests of the community. Following are a couple of examples of such borderline cases. First, consider the claim that “The universe began and will end with a ‘big bang’.” Whether or not the universe began and will end with a big bang is not dependent on what humans believe about the beginning and end of the world. How the universe began and how it will end is independent of any human belief or conclusion. So, on its face, that claim seems as if it should be judged by whether or not the claim conforms to some elements of observed reality. On the other hand, some will argue that a belief that the world began with a “big bang” does not conform to community interests because it appears, at least on its face, to be inconsistent with some versions of religion. To the extent that those versions of religion are seen as good for the community, the definition of the beginning of the world as being with a big bang will be seen as bad for the community. Consider a similar claim that “The human condition is the result of a process of evolution.” In order to satisfactorily support such a claim, a person needs to describe how the claim corresponds to empirical observations or lived experiences in the world. At the same time, some may argue against that claim because it, like the big bang example, does not serve the interests of a certain religiously inclined community.
Definitions, in particular, almost always contain an imbedded question about the needs and interests of the community—about the values and principles by which the community lives. Claims of definition frequently suggest that a certain definition ought to apply to a particular category of things. Claims of definition frequently involve controversial questions—what should something be named? Should a group be called “terrorists” or “freedom fighters”? Should an abortion be called “terminating a pregnancy” or “killing a baby?” These claims of definition not only are attempts to answer controversial questions, but are also efforts to provide answers that can then be used to develop other kinds of claims, especially evaluative ones. For instance, supporting freedom fighters has a more positive connotation than supporting terrorists, even though the people described as “freedom fighters” may be engaging in the same kinds of activities as those who are described as “terrorists.” Similarly, “terminating a pregnancy” does not have nearly the negative connotations as “killing a baby.” Thus, by supporting certain definitions of “freedom fighters” or “pregnancy termination” the arguer provides a more effective way to evaluate those concepts.

In Botswana, the debate over how to use wilderness areas and manage wild animals features a claim of definition. Government sources use “natural resources” to refer to animals and exotic locations, advertising on roadside billboards using gigantic pictures of rhinoceroses and giraffes accompanied by phrases such as, “Save our natural resources.” A nation that historically has relied on its diamond mines to raise its standard of living above that of surrounding countries, the government of Botswana is attempting to supplant the dwindling diamond supply with a “natural resource” that brings income through tourist business. Thus, the claim is that exotic animals and locations should be defined as a “natural resource.” Farmers who defend their livestock against attacks by lions, and ranchers who give up land to wilderness areas may find that they need to argue against defining animals and wilderness areas as “natural resources.” For them, lions and other animals that attack their livestock are “wild, predatory animals,” not “natural resources.”

Claims of Association

Debaters use claims of association to show how people, institutions, concepts, or policies are associated with one another.³ Things and concepts are associated with one another in a variety of ways. Two of the most common kinds of association used by arguers are associations of cause and effect and associations by similarity. Both of these kinds of association go beyond defining and describing objects to assert that two or more objects are associated with one another by the forces of cause and effect or by similarity.

For example, the claim that “the embargo imposed on Cuba by the United States has weakened the Cuban economy” is an assertion about the cause and effect association.

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³ In a sense, all claims involve associating one thing to another. Descriptions associate a thing with our experience of the thing; definitions associate a word with a concept or a thing; and evaluations associate some thing with a value. However, this category of claims is subtly different because it is used to explain different methods of associating one concept with another.
between two things: the embargo imposed on Cuba by the United States, and the Cuban economy. The statement suggests that those two are related to each other by cause and effect. The cause is the United States’ embargo of Cuba and the effect is a weakened Cuban economy.

Claims of association by similarity are useful when debaters need to ascribe the characteristics of one thing to another. For instance, some have compared exploitation of animals for work and food to human slavery. To make such a claim, a debater might argue that in order to use animals for work or for food, humans need to consider animals as “property” in the same way that slaves were considered property. Since most audiences reject slavery on moral grounds, this kind of claim of similarity is used in an attempt to convince an audience to reject the idea that animals can be considered property.

Claims of Evaluation

Claims of evaluation include several kinds of claims, all of which involve values or evaluations in similar ways. First, these kinds of claims can be used to order values so that one value is considered more important than another. For instance, a debater might assert the claim that “freedom is more important than security.” Such a claim is interesting by itself because it brings to light a particular hierarchy of values. A value hierarchy can be used to assign certain concepts, people, institutions, or actions a higher or lower value in terms of how those things will be evaluated. Thus, this kind of value hierarchy may also become important when debaters create claims to assign values to objects.

Second, some evaluative claims assign values to objects. These claims are quite common in debate. For instance, the claim that “the culture of ancient Greece was the most enlightened in human history,” assigns a positive value to the culture of ancient Greece. Similarly, to argue that “the 2008 Beijing Olympics were the best Olympic games in modern history,” assigns a very high value to the 2008 Olympics relative to other Olympic games.

Third, another very common type of evaluative claim involves policy or action. “The nations of the world should reduce dependence on nuclear power” is an example of a claim that supports a particular policy. Another is “The government of Botswana should do more to protect wildlife within its borders.” Both of these claims evaluate a particular action, whether that action is reducing dependence on nuclear power or protecting wildlife.

A Taxonomy of Claims

Claims recommending changes in policy may involve debates about definitions and descriptions, associations of cause and effect or similarity, as well as values. Policy claims are among the most complex claims that can be debated. Still, as a matter of convention, they are probably the most common.

Thinking about how to classify different kinds of claims is more than just an academic exercise. By considering how a particular claim is classified, a debater can also better think
of how to support that claim. As they become more experienced, debaters will learn to use certain types of claims, either singly or in combination with one another, to support various kinds of claims. Methods of combining types of claims to support claims of evaluation will be considered more fully in Chapter 20.

The category system used in this text is different from systems used in other books about argumentation and debate. As stated earlier, the traditional and most common taxonomy is fact, value, and policy. Because debaters will undoubtedly come in contact with this traditional method of organizing claims, a description of the similarities of the traditional taxonomy and the one used in this text is presented in the table below. The table uses Hill and Lehman’s taxonomy as a starting point because it is perhaps the most complete.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Taxonomy Used in This Text</th>
<th>Taxonomy Used by Hill and Lehman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Fact: Being (brute fact)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Fact: Designation (institutional fact)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause and Effect Association</td>
<td>Fact: Relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association of Similarity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation: Ordering Values into Hierarchy</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation: Assigning Values to Objects</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation: Advocating Policies and Actions</td>
<td>Policy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The categories of “definition, description, and association,” as they are used in this text, correspond to Hill and Lehman’s category of “fact.” Hill and Lehman’s category of “fact” includes three subcategories: “being, designation, and relationship.” Hill and Lehman’s subcategory of “being” corresponds to this text’s category of “description.” When a debater describes an object, that description is frequently offered in terms of brute facts, especially when the object to be described is one that exists in the empirical world. Hill and Lehman describe the subcategory of “being” as “concerned with whether an object of focus exists or whether an action occurred.” (Hill and Leeman, p. 134). Their “being” subcategory appears to be similar to what Searle called “brute” facts. Hill and Leeman’s subcategory of “designation,” seems similar to what Searle called “institutional” facts. In their words, designation involves “naming or classifying an object of focus” (Hill and Leeman, p. 135). Thus, Hill and Leeman’s category of “facts” corresponds to “definitions and descriptions” in the taxonomy used in this text. This text’s category of “association” is similar to Hill and Leeman’s subcategory of “relationship” although they exclusively discuss relationships of cause and effect. As they state, “propositions of fact can address issues of relationship [emphasis mine]” (Hill and Leeman, p. 135). Hill and Lehman’s system does not explicitly include associations of similarity.

Hill and Leeman’s taxonomy contains a category called “value” which “generally posits some sort of evaluative judgment about the object of focus” (Hill and Leeman, p. 135). Therefore, their category of “value” corresponds to this text’s category of “evaluation,” specifically as to how values are sorted into hierarchies or how values are assigned to objects.
Finally, Hill and Lehman include a category they call “policy,” about which they assert, “that some type of action—policy—needs to be undertaken” (Hill and Leeman, p. 129). Their “policy” category is the same as a subcategory of our “evaluation” that is called, “evaluating policies and actions.”

Since the system used in this text is so similar to the traditional taxonomy as presented by Hill and Lehman, some might question the need for a different taxonomy. Why not simply adopt the more traditional and well-known taxonomy? The answer to that question is that the category system used in this text is more than a taxonomy. It is a functional system that can be used to show how various forms of claims can be combined to create other kinds of claims. A complete answer to the question will be presented during the discussion of “Combining Claims Coherently” in Chapter 20.

Exceptions

A question that no traditional debate texts consider is that of an exception. An exception is what Stephen Toulmin called a reservation. An exception allows the arguer to identify circumstances in which the claim does not hold. So, one might claim that in cases of divorce, the wife ought to have custody of the children except in cases where she is proven to be an incompetent parent. Another example might be that the People’s Republic of China should adopt an odd-even system for automobiles except in taxis. In both of those cases, exceptions allow the arguer to further define the circumstances under which the claim ought to be accepted. This is especially useful because an arguer who proactively describes his or her own exceptions will be more persuasive than an arguer who allows the opposing debater to point out the exceptions. Exceptions thus allow a debater to make the claim clear and focused.

The following diagram illustrates the use of evidence to create a claim that contains an exception:

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4 The odd-even system adopted in Beijing during the 2008 Olympic Games mandated that automobiles with licenses ending in odd numbers could be driven only on odd numbered dates and that those with licenses ending in even numbers could be driven only on even numbered dates. An exception was made for taxis.
Some exceptions are more appropriate than others. Appropriate exceptions are those that follow the implicit reasoning used in the original evidence–claim relationship. The exception mentioned above is a reasonable one, because the original evidence—claim relationship—involves who is a good parent and, therefore, which parent ought to have custody of a child during a divorce. An inappropriate exception is one that simply tries to protect the claim from legitimate objections that are not a part of the original evidence–claim relationship. For instance, to claim that, in case of divorce, custody should be granted to the mother unless she is a member of a certain religion or minority group is less legitimate because being a member of such a group is not obviously related to whether or not she is a good parent.

This chapter has discussed the idea of a claim that is sometimes combined with an exception. Claims are a fundamental element of an argument because they directly involve and articulate the point that the arguer is trying to debate. Exceptions provide the debater with an opportunity to focus and clarify the claim by identifying situations and circumstances when the debater does not support the claim, thereby strengthening the claim against the opponent’s refutation.

Summary

This chapter focused on the most basic element of any argument, the claim, along with any exceptions that might accompany that claim. The chapter briefly touched on the concept of evidence, which will be more fully explained in the next chapter. Evidence was considered here because it is the element of argument that is designed to support the claim. Without evidence, no claim can be persuasive.
In this chapter, claims were divided into four categories: descriptive, definitional, associational, and evaluative. These four claims are the basic taxonomy of argumentative claims in this text, replacing the more familiar taxonomy of fact, value, and policy.
Claims and Exceptions

Terms and Concepts From Chapter 15

- Claim
- Exception
- Evidence
- Brute fact
- Institutional fact
- Association of cause and effect
- Association of similarity
- Claims that order values into a hierarchy
- Claims that attach a value to an object
- Claims that advocate a policy or an action

Discussion Questions For Chapter 15

- What is the basic claim – evidence relationship?
- How can a claim be used as evidence for subsequent claims?
- Briefly describe the four kinds of claim?
- Why is a taxonomy an important concept for argumentation?

Exercises For Chapter 15

Take a specific topic (euthanasia, capital punishment, children’s war toys, etc.) and phrase one of each of the four kinds of claims about each of the topics. In each case, can an exception be attacked to the claim?

Using the topic chosen above, think of what kind of evidence might be used to support the claim then diagram the evidence—claim relationship.