TWO CONCEPTS OF ARGUMENT

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Students of argument rarely acknowledge that the term "argument" has two importantly different senses. In this essay I attempt to show the importance of distinguishing these senses, taking as a focus for analysis Wayne Brockriede's recent discussions of the concept of argument. I will argue that Brockriede's view suffers from a failure to heed the distinction I emphasize, but that this failure signals important developments in the study of argument.

I

In everyday talk the word "argument" is systematically used to refer to two different phenomena. On the one hand it refers to a kind of utterance or a sort of communicative act. This sense of the term I will call "$argument_1$." It is the sense contained in sentences such as "he made an argument." On the other hand, "argument" sometimes refers to a particular kind of interaction. This sense, "$argument_2$," appears in sentences such as "they had an argument." Crudely put, an $argument_1$ is something one person makes (or gives or presents or utters), while an $argument_2$ is something two or more persons have (or engage in). Argu-

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ments$_1$ are thus on a par with promises, commands, apologies, warnings, invitations, orders, and the like. Arguments$_2$ are classifiable with other species of interactions such as bull sessions, heart-to-heart talks, quarrels, discussions, and so forth.

Now I should immediately emphasize that the distinction I am pointing to does not turn on the number of persons involved. We might, for example, find it useful in some situations to speak of one person having an $argument_2$ (with himself); and we might similarly encounter cases where we would want to say that two or more persons had jointly made an $argument_1$. But these cases seem secondary on the paradigmatic senses of "$argument_1$" and "$argument_2$," and so I have in setting out the distinction referred to what seem to be exemplary uses of the two senses of the term.

This distinction is, I think, a plausible and natural one, as evidenced by our everyday ways of speaking. Certainly an $argument_1$ is very different from an $argument_2$ One speaks of arguments$_1$ being refuted, valid, or fallacious, while one does not ordinarily characterize arguments$_2$ in these ways; and one speaks of arguments$_2$ coming to blows, or being pointless or unproductive, while one does not usually characterize arguments$_1$ in

just these ways.[1] There is, in short, an obvious distinction between arguments$_1$ and arguments$_2$ embedded in our everyday use of the term "argument." It is this distinction that underlies the curiosity in statements such as "Bob and I had an argument and it was refuted."

I might mention that this distinction is usefully extended to cover related forms, so that (e.g.) a person who is arguing$_1$ is making an argument$_1$, and a person who is arguing$_2$ is in the process of having an argument$_2$. The distinction here is evidenced in everyday talk by the difference between "arguing$_1$ *that*" and "arguing$_2$ *about*," the difference between the sentences "I was arguing$_1$ that P" and "we were arguing$_2$ about Q" (or "I was arguing$_2$ with myself about Q"). Similarly, one might use "arguer$_1$" to refer to a person in a way that highlights the fact that the person is to be understood as making an argument$_1$, and "arguer$_2$" to emphasize that the person is to be understood as engaged in an argument$_2$ with another person.[2]

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[1] Now I suppose that, for each characterization I have just mentioned, it could be argued that the description could be extended to apply to both arguments$_1$ and arguments$_2$. This might well be true, but I think that in each case it would be clear that the characterization *was* an extended one, that some shift in the meaning of the characterization had occurred.

[2] These related distinctions are not quite as clear-cut as is the distinction between the two senses of argument. There are several reasons for this. One is that an arguer$_1$ (who is arguing$_1$, who is making arguments$_1$) will often at the same time be an arguer$_2$ (be arguing$_2$, be engaged in an argument$_2$). Another is that some might be inclined to say that a person who seems to be engaged in an argument$_2$ but who is not making arguments$_1$ is actually not engaged in an argument$_2$ at all, but rather is engaged in, say, a quarrel (that is, some might want to restrict the sense of "argument$_2$" so that quarrels and the like are excluded); this restricted sense of "argument$_2$" makes it necessarily true that an arguer$_2$ be an arguer$_1$. But surely one can be an arguer$_1$ without being an arguer$_2$, since one can make arguments$_1$ without becoming engaged in an argument$_2$ (if, for example, one's arguments$_1$ are ignored), and

The importance of distinguishing arguments$_1$ and arguments$_2$ can be displayed by examining Wayne Brockriede's recent analysis of argument.[3] Brockriede offers six general characteristics of argument. These are not, he emphasizes, necessary and sufficient conditions for something's being an argument, but are rather general features to which one can appeal in deciding whether something is (or can usefully be seen as) an argument. My claim is that Brockriede's analysis unfortunately elides arguments$_1$ and arguments$_2$, to the detriment of his characterization of argument.

Brockriede's first characteristic is that argument involves "an inferential leap from existing beliefs to the adoption of new beliefs or to the reinforcement of an old one."[4] This first characteristic seems obviously to be a description of arguments$_1$.

A second characteristics of argument is "a perceived rationale to support that leap."[5] This might initially seem to be an attribute of arguments$_1$. However, Brockriede's elaboration of this characteristic introduces complications. He writes:

An arguer must perceive some rationale that establishes that the claim being leaped to is worthy at least of being entertained. The weakest acceptable rationale may justify saying that the claim leaped to deserves entertainment "for the sake of argument." A stronger rationale may justify a person's taking a claim seriously —with the hope that after further thought it may be accepted. A still stronger rationale may convince someone to accept a claim tentatively until a better alternative comes along. If the rationale is too slender to justify a leap, the result is a quibble rather than an argument;

thus one can argue$_1$ without arguing$_2$. So while these related distinctions are somewhat murky, they still seem to have some merit.

[3] Wayne Brockriede, "Where is Argument?" *Journal of the American Forensic Association*, 11 (1975), 179-82. See also Wayne Brockriede, "Rhetorical Criticism as Argument," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 50 (1974), 165-74.

[4] Brockriede, "Where is Argument?" p. 180.

[5] *Ibid.*

but a rationale so strong a conclusion is entailed removes the activity from the realm of the problematic. If the perceived rationale occupies either polar region, it fails to justify the label of argument because the claim either appears ridiculous (not worth arguing about) or too risky to entertain.[6]

Now the locus of perception here is apparently the "persuadee" (i.e., the recipient of the arguments$_1$ initially advanced by the "persuader"). That is, Brockriede's claim seems to be that the persuadee must see the persuader's claim as "worthy at least of being entertained" before there is (or can be) an "argument." This analysis, it seems to me, confuses not only arguments$_1$ with arguments$_2$, but also arguments$_1$ with good (but not too good) arguments$_1$. I can best explain this as follows.

It is probably true that a persuadee must see at least a scintilla of support (for the leap) before he sees the claim as a serious one—one worth having an argument$_2$ about. But it does not seem to me that where the persuadee finds this support lacking he cannot recognize that the persuader *has* advanced *some* argument$_1$, however poor that argument$_1$ may be. That is, a bad argument$_1$ is still an argument$_1$. I might well recognize that someone has advanced an argument$_1$ (has offered putative reasons for a claim) yet also see that argument$_1$ (those reasons) as so unconvincing that I see no need for my advancing counter-arguments$_1$ (no need for us to have an argument$_2$). The person made an argument$_1$, but it was a terrible argument$_1$ —so terrible that I need not engage him in an argument$_2$. Conversely, if the persuadee finds the rationale so compelling that he utterly accepts it, he will again likely see no need for having an argument$_2$. But the persuader has still presented an argument$_1$; a convincing argu-

ment$_1$ is still an argument$_1$. (I will return to this point shortly in the context of discussing "analytic arguments.") In sum, Brockriede's discussion of this second characteristic not only confuses the conditions that make an argument$_2$ likely to occur with the conditions for an argument$_1$'s having been made, but also unhappily limits the scope of arguments$_1$ in a way that excludes highly successful arguments$_1$ and utterly unsuccessful arguments$_1$.

Brockriede's third characteristic is "a choice between two or more competing claims."[7] He suggests that "people who argue have some choice but not too much. If they have too little choice, if a belief is entailed by formal logic or required by their status as true believers, they need not argue; but if they have too much choice, if they have to deal with choice overload, then argument may not be very productive."[8] The difficulties with this analysis are rather complex. Consider first this claim: "If a belief is entailed by formal logic, then people need not argue." As it stands, this claim is not well put. Any statement can be "entailed by formal logic" given the right kinds of premises. Perhaps Brockriede's intent here can better be expressed as follows: "If a person sees a claim as logically following from premises he accepts, then he need not argue." But this version of the claim will not do either. The fact that I accept the premises which formally entail a given claim does not ensure that others (whom I might wish to persuade) will also accept those premises. If I want those others to accept my claim, then I may well need to argue$_1$ (i.e., make arguments$_1$) for it. Perhaps, then, the point Brockriede wishes to make can be put this way: "If a person sees a claim as logically following from premises that he ac-

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 180-81.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 181.
8 *Ibid.*

cepts and that he believes some other person O accepts, then he need not make arguments to O in support of the claim." Now this version might be acceptable if all persons reasoned in a strictly logical fashion, for if this condition were met then the knowledge that O accepts certain premises would give grounds for believing that O accepts claims that are logical consequences of those premises. Under such conditions, there would in fact be no need to make arguments$_1$ (to O) for those logical consequences. As it happens, of course, not all persons always reason in a strictly logical way.

I suspect that theorists of argument have been misled here by examples such as "Socrates is a man, and all men are mortal, so Socrates is mortal." This case presents a conclusion which is on its face acceptable to most persons; one need not construct an argument$_1$ here. But not all conclusions of logically tight arguments$_1$ are so clearly unobjectionable. We are to the point of discussing what are sometimes called "analytic arguments," arguments$_1$ in which the conclusion is logically entailed by the premises. Brockriede, of course, is not alone in suggesting that analytic arguments$_1$ are not really arguments$_1$ at all. My claim, however, is that this exclusion of analytic arguments$_1$ from the realm of argument$_1$ is unwarranted.

Suppose, for example, that I wish to disabuse some philosopher of what Richard Taylor calls "simple materialism," the belief that persons are identical with their bodies. I might attack this belief this way:[9]

(1) If two things are identical, then any predicate meaningfully applicable to one must be meaningfully applicable to the other.

(2) Certain sorts of predicates (e.g., moral assessments and, roughly speaking, intentional characterizations such as "believes that p"

9 Taylor makes something like this argument in his *Metaphysics* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 8-10.

and "hopes that q") are meaningfully applicable to persons but not to their bodies.

(3) Therefore, persons are not identical with their bodies.

What are we to make of this? That I haven't really made an argument$_1$ here (by virtue of its analyticity)? But I certainly did something very much like presenting an argument$_1$. That my hearer (if he now abandons his earlier stand) really believed my conclusion all along (it being implicitly contained in premises he accepted)? But in a perfectly straightforward sense he did not initially believe my conclusion. No, I think the most plausible characterization of what I have done is that I have made an argument$_1$ —this, even though the argument$_1$ is "analytic." (Notice that nothing turns on my hearer having accepted my argument$_1$. I could properly be said to have made an argument$_1$ even if my hearer had rejected one of my premises as false. Indeed, I could properly be said to have made an argument$_1$ even if my hearer had not thought my claim worthy of being entertained even "for the sake of argument.")

Now to suggest that analytic arguments$_1$ are genuine arguments$_1$ is not to claim that analytic arguments$_1$ occur very often in everyday life, that naive social actors regularly employ logically tight forms of argument$_1$, that the "analytic ideal" is a useful framework for describing or understanding everyday arguments$_1$, or that only analytic arguments$_1$ are arguments$_1$. It is only to claim that analytic arguments, are in fact arguments$_1$, that there is no good reason for excluding (as Brockriede does) logically tight arguments$_1$ from the realm of argument$_1$.

So far I have discussed this third characteristic—"a choice between two or more competing claims"—in terms of arguments$_1$. But the same characteristic could be viewed from the perspective of argu-

ments$_2$. Thus, for example, if persons "have too little choice . . . they need not argue"—that is, they need not have an argument$_2$.[10] If you and I are trying to decide what course of action to adopt, and we see only one plausible alternative, it may well be pointless for us to have an argument$_2$. Similarly, if we "have too much choice," if we "have to deal with choice overload, then argument may not be very productive"—that is, it may not be useful for us to have an argument$_2$.[11] Our alternatives are not sufficiently narrowed to permit productive arguments$_2$ to occur. The third characteristic, then, can be read as applying either to arguments$_1$ or to arguments$_2$, and hence it does not distinguish the two senses of "argument."

Brockriede's fourth characteristic is "a regulation of uncertainty." He indicates that "if certainty existed, people need not engage in what I am defining as argument. When uncertainty is high, a need for argument is also high. . . . If people have too little uncertainty to regulate, then they have no problems to solve and argument is not needed."[12] Brockriede notes that usually arguers will attempt to control uncertainty by reducing it, but that on occasion arguers might strategically choose to increase uncertainty.

When one speaks of "arguments" as designed to reduce or increase uncertainty, one seemingly is referring to arguments$_1$. One common purpose in making arguments$_1$ is to regulate the persuadee's uncertainty (especially to reduce his uncertainty about which of two competing claims to honor). Sometimes, however, arguments$_2$ are conducted for the same purpose. Institutionalized arrangements for arguments$_2$, as in the American judicial system, frequently involve purpose-

ful clash where the point of having the argument$_2$ is to present the issues to (and thus regulate the certainty of) a third party; each arguer's arguments$_1$ and counter-arguments$_1$ are primarily directed at the third party (the audience, e.g., judge or jury), rather than at his opponent. Hence Brockriede's fourth characteristic of "argument," while apparently focused on arguments$_1$ can apply equally well to both arguments$_1$ and arguments$_2$. Thus this fourth characteristic does not distinguish the two senses of "argument."

The fifth characteristic is "a willingness to risk confrontation of a claim with peers."[13] This seems an attribute of the arguer rather than of the argument, and apparently focuses on persons who are making arguments$_1$ (i.e., arguers$_1$) but who are not yet engaged in an argument$_2$. Presumably those involved in an argument$_2$ (arguers$_2$) are already engaged in confrontation; for them, that risk has been actualized (though, of course, different risks may now arise).

The sixth characteristic advanced is "a frame of reference shared optimally." The suggestion is that persons "cannot argue with one another very effectively if their presuppositions share too little or are virtually irreconcilable; but argument is pointless if two persons share too much."[14] In characterizing his own essay as an exemplar of "argument," Brockriede makes a telling commentary with respect to this sixth attribute: "I have presumed throughout that our frames of reference overlap at some points but not at too many."[15] Now it might be true that for a person to advance an argument$_1$ he must presume that his frame of reference overlaps at some points with those of his listeners. (Of course, it seems that this is a re-

10 Brockriede, "Where is Argument?" p. 181.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., p. 182.
15 Ibid.

quirement not merely for a person's advancing an argument₁, but for a person's speaking at all.) But this is not the same as saying that for two persons to have an argument₂ they must share a frame of reference. The second claim may be true as well, but it is not synonymous with the first.

Further, what I have called the "second claim" here is ambiguous. One is not sure whether Brockriede means to suggest that a shared frame of reference is required ("required" in the loose sense of being a "generic characteristic") for persons to have an argument₂, or whether such is required for two persons to have a productive argument₂. Now perhaps Brockriede wants to restrict the sense of "argument" (more carefully, "argument₂") in a way that includes only productive (worthwhile, good) arguments₂, preferring to reserve some other term (say, "squabble") for unproductive arguments₂. But this is something left unclear in Brockriede's discussion.

In sum, Brockriede's treatment of "argument" elides two distinct senses of the term. As a consequence, his discussion of the generic characteristics of "argument" is confused. Characteristics one, two, and four appear to focus on arguments₁; characteristic six seems to center on arguments₂; and the status of characteristics three and five is unclear.

II

I hope it is now clear that a confusion of the two senses of "argument" leads to unhappy consequences. Fruitful work in the study of argument will obviously turn on a recognition of the differences between arguments₁ and arguments₂. But Brockriede's elision of the two senses of "argument" is important, because it is indicative of shifting concerns in the study of argument.

Broadly put, most contemporary treat-

ments of argument have had two central features: a focus on arguments₁ and a prescriptive orientation. Hence the emphasis of textbooks and coursework in argumentation is on teaching one to be a good (effective, ethical, strategic, . . .) arguer₁: Here is what a logically sound argument₁ is, here are some common fallacies in argument₁, these stock issues give you a clue as to what arguments₁ you will likely need to make, and so forth.

Brockriede, however, is obviously as concerned with arguments₂ as with arguments₁ (even while he does not differentiate there clearly). And accompanying this expanded interest is, I think, a descriptive or explanatory concern, rather than a purely normative orientation. That is, Brockriede seems more concerned with understanding and explaining "arguments" (of whatever type) than with offering prescriptions to "arguers" (of whatever type).

This same general shift from prescription to description can be discerned in Stephen Toulmin's *Uses of Argument.* Toulmin notes that logic, as he conceives it, "may have to become less of an *a priori* subject than it has recently been; so blurring the distinction between logic itself and the subjects whose arguments the logician scrutinizes."[16] Toulmin continues:

Accepting the need to begin by collecting for study the actual forms of argument current in any field, our starting-point will be confessedly empirical. . . . This will seem a matter for apology only if one is completely wedded to the ideal of logic as a purely formal, *a priori* science. But not only will logic have to become more empirical; it will inevitably tend to become more historical. . . . We must study the ways of arguing which have established themselves in any sphere, accepting them as historical facts; knowing that they may be super-

16 Stephen Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), p. 257.

ceded, but only as the result of a revolutionary advance in our methods of thought.[17] Thus Toulmin suggests that students of argument undertake the task of "seeing and describing the arguments in each field as they are, recognizing how they work; not setting oneself up to explain why, or to demonstrate that they necessarily must work."[18]

Notably, much of the criticism leveled at *Uses of Argument* has focused on prescriptive questions. Thus, for example, Cowan charges that Toulmin "has not shown *how* conformity to the forms and procedures he outlines does provide any support or justification at all. . . . How are we to know whether a proposed backing *really* backs?"[19] This line of criticism is somewhat off the mark, just because Toulmin is much less concerned with justifying the use of the kinds of arguments$_1$ he mentions than he is with simply describing and explicating those arguments$_1$. One might say that for Toulmin, like Wittgenstein, the central task is that of "clarifying those public standards of justification that we all employ in science and in everyday life."[20]

One could, I think, point to many other indications within the study of argumentation of an emerging concern with the description and explication of argument, as opposed to a focus on prescriptive matters: the extensive discussions of the role of formal logic in argumentation,[21] Perelman's work on types of argu-

ments$_1$,[22] Crable's recent textbook *Argumentation as Communication*.[23] But all of these discussions largely focus on arguments$_1$. Arguments$_2$ do not receive very much (explicit) attention. Brockriede's essay, however, makes it clear that a shift from prescription to description will very naturally include an (expanded) interest in arguments$_2$.

Unfortunately Brockriede does not clearly distinguish arguments$_1$ and arguments$_2$. Yet I think it is obvious that a coherent description of everyday "argument" will turn on recognizing that distinction: it is one thing to describe or explain an argument$_1$ that someone makes, and something quite different to describe or explain an argument$_2$ that two persons are having.

But to recognize the distinction between arguments$_1$ and arguments$_2$ is only to have a starting-point for analysis. Very thorny issues immediately arise concerning how one is to delimit arguments$_1$ and arguments$_2$, and how one is to characterize the relation between arguments$_1$ and arguments$_2$. For example: Do we want to say that an argument$_2$ necessarily involves the exchange of arguments$_1$ and counter-arguments$_1$ (so that what we might call "squabbles" or "quarrels," in which—if we defines them this way—arguments$_1$ are not exchanged, are not arguments$_2$)? Or are quarrels genuine arguments$_2$, simply different from arguments$_2$ in which arguments$_1$ are exchanged? Again, would we want to say that someone had made an argument$_1$ if no argument$_2$ took place (so that making an argument$_1$ definitionally involves having an argument$_2$)? Or are we willing

17 *Ibid.*
18 *Ibid.*, p. 258.
19 Joseph L. Cowan, "The Uses of Argument—An Apology for Logic," *Mind*, 73 (1964), 31.
20 John Turk Saunders and Donald F. Henze, *The Private-Language Problem* (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 19.
21 See, e.g., Ray L. Anderson and C. David Mortensen, "Logic and Marketplace Argumentation," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 53 (1967), 143-51; Glen E. Mills and Hugh G. Petrie, "The Role of Logic in Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 54 (1968), 260-67; David W. Shepard, "The Role of Logic," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 55 (1969), 310-12; Hugh G. Petrie, "Does Logic Have Any Relevance to Argumentation?" *Journal of the American Forensic Association*, 6 (1969), 55-60; C. David Mortensen and Ray L.

Anderson, "The Limits of Logic," *Journal of the American Forensic Association*, 7 (1970), 71-78.
22 C. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, (1969), esp. Part Three.
23 Richard E. Crable, *Argumentation as Communication: Reasoning with Receivers* (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1976).

to allow that arguments$_1$ can be made even if no argument$_2$ ensues?

And beyond these initial questions, the distinction points to rather more direct inquiries concerning everyday argumentation: How are arguments$_2$ conducted in everyday life? What strategies are employed in making arguments$_1$? To what (if any) standards do naive social actors hold everyday arguments$_1$? Along what dimensions do arguments$_2$ differ (e.g., institutionalized vs. informal)?

I do not propose to answer these questions here. I am convinced, however, that questions such as these—questions predicated on the recognition of the distinction between arguments$_1$ and arguments$_2$ —are central to the understanding of everyday "argument." The emerging shift from prescription to description in the study of argumentation will come to naught so long as theorists of argument do not recognize the two senses of "argument."