Argument, Assertion, and the Act-Object Relation:
a study from the standpoint of Critical Thinking

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

The discipline of Critical Thinking is a methodology for the analysis and appraisal of natural language argument, commonly referred to as 'real' argument, a term intended to signify a contrast between the reasoning found in ordinary written or spoken texts, and the specialised constructions tailored by logicians to exemplify validity. There are, accordingly, two perspectives from which to view arguments: the arguer's and the critic's. From the critic's perspective an argument is simply an object of appraisal. From the arguer's perspective, however, an argument is more intimately associated with the act or practice of arguing or, as many commentators prefer to say, an argument is a *product* of the practice (of argumentation). There is hence an ambiguity between the act and object senses of 'argument', as well as a difference between object-senses themselves, depending on the perspective taken.

For the traditional logician, an argument is a set of sentences or propositions, one of which is claimed, supposed, or intended, not necessarily in any active sense, to follow from the other(s). Such a conception facilitates assessment on the criterion of validity. Indeed, an argument can be defined as an object that is either valid or invalid. For the critic of 'real' argument, the object is what is propounded by a speaker or author, typically for persuasive purposes. Arguments from this perspective are not mere sets of arbitrarily designated propositions, but claims and inferences identified by the critic based on the interpretation and classification of actual texts.

The aim of the thesis is to integrate these two conceptions of argument by identifying a point of intersection between the two perspectives: that is, to explain how the object of acts of argument can be seen to coincide with the objects of logical appraisal. I argue that the act of propounding an argument is essentially an assertive act, its object a complex proposition. It is more precise, however, to see propounding an argument as two mutually complementary acts, also assertives: 1) premising (or reason-giving) and 2) concluding (inferring). Premising is directly

assertive, its objects the premises themselves. Concluding, however, is more than just the assertion of a conclusion. If it were not, the argument would merely be a conjunction. What is asserted, in an act of concluding, is *equivalent* to a conditional formed from the conjunction of premises, (A), as antecedent, and the conclusion, (C), as consequent. What is asserted, then, in the whole act of propounding an argument, is the conjunctive proposition:

(1)   A and (if A then C)

An assertive utterance of (1) commits the speaker to C by modus ponens. Hence, I propose, the act of argument (i.e., the propounding of an argument) is naturally deductive, and its object a deductive argument accordingly. By the same token its object (i.e., that which is propounded) corresponds with the ordered and indexed set designated by the logician as an object of appraisal.

This account, I conclude, has important implications for critical thinking. It provides a theoretical basis, a groundwork, on which to develop a deductivist methodology for appraising natural-language arguments. Whilst I do not go into detail on the practical application of natural-language deductivism (NLD), I take the thesis to be an endorsement, and justification, for its implementation, and for a greater role within critical thinking for logic.

Introduction

Perspectives

Charles Hamblin (1970: 224) wrote: 'The concept of an *argument* is quite basic to Logic, but seldom examined.' There is clearly some truth in this observation; the notion of an argument is taken as primitive in logic. In Paul Tomassi's words, argument is 'the stuff of logic', and the logician 'someone who worries about arguments' (Tomassi 1999: 2). But to worry about arguments is not necessarily to worry about what they are. The principal task in logic is to determine which arguments are valid and which are not, so that the real worry for the logician is whether the definition of validity is fit for the purpose of evaluating any putative argument that comes before it. To ensure this universal applicability, the fewer constraints that are put on the definition of an argument the better, for which reason Simpson (2008: 48) is content to say that 'An *argument* is simply a collection of statements.' It is not the everyday understanding of argument, but it suffices well enough as a bottom line for logic.

There are other contexts, however, and other disciplines, for which argument is also 'quite basic', but in which it has a very different profile. One is Critical Thinking (CT).[1] Critical thinking can be summed up as a methodology for identifying, analysing, and appraising natural-language arguments. This makes CT an appropriate starting point for this thesis. But I have a second, personal motive for adopting this perspective, namely a lengthy involvement in the teaching and assessing of CT, and consequent first-hand experience of the problems that conflicting conceptions of argument pose for a discipline that purports to be both rigorous and informal. However, the thesis is not about critical thinking as such; nor a defence of its tenets, which I refer to at numerous points in the thesis. On the

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[1] I use the uppercase initials on this first occasion to signify that this is a reference to the *discipline* of CT and not critical thinking in general, i.e. thinking critically, which need not concern argument at all. Thereafter I use lowercase, as I do for 'logic'.

contrary, despite its centrality to the discipline, the concept of argument, and the related concepts of assertion (claim, reason, etc.), are in my view seriously ill-defined in the literature. This is not through lack of debate in the field so much as lack of consensus. Disagreement extends to the point where arguments are sometimes identified with texts, sometimes conceived of as abstract objects, sometimes illocutionary acts, sometimes products of disputation; sometimes a confusing hybrid of two or more of these.

Assertion, too – though the subject of deep analysis in mainstream philosophy of logic and language – is given no comparable attention in critical thinking textbooks. 'Assertion', 'claim', 'statement' – even 'sentence' – are often used more or less interchangeably to describe the components of arguments, the reasons and conclusion of which arguments are understood to consist. But used that way these terms introduce into the account a well-known ambiguity between an act-sense (of asserting, claiming, stating) and an object-sense (what is stated, etc.) This ambiguity inevitably rubs off on to 'argument' if *an* argument is defined in the standard way as a set of reasons and a conclusion. Reasons are given, and conclusions drawn, *producing* as it were arguments. (The idea of arguments as products of acts of argumentation is discussed in Chapter 4.) But from an alternative viewpoint, arguments are just the complex objects that we advance or propound when we argue, but whose constituent propositions – or 'claims' in the object sense – form arguments whether propounded or not. Which, out of these, is the argument? It is the principal question for this thesis to answer – and likewise for critical thinking to answer. In short, what is the object that we naturally call 'an argument'; and how does it relate to the activity we call 'argument'?

We engage with arguments in two main ways: actively on the one hand, critically on the other. That is, we argue (and advance arguments), and we judge arguments that we encounter to be good or bad; to succeed or to fail. Logic, formal and informal, and critical thinking are all concerned with the evaluation of individual arguments and with developing a rigorous methodology for the purpose. How arguments are conceived of in that context is in part a reflection of the criterion or

criteria by which they are judged, which of course vary from one discipline to another. Formal (classical) logic, one could say, is single-minded in this respect: an argument is valid if and only if it only uses rules of inference that are truth-preserving. That is why classical logic has no need of a fulsome definition: its objects of appraisal are just those that can be assessed for validity. But the orthodox view in critical thinking is that validity – or more specifically deductive validity – is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for due approval of an argument and that validity-aptness is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for being an argument. There are good but invalid arguments, and bad but valid ones.[2] Generally speaking, the procedure in CT involves judicious application of different criteria and different standards, dependent upon the kind of reasoning the target argument is perceived to display, and the purpose it is perceived to serve. The degree to which the standard of deductive validity is applicable within the expressly informal logic that CT espouses is a moot point. At one end of the spectrum there is some support for the approach known as natural language deductivism (NLD), which effectively measures all putative arguments against the standard of deductive soundness, and involves reconstructing arguments that do not have the surface-character of a deduction in a form that does.[3] At the other extreme, deductive validity and/or soundness is rejected as a viable standard for appraisal of so-called 'real' (as opposed to artificial) argument. In between falls a plethora of approaches which recognise non-deductive arguments as warranting some form of qualified or graded approval, with or without deductive validity as one of the criteria.[4] A survey of the literature indicates quite clearly that the orthodox approach in critical thinking and informal logic is the latter. Alec Fisher, in his book *The Logic of Real Arguments*, describes and advocates

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[2] This is not to say that logicians equate 'good' with 'valid' or fail to acknowledge the difference between a mere premise and a reason to believe, or justification. The difference is in the focus of interest and motivation between classical and informal logics, not in perception of what an argument is.

[3] For example, Groarke (1999) contra e.g. Govier (1987) and (Johnson 2000).

[4] Thomas (1986: 122ff) rates arguments on the 'degree of support' given to the conclusion, which he grades from nil, through weak, moderate, and strong, to deductively valid at the top.

> a method which draws on the insights and lessons of classical logic where these are helpful, but which is non-formal and reasonably efficient (both requirements exclude a method which requires us to translate arguments into the symbolism of classical logic). (Fisher 1988b: 128)

Quite how the insights of classical logic can be 'helpful' without leading to a form of deductivism, is not clear. Logic is formal; that is its strength. 'Informal logic' avoids being an oxymoron only if construed as doing formal logic informally. True enough, it is not necessary to use symbolic language to represent the underlying form of an ordinary piece of reasoning. But if something *aspiring* to deductive validity cannot be detected in a putative argument, it is hard to see what makes it an argument. In what could be a testimonial for deductivism, Shand (2000: 14) has written

> All this points to my contention that the core idea of a good argument is deductive soundness, and that arguments are better the closer they get to being deductively sound. One starts with true premises and what would, if denied, form a contradiction with those premises ... In this deductive sense the conclusion *follows* from the premises: if *these* premises are true, then deductively *this* follows. I know of no other way in which conclusions truly *follow* from premises.

The argument

The line taken in this thesis proceeds eventually to a deductivist conclusion. In short, I take arguments to be the *objects* of acts of argument: the stating of premises and the drawing of conclusions. What are asserted are premises and what are inferred from the premises are conclusions. Conclusions are also asserted, only not, I contend, in the same straightforward way as premises. The asserting of a conclusion is not the same as the inferring of it. Premises and conclusions are objects of the related acts, but not (or not necessarily) their *products*, other than in the sense of being employed by the agent to perform the act. A text in which an argument is expressed is rightly attributable to its author as a product of his or her making. But the argument itself – that which a critic needs to extract from the text for appraisal – is quite abstract, and is defined by its form. It is also evaluated by its form, which at root is deductive form. Arguments purport to be valid, in the same

way that assertions purport to be true, and both are judged accordingly. Argument-form is logical form, and logical form is at root deductive form. Critical thinking, if it is to live up to its claim to rigour and objectivity, ignores the deductive character of argument at its peril, a point to which I return, and for which I argue, in the last chapter, where I make a case for a modified NLD.

CHAPTER ONE: Arguments

1.   The standard definition

What then *is* an argument? According to Copi & Burgess-Jackson (1992: 12) the answer is: 'a group of propositions of which one, the conclusion, is claimed to follow from the others, which are premises' Copi calls this a logician's definition.[5] However, it is more than this. Since it clearly captures the general everyday conception of argument as much as it does the technical, and is employed in informal as well as formal contexts, I shall refer to it as the standard definition. There are of course variations on the theme. In some versions the constituents of arguments are seen as 'sentences'[6] rather than propositions; in others 'claims'[7] or 'statements',[8] even 'assertions'. None of these variants alters the central point that an argument is a complex structure whose elements divide into a set of (one or more) premises and a conclusion. Therefore, although the differences are by no means inconsequential, it is prudent simply to register them at this stage. Their significance will emerge in due course.

The standard definition has a long pedigree. According to Sextus Empiricus, the Stoic logicians held that

> an argument is a complex of premises and a conclusion. What they call its premises are the propositions adopted by agreement for the establishment of a conclusion. A conclusion is the proposition established from the premises. For example, in 'If it is

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[5] In an earlier text Copi (1986: 6) writes: 'An argument in the logician's sense is any group of propositions of which one is claimed to follow from the others, which are regarded as providing support or grounds for the truth of that one. Of course, the word "argument" is often used in other senses, but in logic it has the sense just explained.'

[6] E.g. Bergmann, Moor & Nelson (2004: 9), where an argument is defined as a set of sentences of which one is *designated* as the conclusion.

[7] The use of 'claim' for the constituents of an argument is particularly prevalent in critical thinking textbooks, e.g., Bowell & Kemp (2002), Fisher (2001), Thomson (2009).

[8] As noted above, Simpson (2008) settles for 'statement'. However, he uses it interchangeably with 'sentence', not on the grounds that the difference is philosophically unimportant, but that it does not impinge on the practice of logic.

day, it is light. But it is day. Therefore it is light', 'Therefore it is light' is the conclusion, the rest are premises. (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism,* Book 2)[9]

Here, as in Copi's definition, an argument is effectively defined by its constituents and their relation to one another, in Sextus' version *establishment* (of a conclusion by its premises). For the Stoics the constituents of an argument are *assertibles*, a subclass of *self-complete sayables*, which Susanne Bobzien (2003: 85) identifies 'very roughly' with 'meanings'.[10] Accordingly, she writes: 'Stoic logic falls into two main parts: the theory of arguments and the theory of assertibles, which are the components from which the arguments are built' (ibid.).

Assertibles differ from the other self-complete sayables in that they can be stated (asserted), and that they are true or false. Crucially, however, their self-completeness implies that they *need not* be stated – they subsist independently of the act – in the same way that sayables in general subsist independently of being said.[11] This is despite the fact that for the Stoics the characteristic function of assertibles is to be asserted. So, whilst an assertible is taken to be self-subsistent, there is still more to *asserting* than just saying (uttering) the sentence that expresses the assertible, if only because an assertible can be *stated* in one context, and merely entertained hypothetically or suppositionally in another. (The example given is: 'If Dio walks, then Dio moves', which contains three assertibles, but only one *assertion*, namely the whole conditional. Neither 'Dio walks', nor 'Dio moves' is asserted in the process.[12])

Arguments (*logoi*), too, are a species of complete sayable, only not themselves assertibles, but formed of assertibles. Importantly for what follows they are, like assertibles, incorporeal, but at the same time they are not acts, beliefs, or

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[9] In Long & Sedley (1987: 36).

[10] Bobzien cites as evidence Diogenes Laertes: 'What we say are things, which in fact are sayables' (*Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*,VII: 57).

[11] Bobzien (2003: 86). See also Frede (1974); Kneale & Kneale (1962, Chapter 3).

[12] Geach (1965: 449) raises much the same point, only attributing it to Frege (*Begriffsscrift*, e.g. §§2, 4). As Geach expresses it, 'a proposition may occur in discourse now asserted, now unasserted, and yet be recognizably the same proposition [...] I shall call this point about assertion *the Frege point*'**.** See further §33 below.

sentences (Bobzien 2003: 101–2). By that account they are objects (as opposed to acts): each a compound of premises and a conclusion.[13] On the whole, in this thesis, I do not depart far from this view. It may be *characteristic* of an argument to be the object of an act of argument, just as it is characteristic of an assertible to be the object of an act of assertion. But unless either of these is an exclusive function, it is not a definition. For some *x* be the object of an act of assertion *x* must be assertible, but *x* does not become an assertible only when it is used to assert something, i.e. asserted. But if the act-object relation in respect of assertions and arguments is not one of mutual dependence – like agent and patient, lover and loved – then it is still important to the understanding of these concepts to say what the relation is.

Returning to Copi we find a definition which certainly purports to identify the argument with an object, i.e. the set of propositions. If that were as far as it went, there would be no requirement to draw on anything suggestive of an act, but of course an argument is more than a mere set of propositions – at least on our ordinary conception of argument, which distinguishes between sets of propositions or sentences that are, and others that are not, arguments. The problem with the standard definition begins with the very division of its components into premises and conclusion. It is a problem Copi points out himself: 'Thus', he says, '"premiss" and "conclusion" are relative terms like "employer" and "employee"' (Copi & Burgess-Jackson 1992: 6–7). Human beings do not divide into employers and employees independently of the particular employments under which they are related. A single individual, A, may be the employer of individual B, and the employee of C, without any change of personal identity. Likewise the domain of *proposition* (or sentence, or assertion, or claim) does not divide up into those that are premises and those that are conclusions. In a complex argument, the same sentence can be the intermediate conclusion of a sub-argument, and the premise

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[13] It should be noted that for the Stoics an argument could not have fewer than two premises. Diogenes Laertius: '(An argument) consists of a premise or premises, an additional premise, and a conclusion. For example: "If it is day, it is light. But it is day. Therefore it is light." For "If it is day, it is light" is the premise; "But it is day" is the additional premise' (*Lives of Eminent Philosophers,* VII, 45).

to a further or main conclusion. There is nothing recognisable about 'a conclusion' or 'a premise' outside the context of the particular argument whose respective components they are. (Indeed, neither exists outside the context, except as an undifferentiated proposition or sentence.) So, on the more general level of definition, we understand the concepts of premises (P) and conclusion (C) via the concept of argument, or via the relation that holds between them in an argument, namely (as Copi says), *following from*, or (as Sextus) *establishment of*, C by P.

Whether these relations are any more intelligible than the definiendum itself is debatable. Would the 'following from', of one proposition by another, have an intelligible meaning for someone not already familiar with the concept of argument and/or the activity of arguing? But even assuming that it would, there is a further and more pressing problem for the standard definition: a conclusion follows from premises only in a *valid* argument or, if preferred, a good argument.[14] So if following from (or establishing, warranting, justifying, etc.), is the defining relation for the components of an argument, what are we to say is the defining relation in a bad (invalid) argument? Either there are no bad or invalid arguments, which is counter-intuitive, or there are arguments that lack the defining relation of following from, which is equally counter-intuitive since it permits any set of propositions to be an argument. The dilemma is simple enough to resolve, and Copi does so with the insertion of the single word 'claimed'. So, the conclusion of an argument need not actually follow: what makes the set of propositions an argument is that the conclusion is *claimed* to follow. The same move can be made for any variant on the standard definition. So, for example, an argument can be understood as a set of propositions, sentences, etc., some of which are claimed to *support* (warrant, justify, establish) a further proposition, sentence; and so on.

Introducing the idea that one constituent is only *claimed* to follow from the others solves the immediate problem of identifying bad arguments, but it comes at a price

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[14] At this preliminary stage 'valid argument' has the informal sense of an argument whose conclusion does follow from the premise(s). That would be a necessary condition also of a 'good' argument (though not a sufficient one, since in a valid argument the premise(s) can still be false).

for the view than an argument can subsist independently of acts of argument. It cannot be denied that there are acts of argument. Concluding is an act of argument; so is producing evidence or giving reasons (premises) for a conclusion. Propounding, too, is an act of argument if what is propounded is an argument (in the object-sense). But the *propounding* is not the argument, nor the concluding the conclusion; and so on for the various components, as well as for the whole. But, to repeat, if we detach the object from the act in order to treat it as an independent entity, then what we are left with is a bare set of propositions, and with that the question of what makes it an argument at all. On the other hand, if we invoke a term like 'claim' we surely have to make some accommodation in the definition for the active sense of claiming, and for agency in the form of some *claimer*. Propositions don't make claims themselves: they are claimed. But if an argument is defined by the relation of things being 'claimed to follow', one from another, then some explanation is needed as to how any argument could be held to subsist independently of a proponent.

2. Whose claim?

Douglas Walton (1990: 409–10), in a response to Copi's definition, asks: 'Claimed by whom? And regarded by whom? By the proponent of the argument, one would suppose.'[15]

 The questions are pertinent, but the answer that Walton gives to them places a very literal interpretation on Copi's definition. Given that Copi's perspective on argument is logic, and Walton's dialectic, it is almost certainly a more literal interpretation than Copi intended. Referring to the phrases 'claimed to follow' and 'regarded as providing support' Walton writes:

> Evidently these phrases refer to a kind of stance or attitude taken up or conveyed by
> the proponent of the argument. To claim that a proposition is true and can be
> supported is to assert that proposition and commit oneself to its truth, implying a

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[15] Here Walton actually cites the slightly expanded version of the definition in which Copi (1986: 6) adds that premises are 'regarded as providing support or grounds for the truth of [the conclusion]'.

commitment to defending its truth, as alleged, against attacks or undermining of it by any potential opponent. In this sense, the term 'claim' tacitly presupposes an interactive (dialectical) framework of a proponent upholding a point of view and an opponent questioning that point of view. A claim is an upholding of some particular proposition that is potentially open to questioning (ibid.).

But on what evidence do 'these phrases' refer to acts or attitudes or stances? There is no more evidence that a 'claim' refers to a stance than that it refers to the object of a stance, an object with respect to which a stance may (or may not) be taken. What is *evident* – i.e. from empirical observation about linguistic usage – is that the word 'claim' is ambiguous. Walton selects the sense in which, he says, 'claim' presupposes a dialectic framework; but the sense he selects is the one which is presupposed by a dialectic framework. In a different framework, we find different presuppositions. There is no requirement for the relations that logicians study to be claimed to hold by a proponent: they hold or they do not independently of whether they are claimed. To be sure, claiming is an act, similar to stating or asserting, and the noun 'claim' can be taken to mean an act in some contexts (although not perhaps as emphatic an act as assertion). But a claim can also be understood with the object sense of what is (but need not be) claimed – a claim for damages, for example, which can be pursued or not as the case may be. (Adapting the Stoic term, it could be dubbed a 'claimable'.) The ambiguity of 'claim' can even be viewed as a convenience,[16] and used with its ambiguity intact as a generic term for the components of an argument.[17] Beall & Restall (2006: 35), in their defence of logical pluralism, co-opt the term for precisely this amenability: 'Read our neutral term "claim" as picking out sentences, propositions, utterances, statements, or anything else you think might feature in the premises and conclusions of an argument.' In a similar way the passive voice used in Copi's 'claimed to follow', need not be taken so literally as to imply the intentional act of an agent. It may just as well be understood as implicit in the wording of a standard argument, conveyed

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[16] Grice (1975: 380) remarks that 'utterance' has a 'convenient act-object ambiguity'.
[17] In most textbooks on critical thinking 'claim' is the generic term given for the premises and conclusions of an argument, with its act and object senses rarely if ever being differentiated.

by the meaning of the connectives conventionally used to indicate argument or inference: 'therefore', 'so', 'since' etc. If someone were to say, with intent to argue,

(1)   It's dark and therefore it's dangerous to be out

he would not have to add anything more to these words to indicate that he was *claiming* the second to follow from the first, any more than he would need to add anything (such as 'is true') to indicate that he was claiming it was dark. The 'claim', in that sense, is in the standard meaning of the expression – not necessarily in the intention of the proponent, if indeed there is a proponent. I typed (1) out as an example of an argument form without intentionally proposing or propounding anything.[18] Yet, looking back at it and reading it with its standard or default meaning, I could say that in (1) there is an implicit *claim* that the second clause follows from the first without its having to be implicit that it is *someone's* claim. It is there to be claimed; a *claimable*. It is not that the sentence is making a claim itself, or *about* itself. A sentence cannot literally 'do' such things as claiming, or asserting. Even when we talk of sentences '*expressing*' things it could be objected, if pedantically, that we are using the words loosely to mean what *speakers* do *with* sentences. However, what speakers can do with sentences is determined by what sentences conventionally mean, and it is a legitimate and well-understood shorthand to refer to this as what sentences 'express'. In a similar way it is a legitimate shorthand to say that a sentence prefixed by 'so', 'therefore' etc., thereby 'expresses' a claim without any requirement for a speaker to have claimed it. Nonetheless, the ambiguity cannot be eradicated, and it is one of the premises of this thesis that a perspicuous answer to the question of what an argument is depends on its resolution (See §§29, 33 & 34). The notion of a claimable goes some way towards clarification. Along with Stoic assertibles, it has a parallel in McDowell's disambiguation of the Fregean 'Thought': 'The realm of sense (*Sinn*) contains thoughts in the sense of what can be thought (thinkables) as opposed to acts or episodes of thinking' (McDowell 1994: 179). The ordinary word 'thought',

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[18] Arguably I have no choice but to propose what the sentences standardly mean, regardless of any intent or otherwise.

like 'claim', has a glaring act-object ambiguity. Frege's *Gedanke*, however, has the strictly object-sense, which is caught by 'thinkable'. A thinkable need not be thought, but (trivially) only thinkables can be thought.

3.   Arguments and argument-claims

Sainsbury (2001: 23–25) draws a distinction between arguments and what he calls 'argument-claims'. By his account an argument is something about which an argument-claim can be made, in particular (at least for the logician) a claim to the argument's validity or otherwise. Sainsbury interprets the expression

(2) $A_1, \ldots A_n \vDash C$ (or: $A_1, \ldots A_n \nvDash C$)

as:

(3)   "$A_1, \ldots A_n ; C$" is valid, (or : "$A_1, \ldots A_n ; C$" is *not* valid.)

In the affirmative case, this is in the same spirit as saying that C follows from $A_1, \ldots A_n$ or that C is a consequence of $A_1, \ldots A_n$. For if C follows (in this logician's sense) from the rest of the complex, the complex is valid. The double turnstile is conventionally used for semantic consequence, the single turnstile for syntactic, so if one indicates a claim, presumably they both do, even if they make technically different claims. But the semicolon, as deployed in (3), is different. It, too, is metalinguistic, but whereas the turnstile is an indicator of actual logical consequence and can properly be used only of sequents that are valid in the right sorts of ways (viz., semantically valid or syntactically valid), the semi-colon is not. The semi-colon just means that the complex is an argument in the sense of being a set of sentences some of which are premises and another of which is a conclusion. Being a conclusion just means being a sentence that is to be evaluated as following, or not, from another set of formulas. The semi-colon isn't an inference marker as such, it just marks a given list of formulas as something assessable as an argument, but without making any commitment about its validity nor any claim that the conclusion *does* follow from the premises.

So, in Sainsbury's account, the subject of an argument-claim is the argument:

(4) $A_1, ... A_n ; C$

The argument-claim, symbolically expressed by (2) – but paraphrased according to Sainsbury by (3) – is true if (4) is valid and false otherwise. By contrast (4) itself is neither true nor false, because it makes (expresses) no claim. That, Sainsbury observes, is the key difference between an argument claim, as he is using the term, and a (mere) argument. In the context of (3), where the claim is explicitly to the validity (or non-validity) of (4), this seems perfectly correct. It also accords with the notion of an argument as an *object*: something which can be propounded (but need not be), and distinct from what is done by a proponent. Sainsbury (2001: 24) firmly endorses this object-sense by casting the argument as an object of *evaluation*: 'something …. about which the question arises whether or not it is valid'. In that context the argument is not to be understood as claiming or asserting anything. To be assessable for validity, all that is necessary is that the set be such that one of its sentences has been designated a conclusion.[19] On the classical conception of validity, an argument is valid if and only if the set consisting of the designated premises plus the negation of the designated conclusion is an inconsistent set. Alternatively we can say the argument is valid if and only if the conjunction consisting of all the premises and the negated conclusion is a logical falsehood. On these criteria it is not necessary for anything to be claimed in order for the evaluation to be made: the set is consistent or inconsistent, the conjunction true or false, regardless of any claim 'made' by it, or made on its behalf. If we are looking for the best expression of an argument in the *object*-sense, bedrock, so to speak, then (4) is it. However, all that has been said about the claim-to-follow found in expressions of argument, such as (1), will have to apply to claims of validity, such as (2). The notional author of each claim is different: of (1) it is the proponent of the argument, of (2) or (3) it is the critic (although, of course, the proponent can criticise his or her own argument). Sainsbury's argument-claim is, as he says, true

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[19] For precisely such a definition see Bergmann et al. (2004: 9): 'An *argument* is a set of two or more sentences, one of which has been designated as the conclusion…'.

or false according to the validity or otherwise of the argument-object (4). But there is no requirement for it or its truth to be asserted (claimed) in order to have the sense that it has. It, too, is a claimable: a *claim* in that sense only. It is the same object whether claimed or not.

Sainsbury's distinction between arguments and argument-claims is fine within the context of evaluation. In that context the argument '$A_1, ... A_n ; C$' is rightly assigned to the role of *object* of the appraisal – a role, though, that is more apparent in the ordinary-language wording of (3) than the symbolic rendering of (2). The obscurity of (2), as Sainsbury explains, is that

> "⊨"appears in the very place in which, in an expression of an argument in ordinary English, one would find a word like "so" or "therefore" or "hence": a word to show that one has come to the conclusion that is being drawn from the previous propositions. This gives a tendency to confuse the role of "⊨" with that of conjunctions like "therefore". But the roles are very different (ibid.).

These roles, Sainsbury continues, differ on three counts. The first is grammatical: '⊨' (he says) 'is a predicate, the sort of expression which can be used to assign a property to something' (ibid.). It means 'is valid' when applied to the ordered and indexed pair '$A_1, ... A_n ; C$', whereas 'therefore' (he says) is a connective. We can say that some arguments are valid, but we cannot say that any argument is *therefore* (ibid.). The second is that something of the form '$A_1, ... A_n$ therefore C' is, like (4), an argument *about which* something else of the form '$A_1, ... A_n ⊨ C$', is claimable. The third point – and in the context of later parts of the thesis the most interesting – is that when 'in ordinary circumstances'[20] someone actually propounds an argument by linking the premises and conclusion with 'therefore', he commits himself to the truth of the *premises*. To put it another way the proponent, if there is one, *asserts* the premises, whereas someone who claims that the resulting expression is valid, makes no such commitment, given that there are valid arguments with false

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[20] Sainsbury uses this phrase to differentiate between arguments actually propounded in ordinary language, and arguments as inert objects of evaluation; but he makes little of the distinction. Cf. 'real argument', as discussed shortly.

premises. For that reason the complete form of expression for *advancing* an argument (as opposed to simply considering it) is:

(5) $A_1, ... A_n$ *and* therefore-C [21]

Arguments are quite often expressed in this manner – for example: 'It's dark and so it's dangerous to be out'. But with or without the 'and' it is assumed that a person advancing an argument means the reasons to be understood as true, for otherwise they would have no worth as *reasons*.[22] To be sure, I can *mention* the same argument in the context of an evaluation (argument-claim) without asserting the premise(s). For instance I could say, with reference to my locality: '"It's dark and so it's dangerous to be out" is a valid argument, and would be a sound argument if said when it is in fact dark.' But when an argument is used, it is purported to *be* sound, which requires that its premises are purported to be true. In an argument in use the premises (reasons) have the force of assertion.

But clearly the proponent of an argument is committing himself to more than just the truth of the premises. There is a further commitment to the assertibility of the conclusion *given* the premises; that is, to the warrant that the premises give to the conclusion. This may sound very much like a commitment to the plain truth of the conclusion, so that when an argument is advanced the proponent also asserts the conclusion. In one sense this is so: the commitment to the truth of the reasons commits the proponent, eo ipso, to the truth of the conclusion. After all, the whole point of giving the reasons is to warrant the conclusion, and if the conclusion is not warranted by the given reasons – either because they are not all true or because the conclusion does not follow from them – the argument fails. The act of successful argument is an advance from the reasons, by valid inference, to a conclusion, so that if one is committed to the reasons he or she is *thereby* committed to the conclusion. However, there is another sense of 'argument' which stops short of commitment to the conclusion. That is the sense it has when we say

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[21] 'Therefore-C' is hyphenated because I treat it as one claim. C is not itself *merely* asserted, when someone says: 'P and therefore C': what is asserted is that P and C *given* P. I return to this in §39.
[22] See below §§ 10–11 on the principle of charity, which underlies this 'assumption'.

that such-and-such is an argument *for* such and such. If I say to someone: 'This is my argument for C', and then say just what that argument is, 'this' does not need to include C. 'This' refers to the reasons. If it were not complete without a prior or simultaneous commitment to C it would not be a sound argument *for C*, because it would fall short of *establishing* C. The argument must be capable of establishing C. When we *express* an argument it is true that we include the conclusion, in order to state what the argument is intended to establish, as in our example:

(1)   It's dark (and) so it's dangerous to be out.

But *asserting* that it is dangerous is no part of *establishing* that it is dangerous. The argument is not:

(6)   It's dark, *and* it's dangerous to be out, and *it follows that* it's dangerous to be out.

I therefore take the latter sense of argument, viz. 'argument *for*', to have an important explanatory sense, since it reflects the move that we make when we argue – its starting point and the direction that it takes. What the proponent of an argument does is to assert reasons – *and* to assert them *as* reasons – for some C. In that sense the act of argument *for* C is complete without *asserting* C. That is not to deny that an argument must include or involve a conclusion. Clearly it does, but it does not require the active asserting of the conclusion in order to be an argument for that conclusion. (The importance of this point emerges later the thesis, and I return to it with additional argument at various points.)

Of course the proponent might be lying when he asserts some or all of the premises, or simply mistaken in believing them to be true. Likewise he might be arguing fallaciously, with or without intent, when he uses the word 'therefore' to indicate that he is drawing a conclusion from the premises, not necessarily because the conclusion itself is false, but because its truth does *not* follow properly from the asserted premises. In short, what this means is that in a standardly expressed argument, one of the components is *claimed to follow* from the other(s), just as Copi says in his definition, but with the qualified meaning of 'claimed'.

We can now come back to Walton's question: 'claimed by whom?' and to his presumption that it is the proponent's claim. Sure enough, the proponent does make a claim when he utters a complex sentence of the form: $A_1, \ldots A_n$ (and) therefore-C. In fact, as Sainsbury rightly points out, he makes two claims: first the conjunction of $A_1, \ldots A_n$ and, second, that C follows from these claims. Being just claims, they need not be true, though they are claimed *as* true. One or more of the premises could be false; and, whether they are true or not, they might not give adequate grounds for the conclusion. What is claimed altogether is a *conjunction*, which, again, is why we should (or implicitly do) include 'and' along with 'therefore' or 'so'. The compound claim is *that* $A_1, \ldots A_n$ and *that* therefore-C.

But 'claim' is still ambiguous here. 'To make a claim' means to claim, to perform an act of claiming; but 'the claim' that is made in the process will generally be taken – if loosely – to mean what is claimed. (Much the same goes for 'assertion',[23] with important implications later in the thesis.) This illustrates quite well what it means to say that the ambiguity is 'convenient': it allows us to refer to something as a claim without having to commit ourselves to an act of claiming and a claimer, yet at the same time to allude its claimability. Of course, in the *pure* object-sense of what is claimed or asserted, the object is a bare proposition. But it is the same object whether claimed or unclaimed, asserted or unasserted.[24] This is not a convenience that can be indulged throughout a thesis which is expressly concerned with the relation, and likewise the *distinction*, between acts and objects (of argument and assertion). But accepting, for the time being, the accommodating sense of 'claim', we can say that the claims made *by* the proponent of an argument – if indeed the argument is propounded – are also made *in* the argument, whether it is propounded or not. That is to say, the *claims* are in the conventional meaning of the words. An expression with the form of (5) cannot be uttered *assertively* without

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[23] However, disambiguation is easier for 'assertion' because the noun and verb forms are different. This will be important in later sections. Nonetheless, the act-object ambiguity of 'assertion' is little (if at all) different from the ambiguity of the noun, 'claim', and has similar consequences. See Chapter 5 below.

[24] See again Geach (1965) on 'The Frege point' (footnote 12, above).

the claims in question being made. That commits the speaker to the truth of the *claimables* that are its constituents, and that commitment is part of the meaning of the standard expression of an argument. We recognise a text as an argument if we recognise this commitment. So it is in this spirit that I take Copi's definition of a conclusion as the member of the set that is 'claimed to follow' from other(s), and/or of a premise as one that is 'regarded as providing support'.

4.   Claims and evaluations

How then does the claim to follow from, in the standard definition, relate to Sainsbury's notion of an argument-claim? The latter, which is signalled in the positive case by "⊨" and translated '…is valid' (according to Sainsbury), is neither a claim by the proponent of an argument nor is it *in* the argument, in the sense just outlined. Sainsbury's argument claim is a claim *about* an argument, as is crystal clear in the longhand version, (3). Moreover it is a very particular claim, a claim to the validity of a particularly ordered and indexed set of propositions. It would be more pertinent, perhaps, to call it a *validity-claim*, especially on the strength of (3). Validity or non-validity is not the only evaluative claim that can be made about an argument.[25] Sainsbury makes a gesture towards generalising the notion by adding that arguments can also be assessed for persuasiveness, opening the door to a range of alternative criteria – elegance, perhaps, or succinctness – but he does not enlarge on the point. His concern is with logical appraisal, and his argument claim is a specifically logical appraisal. An argument may then be understood simply as any object which is either valid or invalid as, analogously, a declarative sentence is an expression that is either true or false.

Put another way, argument can be identified simply as the *domain* of logic. Gillian Russell (2008: 593) observes that

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[25] 'Non-valid' is used in preference to 'invalid' to allow for the evaluation of objects that are either bad arguments or non-arguments but where it is unclear which. To judge them invalid would imply that they were deemed to be arguments, but 'non-valid' allows their argument status to be undecided, and thus has relevance for 'appraisal-first' strategies. See §20 below.

the domain of logic might be thought of as a great collection of arguments to be divided into two exclusive and exhaustive subcollections, the valid and the invalid, and the task of the logician as that of dividing one from t'other.

As the subject of an argument-claim, so conceived, the argument itself is the object of an evaluation, on the 'dimension' of (i.e. by the criterion of) validity.[26] This, being both exclusive and exhaustive, goes a good way towards being a definition of 'argument' – some might say the whole way. Its evident limitation is that under such a definition every conceivable finite and ordered set of declarative sentences will be the expression of an argument if a semicolon is placed between its ultimate and penultimate formulas. If it were offered as a definition of what people intuitively take an argument to be, an obvious objection would be that it does not discriminate between those sets of sentences or propositions that are invalid arguments and those that (intuitively speaking) are not arguments at all. As a logician's definition, of course, this is not a limitation but a strength, and surely a necessary condition for completeness. A calculus could not be held to be complete if amongst sets of propositions there was a sizeable number that could not be classified as valid or invalid because it was unclear whether they really counted as arguments. Besides, as Gillian Russell goes on to say, logicians are not really interested in the question of what an argument is,[27] as shown by the scant attention that is paid to it in most logic books (Copi's included). Logicians, she says, tend to move on quickly to the business of argument-evaluation.

Sainsbury makes it very clear that his validity-claim – (2) construed as (3) – is *about* a set of objects arbitrarily designated as arguments. It is hence a metalinguistic claim, similar to the way in which 'is true' is appended, in Tarski's schema, to a quoted sentence rather than to the sentence itself. What we find quoted in the argument-claim is the reference to what is evaluated *by* the claim, namely: '$A_1, ... A_n$; C'. The argument-claim represented by (2) thus escapes any suspicion that it is

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[26] Sainsbury may be following Searle in using the notion 'dimension of assessment'. For example, Searle (1979: 12) writes: 'All the members of the assertive class are assessable on the dimension of assessment that includes *true* and *false*.'

[27] 'Logicians do not spend a lot of time on it, any more than mathematicians spend a lot of time worrying about what numbers are' (Russell 2008: 593).

claiming something about *itself*, though it is claiming something about the sentences (or propositions) referred to *in* the claim – i.e. to all of $A_1, ... A_n$, and to C.

The claim alluded to in Copi's definition of an argument is different, and more difficult to put a finger on. One way to contrast it with Sainsbury's argument-claim is in terms of *voice*. The voice we 'hear' when we read (2) and (3) is the voice of a notional critic, an appraiser standing back from the argument. Using 'voice' in the grammatical sense, we say the verb 'claim' is *active*: it is in direct speech; the critic is asserting that the argument is valid or invalid. In the contrasting grammatical sense of 'voice', the claim that features in Copi's definition is *passive*: it is claimed that one proposition follows from the others (in an argument). In the more ordinary sense it is the notional proponent's voice, not the voice of a critic. If we transpose this claim into direct speech it can only be a claim that the conclusion *does* follow, the standard form of expression of that claim being (5) – '$A_1, ... A_n$ (and) therefore C'. What it cannot be is a claim that the conclusion does *not* follow from the premises. That is an option that applies only to the critical, evaluative claim: $A_1, ... A_n \nvDash C$.

The implication of this is that the claim attributed to an argument by the standard definition is a *designatory* claim; it assigns each of the constituent propositions the role of either conclusion or premise, and defines each by its *putative* relation to the other(s) in an expressed argument. In that respect nothing more is done than declare the complex an argument, which by convention is all and only what ' ; ' means. Hence the object to which the standard definition refers is an object of evaluation on a par with (4). It is valid if what is claimed is true, and invalid if what is claimed is false. The reason why this might seem questionable is that claiming that one proposition follows from one or more others appears far more informative than the mere separation of the two sub-sets by a punctuation mark. That difference, however, is superficial. Just as (2) is construed as: '"P ; C" is valid' (where P is a set of premises, and C a conclusion), 'P ; C' itself may be construed as: 'C is a conclusion and P its premise-set', which is tantamount to: 'C is claimed to follow from P'. The latter *explicates* the former, but basically the claims are

equivalent in meaning – i.e. that 'P ; C' is an argument. (We can now see, too, why the negation of (4) would not mean that C did not follow from P, but instead that C was not *claimed* to follow from P, or in other words that 'P ; C' was not an argument.)

5.   Acts of argument and their objects

To recap briefly, an argument-claim, as Sainsbury defines it, is true or not according to whether the related *object* is valid or not. It is effectively an evaluation, one of two. The other, which is indicated by striking through the turnstile (⊬), is a claim that the argument is not valid – though still an argument. The object of the claim is a set of propositions separated into two subsets, one designated as premises and the other a conclusion. This we can call the argument-object, as opposed to the argument-claim. The argument-object makes no claim; the claim is made about it. If we were to think of the argument-claim as an act its agent would be an argument-critic.

An act of argument, by contrast, is the act of a proponent, and is performed when a reason (or number of reasons) is given *for* a conclusion. It might alternatively be thought that the act of argument is performed by drawing a conclusion from the reasons, but there is a problem with defining the act that way because a conclusion cannot be drawn without there being reasons from which to draw it. There is a sense of directionality in the procedure. It is true, as we have seen, that in a good argument the conclusion follows from the reasons, and that by the same token the reasons give grounds that warrant the drawing of the conclusion. If we think about what is going on when we argue from premises to a conclusion, we can envisage the agent reflecting on one or more propositions and concluding something from them. For example, I may see that the tide is going out and conclude that I will soon be able to reach a nearby island that might be unreachable at high tide. The act so-described is inference, although under the same ambiguity that we find in 'claim' and 'assertion', the word 'inference' can also take the meaning of what is inferred. On one side of the ambiguity there is the inference I make (carry out) in concluding

that I can now get to the island. On the other there is the proposition that the island is currently reachable, which – despite how I came to know or believe it – is true or false by its own lights, and can be asserted or denied accordingly. I refer to it as 'an inference', even in the object-sense, because it is something I have come to by an act or process of inference; but *what* I have come to is an object, a proposition, that is not a product of my making. That is not to say that 'inference' and 'proposition' simply mean the same. Obviously an inference is a special kind of proposition – coloured, as it were, by the mental act or speech act whose object it is. Likewise inferring is a special kind of thinking or speaking. But the point to be emphasised here is that what is inferred is not a different object for being inferred.

To think of inferences as *products* of acts of inference is consistent with a view (prevalent in the field of informal logic) that arguments are products of acts or processes of argumentation (e.g. Johnson (2000: 168) . It seems reasonable enough, in the context of an argument that is actually being put forward, to characterise the conclusion as a product, the *output*, say, of an act of inference, produced by being drawn from premises. By the same token we might want to define premises as products of acts of reason-giving for a conclusion. We talk quite naturally of people *producing* reasons to support a position. But although the characterisation of an argument as the product of a process might have some intuitive appeal, it does not account for the less intuitive but equally important object-sense. This is because an argument-object need not be produced by any act of argument in order to be an argument.[28]

What is inferred in an act of argument is a claim, but only in the strict object-sense of something claimed – a claimable. The claim is an inference insofar as it is inferred. But there is also a purely referential sense of 'what is inferred' which is detached from any associated act of inferring. Take the claim that a certain island can be reached (at a given time and place). Its truth conditions are unaffected by

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[28] This may be disputed, however, by those who draw a distinction between 'real' or 'authentic' argument and the objects logicians designate as arguments for their purposes. See the next chapter.

whether or not it is inferred. Instead of *inferring* that the island could be reached, I might have seen with my own eyes that this was so without any thoughts about the tide, and asserted that it was so without any reference to the tide. Similarly I might have claimed or asserted that the tide was out without meaning it as a reason to conclude anything about the island. What I simply assert or claim, and what I give as a reason for the conclusion, is just that the tide is out. In giving it as a reason on one occasion, and as a plain assertion on another, I do not bring about any real or intrinsic change to it. The thing that is plainly asserted, and the thing itself that is given as a reason etc., are one and the same proposition. Yet clearly what we refer to as 'an assertion', 'an inference', or 'a premise' are not identical objects. It might be argued, therefore, that the admixture of an act of inferring – as opposed to an act of simply asserting – changes the object of the act in some way that is analogous to the change caused in, say, a copper pipe when it is bent. However, this is a crude analogy. A bent pipe is intrinsically different from a straight one – they possess different properties – and the acts of bending or straightening bring about the respective differences in a sense that I am denying to acts of asserting or inferring, etc. with respect to their objects. That is not to deny that *something* changes or emerges when a proposition is given as a reason or drawn as a conclusion – i.e. when an argument is advanced. But the independence of the object from any or all of these acts is not incompatible with this broader idea of change.

One way to mark the distinction is to invoke the concept of Cambridge change, a term used by Geach (1969: 71–2) for a definition of change under which a thing changes if it has a certain property at one time, but not at another.[29] Geach challenged the definition for being too generous, in including not only changes to intrinsic properties of an object – such as a person growing older or taller – but also to external, relational properties, such as a wife's becoming a widow, or an item changing in price. The latter he called 'mere' Cambridge change, implying that an object undergoes genuine change only when it has an *intrinsic* property at one time

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[29] The definition was espoused by Russell and McTaggart, hence the tag 'Cambridge change'.

but not at another (Weberman 1999: 139–40). Cleland (1990: 279) contrasts the *merely* relational change in a mother who is outgrown by her daughter (to become the shortest member of her family) with the 'real' change in the daughter by becoming taller herself. The qualifying use of 'mere' is important because there is clearly relational change in both instances, but in the daughter there is a discernible intrinsic change also. It is tempting to dismiss *mere* relational change as bogus change.[30] That, however, is not the contention here. It seems clear that when a proposition is employed as a premise or drawn as a conclusion there is a change in one or more of its properties, albeit external to its properties as a bare proposition. For a start, it is now perceived as being part of an argument. But that is not to say that either the proposition, or the argument of which the proposition is a part, is thereby produced, or changed internally, by being so contextualised.

So the question of whether it follows from the tide's being out that the island can be reached can be asked and answered intelligibly without its having to be established that anyone has *given* the first as a reason or *drawn* the second as a conclusion. From the vantage point of the critic, the question is about claims, and the relation between them, in the wholly object-sense of *what* is claimed. In the case of a single claim or assertion, what is claimed or asserted is the same object as that which is evaluated as true or false. In the case of an argument the situation is obviously more complex, but it can be understood in a similar way. What is claimed, in an act of argument, is a relation between the components of the argument. In an act of evaluation that claim is judged true or false – true if the relation holds and false otherwise – and the argument is judged valid or non-valid accordingly. In short, the act of argument – i.e. propounding – and the act of evaluation have the same object. Because the object is evaluable whether or not it is the object of any actual practice or performance, we can derive a wholly object-sense for 'argument'. Talk of arguments as the 'products of acts', which is a hybrid concept, tends to compound rather than resolve the ambiguity. Of course it is the

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[30] Weberman (1999: 140 and footnote) suggests that Geach's (1969) examples (if not his explicit comments on the Cambridge definition) imply this view.

familiarity we have with the acts of arguing, and with texts expressing arguments, that informs our concept of argument. It is inconceivable that we could have the concept of an argument without the experience of performing and responding to argument-acts. But the object of an act of argument – what is propounded – is no more dependent for its validity or invalidity on its being the object of an act of propounding than an individual proposition is dependent for its truth or falsity on being the object of an act of asserting.

6.   Argument and assertion

We arrive now at one of the central issues for the thesis: how do acts of argument relate to their objects? This question has already made an appearance in connection with Sainsbury's distinction between the objects logicians assess for validity, and those which are expressed 'in ordinary circumstances'. Since 'ordinary circumstances' are those in which an argument is actively put forward by an arguer, it can be assumed that the argument purports to be sound; that is, its premises are purported to be true, and the inference to the conclusion is purported to be valid. Asserting one or more claims as reasons for another claim commits the proponent to the truth of what is asserted, so that if he knowingly asserts something false as grounds for a conclusion, then obviously he is guilty of lying. But likewise if he knowingly gives as reasons claims that do not warrant the inference to the conclusion, he is also doing something rather like lying, even if the propositions themselves are true. [31]

The reasons for the twinning of assertion and argument in the title of the thesis should now be fairly obvious. Acts of argument, like acts of assertion, *have* objects: premises, conclusions, whole arguments, which are standardly expressed by means of declarative sentences, or compounds of them. Moreover the same commitment to truth applies to the component acts of argument as it does to claims and

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[31] Lying, it should be noted, is a complex notion, involving more than the truth or falsity of an asserted proposition. Lying is a special case of asserting, and of the act-object relation vis-à-vis assertion. However, its special features do not affect the present point, and are outside the scope of this thesis.

assertions in general. Acts of argument are not so much *like* assertion as a species *of* assertion, as many commentators have observed. John Searle classifies deducing and concluding as assertives, differing from plainly asserting or stating by 'the added feature that they mark certain relations between the assertive illocutionary act and the rest of the discourse or the context of utterance' (Searle 1979: 13). Obviously, it is premises (reasons), given in the discourse, to which concluding and deducing mark a relation. It would seem to follow that an act of *premising* would conversely mark a relation to a conclusion or deduction, but Searle does not add this. Indeed he does not make reference to a specific speech-act of premising (or reason-giving) at all, possibly because the circularity of a mutual relation would undermine his classification of concluding. He may consider concluding to define premising (and premises), but not vice versa. On that presumption, the *stating* of a reason or premise would then be a plain assertive, and the special act of deducing or concluding would mark what was previously asserted as a premise.

Hitchcock (2007), with reference to Searle's taxonomy, also classifies the act of reason-giving as an assertive, and he expressly singles out reason-giving as the defining feature of argument (in all but the purely disputational sense):

> A simple argument is a sequence of three objects: a speech act *c* of any type concerning some proposition, an illative such as the word 'since' (in its inferential sense), and a set *P* of one or more assertives. (Hitchcock 2007: 107)

It is interesting to note that Hitchcock appears to depart from Searle's classification by not requiring concluding to be assertive, though it 'concerns' propositions. In one respect this is evidenced by the various non-standard ways in which we express arguments. An illative need not be succeeded invariably by a declarative sentence – for example: 'The tide's turned, so should we leave the island?' But it is reasonable to suppose that however the conclusion of an argument is expressed, it could always be converted into a declarative sentence. Besides, Hitchcock's real point is that, whilst inferences can take a variety of forms of expression, reason-giving cannot: it is essentially assertive.

Brandom (1983) also sees an essential connection between the acts of asserting and concluding. Developing a point that he takes from the early writings of Frege,[32] he proposes that the key to a correct understanding of assertion lies in its relation to inference:

> That is, asserting is issuing an inference license. Since inferring is drawing a conclusion, such an inference license amounts to a warrant for further assertions, specifically assertions of those sentences which can appropriately be inferred from the sentence originally asserted. (Brandom 1983: 639)

Hence, although the two philosophers would agree that the act of warranting a conclusion is characteristically assertive, they come to the view from different directions, and for different purposes, Hitchcock's being to classify reason-giving Brandom's to explain assertion. It might seem a step too far to say that warranting conclusions is the whole point and purpose of assertion. There are other ways to explain why we assert things, one of the most obvious being to convey information. Brandom observes this himself, though not in order to detract from his main contention. For the point and purpose of communicating information is no less in need of explaining than is assertion itself. The value of an item of information is in what we do with it, which can generally be understood in terms of what we infer from it, or how we act on it, which is a mark of what we infer from it. For present purposes all we need take from Brandom's proposal is that warranting conclusions is a significant function of assertion, consistent with the commitment to truth that is associated with assertion. But it is certainly plausible that the strength of the commitment is at least partly explained by the role assertion plays in warranting inferences. We say that assertions are *supposed*, *expected*, *meant*, etc. to be true, placing the onus on the author of an assertion to be mindful of the truth. We also say that, from the point of view of the audience, assertions are generally *trusted* or *counted on* to be true. We say likewise that the premises of an argument, being assertions, are supposed to be true, and that the conclusion is supposed to follow

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[32] '(W)hen the younger Frege glosses asserting as putting a sentence forward as true, the phrase has the sense of "putting the sentence forward as one from which it is appropriate to make inferences".' Brandom (1983: 639, citing various passages from Frege's first logic published posthumously in Hermes (1979).

from them. Shand (2000: 20), in a definition with echoes of Copi's, writes: 'An *argument* is a set of *propositions* where one of the set (the *conclusion*), is supposed to *follow from* the others (the *premises*)'. Here 'supposed' takes the place of Copi's 'claimed', but the two words are not (or not necessarily) interchangeable. It is true that 'C' can be supposed to follow from 'P' in the sense of someone's actually supposing it to do so. That, however, is not the only interpretation, nor the most natural one in the context. For 'supposed' also has the sense there of 'ought'. If someone were to respond to an argument by saying: 'A conclusion is *supposed* to follow from its premises', it could have the implicature that the argument was defective. The notion of an argument as a complex in which a certain relation is supposed to obtain gives the impression of something inherently open to criticism; but no more so than one in which the same relation is *claimed* to hold. Whilst the two terms have different meanings, being *supposed* to φ is implied by being *claimed* to φ, (though not the converse) given that in general a *claim* is supposed to be true.

The view that acts of argument are essentially assertive is, I think, safe from objection. Premises are claimed, and therefore supposed to be true; conclusions are *claimed* – and therefore *supposed* – to follow from premises. It is true that some argument is more tentative than other argument but assertive force varies without ceasing to be assertive.[33] Besides, if both claims are true, as claims are supposed to be, then the object-argument is sound, whatever level of assertive force or commitment the author happens to put behind them. The soundness of an argument is independent of any act of argument whose object it might be. The premises are true or false, and the inference valid or invalid, regardless of the delivery. To that extent, the argument is an object through and through, and from the logician's point of view the act of argument is largely an irrelevance. However, there is one question that is not answered by reflecting on the object-sense of argument alone, and that is why it *matters* whether an argument is valid or invalid

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[33] See Searle (1979: 412-13): 'The degree of belief of commitment may approach or even reach zero, but it is clear [...] that *hypothesizing that p* and *flatly stating that p* are in the same line of business in a way that neither is like requesting.'

– or indeed sound or unsound. It matters for the same reason that it matters whether an assertion is true or false, or to be more precise whether what is asserted, when an assertion is made, is true or false. It matters in both cases because if there is not a presumption that authors *mean* their assertions to be true and their arguments to be sound, rational discourse would founder.

The parallels between assertion and argument are striking. Just as Brandom takes inference to provide an explanatory framework for asserting, I take assertion, in return, to throw light on argument, in particular on the relation between acts of argument and their objects. Evaluation, as we have seen, gives us a clear view of the argument-object. Assertion – it will be argued – provides insight on the act. I return to assertion itself in Chapter 5. Most importantly I consider the intersection of the two perspectives in Chapter 6.

7.   Propositions: an endnote to the chapter

At the outset of the chapter it was noted that the gist of the standard definition is not significantly altered by replacing 'proposition' with 'sentence', or with the neutral 'claim'. The proposition is what is claimed or asserted; the sentence the means by which it is expressed. In this case what are claimed or asserted or expressed in sentences are just the elements of an argument, a premise or the conclusion. This is not to say that the differences between propositions, claims, and sentences are unimportant philosophically; only that the standard definition of an argument makes broadly the same point whichever of these terms it employs. The general point is that an argument is a set of elements, one of which, putatively, follows from the others. In line with Copi, I have referred to these elements as 'propositions'. However, Copi could as well have referred to the constituents of an argument as sentences. In some parts of his (1992), he clearly refers to sentences as propositions, for example when numbering the premises and conclusion in the text of a complex argument. At one point he quotes a passage beginning, 'Petersburg, too, was occupied by Federal troops', which he uses to exemplify texts containing no argument. Copi's explanation is as follows: 'Here every proposition

contained in the paragraph is asserted, but no claim is made, either explicitly or implicitly, that any of them provides grounds or evidence for any other (Copi 1992: 31). First, the contents of a *paragraph* are not propositions. 'Petersburg, too, was occupied...' is a sentence and so are those that follow in the passage that Copi quotes. Second, what is asserted – if it is asserted – is correctly identified as a proposition. It would strictly be imprecise to say that the *sentence* was asserted, though it often is said with the meaning that a sentence was uttered assertively, including being written down as an assertion. What is asserted is *that* Petersburg was occupied, which is not the written sentence. Third, neither propositions nor sentences *make* claims or assertions. Authors do these things by performing acts. Here and elsewhere in the book Copi allows this blurring of the distinction, intentionally or otherwise.

Without constant, laborious qualification, it is difficult to maintain these distinctions with precision and consistency. My aim is to be as consistent as possible along the following lines: I take *sentences* to be the objects of utterances, inscriptions, etc. and *propositions* to be the objects of assertions, beliefs, etc., both on the basis of a proposition being understood as the meaning of a declarative sentence. Propositions have not always been distinguished from sentences in this way, nor is that definition universally accepted,[34] but it has become quite usual in recent analytical philosophy.[35] It would be odd to say we assert *meanings*, but it is perfectly cogent to say that we assert what sentences mean, for which I employ 'proposition'. We need, too, a term for the single meaning of what two people might both assert using different sentences, or the same sentences at different times. Token utterances of the same sentence might be said to have the meaning of the type sentence that the utterances have in common. But, as Gaskin (2008: 9) observes, 'if distinct token sentences can mean the same, we cannot, on pain of breaching the logic of identity allow meanings to be token sentences'. Clearly two token sentences can have the same meaning: If I say 'The tide is out', and you say

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[34] See e.g. Alston (1996: 17).
[35] See Gaskin (2008: 8).

'It's low tide' with the same thought in mind, then there is something that we are both asserting.

As for ontological status, of meanings or of propositions, that question is not a central issue for this thesis. 'There is a proposition that X asserted and Y denied', or 'There are propositions that no one has affirmed or denied' need not mean these things exist in any heavy sense. The way in which objects of certain acts are identified with propositions in this thesis may have realist overtones. However, a thoroughgoing realist conception of the objects in question is not a *sine qua non* for the argument as a whole. Premises and conclusions are objects of acts of argument, namely the giving (asserting) of premises and drawing of conclusions, and as such I refer to them as propositions. When it comes to interpreting arguments, however, it is sentences that we extract from texts and identify as premises or conclusions. Thus, inevitably, there will be some overlap in referring to the objects people assert and the objects others apprehend.

CHAPTER TWO: Real argument and critical thinking

A shadow fronted him tempestuously.

"You shut up, you fat slug!"

There was a moment's struggle and the glimmering conch jigged up and down.

Ralph leapt to his feet. "Jack! Jack! You haven't got the conch! Let him speak."

Jack's face swam near him. "And you shut up! Who are you, anyway? Sitting there telling people what to do. You can't hunt, you can't sing—"

"I'm chief. I was chosen."

"Why should choosing make any difference? Just giving orders that don't make any sense—"

"Piggy's got the conch."

"That's right—favour Piggy as you always do—"

"Jack!"

Jack's voice sounded in bitter mimicry. "Jack! Jack!"

"The rules!" shouted Ralph. "You're breaking the rules!"

"Who cares?"

Ralph summoned his wits. "Because the rules are the only thing we've got!"

But Jack was shouting against him. "Bollocks to the rules! We're strong—we hunt! If there's a beast, we'll hunt it down! We'll close in and beat and beat and beat—!"

William Golding: *Lord of the Flies*

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8.   Identifying argument

The main skills taught and assessed under the heading of 'critical thinking' are analysis and evaluation of natural-language reasoning found in various sources.

Our objective is to describe a systematic method for extracting an argument from its written context and for evaluating it. (Fisher 1988b: 128)

The method which we describe applies to reasoning, or argument, as it actually occurs in natural language […]. We begin by describing how to recognise contexts in which reasoning is taking place [...]. We then describe how to uncover and display

the structure […]. Finally we explain how, as far as possible, to decide whether the reasoning is correct or not. (Fisher 1988b: 15)

'Reasoning' in this context is not to be understood as synonymous with 'argument'. We naturally and rightly think of reasoning as a larger domain than argument and as being more diverse, including, for example, explaining, problem-solving, and decision-making.[36] These merge with argument, but range beyond it as well. Appearances to the contrary, Fisher is not saying here that we can identify an argument simply by recognising reasoning. The reasoning to be identified is the reasoning in the argument and we cannot recognise one without recognising the other.

How do we recognise an argument? How, in other words, do we differentiate between sets of sentences or propositions that are, and others that are not, arguments? This question would naturally seem to be prior to any critical question, since we cannot analyse an argument, still less say whether the reasoning it embodies is good or correct, if we cannot first be sure that the object qualifies as an argument. (In general it cannot be said of any *x*, that *x* is a good *F*, if *x* is not an *F*.) Intuitively the logical procedure is: 1) identify, 2) analyse, 3) appraise. But when it comes to applying this procedure to natural-discourse contexts, it proves to be more easily said than done – and possibly the wrong procedure anyway (Ennis 2001; Hamblin 1970). In this chapter we consider why this is so, and examine some of the implications this has for the methodology of CT.

For formal logic, as already observed, there is no such issue. The central concept in logic is the consequence relation, and the question for the logician is whether or not that relation holds between one or more sentences, propositions, or claims, and another. According to Read (1995: 35):

The aim of logic is to clarify what follows from what, to determine which are the valid consequences of a given set of premisses or assumptions. The consequence

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[36] See Finocchiaro (2005: 22).

relation relates a set or collection of given propositions to those propositions or conclusions which correctly, or validly, follow from them. We can say that the premisses entail the conclusion; or that the conclusion validly follows from them; or that one may correctly infer the conclusion from the premisses.

Prior to investigating whether the relation obtains or not, there is no need to make any differentiation between sentences which express premises and sentences which express a conclusion, because ultimately any sentence can wear either of these designations under evaluation. The evaluation casts them in these roles. As Read says in the extract, the premises are 'given' or they are 'assumptions'. But here these words do not have the natural, active meaning of being given as reasons, or assumed to support the conclusion. The words can have those senses when arguments are considered as acts of argument, or transcripts of arguments, with actual or envisaged proponents, but as objects of evaluation – 'given' just has the meaning of 'any', and 'assumption' of anything that might be thought, whether or not it has any merit as a reason. Either way, there is no need to ask whether a given sentence or assumption is rightfully a premise in order to proceed with a further question of whether the set of which it is a member entails the given conclusion. In the mere asking what does (or does not) follow from a set of sentences, those sentences are *assumed* to be premises.[37] Moreover, the question, 'what follows *logically* from what?' is a question of argument form, not of content. Any simple sentence can be substituted for any other without affecting the validity of a complex whose form is valid. Therefore trivially any proposition will do as well as any other in an argument whose validity has yet to be assessed. Cutting to the chase, it could just be said that any set of sentences can be evaluated as an argument, and that is effectively where this discussion has been leading. It will be of importance, too, in Chapter 6.

In *acts* of argument, however, and hence in arguments encountered in natural discourse, premises are not 'given' in the above neutral sense, nor are they 'assumptions' just for the purposes of evaluation. They are *actually* given, i.e.

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[37] Premises are sometime referred to as 'assumptions' across the board. See, e.g., Lemmon (1965).

claimed as reasons, and particular conclusions are actually claimed to follow from them. These claims are reflected in the standard form of expression that arguments take in English. It might seem a reasonable expectation therefore that we can distinguish arguments from non-arguments by the presence or absence of a consequence relation. However, since a given set of premises and conclusion need not *be* valid – that is, in a given collection of propositions there may be no consequence relation – we are back to the problem of identifying bad arguments, and to the need for a definition which recognises that the arguments are merely *claims* to consequence which may not be true. In a bad argument the claim is false, but it is still an argument. As noted in Chapter 1, this 'claim' is implicit in the standard wording of an argument, and marked by one of a range of markers such as 'so', 'therefore', 'because' or 'since'.[38] Can we not simply rely on these surface forms and features to indicate when reasoning or inference is taking place, and accordingly identify the argument whose reasoning it is? Finocchiaro (2005: 26) considers this a feasible starting point.

> The essential feature of all reasoning is the interrelating of individual thoughts in such a way that some follow from others, and that the normal linguistic expression of such interrelated thinking involves the use of particles like 'because', 'therefore', etc. However minimal this conception is, it allows the theory of reasoning to get started by suggesting that we try to understand and to evaluate those discourses having a high incidence of these logical particles.

But any list of sentences or claims whatever may be designated an argument for the purpose of assessing whether or not a consequence relation holds, logical or otherwise. Symbolically, all it takes is a punctuation mark to indicate inference, and/or to separate a conclusion from its premises if, by stipulation or convention, the mark indicates what 'therefore', 'so', or 'since' mean in ordinary language. But,

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[38] Normally, 'therefore', 'so', etc. are classed as adverbs, 'because' and 'since' as conjunctions. This just shows that inference can be indicated in natural language by more than one grammatical construction, one in which the reasons are prefixed, the other the conclusion. Because the usual convention for formalising natural-language (NL) argument is to list the conclusion after or below the premise(s), the 'so' form tends to be the standard one – although it is worth noting that Hitchcock (2007: 107) apparently takes the view that 'since' is the more perspicuous. I, on the other hand, take the view that the standard form of NL argument is conjunctive – P *and* so-C.

conversely, all it takes to indicate argument in a random set of sentences is to replace a punctuation mark with a conventional inference indicator. A lot of bad arguments can be composed in that way. They have the surface form of natural arguments, but are no more natural for that than the 'made up example' to which Fisher refers as the antithesis of his concept of 'real' argument (of which more shortly).

Besides, not all uses of 'therefore', 'so', or 'since' have an illative sense. In many cases these words are found in the context of explanation which, although it is a form of reasoning, differs in kind from the reasoning in an argument. Take: 'She was bored, so she left', or 'So did I', or the line from the rock-song: 'Since you've been gone, I can breathe for the first time.' In the first of these the subject's alleged boredom would explain why she left, but is no sort of warrant for concluding *that* she left. Nor is 'so' an illative in the second case, where it has the meaning of 'also' or 'likewise'. The role of 'since' in the song is again neither explanatory nor illative, but relates to a lapse of time. It is not the connectives here that give meaning to the sentences, but the meaning of the sentences that determines the specific sense of the connectives. It would not be a relevant objection that the temporal 'since' and the causal or illative 'since' are different words – as are *seitdem* and *da* in German – and their sameness in English is merely an orthographic coincidence. The point here is that the words fail as indicators because they can indicate different things. 'So', 'since' etc. are recognisable as argument indicators only in an argument.

Many expressed arguments have no explicit inference indicator. Recall example (1) from the previous chapter:

(1)   It's dark, and so it's dangerous to be out.

The intended force of this would be retained if uttered as

(1')   It's dark; it's dangerous to be out.

But without knowing its history or context it now becomes a matter of speculative interpretation whether the author was indeed arguing from the first sentence to the second. It would be bizarre to interpret it as the reverse, though not because of the order of the sentences. In general the order of sentences in a natural-language argument does not reliably indicate the logical order. (1') could be rewritten

(1'')   It's dangerous to be out; it's dark

without being a different argument (if it is argument). But as far as linguistic form is concerned there are no cues by which to settle whether (1') means the same as (1), or something else – say, a pair of unrelated claims. Alternatively the two sentences might themselves be understood as premises to an implicit warning not to go out.

(2)   It's dark. It's dangerous to be out. [So stay in.]

9.   Interpretation

Theoretically speaking it can be asked of any list of sentences whether one of them is, or is not, a consequence of the others. Partitioning the list into premises and conclusion designates the list as an argument, and renders it apt for appraisal. We might say that it sets the complex up as a suitable object for appraisal as an argument. But that conception of an argument is both counter-intuitive and unrewarding for anyone who is looking for some difference between strings of sentences which can, and strings which cannot, be recognised as arguments ahead of being subjected to evaluation. Under the standard definition there is no such distinction. Any string can count as an argument, so long as it consists of declarative sentences, or expressions which can be recast as declarative.[39] Any sentence can be *claimed* to follow from another or others. Logic could not get started if it were incumbent upon logicians to first sort sets of sentences into those

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[39] Hitchcock (2007: 107) goes further that this and characterises a conclusion as any expression 'concerning' a proposition. This is too vague and inclusive in my view. Clearly there are arguments that have rhetorical questions as conclusion. Some have commands: 'She's armed and dangerous so what are you waiting for: shoot her!' If you ask what the speaker is inferring (from the premises) it is that the addressee should shoot without delay. In this respect the non-indicative sentences 'concern' propositions by giving expression to them. But Hitchcock means it to be much more accommodating, stretching as far as attitudes, feelings, etc.

whose conclusions exhibited some *actual* purport or propensity to follow from their premises, whatever the signs of that might be. Besides, the question could not even be put without first identifying a conclusion; yet, by the standard definition, a conclusion is just a sentence that is claimed to follow from others. The circularity in that would nullify the distinction at the boundary between bad arguments and non-arguments – indeed, between arguments and non-arguments full stop. The only hard line that can be drawn is between valid arguments and all other sets of declarative sentences, randomly selected or arbitrarily assembled. Yet, that said, language speakers have apparent confidence in their ability to identify reasoning and inference intuitively in natural discourse. Some combinations of sentences are seemingly recognisable as arguments; that is, some sentences in a given text are recognisable as reasons, others as conclusions.

But what does it mean for a sentence (or its meaning) to *be* a reason, or to *be* a conclusion? Neither a reason nor a conclusion is a kind of sentence, except insofar as it is a declarative. In practice the identifying of some claims as reasons and others as conclusions seems to come down to a question of how 'good' an argument formed from those claims would be, if propounded. But there are clear problems with that qualitative yardstick. Not all collections of sentences, with one designated as the conclusion, *are* valid. That is obvious. But nor are some more valid than others – validity does not admit of degrees. Example (1), which was considered just now is certainly not valid. It does not have a valid form.[40] It is no more valid than, say:

> (3)   It's dark; it's Friday.

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[40] It should be added that nor is (3) is any more *invalid* than (1). 'Invalid' is an apt evaluation for any argument that is not formally valid, but not for an expression that is not a valid argument just because it is not an argument. If we translate (3) into a sequent of standard propositional logic we get 'P;Q' (*vel sim.*), which is indeed formally invalid because it contains no logical operators and the premise is not the same as the conclusion. But it is the translation of (3), *qua* argument, that is invalid. Informally speaking, 'invalid' may be used of an argument that has a surface form that resembles a valid form, but is not valid. A fallacy, therefore, is a fallacious *argument*, (Hamblin 1970: 224).This point becomes relevant to the discussion of the next example, (4).

Yet it seems safe to say that a typical audience would rate (1) as a 'better' contender for argument status than (3), possibly to the point of denying that (3) is an argument at all. Asked why (3) might not qualify as an argument, the obvious answer is that, as an argument, it would be a non-sequitur: it doesn't follow from its being dark that it's Friday. But if that measure is applied literally, (1) is also a non-sequitur, since the second sentence does not follow necessarily or invariably (or even typically) from the first, any more than it does in (3). Of course, the term 'non-sequitur', used in a non-formal sense, need not mean a failure of logical consequence, but something more akin to lack of relevance or connectedness between the reason(s) and the conclusion. There is a fairly obvious connection in (1) between the first and second sentence, but in (3) there is none, or if there is it is obscure. Yet if we think of (1) and (3) as actual utterances, there would be no difficulty in thinking up possible scenarios under which its being dark could be a reason to infer that it was a Friday – a history of power-cuts on Friday nights, for example. What generally inclines us to see (1) as a better argument than (3) – and therefore as worthier of being accorded argument-status – is the greater *normality* of associating darkness with danger than with the day of the week. It is a *fact* that there are places in the world where the streets are more dangerous by night than by day; but there are few, if any, where it's only dark on Fridays. Accordingly, a person chosen at random to consider both examples would be more likely to be persuaded that it was dangerous to be out than to be persuaded, on the same grounds, that it was Friday. By the same token, he or she would be more likely to deny that (3) was an argument than to deny that (1′) was.

What this suggests is that people naturally tend to recognise arguments more readily when they can interpret them as good arguments; and less readily, or not at all, if the arguments appear to be weak ones. A pair of sentences in succession, without any explicit connective, will tend to come across as an argument if either claim seems like a good reason to accede to the truth of the other; if not, then some other explanation is likely to be sought for their juxtaposition. If someone were to say:

(4)   This tree is dying. The leaves are yellow.

this could be taken as a pair of unrelated assertions. But assuming there were no contra-indications or special context, this would be an unlikely way for a typical audience of competent English speakers to take it.[41] The most plausible interpretation would be that the second sentence was a reason for the first.[42] This has nothing to do with logical form. (4) like (1) and (3) is neither valid nor strictly speaking invalid. Nor does it have to do with surface form: there is no inference-indicator term; and the sentences follow in no conventional order indicative of argument. (The usual convention is for the conclusion to follow the premises, but (4) would commend itself as an argument no more nor less if the order were reversed.) Nor finally can the matter be settled on the basis of author-intention since the author is purely notional. All that can reliably be called upon is the normal expectation that when two or more claims are made in sequence there will be some relation between them. That is the norm; unrelated utterances are not the norm, and are puzzling to audiences when no obvious rationale can be seen for their juxtaposition. Even a lone assertion, made out of the blue, can leave its audience puzzled as to why it has been made at all. The natural response is: '*So*?' – a word which ordinarily (without the question-mark) presages some conclusion.

It is relevant, too, that conversational language has a range of expressions which, as it were, explain or excuse bare assertions. The speaker might say 'apropos of nothing…' to fend off the normal expectation that an assertion is apropos of *something*. What is significant is that there is a felt need to explain lone assertions. We look to adjacent assertions to provide the explanation, one being that one of the assertions is a reason for, or inference from, the other. If Brandom (1983: 639) is right about the primary function of asserting, then inference is arguably the most

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[41] Such a special context would obtain if, for example, the speaker were to preface his remarks as follows: 'Here are two facts: The tree is dying. The leaves are yellow.'

[42] A marginally less appealing interpretation would be that the first was a reason for the second, making (4) an explanation rather than an argument. Argument and explanation are very close in form and without explicit connectives a complex expression can be ambiguous between the two interpretations: 'The tree is dying so the leaves are yellow'; or 'The leaves are yellow so the tree is dying'. This is taken up in Chapter 5.

natural explanation. It would be why, conversely, natural-language arguments can be so freely expressed without explicit connectives. If an inferential relation between the propositions can be seen, and is the most natural assumption to make about their immediate proximity, there is no need for the author to make the relation explicit: audiences will do it for themselves. These empirical observations about linguistic behaviour lend some support to Brandom's contention that asserting is characteristically a warrant for inference, since if that is so it would explain the linguistic behaviour.

None of this, however, establishes that (4) *is* an argument. It is just a pair of sentences. All that is established is that where people see the makings of a *good* argument, with or without explicit linguistic indicators, there is an apparently natural instinct to recognise it *as* an argument. By the same token we tend to look for alternative interpretations for sets of sentences which can be construed only as bad arguments. Why? For an answer to that we should look to the principle of charity. The next section examines that principle and its implications.

10.   The principle of charity (1)

In his *Arguments about Arguments*, Finocchiaro (2005: 92) separates critical thinking into two distinct tasks: 'the reasoned interpretation ... and the reasoned evaluation of arguments'. This division seems perfectly reasonable. First we say what the argument is; second how good it is, giving justifications for both judgements. But even very simple examples can have more than one possible interpretation, some under which they are judged to succeed, others to fail. In such circumstances, the evaluation will go hand in hand with the way the text is construed. Take the following example:

(5)   These banknotes are forgeries. They all have the same serial number.

Why should we interpret this in one way rather than another? In the textbooks the procedure appears deceptively straightforward: specimen (5) is presumed to be an argument consisting of two claims, the first being the conclusion and the second

the premise. It appears to be a good argument since it is a well known fact that genuine banknotes all have different numbers. But as the text stands, the first claim does not follow from the second – at least not deductively – because the crucial premise is omitted. (5) is an enthymeme.[43] In critical thinking the standard procedure for interpreting an enthymeme is to add the missing premise, on the grounds that it is needed to ensure that the conclusion follows from the original premise(s). Then, since what is added is in this case true, (5) would be given a favourable rating on the following interpretation:

(6)   These banknotes have the same serial numbers. (Genuine banknotes all have different numbers.) So these banknotes are forgeries (not genuine).

The practice described above is usually presented in critical-thinking literature as an application of the principle of charity.[44] This principle, or maxim, is basically a constraint on interpretation, to be observed for example when we are not sure what some utterance means, or what is intended by it. The paradigm example, known as *radical* interpretation (Quine 1960; Davidson 2001), is translation from scratch from a wholly alien language into one's own language. But the principle applies also to the domestic case, of interpretation within a shared language, as Quine and Davidson both agree. Without some constraint we could, in theory, construe the sentences or utterances we encounter in any way we chose or guessed at. The principle of charity limits our options to those which, in Davidson's words, would 'maximise (or optimise) agreement' (2001: 27, 169). At the very least, our interpretation of others' utterances should accord with our own standards of rational behaviour. It would obviously be uncharitable to interpret someone's words in the least plausible way, when there was a perfectly plausible interpretation available: namely what the critic or interpreter would mean by the same utterance. It would be equally irrational to assume a person is always lying, or

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[43] Technically and traditionally an enthymeme is an incomplete syllogism, but the notion has come to include incomplete arguments of other forms as well. Since (6) is a deductive form, (5) can properly be called an enthymeme in the technical as well as the more general sense.

[44] See, e.g., Fisher (1988b), Bowell & Kemp (2002) and Butterworth & Chislett (2009).

ignorant, or intentionally employing deficient logic. In the context of critical-thinking methodology, applying the principle of charity is understood as a simple dictum that one should construe an argument in the best light possible; not assume that it is a fallacy and interpret it accordingly. Indeed, within a dialectical system, a debate for example, it is considered a disreputable form of rhetoric to interpret an opponent's case uncharitably in order to assist refutation or counter-argument – a so-called 'straw man' (Warburton 2000: 126–7).

In the case of (5) there is no difficulty in recognising the potential of the text to be interpreted as a good argument, suitably supplemented by a covering generalisation. By interpreting the text as an argument at all, we are tacitly assuming that the covering generalisation is somehow implicit in the text. But why should the interpretation be motivated in this way? The principle of charity, as an applied procedure in critical thinking, envisages an author who is broadly as knowledgeable and as rational as the interpreter. But in the case where all we have is the text, and the task is to respond to it critically, the 'author' is purely notional. As (5) stands the reader knows nothing of the provenance of the text, so that without any guiding principle one interpretation is theoretically as good as any other. Different contexts could be envisaged for (5) in which no argument was apparent. Imagine an expert pointing out various features of a set of banknotes which have already been identified as counterfeit. The fact is that (5), like (4), is ultimately no more than a pair of sentences. We can say, to be sure, that one of the sentences of (5), with a suitable covering assumption, *follows* validly from the other. But we have no grounds to presume that either one is *claimed* or *supposed* to follow from the other. Besides, even if it is presumed that (5) is an argument, its surface form, in the absence of a connective, gives no indication of the direction of the supposed reasoning. Before the logician engages with a set of sentences the conclusion and premises are designated, and there is no further interpretation to be made prior to evaluation. Nothing is designated in (5). In that respect the critic working on a natural language argument starts further back.

A familiar classroom technique for dealing with undifferentiated sets of sentences like (5) is to *insert* an inference indicator to assess whether or not the resulting complex makes sense. It is sometimes referred to as the 'therefore test' (Fisher, 2001: 25–27), although any illative term can be employed to the same or similar effect. But the unreliability of the test is patently obvious. For a start, making sense grammatically, does not necessarily coincide with logical sense. It makes no better *sense* to say:

(7)   The numbers are the same so the notes are forgeries

than to say:

(8)   The notes are forgeries so the numbers are the same.

To urge that (7) is the right way to interpret (5),on the grounds that it is a better argument than (8) is to presume that (5) is an argument. Were the critic to presume instead that (5) was an explanation, (8) would be the more charitable interpretation. The upshot of all this is that if we first have to recognise and construe a text as a good argument, in order to identify it as an argument, the grounds for the identification are question begging.

If the grounds are shaky for interpreting texts charitably as good arguments, they are even shakier for interpreting a text as an argument in such a way as to show that it is flawed. For then the principle of charity appears to conflict with itself. Consider the following:

(9)   Blackpool is not a city. It has no cathedral.

Although both sentences are true, neither is a good reason for the other. Of course, the first sentence would follow from the second if having a cathedral were a necessary condition for being a city. But it is not. By following precisely the same interpretative procedure as was applied to (5), (9) can be interpreted as a *valid* argument. The difference is that the envisaged author of (9) would have to be judged either ignorant of an important relevant fact, or irrational in arguing on the basis of a known falsehood. Ennis (2001: 114) takes this up as follows: in a situation

where an assumption is required to validate a piece of reasoning, and the assumption would be a falsehood, 'ascribing that same assumption could be useful as a way of exhibiting a probable defect in the argument, a defect that shows that we probably should not draw the given conclusion'. Here, as before, the interpretation is premised on appraisal – on what it would take for (9) to be valid – only in this instance the assumption-ascription (as Ennis calls it) exhibits the defect. Applying the principle of charity cuts both ways. It can be used to interpret (9) as an argument by filling in what is needed to construe (9) as an argument, but so doing exposes (9) as a bad argument. The remaining option is that (9) is not an argument: just a pair of supposed facts about Blackpool. That way neither sentence need be judged *not* to follow from the other; and since neither *does* follow from the other, this would be the charitable interpretation to give if it is assumed that (9) was an actual pronouncement.

It is important to clarify that it does not make sense even to ask whether (9) is an argument, without importing the notion of an author, and/or context. If (9) is not at least conceived of as someone's output, the application of charity does not get a grip. The question, as it is being addressed here to a pair of sentences encountered out of context, is at most a hypothetical question: How should the audience take the sentence if it had been uttered just as it is? The whole idea of the principle of charity is that it assists *radical* interpretation. It implies a starting point where there is doubt as to the meaning or purpose of the utterance. If I knew that the speaker in this case was propounding an argument I would not have to ask whether (9) was an argument, even if it was a ludicrous argument! I would move ahead to appraising it accordingly. The principle of charity is what we employ precisely when we *don't* know what the speaker intends. In the case of (9) we don't *know* whether there is a speaker. The question for me as interpreter is whether *I* would respond to (9) – if I heard it spoken or saw it written – in the way that people usually respond when they encounter an argument, i.e. by recognising the *reasonableness* of giving one of the sentences as a reason to believe the other. If so I can charitably entertain (9) as an argument, even if I then go on to judge the reason wanting. If not, I should not evaluate it as an argument, but look for some other

interpretation. The principle of charity does not require there to be an actual source or author – it *assumes* one and then discharges the assumption once the principle has been applied.

Fisher (1988b: 17–18) makes it quite clear that this is ultimately what the principle of charity dictates: 'If interpreting as reasoning a passage which is not *obviously* reasoning yields only bad arguments, assume it is not reasoning.' Plainly, (9) is *not* 'obviously reasoning', so Fisher's application of charity should require that we treat (9) as a non-argument, rather than a defective argument. But which is more charitable? On the one hand (9) does not exhibit bad *reasoning* so much as a factual misconception. For if the assumption that the critic ascribes to the argument *were* true then the reasoning would be sound; and we must assume that the author – if there is one – is not inexplicably advancing an unsound argument. It would not be uncharitable, in the Davidsonian sense, to assume that the author had reasoned properly within the bounds of his or her beliefs.[45] On the other hand, as Ennis rightly says (above), the falsity of the required assumption is a signal that 'we probably should not have drawn the conclusion'. In other words, on the principle of charity we *should not* construe (9) as an argument.

Obviously this is wrong. To conclude that (5) is an argument and (9) is not, on the basis of the procedure described above, is a *mis*application of the principle of charity. (5) is no more an argument than (9); it is just the better argument if both are interpreted as arguments. Moreover, to discriminate between (5) and (9) on that basis is self-defeating, for it limits those objects that we are at liberty to assess as arguments to those we can interpret as sound. That is not to say that (9) *is* an argument. The supposedly charitable rule that Fisher proposes does not settle the identification question either way. Instead what is shows is that the criteria for identifying arguments cannot be evaluative criteria. There is no obvious cut-off point below which a set of sentences cannot be accommodated by adding a

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[45] Davidson (2001: 196): 'The guiding policy is to (apply the PoC) as far as possible, subject to considerations of simplicity, hunches about the effects of social conditioning […] and knowledge of explicable error'.

covering premise, if at the same time the covering premise need not be true. The falsity of the covering premise, as Ennis rightly says, can tell the critic that the putative argument is unsound, but not that it is not an argument.

11.   The principle of charity (2)

From the previous section it can be seen that the principle of charity has both a descriptive, and a prescriptive (normative) application. It is the latter application which predominates in critical thinking, where the principle comes over as a quasi-ethical injunction to interpret a perceived argument in a way that one would find most persuasive oneself; to give it its best shot, so to speak. The account given by Bowell & Kemp (2002: 44–7) has this slant, at least in part. People, they say, are seldom completely illogical, but do not always express their reasoning as clearly as they might. We should not judge just what a person *says* so much as try to 'bring to light' what he or she is trying to say, their 'genuine reasons'.

> If we do not attempt this, then we are not really doing the person justice; we are not being as receptive to his or her attempts at communication, as we would surely wish others to be to ours. (Bowell & Kemp 2002: 47)

This is just the golden rule, by another name. Of course the word 'charity' invites this conception of the principle as something commendable but ultimately voluntary. But in the descriptive sense there is nothing voluntary about it. Charitable interpretation of the words of others, Davidson tells us, is 'unavoidable'. It is 'forced on us; whether we like it or not, if we want to understand others, we must count them right in most matters' (Davidson 2001: 197).[46]

Why must we count them right? Not because we must assume that people are in general truthful, rational, and informed. 'Must' has more the sense it has in Stanley Cavell's 'Must we mean what we say?' (Cavell 1969: 1–43), to which the answer is Yes, and again whether we like it or not – it's a logical 'must'. The speaker can lie or be mistaken when asserting something, and the audience can be mistaken in taking

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[46] See also Davidson (2001: 27).

it to be true when it happens to be false. But what neither can be mistaken about is that a declarative sentence, uttered assertively, has the purport to be true even if it is patently false. Indeed, an assertion could not be called a lie or a mistake if assertions were not supposed, or did not have the purport, to be true. The purport remains in force even in the extreme case of both parties knowing that what is being asserted is false. There is no choice about this: the speaker cannot make an assertion without the words having the purport to be true; and the audience cannot choose to understand the assertion as lacking that purport – though they can choose to disbelieve it or contradict it.

That is one sense in which the principle of charity is descriptive and 'unavoidable'. It is not Davidson's point, though it must surely be a necessary condition for maximising agreement. Davidson's is the stronger point, that in order to understand others, you have also to assume that most of their beliefs are true; if you did not assume that, you would have no way into interpreting their language. Nor would you have a way in if you did not assume that in their language an assertion committed the speaker to the truth of what is asserted. Both are *descriptive* because it is how things are in the language community to which we belong. In any particular case there is a potential for disagreement, or for mistakes. But the *principle* still holds, and must hold, across the board. As Malpas (1992: 150) points out, charity is much more than a heuristic device for translation. It is, he says, 'a methodological presupposition of interpretation rather than a principle that will assist in resolving particular cases of interpretative difficulty'. The prescriptive application of the principle derives from the descriptive, not vice-versa. We are not naturally charitable in our reception of others' speech because we *ought* to be. But given that we are naturally and necessarily charitable, we ought to heed the principle when we are in reflective or critical mode. To interpret what others say in ways that maximise agreement, we should start out from the assumption that what people say is what they hold to be true, and that what they hold to be true is what *we* would hold to be true under sufficiently similar conditions. In particular cases the presumption may lead (and does lead) to misinterpretation. But so long as these are anomalous cases, and not the norm, the maxim will hold good and

communication will flourish between speakers of the same language, and translation will be enabled. If disagreement were the norm and not the anomaly, communication would break down, or never get started. Due to the principle of charity, even radical translation is not quite 'from scratch'.

Competing interpretation

We return now to the question which prompted this discussion at the end of §8: On what grounds do we, and should we, interpret some sequences of sentences as arguments and others not? The principle of charity provides a lead. Sequences of apparently unrelated sentences or assertions are puzzling, implying (to no great surprise) that we expect there to be some relation between successive assertions to account for their being asserted. We do not and should not assume that there is no relation, if we can see a plausible one; nor should we interpret a text as a weak argument if we can see a fair interpretation under which it is a stronger argument. There will be competing interpretations: different ways in which the propositions could be seen to be related. There are standard, conventional ways for speakers to clarify the relation they have in mind which can limit the number of plausible options, at best to just one. One way to leave no doubt is by uttering what Austin (1962) called an explicit performative. For example:

(10)   From the colour of these leaves *I infer that* the tree is dying.

This is not an express argument, however; it is rather the expression of an attitude or intention, like saying 'I believe that…', or 'I assert that'. The standard way to express an argument in English is very familiar. For instance:

(11)   The leaves on these trees go yellow if the tree is dying. The leaves on this tree are yellow, and so this tree is dying.

Here there is no practical difficulty in interpreting the words as an argument. There are no obvious competing interpretations besides argument. The principle of charity enjoins us to assume (in the absence of any counter-indications) that the speaker is right about what his words commit him to, and in particular what his use

of 'and so' commits him to in the context: namely to the truth of his first two assertions, and to the existence of a consequence relation between them and the further claim. The question of whether or not it is an argument looks to be settled by its surface form. No reasoned interpretation is needed. The critic can get on with the evaluative question – is (11) a *good* argument? – with apparent confidence that the object of evaluation is an argument.

Identifying bad arguments

But even with this apparently clear-cut case, we have not solved the problem of identifying bad arguments. We, as critics, recognise (11) as an argument on the principle that its author is generally right about things, and has the same rational perception of what follows from what as we do. We recognise certain claims as reasons if they strike us as good reasons. If we think something is not a good reason for some ensuing claim (C) we should think twice about construing it as a reason for C. The trouble with (11) is that the notional author required for application of the principle of charity is committing a fallacy, as any logician or competent critic – including, it is hoped, anyone with a basic training in critical thinking – would recognise. Thus the principle of charity, at least in its prescriptive mode, sends conflicting messages. If the critic takes (11) at face value, as an argument, he should either conclude (uncharitably) that the author is not as rational as he is, or assume (charitably) that the author meant something else short of an argument, that did not entail his having argued so badly; or that he meant something *more* than his words literally mean; but that he just didn't put it across properly.

This last course would appear to be Bowell and Kemp's application of charity. We assume that the author meant to say 'only if' rather than merely 'if'. That would rescue the author from the charge of perpetrating a fallacy. (11) is reconstructed as (e.g.):

> (12)   The leaves on these trees go yellow *only if* the tree is dying. The leaves on this tree are yellow and so this tree is dying.

'The argument' can now be passed as valid, and sound if both premises are true. But in what sense is this an evaluation of the argument in question, which was expressed by (11), and is now re-expressed as (12)? Despite differing only by addition of one word, (12) is not remotely the same argument, as shown conclusively by the fact that (12) is valid and (11) is not. But that is a difference identified by *evaluation*, not by prior interpretation. We are seeing again the entanglement of the two conceptions: object of evaluation versus object of interpretation. Moreover, the rescue package offered by interpreting (9) as (10) could misfire if, on inspection, it turns out that not all trees of the relevant species that develop yellow leaves die. So what the argument gains in validity from the application of charity, it might lose in soundness.

Acknowledging this the critic might adopt the other available approach of weakening the conclusion:

(13)   The leaves on these trees go yellow if the tree is dying. These leaves are yellow and so this tree *could be* dying / is probably dying.

But again this is a different argument. Not to labour the point further, the principle of charity is not a procedural rule for reconstructing putative arguments *sympathetically*, especially if we do so as a preparation for critical appraisal. Charitable interpretation requires us not to construe a fragment of discourse as a *bad* argument if there is a more rational explanation for its utterance. But it does not require us to construe the fragment as a good argument. We can, in the role of critic, *correct* it; but that is to evaluate it and identify what is defective in it. We would lose any coherent sense of evaluation – and of 'it' – if what we evaluate is the corrected text. We can correct for factual accuracy, or for clarity, or conciseness, or other presentational features. But if we correct the reasoning, we have another argument, as in (12) and (13) above. Bowell & Kemp (2002: 47) are well aware of this, and qualify their proposed methodology with the following:

The principle of charity … has a certain limit, beyond which the nature of what we are doing changes somewhat. If our task is to reconstruct the argument actually

intended by the person, then we must not go beyond what, based on the evidence available to us, we may reasonably expect the reasoner to have in mind. Once we go beyond this point then we are no longer in the business of interpreting their argument. Instead we have become the arguer.

To recap, we must look for the identifying marks of argument independently of the criteria which we would use for identifying good (or bad) argument, if the purpose is objective critical evaluation. The alternative, which the formal logician accepts in practice is to treat all sets of propositions as arguments indiscriminately; in other words of making no distinction between a mere set of propositions and what intuitively we think of as a *real* argument: someone's *actual* argument. In critical thinking, however, and amongst most proponents of informal logic, the concept of real argument, for all its problems, is foundational.

12. 'Real' argument

In critical thinking, and for many informal logicians, 'real argument' is a term of art, hence the quotation marks around 'real'. It has roughly the meaning of *natural* or *actual* argument, but also has a negative sense where the term itself can appear almost provocative or disparaging. Fisher's *The Logic of Real Arguments* Fisher (1988b) catches both senses:

> Nearly all the arguments used in this book are arguments which have *actually been used* by someone with a view to *convincing* others about some matter. They are real arguments – not the 'made up' kind with which logicians usually deal. They originate from various sources... (Fisher 1988b: 15) [47]

Douglas Walton, Trudy Govier, and Ralph Johnson are among others who have made free with the term, not always critically. Johnson (2000: 121) claims that 'informal logic is the logic of real arguments'. But that is really a comment about the efficacy of informal logic in dealing critically with certain kinds of argument, broadly defined as natural-language arguments. Johnson's claim cannot be taken as

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[47] Walton (1990: 409) is more nakedly disparaging : 'Among those not corrupted by logic courses, however, the term "argument" has a broader meaning.'

a definition, however, since even the most formal and artificial of arguments can be expressed in natural language. In the spirit of the concept the distinction is between arguments that have occurred naturally, for a purpose such as persuasion, and those that have no other purpose than to exemplify some argument form, or to help students learn logic.

The purpose most commonly associated with 'real' argument, is persuasion. This cannot be a definition of an argument either, since there are many instruments of persuasion that are not arguments. Moreover there are (arguably) arguments which neither persuade nor exist to persuade. Persuasion may be a characteristic *use* of argument, but that is a different point and even then it is questionable whether persuasion is an exclusive use.[48] Proofs and demonstrations, for example, are forms of argument whose conclusions need not be in doubt, and whose purpose therefore is not to persuade. It can be objected that these and other exceptions still exhibit something persuasion-*like*; that for something to be recognisable as an argument it would have to have some recognisable capacity to persuade? But that would be a confusion. Are we to take it that to qualify as 'real' an argument must *actually* have been put to use, for some persuasive or quasi-persuasive purpose? Or is it sufficient that it has the appearance of an argument that could be put to such use; i.e. be 'natural' in its form of expression? It is clear that the answer is the former. If we are to give any strong sense to the notion of real argument it must apply first and foremost to the object of an actual act of argument – something put forward by an arguer. Texts which give expression to the act are real then by derivation: texts of real arguments. Texts which resemble the texts of real arguments are at two removes: they are real in the sense in which we refer to a good copy – 'X is a real likeness'. But although this is correct, in practice it has little value as a distinction because between the text of a real argument and the 'real' likeness there is typically no discernible difference.

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[48] See (Blair 2004: 138): 'By focussing almost exclusively on the persuasive function of arguments and on argumentation as a process of rational persuasion, many have tended to conceptualize argument as having an analytic connection with persuasion.'

Govier (1987: 4) clearly aligns 'real' with 'actual'. She describes an actual argument as 'a piece of discourse or writing in which someone tries to convince others (or himself) of the truth of a claim by citing reasons on its behalf.' Like Fisher she makes the contrast with 'contrived arguments—series of statements constructed by logicians to illustrate their principles and techniques' (ibid.). Blair & Johnson (1980: 27), in a similar vein, write:

> We need a term to refer … to arguments actually used in a first-order way to attempt to convince – and moreover used without self-consciousness about the 'nature' or 'structure' of some ideal argument. The term 'natural arguments' will then distinguish such arguments from those which are invented just in order to serve as examples, and also (for the most part) from those which are self-consciously framed according to an explicit model of argument.

Objections

It cannot be ignored that the English expression 'real argument' has an ordinary sense outside the confines of critical thinking and informal logic. To say that an argument is real if it has actually been used for some recognisably argumentative purpose is a legitimate use of the word. However, it is only one such use. There is another important sense in which the designation 'a real *F*' just means 'an *F*'.[49] 'Real' in that sense is close in meaning to 'genuine': a sense under which is reasonable to ask: 'If such and such a text is not a real argument, in what sense is it an argument?'. Those who uphold the distinction between real and non-real argument need to answer this question. They might brush it aside as equivocation, and fall back on a stipulative definition of 'real'. However, if the ordinary term is to retain any of its natural meaning, the objection is a substantial one.

Open scepticism about the coherence of the distinction can be found in Goddu (2007). He begins:

> I am not an informal logician—though admittedly, I am not sure what it would take to be one. I am, however, very interested in understanding the nature of arguments

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[49] Colloquially 'actual' has this sense too, but we can ignore it here.

and in producing a general theory of arguments. So my question here is—does the notion of "real" argument have any place in a general theory of argument? Put another way, is the concept of a "real" argument a theoretically significant one? (Goddu 2007: 1)

Goddu compares the notion of real (i.e. genuine) diamonds, and rightly observes that just as non-genuine diamonds are not diamonds at all, non-genuine arguments are not arguments at all. But if non-'real' arguments are understood in this sense, then the distinction is empty because the class of 'real' arguments would be one and the same as the class of *arguments*. This would supposedly exclude only the 'made-up' kind with which logicians deal, but since, *ex hypothesi*, these are made-up *arguments*, on what grounds are they not real? Goddu turns to the idea of fake or 'pseudo argument':

> (I)t may turn out that some of the non-genuine arguments are similar enough to bona fide arguments that care must be taken to distinguish the genuine ones from the pseudo ones. We might even call particular uses of the pseudo arguments, ... fake arguments. (Goddu 2007: 2)

We could add here 'apparent' arguments which would include arguments that have no persuasive or similar purpose, but have the hall-marks of an argument. Another is 'synthetic' (in the same sense as 'synthetic fibre', or 'synthetic snow'). Some such arguments might be employable as persuasive arguments, but fail the 'real-argument' test because they are simply parodies of persuasive texts. That would identify them as fakes, and certainly as 'made up' or synthetic. But here the analogy with diamonds plainly fails, as Goddu means it to. We can distinguish a fake diamond from a real one by its composition, its molecular structure or detectable physical properties. But a 'real' argument and a parody of 'real' argument may have exactly the same composition and hence have no discernible difference from the *bona fide* case. There is a scene in the 1970s film *The Sting*, in which two hoaxers pose as decorators in order to get temporary access to a telegraph office. To preserve the illusion they put up ladders and start painting the walls. We can say that they are not real (*bona fide*) decorators, but we cannot say that they are not really painting the walls. Similarly if an expression is made up to

look and sound sufficiently like an argument as to be indistinguishable from an argument that has been produced to really influence its audience, then it is hard to justify denying it the status either of an argument or a *real* argument. The best that can be made of the situation may be to say that arguments can be judged more or less *realistic*, according to how closely they resemble *bona fide* arguments. But this is a clumsy compromise, and one that probably raises more problems than it solves.

One such problem, ironically, arises directly out of critical-thinking procedure. Bowell & Kemp (2002: 47) referred to it as the task of reconstructing the argument actually intended by the person. Fisher uses the term 'extracting'. The purpose of the 'extraction' is to identify – or in Fisher's word 'uncover' – the argument in the text, and to show that it is an argument. In practice this means reconstructing all or part of the text to display its structure. So understood, extraction may amount to no more than picking out the perceived conclusion and listing the premises. But in many cases major reconstruction of all or part of the text may be necessary in order to interpret the content as an argument. The problem is that what is extracted and deemed to be the author's argument, is in fact the critic's understanding of it. Only when a text already exhibits a standard argument form is no overt interpretation needed. But standard form is unusual in ordinary-discourse reasoning and, besides, even identifying a text as a standard argument is an interpretation. As Blair (2004: 144) rightly notes: 'Discourse can be identified as argumentation or as containing arguments only in the light of a given particular interpretation of it.'

So which is the real (genuine, actual) argument: the author's text, or the reasoning extracted from the text, or the critic's interpretation? The notion of 'real' argument does not provide an answer: each might qualify on one or more counts and fail on others. The text is 'real' in the sense of being what we take directly from the source. The reasoning extracted from the text is what is understood to be expressed *by* the author *in* the text. If the critic's interpretation is a fair representation of what the author intended his or her text to convey, then both are

legitimate senses of 'the argument' on one level or another – roughly analogous to an actual assertion and what is asserted. If the 'real' argument is identified with what is extracted, then it is a wholly abstract object corresponding to that which the author's original text and the critic's interpretation have in common. A third contender is the interpretation. But the interpretation exists for no other reason than to show the form of the putative argument; it has no persuasive or other natural purpose. We might say that it is a 'real' argument because it has been derived from an actual argument, but the interpretation of a text *as an argument* no more escapes Blair & Johnson's (1980: 27) charge of being 'self-consciously framed according to an explicit model of argument', than do the classical logician's made-up examples. Given these countervailing criteria, I agree with Goddu that unless a clearer notion of 'real' argument is forthcoming, there is no obvious utility for a general theory of argument in the demarcation.

> On the one hand, assuming there are counterexamples to the adequacy of formal logic as part of an adequate theory of argument, no appeal to a class of 'real' arguments seems required to identify these counterexamples. On the other hand, none of the primary candidates for 'real' arguments, viz., everyday arguments or actual arguments or natural arguments, can support either a clearly demarcated subject matter for informal logic or an adequate defense against counterexamples to one's preferred theory. Thus, instead of focusing on an alleged class of 'real' arguments, I would recommend focusing on the theoretically significant and challenging problem of distinguishing those entities that are genuine arguments from those that are not. (Goddu 2007: 9)

If the notion of real argument has a significant part to play in any general theory of argument, we need to find some way to eliminate the need for quotation marks. The question should have a different emphasis: not, 'What is a *real* argument?' but, 'What is a real *argument*?' (or, 'What is an argument *really*?'). This deeper and more open question is not answered by working backwards from the presumed domain of informal logic and asking what is real about the arguments in that domain.

What is real argument?

There is one very obvious answer to this question: real argument is the act (or activity) of arguing. It is a platitude to say that any act of argument is *argument*, but it is not a pointless platitude if what is wanted is an unassailable position on which to premise a definition. It is not, of course, an answer to the earlier question of what *an* argument is, real or otherwise, since arguments are not acts. Argument, in the grammatically mass sense of the noun, is an attribute of arguments, and of acts of argument. But 'an argument', in the grammatically countable sense, does not ordinarily refer to the performance of an act of argument, but to the object-argument presented or propounded in the process. Moreover, 'an argument' usually refers to a complete, complex object, whereas an act of argument can be something less than the propounding of a complete argument. 'Argument' (mass) can also mean dispute, and 'an argument' can be a dispute – though according to Hitchcock (2008) that is just a quirk of English.[50] Disputation may consist merely of claims, counter-claims, questions, objections, and so on — even insults. But typically disputation also features what I have been calling acts of argument, in particular acts of reasoning-giving. Hitchcock usefully draws a distinction between *mere* dispute and reason-giving, by which he means reason-giving for some position or claim (as opposed to the purely explanatory sense of 'reason'). An act of reason-giving in the context of a dispute is a natural act of argument, and real enough in that sense to provide the desired starting point. It may not be accompanied by an explicit conclusion, but so long as it is clear from the context what the reason is *for*, or meant to accomplish, we can be satisfied that a conclusion is implicit. Conversely, if no conclusion is either explicit or implicit, the act in question is not an act of reason-giving, in the act-of-argument sense.

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[50] It is worth noting that English is apparently unique in using the same word for these two senses. In classical Greek, for example, the reason-giving sense is expressed by the word *logos* ... in one of its many senses, whereas the disputational sense is expressed by the word *amphisbetesis* or *antilogia*, "dispute" or "controversy". In Latin, the reason-giving sense is expressed by the word *argumentum*, "proof" or "evidence", the disputational sense by the word *disputatio*, "debate" or "dispute". ... In Spanish the reason-giving sense is expressed by the word *argumento,* and the disputational sense by the words *discusión* (discussion) or *controversia* (controversy) or *disputa* (dispute)'.

Perhaps our best insight into the nature of the act is dispute, for which reason many thinkers who have written about natural language argument view it primarily from the perspective of dialectic. Notable examples are Hamblin (1970), Walton (1989; 1990), van Eemeren & Grootendorst (1992), and Johnson (2000.) Dispute certainly is a natural context for argument. In the extract from *Lord of the Flies* at the head of this chapter the two principal characters are arguing, in the sense of disputing, with each other. But at a number of points in the exchange they can be seen to be *reasoning* with each other as well. Out of context the line,

(14)   I'm chief. I was chosen.

would be just a pair of sentences. In context we can see that they are claims made in response to Jack's challenge to Ralph's authority or entitlement to give orders and tell people what to do. Ralph does not say: '*Therefore* I have the right to tell people what to do', but because Jack has challenged that right, it is clear what Ralph is arguing for, by giving reasons to defend his right. Insofar as we can say such things about a fictional exchange Ralph gives expression to an act of argument. (14) is not that argument, but can reconstructed so as to convey an argument.

Analysing the fragment of dialogue, the critical reader might want to say that (14) is therefore an argument for a conclusion that is implicit in the context of the dialogue. He or she might want to go further still by identifying (14) itself as a simple argument: a sub-argument with its own (intermediate) conclusion, feeding into to the larger argument for the implicit conclusion. (14) might then be reconstructed on lines like these:

(15):   I was chosen. So I'm chief. So I can tell people what to do.
      (Reason)   → (Int. concl.)   → (Main conclusion)

This kind of mapping will be familiar to anyone versed in basic critical-thinking methodology, though usually in application to longer and more developed texts. The orthodox rationale would be that (15) is Ralph's argument, extracted from the dialogue and interpreted in a standard verbal form, supposedly to clarify the form

of Ralph's reasoning. Only (15) is plainly not Ralph's argument, nor is it even a plausible representation of anyone's actual thinking in such a context. (15) is a construct on the words Ralph speaks: an interpretation moulded to fit a conception of argument and premised on the assumption that the speaker has such a line of reasoning in mind.

Recall Bowell & Kemp's constraints on the interpretation of a putative argument: 'If our task is to reconstruct the argument actually intended by the person, then we must not go beyond what, based on the evidence available to us, we may reasonably expect the reasoner to have in mind.' How in practice the text can be made to yield that evidence conclusively is a crucial issue for critical thinking.

13.   Analysis and classification

Divining author intention is an inexact science.[51] Speakers can make their inferences more or less transparent by the use of indicative language. Context can often do the rest: 'I'm chief. I was chosen' is not transparently an argument, but we can construe it as such, and identify its unstated conclusion, from the context of the dispute from which it was extracted and in virtue of which it is a paradigm of 'real' argument. But many arguments are only obliquely stated, either for rhetorical reasons, or economy of words, or simply because the text lacks clarity; and contextual evidence is not always to hand. We can be sure that there are *intended* arguments expressed in some texts that we would not recognise or identify as arguments, and texts in which we might be inclined to read argument when none was intended. But even outside these grey areas, authorial intention can be hard to determine with confidence.

One strategy, as we have just seen, is to be guided by *charity*: effectively to recognise as reasons what we would give as reasons to justify a conclusion. Fisher details a strategy of this sort, based on what he calls the 'Assertibility Question'

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[51] With reference to the fictional dialogue, I use 'author' to mean the character speaking, not the author of the book, Golding.

(AQ). Starting with what can be perceived to be the main conclusion (C) of a text to be analysed, ask:

> (AQ) What arguments or evidence would justify me in asserting conclusion C. (What would I have to know or believe to be justified in accepting C?
>
> Having done this look to see if the author asserts or clearly assumes these same claims (reasons). If he does it is reasonable (and accords with the principle of charity) to construe him as having intended the same argument. If he doesn't you have no rational way of reconstructing his argument (on the basis of the text alone). (Fisher 1988b: 22)

This strategy clearly involves a measure of circularity. First, it requires the identification of a conclusion in order to gauge the support given to it (or not) by the other claims in the text. But given that the designation 'conclusion' implies a relation to reasons or premises – good or bad – the text has already been posited as an argument, and the AQ is really a question about its justificatory quality. Second, it assumes that the only argument extractable from the text – if there is an argument at all – is the one that can be attributed charitably to the author. But that is not a purely analytical question: it is in large part already an evaluative one. By merely asking whether certain claims in a text would commend themselves to us as *reasons* for another claim, we have posited the existence of an argument and are effectively judging its worth. This is a crucial point, and a general one, not confined by any means to argument extraction. For any F, that is subject to evaluative judgement, if something is a sufficiently bad F, it ceases to be an F at all, or at least a recognisable F. This applies to vague predicates only, of which 'is an argument' is evidently one. There would be no comparable issue with, for example, the predicate 'is a number', since even if we have some pretext to call a given number 'bad' – unlucky, say – there is no degree of disapprobation of any sort that would render it any less a number. By contrast, a designation such as 'is an estimate' becomes decreasingly apt in proportion to the degree of difference between it and the value being estimated, to the point where it is unrecognisable as an estimate. Nonetheless, people make grossly unrealistic estimates, just as they give grossly inappropriate reasons or advance patently fallacious arguments. The point beyond

which it is implausible to assume, on the strength of the degree of accuracy, that a person is making a considered estimate, as opposed, say, to a random guess or intentional distortion, is not a sharp one. The parallel with argument is obvious and needs no explication.

As Bowell & Kemp (2002: 47) rightly warn, the critic always runs the risk of arguing *for* the author, and then assessing his (the critic's) own argument. Of course, in practice, we do interpret what others write and say charitably, and this would include recognising someone as arguing when he or she is arguing as we would argue, either by using the words and phrases we would use, or by evidently making the sort of inferences we would make. But that is the principle of charity in its descriptive form. It is not a prescriptive strategy for objective analysis of texts as arguments. (Fisher 1988b: 22) concedes as much. The application of the AQ, he says, 'is not a mechanical method …; it requires judgement and imagination'. He adds: 'Furthermore, the extent to which you can grasp an author's intended meaning will depend on your understanding of the language and your knowledge of the subject and so will be a matter of degree.'

The insistence that critical thinking deals with 'real' argument goes hand in hand with the idea that the presence or absence of argument is determined by the intentions of an author. Except in cases of outright transparency, where an argument is expressed in a patently standard form, interpretation will always be defeasible. For critical thinking this is a problem.

Classification

The interpretation of an argument does not end with interpretation *as* an argument. Arguments differ in form, style, strategy, and more; and the differences in the way an argument is characterised or classified are obviously relevant to its subsequent evaluation. In particular an argument that is assumed to be deductive will face a different criterion or standard of approval from those that are applied to an inductive or otherwise non-deductive argument. But if, as we have seen to be

the case, some evaluation becomes almost inevitably part of the means by which we identify an argument in a text, it is no less inevitable that it will also influence how we classify an argument. The same charitable principle operates: we should not jump to the conclusion that a putative argument is a bad deduction when we can see that it is a good argument of some other sort. But how can we make that judgement without first recognising the argument as a deduction and then as good? Moreover, how do we recognise the argument we reject as a bad deduction without first having some means to identify it as a deduction? We are in a classic chicken and egg situation.

Needless to say, we can set aside cases of standardly expressed arguments. If an argument is constructed with a transparently deductive form, then obviously it needs no reconstruction to show its form, and so neither of the above questions is an issue.

(16)   All birds can fly; Tweety can fly; therefore Tweety is a bird

has a paradigm deductive form, though an invalid one with a false premise to boot. There is still the question of whether it is a real (as in actual or natural) argument, but that is a different question. Its relevance is that arguments of the kind that concern critical thinking rarely have explicit deductive form. (16) is deductive and invalid just because it has been written to instantiate the form of an invalid deduction. If it had been written as the lyrics of a song it could still be argued that it wasn't a 'real' deduction.

Robert Ennis (2001) addresses the problem these questions raise for real or natural-language argument in an important paper entitled 'Argument appraisal strategy'. He begins with the observation that most critical thinkers, and most text-books on the subject, adopt a three-stage procedure for dealing with arguments. The stages he describes are:

(1) identifying the parts of the argument, (2) classifying the argument as deductive, inductive, or some other type, and (3) appraising the argument using the standards appropriate for the type. (Ennis 2001: 97)

Ennis recognises that this sequencing of the three main critical tasks is plausible 'at a glance', but he argues that it is a flawed strategy. In particular he claims that the second stage, discerning the type of argument before evaluating it, is unacceptable. He cites Woods & Walton, Samuel Fohr, and Trudy Govier as proponents of the approach, but also describes it as a 'popular strategy' that people are intuitively inclined to adopt as the logical or natural modus operandi. Fohr (1980: 6), for example, writes:

When faced with judging the worth of an argument philosophers will commonly decide how it is to be analyzed and only then examine it. In other words, antecedently to judging it they will decide how it is to be judged.

Ennis rejects this partly because he considers the distinction between deductive and inductive *arguments* to be 'not viable' (Ennis 2001: 98). Here he is not denying that there is a distinction between the terms, only its applicability to analysing argument prior to appraisal. Where the distinction is useful, he says, is 'between sets of standards (for appraisal) and not between types of arguments' (ibid.). A second part of the problem as he sees it is that very few real arguments of the sort with which critical thinking is concerned, as they are explicitly stated, actually satisfy deductive standards. This, he says, is in fact two problems. One is that ordinarily people rarely state all the premises that they would need to state if they were seriously attempting to present a deductively valid argument. It is standard practice in critical thinking to fill the perceived gap in the reasoning with a further sentence which would make the putative argument valid. But unfortunately, Ennis continues, this 'gap-filler' is often a universal generalisation which is often false, making the argument defective anyway. The other related problem, that Ennis says is often ignored, is that

though many arguments appear to come close to satisfying deductive standards (usually after reasonable assumptions are added), they include implicit or explicit

qualifying terms like 'generally', 'probably', *'ceteris paribus',* and *'prima facie',* which usually render them deductively invalid. (Ennis 2001: 98)

In place of the three-stage procedure, Ennis advocates a technique of applying sets of variable standards, in turn, to *undifferentiated* arguments, and only retrospectively, if at all, differentiating arguments by type. It is a form of what is termed 'appraisal-first', in contrast with analysis-first which is the order of events in the three-stage strategy. Before discussing the merits of appraisal-first, which rightly belongs to the next chapter, I shall complete this chapter by examining some of the grounds for scepticism – a scepticism which I share with Ennis – about the viability of analysis-first procedure.

Psychological accounts, and achievement accounts

Ennis (2001) suggests that there are two main approaches to analysing an argument as deductive or otherwise: the psychological account and the achievement account. He summarises the difference as follows: 'The *psychological account* distinguishes on the basis of what is attempted, claimed, intended, purported, believed, etc., to be achieved by the argument. *The achievement account* distinguishes on the basis of what the argument actually achieves' (Ennis 2001: 101).

The difference can be illustrated, albeit simplistically, by two short texts that were discussed in §10:

(5)   These banknotes are forgeries. They all have the same serial number.

(9)   Blackpool is not a city. It has no cathedral.

As noted in the earlier discussion, (5) can be construed plausibly as a deductive argument, because there is a charitable reading under which one of the sentences *does* follow pretty conclusively from the other. The charitable reading just requires the critic to take as read what is common knowledge anyway – indeed, it is virtually analytic, given the meaning of 'serial' – that genuine banknotes all bear different

numbers. There is no need to invoke an actual author, nor to speak of anything being actively 'claimed' or 'intended' to follow from another. Under the achievement account all that is claimed is that as a deduction (5) succeeds in establishing its conclusion on the strength of its premise. That success is conferred on (5) by a well-known fact about banknotes. When (5) is supplemented with that fact the argument is not only valid but sound:

(5')   All legal banknotes have different serial numbers.
        These banknotes all have the same serial number.
        These banknotes are forgeries (not legal).[52]

In short, the validity of (5') together with the truth of its implicitly conditional premise, warrants the interpretation of (5) as a deductive argument; technically an enthymeme. It is valid because if the banknotes have the same number, given that all legal banknotes have different numbers, the conclusion cannot be false. But simply interpreting the complex as valid is not enough for the so-called achievement account. This can be seen when we turn to sample (9). Superficially this has the same form as (5) – a mere pair of statements – but in (9) neither sentence follows from the other without the addition of a false premise. Construed as a deduction (9) *fails* to establish that Blackpool is not a city, since having no cathedral is known to be an insufficient reason for that conclusion. The achievement account is therefore unavailable; the most that can plausibly be said is that the text expresses an *attempt* at deduction, or *intended* deduction, and any such notions as these are plainly psychological. It is of no avail to say that the author may not have known that some cities lack a cathedral, or may have had some special knowledge as to why in Blackpool's case the lack of a cathedral cost it city-status; for these, too, are psychological factors. From within the author's sphere of knowledge, (9) may be as sound as (5). But the perspective required for the achievement account is not the author's but the critic's – and moreover a critic

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[52] I am ignoring the possibility that one of the banknotes could be a genuine note whose number is duplicated on all the others. Strictly speaking the conclusion should be: 'At least one...'.

who is sufficiently well informed to judge correctly whether the implicit assumption is true or false and the argument therefore sound or flawed. In that respect the achievement account is an objective judgement, effectively an evaluation. Any sequence of sentences can be said to *be* valid – i.e. to 'achieve' validity, in that rather curious sense – if it has a valid form. But most natural language arguments are neither valid nor invalid as they stand. A pair of sentences like (9) *cannot* be said to achieve validity as it stands. Nor can it be said to achieve validity after being assigned an additional – supposedly implicit – premise, since any pair can be 'made' valid in that way by adding a rider to the effect that *if (*the premise) *then* (the conclusion). However, it *can* be judged whether, if augmented in such a way as to be valid, usually by adding a covering premise, the outcome would be sound or unsound – sound if the needed premise is true, otherwise not. If sound, then we can say that the argument is valid because that is entailed by its being sound. Then 'achievement' has some acceptable sense. That I take to be the essence of the achievement account. But if, in order to make the argument valid the added premise is patently false, then there is a quandary. For any set of sentences can be 'made' valid if there is no restriction on what can be added. In general, 'A therefore B' (which is not valid) achieves validity on the addition of 'If A then B'. But if the extra premise required for validity is patently false, the principle of charity would rule against that interpretation. The test would have to come down to how patently false the additional premise would have to be; what would be a reasonable misapprehension to be under.

In short, the achievement account is applicable only to arguments that are evidently sound, or that would be deemed sound on a charitable interpretation. It is clearly an insufficient condition (for deductive status) that a given text be interpreted as a valid argument, since any set of sentences can be interpreted as a valid argument by judicious supplementation. If what has to be added to the set to achieve validity is unwarranted or implausible, then there are no objective or charitable grounds for declaring the original text to be a deduction. If we are to provide some explanation for unsound or invalid deductions, we have surely to use the language of failed attempts, or errors of reasoning, on the part of a supposed

proponent – that is, we must to revert to a psychological account. But if a failed attempt at deduction is to count as a deduction, so is a successful attempt. Indeed, a sound argument may be judged a deduction under either the achievement account or the psychological, or both, and there are no obvious explanatory reasons to prefer one account over the other? For example, on the analysis of (5) given above, it could be said that the conditions of the achievement account have been met or, by the same token, that (5) represents a successful attempt at deduction – if, indeed, a deduction is what the proponent of (5) was attempting.

But what are the grounds for presuming that a deduction has been attempted at all – i.e. that an attempt at deduction is the right interpretation of (5)? If I wanted to appraise the text of (5) charitably as an argument, I might be better advised to construe it as abductive. The envisaged speaker, on observing that there are duplicate serial numbers on the banknotes judges the best explanation to be that the notes have been forged. This is an unmistakably psychological account; but it is also right to say that if (5) was intended as an abductive inference, it patently succeeds. It is just possible that the duplicate numbers were not the result of forgery but instead a fault at the mint. But forgery is the more plausible explanation, which is all that is required for a favourable appraisal of the argument so interpreted. (It is worth noting for future reference that the remote possibility of a different explanation is more of a threat to the deductive interpretation than to the abductive, especially if we are looking for logical consequence, since the assumption that all banknotes with duplicate numbers *must be* forgeries could conceivably be challenged. Hence, more accommodation or qualification, of the *ceteris paribus* kind Ennis mentions above, has to be made in interpreting the text as a valid deduction, than as a *good* argument to best explanation.) Last but not least, (5) might be understood as a form of induction, the notional author simply premising his or her conclusion on never have having seen identically numbered banknotes that weren't forgeries. The fact is that without some contextual information or acquaintance with author intention, the text of (5) does not vindicate any of these classifications above the other. And strictly speaking this

applies to those putative deductions which 'achieve' validity as to those that do not.[53]

Comments on the psychological account

Despite its widespread use both in definitions of argument (e.g. Copi 1962, Vorobej 1992; 2006) – and in resulting methodology (e.g. Black 1946, Fisher 1988b; 2001, Bowell & Kemp 2002) – the psychological account is quite obviously problematic. As we have seen, Fisher, (1988b: 22) advocates a procedure to '*divine'* an author's intention which, he admits, draws on 'judgement and imagination'. Another patently psychological account is given here by Vorobej:

> [D] An argument is deductive if, and only if, the author of the argument believes that the truth of the premises necessitates (guarantees) the truth of the conclusion.

> In other words, in a deductive argument the author of the argument believes that it is not logically possible for all the premises to be true and the conclusion to be false. An argument is *non-deductive* if, and only if, it is not deductive, i.e. if, and only if, the author lacks the requisite belief referred to in [D]. (Vorobej 1992: 105)

The problem here is not so much that we cannot be expected to know in all or even very many cases what an author of a text intends or believes. The real problem is that, as an object of *evaluation*, an argument is deductively valid or not independently of the claims its author is making for it. By analogy a proposition is true (or false) whether or not it is believed, or claimed, to be true by the utterer of a sentence whose meaning it is. If we want to say that the author's beliefs determine what type of argument he is presenting, then we are giving a different meaning to 'the argument', from that which corresponds to what the critic is assessing as valid or sound. Vorobej acknowledges that these twin perspectives impinge on the definition of deduction, insofar as the 'requisite beliefs' of the author may be true or false, and the argument acceptable or unacceptable

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[53] I return to these issues in connection with natural language deductivism in the final section of the thesis.

accordingly.[54] He claims that [D] meets this necessary '*bifurcation condition*' without which all deductive arguments would be valid (1992: 106). Nonetheless Vorobej is unequivocal in his assignment of priority to the proponent's perspective:

> On my account, to call an argument deductive is simply to describe it with reference to how it is conceived by its author. To call an argument deductive is not even to begin to evaluate it, though it does carry some implications as to what sorts of evaluative questions eventually ought to be raised about the argument. (Vorobej 1992: 107)

An obvious consequence of [D], however – not lost on Vorobej – is that a non-deductive argument could be deductive under [D], if for example, the beliefs of the author are 'sufficiently eccentric or confused' (ibid.), that is if the author believes what he conceives of as a conclusion to follow from what he conceives of as premises. Likewise a classical paradigm such as *modus ponens* or hypothetical syllogism could be described as non-deductive according to [D]. To insist, says Vorobej that every example of a classically recognisable *modus ponens* is deductive reasoning is to 'beg the question against [D]' (1992: 108). But to insist that [D] is an adequate description of deductive argument, is to impose on the critic the task of recognising failed attempts at deduction, and eliminating unintended successes. Both are unintuitive measures of what we take 'deduction' to mean.

By what means do we identify an argument as a failed attempt, or unfulfilled intention – or for that matter a chance achievement? In Ennis's words:

> Because arguments are not living purposeful creatures, they do not literally attempt, claim, intend, purport, or believe. Rather it is people, usually argument authors, who do those things with arguments … Sometimes an argument is just being considered without any proponent. Then it would not be classifiable at all by those advocating a psychological approach, since no one is making a claim, etc., about it, constituting a problem for the psychological approach. (Ennis 2001: 102)

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[54] It should be noted that Vorobej (1992: 105–6) intends the word 'author' to be 'interpreted liberally so to mean anyone who supports, advocates, or is committed to an argument, even if they are not the person originally responsible for that argument.'

Ennis asks what we are to make of an author who does not have a competent grasp of the concepts of, for example, deductive validity, or following necessarily, or logical. How could such an author be deemed to have performed a deduction merely from the evidence of the text? According to Ennis (2001: 104), 'An arguer cannot claim what is not in her conceptual scheme.'

Deducing a conclusion from a stated premise is a complex mental act, typically linguistic, but not necessarily a speech-act. If someone makes a statement and I draw a conclusion from it without saying anything, I have no less deduced a conclusion from it. Still, it is an act that can be performed only by someone who knows *how* to do it, and has some intention to do it. Having a general feeling of confidence that some claim*, B*, is warranted by some evidence or reason, *A ,* may suffice to prompt a person to conclude the probability of *B* on the strength of *A*; and it might be the case that an interpreter more at home with logical concepts can see that *B* can be validly *deduced* from *A*. But that does not mean that the arguer performed a deduction other than in the sense of having uttered some sentences that form a deductively valid argument, or that can be construed as such under the achievement account. The psychological account requires us to know at least what the arguer is attempting to do to; what standard of conclusiveness he is aiming for.

Ennis, however, goes further than this in proposing that unless an arguer has the concept of deductive validity, he or she cannot be considered to have argued deductively – i.e. succeeded in the attempt. But this is neither convincing nor necessary to the account. By analogy, an act can be an attempt at murder even if the perpetrator does not know the difference between murder and manslaughter. Murder is defined not by the intention to commit what the agent takes to be murder, but by direct reference to his premeditated act of killing. Likewise an attempt at murder on the part of an agent does not require the agent to have the concept of *murder* or know its legal definition. Speaking generally, an agent can properly be described as attempting to φ even when φ-ing is not the description he would necessarily give to the act he commits, or intends to commit. In other words his intention – what he intends – can be described in a *de re* rather than a *de dicto*

manner. It is not at all implausible that an act of argument could be an attempt at arguing deductively even when the proponent is unable to distinguish between deductive and non-deductive argument. People can know *how* to argue deductively inductively, abductively, from analogy, etc., without knowing *that* these classifications exist on any formal level. Ryle (1949: Ch. 2) famously argued against what he called the 'intellectualist' view that theoretical knowledge precedes practical ability – though not with respect to ability to argue in particular. Of more specific relevance perhaps is the distinction Peirce (1901) makes between the notions of *logica utens* and *logica docens*.

> Every time a man really reasons…, he is clearly or obscurely conscious that his present inference belongs to a general class of cases in which an analogous conclusion might be drawn; and his approval of this reasoning consists in a belief that by acting on the same principle in all cases he will on the whole be advancing his knowledge more than by not drawing such conclusions. If this be true, as the reader's self-observation may satisfy him that it is, a man cannot truly reason without having some notions about the classification of arguments. But the classification of arguments is the chief business of the science of logic; so that every man who reasons (in the above sense) has necessarily a rudimentary science of logic, good or bad. The slang of the medieval universities called this his *logica utens* – his 'logic in possession' – in contradistinction to *logica docens*, or the legitimate doctrine that is to be learned by study. (Peirce 1895: 891–92)

The idea that we can reason by acquired instinct, habit, or imitation, etc. without knowing any rules or concepts of formal logic, is not unduly controversial, any more than is the idea that we can learn a language without studying formal grammar. Searle (2001) argues that people do not argue *from* the rule of modus ponens to the validity of a conclusion given certain premises, but just from the content of the premises to the conclusion. The recognition of the rule of *modus ponens* follows from our habitually arguing that way, not vice versa. Searle (2001: 21) advises (with emphasis) that '*We need to distinguish between entailment and validity as logical relations, and inferring as a voluntary human activity.*'

If a person can argue deductively by instinct or accident or good luck, just if his chosen premises happen to entail his conclusion, then we have no need of the psychological account. A successful attempt at deduction will be accounted for entirely under the achievement account. The psychological account is required only to explain what it is for an argument to be an *invalid* deduction, for which of course the *achievement* account has no answer, by definition. The problem with the two accounts is that they address different questions, one about the act of arguing, the other about the argument-object – sentences or propositions and their relation to one another.

A disjunctive account

Whether or not an object of evaluation is valid is a matter that is settled under the achievement account. Hence there are some texts which may be construed as attempts at deduction and which are, as it happens, deductions and therefore, arguably, successful attempts. Monroe Beardsley is prompted by this to offer a disjunctive definition. A deductive argument, he proposes, is 'an argument that either *is or claims to be* valid' (Beardsley 1975: 23). Notwithstanding the objection that arguments do not themselves claim anything, this two-pronged definition might be thought to have a superficial attraction. If an argument is sound, it is classifiable as a deduction under the achievement account; and if invalid, but evidently an attempt at deduction, it is a deductive argument under the psychological account. It is non-deductive only if it fails on both counts.

But there is an obvious problem with this. The achievement account is based on *appraisal* of the argument regardless of any intentions or beliefs that may have brought it into being. If the object of appraisal is deductively valid, it is valid *and* a deduction. If it is not valid but can be supplemented in a manner that makes it valid, without false assumptions, then too it may be said to 'achieve' deductive validity. But would that still be the case if, under the psychological account it could be seen that no attempt at deduction was made by the author – perhaps no attempt at argument even? To use a football analogy, a shot at goal (like a shot at deduction) may or may not produce a goal; but conversely a goal need not be the

result of a *shot* at goal but instead of a pass or fumble of some sort. Goals are registered exclusively on an achievement basis; shots on the basis of intention or attempt. A shot at goal may be so poor that it is unrecognisable as a shot, but it is a shot nonetheless. Alternatively it may be very good, and produce a goal; but even then the goal is not a shot, nor the shot itself a goal. Hence 'shot' and 'goal' have easily distinguishable extensions, whereas 'deduction' has the misfortune to carry both meanings if, as Beardsley claims, either account is applicable. Under the psychological account a deduction is an act of (typically verbal) reasoning that is performed with the intent to provide conclusive reasons for some conclusion. Under the so-called achievement account all that is necessary for the argument to be a deduction is that the conclusion does follow necessarily from the premise-set, or can be so construed on the basis outlined earlier.

I agree with Ennis (2001: 104) that the disjunctive account is a case of 'want(ing) it both ways'. There is nothing wrong with that if both ways can be had. But I would go further than Ennis by saying that the disjunctive account falls between two stools. The premise for Beardsley's case is that alternative accounts can be given with respect to the same *argument*, classified in the same way. But, as with goals and shots, the psychological and achievement accounts do not relate to the same thing or even similar things, but to two very different things, one an intentional act, the other an abstract object. The disjunctive account falls foul of the ubiquitous ambiguity between, in this case, an act of (or attempt at) *deducing*, and some object or product of the act. When arguer X deduces something, he or she performs a *deduction*; and so on for an induction, an inference, an assumption, and other acts generally. But it is an equivocation to say that the same 'deduction' can be recognised on the one hand by its validity or soundness, or recognised on the other as an attempt to deduce. The object cannot be classed as an attempt; and an attempt cannot be assessed as sound – although, if the object is sound, the attempt can be judged successful.

Ennis gives rather short shrift to the achievement account. He merely draws the distinction as above and, at a later point, comments that it is 'a reason to be

pessimistic' that these two accounts between them are all that the majority of textbooks have to offer (Ennis 2001: 110). His fire is directed almost entirely at the psychological account. My own objection to the 'achievement account' is that the term is a misnomer. Achievement implies that some aim or purpose has been met. For something to be 'achieved' by a text there needs to be some notion of aim or purport, which, in the case of argument, would be to justify or establish some claim, or persuade some audience, etc. (It need not be the author's actual aim; it may be an aim supposed by the interpreter.) But if all that is necessary for classification as a deduction is to *be* valid – under one of Beardsley's two alternative criteria – then any argument that is valid 'achieves' the status of a deduction by being valid. But then the language of 'achievement' just seems otiose.

Conclusions

The fundamental problem with the two accounts is that they purport to relate to the same things, namely arguments. But when critically examined it is clear that these conceptions of 'the argument' are deeply different in kind. In the psychological account what is being identified is an act of arguing or reasoning on an agent's part, and the question is whether in psychological terms the author can be judged to be reasoning, and reasoning deductively – namely: would an author (or charitable interpreter) argue from this premise to that conclusion; and, in so doing, make the assumption required for it to be construed as deductively valid? The achievement account, on the other hand, relates to an object, a pair of propositions and a supposed relation, the argument *itself*, so to speak. This clear categorial distinction must be observed if the two accounts are to maintain their distinctiveness and thus be genuine alternatives under a disjunctive account. The danger of the disjunctive account is that the two questions tend to trade on each other and hence blur the distinction. The achievement account cannot borrow a notion of intention or aim from the psychological account, and at the same time be based on the criterion of validity alone. Yet without notions like aim or intention on some agent's part it is hard to see what logical grounds there are for importing implicit assumptions. The difficulty for the disjunctive account is that the supposed

alternative tests overlap, bringing psychology into the achievement account, and the criterion of deductive validity into the psychological.

With the achievement account and the psychological account both facing major problems, and resting on a category mistake, I would follow Ennis in expressing serious doubt that the deductive / non-deductive distinction can serve any useful purpose at the stage of interpretation and analysis. I would agree, too, that the time and place for invoking the distinction – if at all – is at the stage of evaluation, once the text has been identified as an argument, and without first attempting to surmise what standard or criterion it, or its author, aspires to. The line I take is that all arguments purport to be valid, because all purport to be sound, thus aligning myself with the school of natural language deductivism. Critical appraisal, on that account, can proceed without the need for categorising a putative argument either as deductive or as having some non-deductive form. Assuming instead that the argument purports to be conclusive, the critic judges what – by dint of assumption-ascription, qualification, etc. – would be required to interpret the argument as valid, and reconstructs the text accordingly. Finally, he or she assesses the truth or plausibility of the premises and implicit assumptions. If no such interpretation is feasible – or if the required assumptions and qualifications are patently false or mutually contradictory – then the argument should be rejected as unsound. (A somewhat fuller account of this procedure is given in the final chapter, §42.)

This of course does not deal with the problem of the first stage, about which Ennis has less to say, namely recognising arguments and distinguishing them from non-arguments in the first place. There the same problem remains, only on a more general level, especially with respect to arguments that are judged defective or fallacious. As Hamblin (1970: 224-5) puts it: How can we 'nail a fallacy' if it remains open to the arguer, or to another critic reading with a different eye, to deny that there was ever any intent or attempt to present an argument – or, if there was an argument, that it purported to be conclusive? The actual or presumed arguer, 'cannot be convicted of fallacy until he can have an argument pinned on him. And

what are the criteria for that?' (ibid.). What indeed? Hamblin's answer is well known:

> There is little to be gained by making a frontal assault on the question of what an argument *is*. Instead let us approach it indirectly by discussing how arguments are appraised and evaluated. (Hamblin 1970: 231)

In the coming chapter Hamblin's staunchly non-deductivist concept of natural-language argument is examined closely, along with his proposed criteria for argument appraisal.

CHAPTER THREE: Appraisal

14.   Resumé and introduction

We arrive now at the point and purpose of critical thinking, namely the appraisal of arguments in natural-language contexts – so called 'real arguments'. It is to this end that arguments need to be identified and analysed. It has been argued in the foregoing that these precursory tasks are hampered by a number of obstacles, chief among them the fact that some degree of appraisal is needed to recognise an argument at all, lending an uneasy feeling of circularity to the widely practised 'three-stage strategy'. This problem is magnified if we add to the mix the question of what *kind* of argument the object for appraisal is and in particular whether it is deductive or non-deductive. For 'deduction', like 'argument' generally, is in part a success term; in part a description of something attempted or intended by an author.

It should once more be noted that these issues apply only to so-called 'real' argument which, as has also been argued, is not as coherent a notion as it is intended to be. A more useful demarcation for critical thinking would be between texts that do and those that do not need interpretation as argument. For it is they alone that require critical analysis to present them in a standard form that will facilitate objective, methodical appraisal. (At the very least this entails identifying the conclusion and listing the premises.) That is not to say that an argument which is obscured by its natural form of expression is any more *real* than an argument whose form is so transparent that it comes 'appraisal-ready'. What we find among natural-language arguments is a continuum from the wholly transparent to the extremely obscure, where the principle of charity would lead us to question whether there is an argument present at all. On that basis we can drop the quotation marks from '"real" argument', and call anything that is an argument a real *argument*, effectively making the distinction redundant. But once pointed in that direction – that is, in the direction of appraisal-first, as discussed in the previous section – there may be, as Hamblin suggests, little to be gained from

asking what an argument is other than an object of appraisal. The critic looks for *good* arguments; or perhaps more openly still, good *reasons* for further claims.

This in part is Ennis's proposal. It is no magic bullet, for it simply exchanges questions about the criteria for identifying and classifying arguments for questions about the criteria for judging putative arguments. He recommends a method of 'successively applying sets of standards' corresponding to argument types. Effectively the critic works through a list of criteria: (deductive) soundness, best explanation standards, standards for generalisation from instances, etc. I leave aside the details of the procedure except to comment on the order of application. Though discretionary by his account, Ennis nonetheless 'find(s) it easier to start with soundness standards, unless it is immediately apparent that the argument would fail them, but might pass some other set of standards' (Ennis 2001: 127). Soundness standards he then defines in the customary way as 'deductive validity and true or acceptable reasons' (ibid.). Hamblin goes further, not only in the adoption of appraisal-first, but in the levelling of the distinction between standards, and above all in rejecting deductive soundness as a viable criterion of appraisal. He declares his hand as follows:

> I shall stop using the words 'valid' and 'invalid' lest they cause concentration on too narrow a feature of this process of appraisal. To avoid jargon as much as possible, let *good* arguments be described simply as 'good'. (Hamblin 1970: 231)

In this chapter I take issue with this position, and with Hamblin's case against the efficacy – indeed the necessity – of employing deductive criteria in the appraisal of arguments. Looking ahead further, I take the view that aiming at deductive soundness is characteristic of the act of argument in the much the same way that aiming at truth is characteristic of assertion.

15.   What is a good argument?

A good argument provides its audience with good reasons: claims that, if true, warrant acceptance of the conclusion as true. Since it would clearly be irrational to

believe the reasons provided by a good argument and deny the conclusion, it might be thought that a good argument is just one which would persuade a rational and informed audience that its conclusion is true. This would accord with Ralph Johnson's definition of an argument as 'a type of discourse or text … in which the arguer seeks to persuade the Other(s) of the truth of a thesis by producing the reasons that support it' (Johnson 2000: 168). It accords, too, with van Eemeren & Grootendorst's (2004: 2) definition of an argument as 'a complex speech act aimed at convincing a *reasonable critic*'. They continue:

> When someone advances argumentation, that person makes an implicit appeal to reasonableness. He or she tacitly assumes that the listener or reader will act as a reasonable critic when evaluating the argumentation. Otherwise, there would be no point in advancing argumentation (ibid.).

We judge favourably things that achieve what they are aimed at, or what their authors seek to achieve by them, and unfavourably if they fail or fall short. But persuasiveness, even when the audience is conceived of as an informed and rational judge, is no definition of a good argument. Although it is unobjectionable that a good argument *should* persuade a rational audience or reasonable critic of the truth of its conclusion, that is a comment on the rationality of the audience more than on the quality of the argument. A rational person is one who *should be persuaded* by a good argument. But a capacity to persuade on the part of the argument is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for its being a good argument, unless the 'rational audience' is idealised to the point of being persuadable by all and only good arguments, at which point the definition descends into triviality. When an argument persuades the right sort of person for the right sort of reasons it is because it is a good argument; not the reverse.

The first requirement of a good argument is that the premises must be true; second the conclusion follows from them. An argument which meets both conditions we call sound, or deductively sound to be exact. A third condition, therefore, is that the conclusion must be true. But from the perspective of the critic (appraiser) there is something odd about this third condition. On the one hand, it is a necessary

condition of soundness since, if the premises are true and the conclusion false, the conclusion does *not* follow. On the other hand the first two conditions are sufficient. If the first two conditions are met, the conclusion *will* be true. That is the measure of a good argument: a good argument is just one that establishes the truth of its conclusion. Conversely, an argument that does not establish the truth of the conclusion is not a good argument, even if the truth of the conclusion is known independently of the argument. Of course, if the truth of the conclusion is needed to establish that the argument is sound, then the argument is circular. That, however, does not make it a bad argument. That Socrates is mortal does not detract from the soundness of the reasoning that he is mortal on account of his being human, and of all humans being mortal. Where the circularity is unacceptable is in the critical (evaluative) argument that the reasoning is sound because Socrates is mortal.

So the question for the critic is whether the first and second conditions have been met: the truth of the premises and the obtaining of the claimed relation of following from. Neither of the other pairs of conditions is sufficient for a positive appraisal. In particular it is not sufficient that the premises and conclusion are both true. Simply having true premises and a true conclusion does not make an argument good in the sense that the conclusion follows from the premises or receives any warrant or justification from them. As Etchemendy (1990: 93) puts it:

> A logically valid argument must, at the very least, be capable of justifying its conclusion. It must be possible to come to know that the conclusion is true on the basis of the knowledge that the premises are true. This is a feature of logically valid arguments that even those most sceptical of modal notions recognize as essential. Now, if we equate logical validity with mere truth preservation ... we obviously miss this essential characteristic of validity. For in general it will be impossible to know both that an argument is "valid" (in this sense) and that its premises are true without *antecedently* knowing that the conclusion is true. This is why such arguments as

> (B)   Washington was President

>   So, Lincoln had a beard

are incapable of justifying their conclusions. For although this argument preserves truth, there is no guarantee of this fact independent of the specific truth values of its constituent sentences.

This introduces something of a paradox for appraisal. To assess an argument for validity, he says, it must be possible 'to *come* to know' that the conclusion is true on the basis of the premises, the implication being that the truth of the conclusion is not known other than by inference from the premises. If Etchemendy is right that there is no guarantee of truth preservation other than the truth of the premises and conclusion, then there is a sense in which *knowing* the truth of those components of the argument robs the critic of the perspective from which to judge the 'passage' from one to the other. If the conclusion is known to be true, in what sense does the passage 'preserve' truth? At the same time, however, we cannot confidently judge the argument to be sound if we retain doubts about the truth of the conclusion at the same time as knowing the truth of the premises. For then we would have to say that the classical criterion for validity – the impossibility of true premises and a false conclusion – (and hence of soundness) has not been met. On the other hand it is frankly absurd to say that an argument is defective just because we know its conclusion to be true independently of the reasons given in the argument! It seems equally absurd to say that we cannot *evaluate* an argument as sound if we know both premises and conclusion to be true. No one really doubts that Socrates is mortal, or requires to be told that his mortality is a consequence of his being human; but few would seriously deny that the classic paradigm is a sound and in that sense *good* argument; or that we cannot see this because we know that Socrates is mortal.[55] But how is that judgement made? It might be answered that a critic with knowledge of the truth of the conclusion can still evaluate the argument by saying that it *would* persuade him or her, *if* the conclusion were in any doubt. But since on this hypothesis the conclusion is not in any doubt, it is hard to see how that judgement could be made other than by having some further, independent criterion by which to establish that the reasoning is sound; and we are back to

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[55] It might be objected that a syllogism is not a good argument on the grounds that it is trivial; but that is a different issue.

where we started. Besides, if Socrates' mortality *were* in doubt – or merely supposed to be in doubt for the purpose of the appraisal – the major premise that *all* men are mortal would also be in doubt, and the argument would not be recognisably sound. It would seem that we cannot *know* that the argument succeeds without knowing that its conclusion is true. Etchemendy concludes the piece quoted above with: 'Consequently, any doubts we may have about the truth of the conclusion translate directly into doubts about the argument's "validity"' (ibid.). So, when the conclusion is known to be true, what is the test of a good argument? What criterion must be met? It would seem that it cannot be *just* truth preservation since in any argument with a true conclusion truth *is preserved*. This is a symptom of the well known paradox of material implication, B→(A→B), and the corresponding argument: B ; (A→B).

I would agree with Etchemendy that the conclusion in a valid argument – as in a good argument generally – must be *justified*; also that truth preservation alone does not meet this criterion. However, the contrast that Etchemendy makes between these criteria is not entirely of like with like. He speaks of the argument *justifying* its conclusion, and of the argument *preserving* truth, giving both attributions an active sense of the argument doing or achieving something. Both, I suggest, are imprecise. A valid argument does not literally justify its conclusion: a conclusion *is justified* in a valid argument if the reasons given in its support warrant the inference to it. In other words, it is the premises of a valid argument which justify the conclusion. It is not the premises which preserve truth, however. I would go further and say that it is not the argument either. It is hard to see how it (the argument), or any of its component propositions, 'does' anything corresponding to 'preserving'. Truth preservation is key to the classical definition of validity, for which it is sufficient that the premises and the negation of the conclusion form an inconsistent set. It is right that this does not capture the intuitive notion of what it takes to 'justify' a conclusion. But, when Etchemendy says that, although (B) preserves truth, there is no guarantee of this fact other than the truth values of the sentences, there is a degree of equivocation. (B) does not 'preserve truth' any more than it 'justifies' its conclusion. It *would* preserve truth if its premise justified the

conclusion, but it patently does not. Indeed the point that Etchemendy is making is that (B) does not justify or warrant its designated conclusion. In that sense we could also say (B) does not 'preserve' truth: it merely *happens* to have a true conclusion. It is interesting that Etchemendy has something of the above ambiguity in mind because he uses quotation marks for the more formal meaning of 'valid'. My point is that the quotation marks should be applied to 'preserve'. Either way, what is acknowledged is the very obvious fact that not all formally valid arguments are necessarily good arguments, in the intuitive, everyday sense of providing grounds that support, establish, or lead to, a conclusion.

Arguments like (B) are examples of what logicians term 'over-generation'. Mares (2004: 4f), observes that any argument whose conclusion is a logical truth follows validly from any proposition. His example is Fermat's last theorem which, he says, follows validly from the proposition that the sky is blue. More notorious still is the classical criterion known as *ex falso quodlibet* (EFQ) which sanctions the conclusion of anything whatsoever that is premised upon a logical falsehood. Any argument of the from: (A &~A) ; B is valid, whatever sentences are substituted for A and B (Read1995: 54f). (We need not be exercised over these cases in the present thesis, since arguments with known-to-be-false premises are rightly rejected, and arguments from logical falsehoods would obviously fall at the first fence. So, too, would blatant non-sequiturs like Mares' blue sky example. But as well as overgenerating, the criterion of logical consequence can also undergenerate. An example given by Read (ibid.) is that 'This is not square' is not a logical consequence of 'This is round', insofar as there is no logically valid form into which the sentences could be substituted. (It's a mathematical, not a logical, consequence.) Moreover, indefinitely many arguments with the same form, '$A_1,...A_n$; B', will have true premises and a false conclusion. Yet

(1) $A_1,...A_n$ (and) therefore B

is basically the form of all natural-language arguments, valid and invalid alike. It is not that logically valid arguments do not have this form, but that they have a more

structured form, requiring a deeper level of analysis into which no simple propositions can be substituted *without* preserving truth. An argument such as

(2)   It's round so it's not square

depends not on structural form for validity – since it lacks it – but on the meanings of the 'component sentences' (Read 1995: 54). We might nevertheless wish to say that (2) exhibits logical consequence because it is a necessary truth, or that it is true by definition, that nothing square can be round. But then do we say that

(3)   These banknotes have the same serial number so they are not genuine
        banknotes

exhibits logical consequence because serial numbers, by definition, are unique? Clearly there is a difference, but it seems more like a difference in degree than in kind. Read (ibid.) notes that truths of mathematics are 'difficult' because they can be reduced to logic, placing them in a special category, different from, say, facts of science or history, or facts about banknotes. But the distinction between logical and definitional truths, and those of a more mundane sort, is not a sharp one (Quine 1961: 20-37). Example (3), it might be said, has a foot on both sides of the line: it could be argued that its validity rests on the *meaning* of 'serial number', or on the mere fact that all genuine banknotes have been given unique numbers in the past, and continue to be so at present. On the latter reading, the truth that determines the validity of (3) is of the same order as the truth of, say: 'All US presidents to date have been men', from which it follows validly – and in ordinary parlance 'logically' – that

(4)   If Leslie was president then Leslie was a man,

Hence, by deduction equivalence,

(5)   Leslie was president so Leslie was a man

is valid. The example (4) is Etchemendy's (1990: 107). The problem it illustrates is that

> (w)hen we equate the *logical* truth of a sentence with the *ordinary* truth of a universal generalization of which it is an instance, we risk an account whose output is influenced by facts of an entirely 'extralogical' sort. Clearly, the question of whether ...[4]... is a logical truth does not depend on the sorts of historical truth that determine the truth or falsity of the generalization
>
> [G]   ∀x[if x was president x was a man][56]

Yet, as Etchemendy goes on to say, [G] just happens to be true, so that claiming logical truth for (5) on the basis of the 'simple truth' of [G] would *mistakenly* succeed; it would have the claimed outcome but for the wrong reasons. So, too, would a denial of the logical truth of (4) if [G] happened to be false.

These are problems enough for classical logic, where logical truth and logical consequence are fundamental issues. But for critical thinking and related disciplines the problems of identifying the right appraisal criteria are no less acute. If anything, they are more intractable for lacking the anchor of a developed logical system. Argument form gives no guidance if, as in the case of all (2), (3) and (5), the surface-form is not deductive. So, for example, the conclusion of (5) cannot be derived from its premise, by any rule of natural deduction, because its soundness or otherwise depends on its content rather than its form. But nor, as we have just seen, does the soundness of (5) – less still the soundness of most so-called 'real' arguments – turn on the logical truth of a covering generalisation. So when the critic of an argument that lacks any superficial deductive form comes to the question of whether the conclusion follows from the premise(s) – one of the two conditions for soundness – the answer tends to rest on extralogical knowledge. No reasonable critic would want to say that any of (2), (3), or (5) was unsound (at any world where the statements involved were facts). However, in each case some form of substantive knowledge is required to underpin the judgement. Whether Leslie's being a man *follows from* his having been a US president, rests on the fact that every US president has been a man – *including Leslie*. Therefore to be in a

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[56] The labelling of the examples is mine, for ease of reference.

position to assert that the conclusion follows from the premises effectively requires knowing that the conclusion is true – another symptom of the problem seen earlier, and one that will have important implication in coming sections.

Intuitively what we expect of a sound argument is that *from* known-to-be true premises we come to know *that* some conclusion is true. But intuitively we also know that *if* the conclusion is true, its truth value is unaffected by the truth or falsity of the premises. On the other hand, unless we can be sure that the conclusion is true when the premises are true, we cannot say with assurance that the argument is sound. I do not deny that this presents a difficulty for natural-language argument appraisal, although I shall argue against Hamblin that it is not an insurmountable one. First, however, I look at Hamblin's head-on challenge to deductivism: the application of the standard of soundness to 'real' argument.

16.   Hamblin's critique of soundness as a criterion of appraisal

The problems outlined above are amongst those addressed by Hamblin (1970). Hamblin reviews a set of 'alethic criteria' – essentially truth preservation – which he claims are too weak for the purpose of appraisal, and an alternative set of epistemic criteria, which he claims are too strong. He says that we cannot approve an argument on the basis that its premises are true, and the conclusion implicit in the premises, without *knowing* that the premises are true and that the conclusion is consequent upon them. In Hamblin's words: '...my premises may be true but the argument will be quite useless in establishing the conclusion so long as no one knows them to be true' (Hamblin 1970: 236). Alethic criteria, therefore, can be applied only in a provisional sense; or, as Hamblin puts it: 'Arguments which pass these alethic tests can be regarded as setting a certain theoretical standard of worth, corresponding with a certain conception of "pure" Logic' (ibid.). Here Hamblin is contrasting 'pure' logic with what he calls the 'Logic of practice'. The point he is making can be put more simply as follows: the alethic criteria which he associates with 'pure' logic will allow evaluation only as far as the establishment of validity. In the logic of practice, a (merely) valid argument is useless, and its

practical worth is undecidable without the additional input required to verify the premises and so determine soundness. That cannot mean that a merely valid argument has no worth at all, for, as Hamblin says, it has a 'theoretical' worth – though he says this in the somewhat disparaging tone that he employs in his treatment of traditional logic. Putting it more positively we can say that validity is the theoretical half of the evaluation, the part of the procedure in which the form of the reasoning is assessed in the absence of knowledge of the truth or falsity of premises. Nonetheless, there is little to object to in Hamblin's basic contention that, for the purpose of critical appraisal of natural arguments, 'It is not enough for the premisses of an argument to be true: they must also be known to be true' (ibid.).

So Hamblin (1970: 236–37) considers what might be gained by replacing the main alethic criteria with two epistemic *E-criteria*:

(E1)   The premises must be *known* to be true;

and

(E2)   The conclusion must follow *clearly* and *directly* from the premisses.[57]

What we are to understand by 'following *clearly*' is that it is clear *to the audience* (including the critic) – so clear that they will be in *no doubt* that the conclusion follows from the premises. That is the whole point of considering the application of epistemic rather than merely alethic criteria. If the premises are known, and the passage to the conclusion is *clear*, then the conclusion is known too.

Crucially Hamblin stipulates that the conclusion need not follow by rules of deduction from the premises. In fact he makes a point of insisting that it need not

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[57] Emphasis added. Hamblin condenses two 'alethic criteria' that he has considered earlier to give one E-criterion, which he labels 'E2,3'. The alethic (A) criteria were: (A2) 'that the conclusion must be clearly implied', and (A3) that it must follow 'reasonably immediately', i.e. without gaps in the reasoning. If there are gaps in the text of the argument the missing premises must be clearly implicit, but that is dealt with by a further criterion (E4) which he comes to later, as do I. From here on I will refer to the compound E-criterion of following *clearly* and *directly* simply as 'E2'. Hence there is no E3.

be sanctioned by any particular logical rules. This is in line with his stated disinclination to attempt to say what an argument is (Hamblin 1970: 231)), and to pursue what was earlier called an appraisal-first methodology; that is, without prior identification or classification of the argument as an argument, or as an argument of any specific sort. The hypothesis he is setting up simply requires that the audience can see that the conclusion is an unmistakable consequence of the premises, even if the reasoning to it is, in his words, 'inductive, or extrinsic, or of a form for which no calculus has been developed' (ibid.). Hamblin also, and presumably for the same reason, stipulates a broad understanding of 'implies', less than entailment. 'Implication', he says 'may be strong or weak, and the argument strong or weak accordingly'. The point of this, however, is not to weaken the epistemic criteria. If *knowledge* that the conclusion follows from the premises is the requirement, then the same level of assurance or confidence would have to obtain whatever the nature of the reasoning.

That might appear contradictory. But Hamblin's objective is not to defend the E-criteria. On the contrary, his aim is to establish (by *reductio*) that the criterion of soundness is too restrictive to apply to ordinary argument *if* the necessary epistemic criteria are also applied. It is simply a manoeuvre on Hamblin's part to pretend that the E-criteria, as he defines them, can be met without the presence of a deductive step in the argument. Under the E-criteria the critic would have to know, not only that P, but also that P follows from C – i.e. that *if P then C*.

1. $K(P)$ (E1)
2. $K(P \rightarrow C)$ (E2)

Then, of course, the critic knows *that C*, by modus ponens.

3. P 1
4. $P \rightarrow C$ 2
5. C MPP 3,4

In other words, if the critic does not know that 'C' (as well as 'P') is true, he cannot meet the twin criteria of E2 without knowing something at least as strong as '*if* P then C'. That is a necessary condition for judging that C follows 'clearly and immediately' from P. But to know the truth of 'if P then C' (in the knowledge that P but the absence of knowledge that C) the critic must know that C follows from P – and in turn that 'A ; C' is valid. In these circumstances the critic is either drawn into circularity, or into the regress that Lewis Carroll describes in 'What the Tortoise said to Achilles': that the validity of arguments depends on a logical rule that depends on the validity of arguments, ... and so on, ad inf.[58]

Hamblin does not make his case against the viability of the criterion of soundness in quite the terms that I have used here, but his point is broadly as I have stated it. In practice, any argument, 'P ; C', which has no obvious deductive form, requires the ascription of some implicit assumption to establish that C is meant (claimed, supposed) to follows from P. One of the most challenging tasks for students of critical thinking is identifying such assumptions, and justifying their inclusion in the reconstruction of natural-language arguments. In view of its importance in critical-thinking methodology – and its relevance to the conclusions in Chapter 6 of this thesis – the topic of assumption-ascription and its attendant problems is addressed in some detail in the coming section.

17. Implicit assumptions

Suppose, as Hamblin supposes, there is a set of premises P and a conclusion C that is implied by P *sufficiently clearly* for the appraiser to be satisfied that C follows from P, but without any stipulation as to the nature or even strength of the reasoning employed. On analysis, the composition of the argument is just

> (6)   P ; C.

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[58] Carroll (1895). See Searle (2001: 19) who invokes Carroll's paradox to make a similar point. 'The way to avoid the regress' Searle says, ' is to refuse to make the first fatal move of supposing that the rule of modus ponens has *any role whatever* to do with the validity of the inference.'

(6) is the minimum level of analysis, making no claims or presupposition about the nature of the consequence relation. It merely labels the constituent parts of a standard argument and arranges them in an ordered list: conclusion to the right of the separator, premises to the left. In that respect it preserves the hypothetical conditions that Hamblin is asking the reader to accept of an argument sanctioned by no particular system or calculus, yet seen nonetheless to be 'good'. But if (6) represents any sort of argument then, according to the standard definition, C is claimed or supposed to follow from P. So to meet the two epistemic criteria so far considered, C must 'follow clearly' from P by some recognisable, though non-specific, line of reasoning. But there is a further missing element in any claim that C follows from P, because 'P ; C' as its stands lacks a *valid* argument form. Take, for instance:

(7)   Donald is a duck so Donald has webbed feet.

This has the basic, non-specific argument form of (6). What is more if Donald is a duck it is reasonable to conclude that he has webbed feet, despite the argument's being invalid as it stands. To be valid it would have to be added that ducks have webbed feet; for if that were not so, it would not follow that Donald has webbed feet. There is nothing unusual in this. In many (probably most) natural-language arguments, one or more premises will be omitted on account of their being so clearly implicit as to need no explicit expression. In an argument of the bare form, 'A therefore B', B could be false in any number of instances where A is true, so that it cannot be judged that the conclusion follows from the premise just by examining (7). A duck whose feet had been bitten off by a pike would arguably provide a counter-example, either invalidating the argument or requiring some ad hoc amendment to (7), e.g.

(7′)   Donald is a normal duck, so Donald has webbed feet.

But if (7) is understood, charitably, as (7′) and advanced by some speaker, *as an argument*, Donald's having webbed feet is claimed to follow from his being a normal duck. It 'goes without saying' in the argument, therefore, that normal ducks have webbed feet – or more specifically that if Donald is a normal duck he has (or

must have) webbed feet – not because it is necessarily true, but because it is implicit in the text's purport to be an argument (or its author's purport to be propounding an argument). For if it were known to the author and/or audience of (7) that ducks have claws and not webbed feet, (7) would not merely be invalid but practically unintelligible *as* an argument.

So when it comes to appraisal under E1 and E2 the standard critical procedure is this: we ascertain that Donald is a duck and we recognise that, if this single truth is to establish with any certainty that Donald has webbed feet, then it must be assumed that all ducks (in the normal way of things) have webbed feet. As well as being a necessary presumption this is also, in conjunction with the stated premise, a sufficient condition for the conclusion. So, once satisfied that in general ducks do have webbed feet, we can give the argument a favourable evaluation. Indeed (assuming Donald is a normal duck) we can say (7) is sound; and more specifically that it is deductively sound since, together with the covering generalisation, the premise could not be true and the conclusion false of any object that is a normal duck. This is the basic procedure set out in most critical-thinking course books and commentaries,[59] with or without any mention of deductive soundness. It is ostensibly an informal procedure since it does not require any prior analysis of the text as deductive, inductive, abductive, etc. or, in Hamblin's words, 'sanctioned by any particular calculus'. It is therefore applicable, arguably, to arguments of all sorts. Instead of the question of formal validity, the question for the critical audience shifts to the truth or credibility of the implicit assumption, which in a case such as (7) is conspicuous by its absence; and it is the *conspicuousness* which justifies its inclusion. In more complex arguments the identification of implicit assumptions is both more challenging and more challengeable; but the principle is the same.

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[59] For a fuller exposition see Thomson (2009: 23ff); also: Bowell & Kemp (2002: 153f), Butterworth & Thwaites (2013: 63ff).

On alethic criteria then, (7') is sound if the premise(s) and any implicit assumptions are all true, and from their truth it follows that the conclusion cannot be false. To meet the E-criteria it must be known that the assumptions as well as premises are both true; or, as Hamblin puts it, adding the further clause:

(E4)   Premises that are not stated must be such that they are *taken for granted*.

If it cannot be taken for granted that ducks have webbed feet it cannot be taken for granted that the conclusion follows from the premises. This procedure, applied to arguments in general, has a promising simplicity. If I *know* that P, and I know some general fact or principle (G) that means that if P is true then so is C, then I may conclude C from P with confidence. Conversely, if I know – i.e. it is perfectly clear – that C follows from P, then I implicitly know the general fact or principle (G) that makes it so. I know what G is – its content (e.g. that ducks have webbed feet) – because it is implicit in the claim that C follows from P, and once I ascertain that P and G are true I also know that C, and may then accordingly rate the argument sound (without overtly employing any deductive proof). But then comes the catch: how could I know that P and G without knowing that C? If I were to say: 'There was a point in the reasoning process at which I knew that P, and that G was something that could be safely taken for granted, but I didn't know C until I put the two together and formed the argument...' it would be fair to question whether I really *knew* P and G[60] before I knew the truth of C. But more to the point, vis-à-vis appraisal, how could I say that knowing P and G provided sufficient grounds on which to claim knowledge of C, if any lingering doubt about C persisted? Yet as discussed in the previous section, matters are no better if the appraiser does know the conclusion. Once the premises of an argument are known, and the conclusion known *with* them as opposed to *from* them, we are back to the seemingly paradoxical situation whereby, in knowing the conclusion, the critic loses the means by which to evaluate the passage from reasons to conclusion. What the critical audience needs to assess is whether, when presented with an argument,

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[60] For economy 'know P' is taken to mean know that P, or that P is true.

the premises justify the conclusion. That is essentially the point Etchemendy makes. The critical (evaluative) question is whether the reasoning would carry us, so to speak, from the premises to the conclusion in such a way that *if* we knew the truth of the premises we would have good reason to believe or assert the conclusion. The other point, that knowledge of the truth of constituents of an argument compromises assessment of the passage from premises to conclusion, is the basis of Hamblin's rejection of the epistemic criteria. But Hamblin pursues the point much further by his wholesale rejection of deductive soundness as a viable criterion for appraising ordinary-language argument.

Why can we not just say that if the argument has a valid form – i.e. a form that is truth preserving under all interpretations of its non-logical parts – and its premises are known to be true, it can then be judged that the conclusion is true from those antecedents? Then the critic can say that the conclusion does follow from the premises by the form of reasoning in the argument. In the example under consideration, if it follows from Donald's being a duck, together with the implicit premise that

(G)   if x is a duck, x has webbed feet,

then Donald's having webbed feet is a logical consequence of Donald's being a (normal) duck.

Hamblin's answer, would be that – *ex hypothesi* – (7) does *not* have any particular logical form, still less a deductively valid form. Hamblin's interest is in 'real' arguments, which do not, as a rule, have *explicit* deductive form. Under the principle of charity a reasonable listener would take certain supposedly implicit claims for granted in recognising the argument. Likewise the critical appraiser makes the same accommodation, and reconstructs the argument with the necessary assumption or assumptions (*Ass*) in place, for example:

(8)   P, Ass ; C

But in this argument C follows from P only if *Ass* is equivalent to

(9)   if P then C,

Anything weaker than (9) would not establish C, or the validity of (7). Hence to construe (7) as valid it is necessary to assume that either C is true or P is false. But to meet Hamblin's first E-criterion, P must be known to be true, meaning C must be true to meet the E-criteria. If C is already known to be true if P is true, then there is no evaluation to be done on the 'passage' (Hamblin's term), from P to C. To that extent I think Hamblin has a point. Unless an argument is explicitly valid on account of having a standard valid form, it cannot be judged sound without knowledge of the conclusion, because knowledge of the conclusion is needed to identify the requisite assumptions which *make* the conclusion true – and that involves a circularity. From this Hamblin argues that the E-criteria of appraisal, imposed on the alethic criteria, are too strong. If a person were to know for sure that the premises were all true, and to know for sure that whenever they are all true then C is true in consequence then, Hamblin claims, the person would already know that C.

There is of course something altogether counter-intuitive in this claim. It comes from the feeling we naturally have that if we follow an argument through from premises to the conclusion we often do arrive at (reveal, learn, discover) something we did not *know* before; and that precisely *what* we learn is C. Therefore knowing that C, once we do know it, just seems different from knowing the argument *for* C. Intuitively we think of a good argument as advancing from something known to something that was hitherto unknown or at least questionable. But then, as we have seen, the argument for C, if it is a really good argument from known premises via seen-to-be sound inference, must supply all the information that is needed for the person in possession of it to be in a position to know, too, that C. In that sense it may be said that nothing new is learned (or can be learned) from an argument if it meets the epistemic criteria in full.

Argument as a response to doubt

In response Hamblin (1970: 238) proposes, provisionally, an additional, remedial E-criterion:

> (E5)   The conclusion must be such that, in the absence of the argument, it
>   would be in *doubt*.[61]

But clearly this reopens the basic problem of appraisal raised at the start of the chapter. For either an argument with known premises *does* establish the conclusion, in which case it is a sound argument; or it does not, in which case it is not a sound argument. So E5 is a curious criterion to introduce. As mentioned at the start of the chapter, there is something absurd about the idea that an argument cannot be judged good – i.e. the judgement is inhibited – merely because its conclusion is known to be true. Likewise there is something absurd about restricting 'good' arguments to those that have conclusions not previously known to be true. As Hamblin, of course, is well aware, the critic cannot *judge* an argument to be valid, when he knows the premises to be true, unless he knows that the conclusion cannot be false. If the audience is in a position to know that the premises establish the conclusion, and that therefore the argument is good, then the audience must be in a position to know that the conclusion *is* true, for that is a necessary condition of its following from true premises. But if E5 is required for a good argument, the appraiser cannot know that the conclusion is true except by inferring it from the premises of the argument, for which purpose it is necessary to rate the argument as sound and from that infer the conclusion.

Hence E5 does not cure the circularity that Hamblin claims for the application of the epistemic criteria. But then he does not expect E5 to save the epistemic criteria since he is in the business of rejecting them as excessively strong. Moreover, E5 is not *needed* to break the circle. As I will argue shortly, the circle can be broken by proceeding in a different direction: that is, asking the critical questions in a different order. For although it is indeed a necessary condition of the argument's

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[61] Emphasis added.

being sound that the conclusion is true, you don't need to draw on your knowledge that the conclusion is true, ahead of appraising the argument, in order to know that the premises are true and the argument is valid, and that *therefore* the conclusion is true. After all, you don't in general need to know all the necessary conditions of the things you know. You might know that Y; and, whilst it might be a necessary condition of Y that X, you might not know that X. In fact that's a common situation. (People knew that apples fell from trees before anyone knew that gravity was necessary for that to happen.) So there could still be some epistemic distance to travel from knowing the premises, and knowing the validity of the argument, to working out the conclusion. That, in general terms, is how the circle is broken; how we can apply deduction and learn something from it. The practical problems of interpreting 'real' arguments do not change this general point.

A case study

Consider the following: Sam and Sarah are walking on the beach. The tide is out and there is bare sand between the shore and a nearby island. Sam says: 'Look, the tide is out, so we can get to the island.' Assuming that this is an argument, we may analyse it in the following standard manner:

> (10)   P: The tide is out
>   _____
>   C: We can get to the island

Sarah can see (and hence knows) that the tide is out. That is sufficient to satisfy both E1 and the entailed alethic criterion that premises must be true. What else must she know or assume if she is to accept the argument as sound? It must be clear to Sarah that

> G1   If (or when) the tide is out we can get to the island

Without (G1) the tide could be out and the island still be unreachable for any number of reasons. (G1) pre-empts all of these contingencies. Accordingly, (10) may be interpreted as an enthymeme and reconstructed to include (G), bridging the inference from P to C as follows:

(10′) P: The tide is out

G1:   If the tide is out we can get to the island

_____

C: We can get to the island

Reconstructing a presumed enthymeme in this way is standard procedure in critical thinking. (See Bowell & Kemp 2002: 43–47). It is also an application of Hamblin's E4 which, it will be recalled, stipulates that implicit premises must be such that they would be 'taken for granted'. But taking a premise for granted does not make it true. To assume that G1 is true alongside P is effectively to assume that (10) is a sound argument. The original question must simply be recast as a question about the truth of G1, just as we did in the example concerning ducks and webbed feet. If we are to appraise (10) favourably we have to know whether G1 is true, as well as recognising that it is needed to infer C from P. So here, in 'real' terms we have a plausible situation. On learning that the tide is out, and, given some local knowledge to the effect of G1, Sarah is satisfied that she and Sam can get to the island.

But now suppose that by some means Sarah knows both that the tide is out, and that the island can be reached whenever the tide is out. Then she knows the conclusion is true because it follows from the stated premise P, together with the truth of G1. Surely she must still say that the argument is sound, since what she knows is sufficient to justify that conclusion. But on interrogation we find that Sarah's knowledge of G1 was based on her knowledge that the island can be reached whatever the state of the tide, which entails not only G1 but also

(G2)   If the tide is *not out* we can get to the island.

and likewise validates the argument:

(11)   The tide is not out

_____

(So) we can get to the island.

Furthermore (11) would be a *sound* argument if uttered at any time at which the tide was not out. But that would not sit well with (10), since it would then be irrelevant on Sam's part to mention the tide in connection with getting to the island. Concluding C from P, though not unsound, would be incomprehensible *as an argument*. Sarah would be justified in responding: 'What has the tide got to do with getting to the island?' or just, 'What does "so" mean in what you have said?'

The soundness of (11) does not conflict with (10)'s being sound. Yet on any day-to-day reckoning, (10) would be a *bad* (in the sense of pointless or senseless) argument if (11) were sound also. The problem is well known. Its root, as observed earlier, is the classical theorem: $B \rightarrow (A \rightarrow B)$, from which, by substitution, we can derive both $C \rightarrow (P \rightarrow C)$ and $C \rightarrow (\sim P \rightarrow C)$. This is commonly referred to as a paradox, although in this particular case, it is not so very paradoxical. There would be nothing unusual about an island that could be reached whatever the state of the tide – by a causeway perhaps – so that, *if* the island is reachable in any event, it follows that it is reachable if the tide is out, and that it is reachable if the tide is in; or (like Fermat's theorem) if the sky is blue. None of these makes the others false; there is no paradox in that respect. However, if the island can be reached whether the tide is out or not out then there is no point or purpose in arguing that it can be reached *on the grounds that* the tide is out; nor any need to assert that the island can be reached *if* the tide is out. So, whilst G1 is not false just because G2 is true, it can still be said to be misleading. In Gricean terms (10) – and accordingly G1 – has the clear implicature that if the tide were *not* out, it would not (or might not) be possible to get to the island. Supposing that Sam knew perfectly well that the island could be reached whatever the state of the tide, he would be saying something less (i.e. something weaker) than he knows to be the case, if he argued from P to C. Asserting that G1 is equivalent to asserting that either P is false *or* C is true; but according to the present scenario Sam knows that C is true *and* that P is not false.

One practical problem with the practice of assumption-ascription in argument analysis is that not everything that may seem to be implied (conversationally) by the author in an argument-text is an implicit assumption *for the argument* – i.e.

necessary for the conclusion to follow from the stated premise(s). Making a related point, Jackson (1979; 1981) claims that a conditional has a low level of *assertibility* if its consequent is known to be true regardless of the antecedent.[62] He measures the assertibility of a conditional statement such as 'if P, C' in terms of its 'robustness' with respect to P. He considers the following situation, which is somewhat analogous to Sam's argument. A two-horse race has resulted in a win for Hyperion (over Hydrogen). If, knowing this, I report that either Hyperion or Hydrogen has won then, says Jackson (1979: 116), 'Everyone agrees I have done the wrong thing'. That changes if all that I know is that the winner's name began with 'H', even if I also know that Hydrogen was a rank outsider and could not have won except under extraordinary circumstances. For then there is still some point or purpose to saying that the winner was either Hydrogen or Hyperion. Indeed, for the purpose of arguing that Hyperion must (almost certainly) have won, it would be relevant to the argument to know that either Hydrogen or Hyperion won, because of the improbability of the only alternative outcome. Likewise, 'If Hydrogen or Hyperion won, then Hyperion must have won', is assertible. But its assertibility would fall to zero if the speaker knew at the time of asserting it that Hyperion had won anyway.

'Arguable' can have a similar sense to 'assertible' in a context such as 'Given X, it is arguable that Y'. If the island can be reached, it is true that if the tide is out the island can be reached; but it would be odd to say that this was 'arguably' true. This, I take it, goes some way towards vindicating Hamblin's E5 as a necessary concomitant of the E-criteria. There must be *conceivable* room for doubt about the conclusion in order to judge whether the argument establishes the conclusion. But if the audience is required to *know* that the premise(s) are true, *and* that they establish the conclusion, E5 cannot be met. So do we say that for an expression to be a good argument it must, as well as being sound, also be 'arguable' with something like Jackson's sense of 'assertible'? Certainly there are sound arguments

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[62] I ignore Jackson's distinction (1981: 130) between 'assertibility' and 'assertability' since it does not have direct relevance here. There is a discussion of the distinction in Chakraborty (2001: 106ff).

that are not useful or relevant as persuasive instruments; and that might seem a warranted reason for eliminating them from what we want to call 'good' arguments. This would make soundness at most a necessary condition. But that is something that we should accede to anyway.

Summary of Hamblin's argument

I.   To rightly be judged 'good' an argument must demonstrate that it would persuade an ideally rational audience of the truth of a claim to which he or she would not necessarily accede without the benefit of the argument.

II.   To meet condition I, the argument must be *sound*: the premises must be true and the conclusion must follow from the premises, and hence the conclusion must be true also.

III.   For the audience to be satisfied that Condition II is met, they must know that if the premises are true, the conclusion is true also. But if, in order to judge that the argument is good, the audience must know – or possess sufficient information to know – that the conclusion (as well as the premises) is true, then Condition I cannot be met.

Traditional logic does not resolve or even address this dilemma because it is not a logician's dilemma. Logic is concerned with validity, not with soundness. It defines a sound argument as a valid argument with true premises, but maintains a strict separation between the two issues – validity and truth – so that there is no interference by one in the assessment of the other. Thus for example, an argument that is unsound due to the logical falsity or inconsistency of its premise(s) may nonetheless be judged valid under EFQ. This has led many informal logicians, looking for a calculus by which to evaluate natural-language arguments, to reject classical methods as irrelevant or inappropriate. Certainly for Hamblin this separation is seen as a limitation on the part of logic, rather than a strength, at least in relation to natural-language reasoning, and especially to argument that is not overtly deductive. The logician can say with finality that an argument is valid if the conclusion cannot be false when the premises are true. But the critical

appraiser – in the field – cannot judge a particular, putative argument to have met that standard without some way of *knowing* whether the conclusion (as well as the premises) is true. But having that knowledge, paradoxically, seems to rob the critic of the crucial litmus test: whether a given argument *would* establish a conclusion that would otherwise be in doubt; or would persuade a rational critic who needed persuading.

That, in broad terms, is Hamblin's negative argument. I shall offer my own response to it in §19. But first it is necessary to examine the positive proposals for which Hamblin's negative argument is intended to pave a way.

18.   The alternative: dialectical criteria

Hamblin's solution, on which I shall dwell fairly briefly here, is to modify the criteria of appraisal. To modify the criteria of appraisal is not necessarily to modify the definition of a good argument. An argument may be good without our knowing or being able to know whether it is good or not, either because we do not know whether or not all its premises are true, or because we do not have the knowledge to judge whether the conclusion in fact follows from them. Equally the argument may be bad without our being aware of its flaw or flaws. Hamblin does not expressly deny that an argument's premises either are or are not true, or the reasoning sound or unsound. His point is that appraisal can and *should* be conducted without reference to these criteria, or expectation that they can be met. In his own words:

> The modified criteria, which I shall call *dialectical* ones, are formulated without the use of the words 'true' and 'valid'; or the word 'known', which would imply truth. With this difference they run closely parallel to the epistemic criteria. (Hamblin 1970: 245. Hamblin's italics.)

The dialectical requirements Hamblin proposes rest on *acceptance* by the parties to the discussion in which a given argument is contextualised. These criteria (prefixed 'D') are as follows:

(D1)   The premises must be accepted.

For 'accepted' one may read 'accepted by X', where the name of any person or group of persons may be put for 'X', provided the same substitution is made all the way though.

(D2)   The passage from premises to conclusion must be of an accepted kind.[63]

(D4)   Unstated premises must be of the kind that are accepted as omissible.

(D5)   The conclusion must be such that, in the absence of the argument, it would not be accepted.

In respect of the crucial D5, he adds: 'If we are prepared to countenance *degrees* of acceptance, we can weaken this to: *The conclusion must be such that, in the absence of the argument, it would be less acceptable than in its presence*.'(Hamblin 1970: 245 [his emphasis]). This addendum has something in it of Jackson's robustness criterion (see previous section). An argument that is robust in respect of its premises mirrors an implication that is robust in respect of its antecedent. The argument 'P and so C' is a good argument if, as well as P and C both being true, C gains more acceptability from P than it would have without P's having been given in support of it. Do Hamblin's modifications solve the (alleged) problem posed by E5? That is, does the replacement of E1-5 with the proposed 'dialectic criteria' solve the problem? Insofar as it removes the need to *know* the truth of the conclusion, then it seems clear that it works, especially if degrees of acceptance are permitted. A conclusion may be judged to have gained in acceptability from the argument without having to *be* true, less still known to be true.

Hamblin's modified criteria come at an obvious cost, however. As he himself concedes (though he may not see it as a concession himself):

(T)his makes the whole question of the worth of an argument a relative matter ...
(A)n onlooker who wishes to apply these criteria to the assessment of an argument must decide from whose point of view he wishes it assessed – the arguer's, the

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[63] The reason for the absence of a D3 is the same as for the absence of an E3, as explained in §16, above (footnote 57).

addressee's, or his own. When an onlooker pretends to give an 'absolute' or 'impersonal' assessment, the point of view is largely his own. (Hamblin 1970: 245)

One very obvious cost is that two arguments with contradictory conclusions drawn from the same true premises may both be rightly judged good arguments on the grounds that for X the passage from P to C is of an acceptable kind, and for Y the passage from P to not-C is of an acceptable kind. Let's say that in X's case the reasoning for C is construed as abductive, and approved because it provides the best possible, or only feasible, explanation for the agreed truth of P. Let's also say that in Y's case the reasoning is construed as a *reductio ad absurdum*, and C is denied (and not-C therefore affirmed) on the grounds that C has contradictory consequences. An onlooker (Z) who wishes to apply the criteria is then in effect an adjudicator; but whether he concurs with X or with Y, the point of view is, as Hamblin says, 'largely his own', and any claim to objectivity a 'pretence' – a kind of role-play. Besides, to be objective, Z would have to be in a position to *know* which, if either, of X's or Y's interpretations of the reasoning was the right one, or the better one; and to have to know that would be to reinstate one or more of the epistemic criteria that Hamblin claims to be too strong.

Returning to Sam's argument, it seems an intolerable outcome that the worth of his reasoning should depend upon whether Sarah *accepts* the premise and its implications or not. She can see that the tide is out; she may know, or not know, that the island is reachable at the time of Sam's claiming that it is. She may (may not) know or simply accept that G1: *if* the tide is out the island *is* reachable; and she may (may not) know or accept that G2: the island would be reachable if the tide were not out, making G1 robust with respect to P, as well as merely true. But each of these is the case or not the case regardless of whether Sarah knows or accepts them. And it follows from this that Sam's argument is either good or bad regardless of Sarah's attitudes to its premises or its reasoning. I as appraiser (Hamblin's 'onlooker') am assisted in my appraisal neither by knowing what Sarah knows or by what she accepts, but only by what is *so*. It is alethic criteria, surely, that determine whether the argument is good or not. If we depart from this we are

pushed in practice, it seems, either to relativistic, pragmatic criteria, or to epistemic ones, with unwanted consequences either way.

19. Response to Hamblin

Hamblin's thesis, as we have seen, has two parts, a positive one and a negative one. In the positive part he introduces the criteria that he goes on to develop into 'a formal dialectic' in the subsequent chapter. With this in mind he maps the dialectic criteria onto the alethic and epistemic which he has found both wanting and problematic in the preceding negative part of the chapter. It is open to question whether the negative argument is entirely open-minded: that is, whether it represents a genuine inquiry into the applicability of formal concepts to 'real' arguments, or whether the rejection of formality was motivated by his preferred, pragmatic approach. There are indeed different ways of appraising arguments depending to a large degree on what one's theoretical interests are. Acts of argumentation in a dialectical framework, and arguments construed as abstract objects, differ from one another on a polar scale, and certainly cannot be evaluated along the same lines. To use a somewhat overworked term, they belong to different paradigms. Therefore my aim in the rest of this section will not be to assess the positive case Hamblin, along with many others, makes for a dialectical theory of appraisal, but for now to venture some critical comments on the negative arguments.

Hamblin starts out from the premise that arguments can be assessed as good or bad without further, technical ado; in particular without analysis and classification, or even identification as arguments. Likewise he is reluctant to offer any firm appraisal criteria, yet ready to deny outright that the terms 'valid' and 'invalid' have any central role to play:

> The first thing we need to do is deny one thing that most of the elementary logic books affirm. A distinction is faithfully made between the truth or falsity of the premises and conclusion, on the one hand, and the validity or otherwise of the inference process on the other. A valid argument, it is said, may have completely

false premises and it may thus have a completely false conclusion. But this is a

complete misrepresentation of the nature of argument. (Hamblin 1970: 231-2)

Here Hamblin's disdain for formal logic, as a tool of appraisal, is undisguised. In indulging it, however, he transgresses an important part of his own declared aim. If he is unwilling to venture a view on what an argument is, he is in a poor position to assert so forcefully what it is not. Worse, he mistakes the logician's definition of validity (above) for a representation of 'the nature of argument', which it is not. To say that a valid argument may have false premises is not a statement about what argument or inference are, but about what validity is. The distinction he describes as being 'faithfully' observed by logicians is not, anyway, a fair representation of classical logic. Johnson (2000: 85) justly remarks that Hamblin was 'fuzzy on the distinction' between argument, inference, reasoning, and, above all, implication. This is not so surprising perhaps, since they are fuzzy terms. All have a tendency to ambiguity between the activities of arguing and inferring on the one hand, and the objects inferred, or the arguments advanced, on the other. The ambiguity is apparent in the Hamblin extract above, but it is not explicitly acknowledged. The process of inferring is something performed by an agent, and clearly its 'validity', if that is the right word to use at all of an act, is of a different order from the relative truth or falsity of the propositions (or sentences) to and from which the inference is made. As Hamblin goes on to say, platitudinously: 'in practice we like our premises to be true, and we do not describe an argument as good if the premisses are false.' (Hamblin 1970: 232). But all this amounts to is that in practice we like our inferences to be (at least) sound: the validity of an argument, for very obvious reasons, is insufficient warrant to believe or assert its conclusion. But then no one with the most elementary grasp of logic would claim that a *merely* valid argument is sound; nor even that a sound argument is necessarily 'good'.

Nor is classical validity a statement about 'the nature of argument', especially 'real' argument. The fact is, the test of validity can be performed on a sequence of propositions or sentences regardless of whether or not it is conceived of as an argument, even on the standard (e.g. Copi's) definition. When an argument is *put*

or expressed, or advanced, then, indeed, something is 'claimed to follow' from another thing or other things; and in any kind of practical context that would suggest the latter are likewise claimed to be true. But the bare sequence of propositions or sentences makes no such claims itself, because 'claiming' is an act (even if it is merely notional for the purpose of the definition). Acts, actually performed, require agents to perform them. (Even envisaged acts require envisaged agents.) In many modern logic texts (e.g. Bergmann et al. 2004: 9), 'conclusion' is merely a designation. Indeed the term 'argument' is often dropped by logicians in preference for 'sequent'. For the purpose of assessing validity the 'designation' could as well be expressed in terms of a proposition's being to the right or left of the turnstile, with the complex being valid if and only if the RHS cannot be false if the LHS is true. Hamblin has a point therefore if he is saying that an argument, understood as a 'process of inference', is misrepresented if it is equated with an object which can be assessed as valid. But who would *disagree*?

Hamblin's underlying objection to arguments conceived of as objects of appraisal by the standard of validity is that they are not 'real' arguments. Generally 'real' argument is contrasted with the artificial, contrived, or inauthentic. Hamblin's criticism is unusual in that he contrasts 'real' argument with 'hypothetical' argument, by which he means something like suppositional or provisional. In my view this confuses an argument – in the abstract, or on the page – with the practice of arguing or inferring, 'real' argument being the latter. Worse, however, Hamblin blurs the distinction between inference and implication (as Johnson, too, complains). Logic, it is fair to say, is indifferent to the *actual* truth value of the premises, so that the question can be asked: '*If* the premises are all true, *could* the conclusion be false?', or 'Could all of the premises and the negation of the conclusion be an inconsistent set?' Then only if the answer is 'No' is the argument valid. The question of validity has to be a hypothetical question.

Hamblin fails to see that the hypothetical nature of the logical question is its strength, seeing it instead as a deficiency. The tell-tale passage is here:

It will be said [in logic]: Arguments occur not only in the form 'P therefore Q' or 'Q because P', but also sometimes, when we discuss the *passage from* the premiss to the conclusion, without becoming committed to the premiss or the conclusion themselves. We say '*If* P then Q'; and in this form an argument can be presented, discussed, validated and agreed to quite independently of whether P or Q are true or false. In some sense, in fact (it would be said), this is the proper form of an argument so far as the logician is concerned, because he is not involved in the question of actual truth or falsity of the statements in his examples, but only with the inference-process that they exemplify.

The answer to this is that 'If P, then Q' is not a real argument at all, but only a hypothetical argument. It says that a certain hypothetical statement P, which I am not now making, would serve if I were to invoke it, as a premiss for a possible conclusion Q; but the argument remains hypothetical because I do not necessarily, now argue in this way. A real argument has real premisses and conclusion, not hypothetical ones. (Hamblin 1970: 233.)

Here, I would argue, Hamblin is again conflating two quite unrelated issues, presumably in preparation for the dialectical criteria he ultimately intends to put in place. Hence he introduces the distinction between 'real' and what he is calling hypothetical argument. But it is a straw man. First, logicians are not in the habit of saying that the proper form of argument is a conditional (or hypothetical) statement. Clearly, 'If P then Q' is not a *real* argument at all, because it is not an *argument* at all. But who would say 'If P then Q' *was* a real argument? A logician (of formal or informal persuasion) may, as Hamblin observes, discuss the passage from premise to conclusion in hypothetical terms; and is right do so because that is the surest means by which to separate the critical questions: 1) does a relation of consequence hold; 2) are the premises true? But that is very different from saying that an argument, when judged to be valid, has a hypothetical form. It is true to say that in stating 'If P then Q' I am not stating 'P', as a premise, but merely supposing what would follow if it were invoked as a premise. That, however, is just the difference between the conditional form and the argument form, 'P (and) *therefore* Q'. But a few lines later Hamblin (1970: 234) anticipates and brushes off this objection with a claim that 'examples in logic books are mostly hypothetical ones

anyway, even when they are in "therefore" form'. This is *ad hoc* as well as wrong. The form of the standard expression of an argument determines that, P, if expressed, is a statement, rather than a mere posit or supposition. That is, if I utter an expression of the form, 'P and therefore Q', with its usual meaning, I state or assert P and I state it as a premise for the conclusion that Q. By contrast, if I utter an expression of the form, 'If P then Q', I do not assert P (or Q), but only the whole conditional. This has nothing to do with the question of whether the argument is 'real' or otherwise, but with whether or not P – in the standard expression of an argument – occurs as the antecedent of a conditional, or in detachment, as the premise of an argument. In an argument it is plainly the latter.

Nor does this question have anything to do with whether P is *actually* stated or not, as Hamblin appears to suggest. 'P' need not be uttered at all. The whole argument, along with its premises, may be stated or unstated. Indeed, if we recall Copi's standard definition of an argument (see §1 above), we see that the premises and conclusion of an argument are held to be propositions (or perhaps sentences), not statements – at least not statements in the sense of acts of stating.[64] When and if an argument is advanced, then P is stated and C claimed to follow from P. But the form of the complex expression 'P and therefore C' is the same whether actually expressed, or merely contemplated as an abstract object. Lemmon (1965: 1) makes the point as follows, without confusing an argument per se with the expressing of an argument (or process of inferring):

> When an argument is used seriously by someone (and not, for example, just cited as an illustration), that person is asserting the premisses to be true and also asserting the conclusion to be true on the strength of the premisses. Logicians are concerned with whether a conclusion does or does not follow from the given premisses.

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[64] 'Statement', may be added to the long list of terms that is used with a measure of ambiguity, or difference of emphasis. It may be understood at times to mean what is stated, or the act of stating. 'Statement' is also used in a grammatical sense to mean a declarative sentence in some contexts. Lemmon (1965: 1), in a definition of argument otherwise practically identical to Copi's, classifies the constituents as either propositions or statements, but without specifying which (one or more) of these meanings 'statement' has.

'Seriously' here means 'when put to use' or 'for a purpose' (other than illustration). But the notion of an argument used seriously, and the informal logician's concept of 'real argument', do not line up with one another. Where Hamblin has a point is in his saying that logic assesses arguments hypothetically. But he is wrong if by that he means that the arguments examined by logicians are hypothetical (or unreal). If they are arguments they are as real, and their premises as categorical, as those that are put to 'serious' use. The difference is that for argument in use the truth of the premises must be known, or the argument rejected (or judgement on it reserved), because an argument with false premises cannot be taken seriously or trusted to yield a true conclusion; whereas for the purposes of assessing validity the truth of the premises need only be posited provisionally.

I consider this part of Hamblin's account to be its main weakness. This is a view evidently shared by Johnson (2000), although Johnson's criticism is that Hamblin does not go far enough in distancing his methodology from formal logic. 'To that degree', Johnson (2000: 85) says, '[Hamblin's] critique remained well within the orbit of traditional logic (with its bias for deductivism[65]), even though his thinking contained hints of a significant break with that tradition.' Johnson observes, too, that given Hamblin's reluctance to offer a definition or classification of argument in advance of attempting to define *good* argument, he failed to provide a sufficiently clear conception of argument to justify his proposed dialectical framework – a framework which Johnson also takes as the defining one for argument. This is a fair observation by Johnson. Hamblin struggles to distance himself sufficiently from the language and paraphernalia of deductive reasoning to make his objections to it clear. For instance, as seen earlier, the attempt to apply E2 without the sanction of any particular rules of inference or methodology, required the 'taking for granted' of implicit assumptions that, if true, effectively render an argument deductively sound, or if false show it to be flawed. That, as Johnson, implies, is close in essence to deductivism. For my own part I have no quarrel with deductivism – quite the

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[65] In Informal Logic, deductivism, or Natural-Language Deductivism (NLD), is broadly a methodology whereby arguments that are not formally deductive are construed as deductive and appraised accordingly.

contrary – but Hamblin is not making a case for deductivism; and for Johnson it is anathema.

20. Appraisal procedure

Hamblin, then, takes issue with the traditional distinction made in logic between the truth or falsity of the premises and conclusion, on the one hand, and validity on the other; and with the hypothetical character, as he sees it, of the latter. But neither the separation, nor the hypothetical nature of claims of validity, is an inadequacy on the part of logic, as Hamblin seems to be saying. Rather, it is the means by which logic enables the inquirer to separate the concepts of necessity, consequence, entailment etc. from the content of individual arguments, and the truth or falsity of their content. Hamblin, of course, is moving straight to the appraisal of the individual ('real') arguments, with stated premises and claimed consequences. So for him the question of the truth of premises comes to the front. Once it is decided that P is false, any 'real' (serious / purposeful) argument must be rejected. That is unobjectionable. But if it is decided that P is *true*, then the basis for critical appraisal is no longer hypothetical. And that is why Hamblin takes the view that alethic criteria are too weak, and why, too, epistemic criteria are too strong.

But aside from the question of criteria, there is a further line of objection to Hamblin's account that concerns the procedure he lays down for the appraisal. As I suggested earlier Hamblin is confusing the argument in use with the appraisal of the argument itself. The confusion is easy to make because an appraisal – if critical – is also an argument: a *critical* argument, or appraisal argument. But the distinction is important. The object of appraisal is a sequence of propositions comprising one or more premises and a conclusion. In an argument in use, the premises are asserted and a conclusion drawn by the speaker, typically (though not invariably) for the purpose of persuading an audience of the truth of some further proposition. This audience is the *target* audience. The target audience experiences and responds to the argument directly, by being persuaded or not. This audience belongs to the dialectical system within which Hamblin conceives of arguments; but

he does not distinguish between the target audience, on the one hand, and the critic (or critical audience) on the other. The critic is not (or not necessarily) in the target audience. The same person may be both a target and a critic of an argument, but, if so, will wear two quite different hats. It is perhaps clearer therefore to think of the 'audiences' as representing different perspectives rather than individual persons.

Now, if the argument is a sound one, and the target audience is rational, they will *experience* the accrual of knowledge (or strengthened belief) that follows from acquaintance with the premises. But they will have the *experience* only if they do not already know the conclusion. It is in that dialectical context that Hamblin's E5 (the requirement that the conclusion be in some doubt prior to the argument) is needed. To put it another way, because the argument operates *affectively* on the target audience, the *effect* is lost if the conclusion is already known. However, if the conclusion is known, something else may be experienced; for example appreciation of the quality of the reasoning. But in making a judgement of that sort, the audience has on its critical hat, for which antecedent knowledge of the truth or falsity of the conclusion is no impediment.

As already stated, the critical response to an argument is itself an argument (Finocchiaro 2005: 92ff), whose conclusion is a verdict on the soundness of the object-argument: P ; C. Whatever the object-argument's inner form of reasoning might be, the critical argument addresses two basic questions. The first is whether every member of the premise-set, P, is true; the second whether C follows clearly from P. If and only if both questions are answered in the affirmative, then the conclusion of the *critical* argument – its verdict – will be that the *object*-argument is sound:

    (12)   P

            $\underline{P \rightarrow C}$

            'P ; C' is sound

Of course, the critical argument, having a judgemental conclusion, is open to higher-level criticism: one critic may approve or disapprove of another's verdict, just as the first may approve or disapprove of the object-argument (initiating a process that in theory may be repeated ad infinitum). A first-level appraisal – which is as far as we need to take things here – is a sound appraisal if and only if the premises of the critical argument, (12), are correctly judged to be true (false). Given the form of (12) we can see that appraisal places a deductive overlay (namely *modus ponens*) on the object-argument.

This does not mean that the object-argument itself is deductive. Hamblin's desideratum that the method of argument appraisal should be applicable to arguments regardless of the 'nature of the passage' from P to C is not challenged here; it is shared. What is challenged is the claim that E-criteria are too strong as a basis for appraisal without E5. The perceived need for E5 results from a failure to recognise that there are two arguments in play: the object-argument which is sound only if the alethic criteria are met, and the critical argument which is sound only if they are *correctly* judged to have been met. This paves the way for an appraisal procedure without Hamblin's counter-intuitive E5.

There is one further and much simpler procedural point that Hamblin overlooks: one so obvious that it raises the suspicion that he omits it intentionally. His method of appraisal begins with assessment of the truth of the premises followed by assessment of the 'passage ... to the conclusion' (Hamblin 1970: 233). Effectively the critic says: 'I am satisfied that these premises are true; now do they imply the conclusion?' But why would Hamblin order the procedural tasks in a way which, on reflection, leads to the paradoxical problems discussed earlier? One way to summarise Hamblin's problem is that once the truth of the premises is known to satisfy E1, then the conclusion must be known to meet E2. But once the truth of the conclusion is known, the opportunity is lost to ask the hypothetical question needed to assess for validity, namely: '*If* the premises are true, could the conclusion be false?' The circularity with which Hamblin charges the application of E-criteria can broken by a simple, procedural rule:

P-RULE: Ask the hypothetical question first; the substantive question second.

Another way to explain the efficacy of this rule is simply to observe that asking the substantive question first *closes* the process prematurely: it blocks the remaining steps that are needed to complete the process. To remedy the problem, all that is needed is to establish the *possibility* of soundness – i.e. by assessing for validity – before addressing the question of actual soundness – i.e. by verifying the premises. Then we have a full warrant for the conclusion, without circularity in the process, and without the need for the counter-intuitive E5.

21.   Acceptability versus objectivity

Hamblin sketches out in the last part of his book a 'formal dialectic'. Dialectic, he says, 'is a more general study than Logic' (Hamblin 1970: 255–56). It starts out from 'the concept of a *dialectical system*... a regulated dialogue or family of dialogues' involving a number of participants, in the simplest case two. Drawing on the ideas explored towards the end of the previous section, we can see that these participants consist of the speaker (arguer) and the target audience. The interaction between these two participants (or categories of participant) is what constitutes a 'dialectical system'.

It is, in essence, a closed system, into which the critical appraiser may look but in which he does not necessarily participate; nor necessarily have the same involvement or interest, or even the same perceptions, as those 'on the inside'. In Hamblin's own words: 'We shall not be concerned to consider any contact with the empirical world outside the discussion-group' (ibid.). This makes sense of the applicability of the criterion of *acceptance* within the particular 'dialectical system'. It might be a special system: Hamblin cites parliamentary debate, or juridical examination and cross-examination, which have their own peculiar rules of engagement, definitions, protocols, etc. But it may also be a much larger cultural group; even the whole linguistic community. Brandom (1983: 640) inclines towards a view of this sort, though on a larger scale than the microcosmic dialectical

systems Hamblin seems to have in mind. Brandom contrasts two approaches to the question of what makes an inference appropriate or not. The first, which he dates back to Frege, Russell, and Carnap, holds that an inference is correct 'just in case the truth conditions of its conclusion are a subset of the truth conditions of its premises. On this line inferences are to be appraised in terms of their faithfulness to the objective reality that determines which sets of representations are correctly inferable from which others' (ibid.). But he continues:

> Another approach, which we may identify with Dewey and the later Wittgenstein, begins with inference conceived as a social practice, whose component performances must answer originally not to an objective reality but to communal norms. Here the appropriateness of an inference consists entirely in what the community whose inferential practices are in question is willing to approve, that is to treat or respond to as in accord with their practices (ibid.).

Macro or micro, the point is broadly the same: if the appraiser is within the group, he or she will tend to judge truth, and valid inference, by the norms that operate inside the system. If he or she is outside the system, looking in, then it will still be appropriate to relate any critical judgements to what passes for truth and validity in the context of the observed community – if the appraiser has that insight – because what counts as a *good* argument in that system is what people in that system will *accept*. As H.G. Wells' famous parable illustrated, in the country of the blind the one-eyed man is *not* king but an outsider, whose judgements are considered fallible on the inside.

The fact is, however, that the critical *appraiser* is not an outsider; nor is the appraiser of the appraiser, and so on. Each must make appraisals of others' arguments in the light of the norms of the linguistic community of which the particular dialectical system may be considered a representative slice. But that in turn does not alter the basic criteria which intuitively we take to define a good argument. It remains the case that a good argument is one which is deemed to have true premises and a conclusion that follows from the premises. As Brandom adds to the above:

> The authorizing of inferences, that is of further assertions, which is our first clue about assertion is to be understood as part of the social practical significance of an assertive performance. In the usual sense, one asserts that the circumstances expressed by a declarative sentence obtain (ibid.).

If, in the usual sense, one asserts that the circumstances expressed by a declarative sentence obtain, then it seems no less justified to say that in the usual sense one asserts that the relation expressed by a sound argument obtain. When an argument is put forward, the standard form of expression is a complex declarative sentence

(13)   P and therefore C,

which is true if and only if : (i) the circumstance expressed by 'P' obtain; (ii) necessarily, the circumstances expressed by 'C' obtain *if* the circumstances expressed by 'P' obtain.

Inferential practices are not any less grounded by 'what obtains' than assertive practices. People are still free to disagree about what it is for one circumstance to be the consequence of another, but surely no more so than to disagree about what it is for a circumstance to obtain in the first place. Lying and falsely asserting meet with disapproval because what is expressed in those instances is false, i.e. doesn't obtain. What is expressed is not (conversely) false because it meets with disapproval. If we think of an argument as a complex proposition, asserting it will meet with disapproval if either the premises are false, or the premises are true but the conclusion does not follow. We can say that these are just communal norms, but they are communal norms in virtue of our notion of what obtains.

Brandom states that assertion authorises inference. But if the inferential practice is not at least as well grounded as the initial assertion, the further assertion is not grounded, however well P is grounded. At the very least there must be confidence in the most basic instance of (13), namely

(14)   P and therefore P

If (14) is not universally approved as sound under conditions (i) and (ii), where is the warrant for (13)? And without the trivial (14) being valid, the fact that the circumstance represented by P obtained would not warrant an assertion that P.

Ultimately, the view that inferential practices are determined by communal norms, subject to approval or acceptance within a community or dialectical system (rather than 'objective reality'), cannot be refuted because we cannot step outside the community to which we belong to check out the reality. But if we widen the 'dialectical system' sufficiently to take in the whole linguistic community, then the norms that are accepted by all the rational participants *are* the objective reality (or indistinguishable by those participants from objective reality).

22. What *is* an argument?

Hamblin declines to say what an argument is. His contention is that the question could and/or should be approached indirectly via the question of what a good argument is, and this chapter has traced the route on which this took him. In principle it may seem a reasonable expectation that if we can define, for any F, what a good F is, and by contrast what a bad one is, we can infer from the criteria we apply what an F is, per se. For instance, a good knife is one that cuts well because it is sharp, and a blunt knife is one that cuts badly because it is blunt. But clearly this does not yield a definition of a knife. A razor cuts well but is not a knife and a fish-knife cuts badly but is a knife. What it is to be a knife has to do with its construction and its parts; a blade, a handle and so on; and also on knowledge of its purpose, which is standardly to cut, but in special cases it is to open letters, de-bone fish, etc. The standard definition of a knife is of such an object, designed for such a purpose. Then and only then can we judge whether or not the object is a good object of its kind on the basis of its fitness for the identified purpose.[66] We do not discover from its fitness for cutting alone that it is a knife.

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[66] There are of course *values* other than fitness for purpose. I am talking here about tools and utensils in particular. Arguments in use are tools.

To be just, Hamblin is not suggesting anything so crudely impracticable – but he can be accused of being somewhat disingenuous, since he helps himself to the standard definition of an argument, as a complex with certain parts, namely premises and a conclusion, whilst affecting to proceed without a definition. Hamblin's actual objective is to define the criteria by which it can be judged whether an argument succeeds or fails, and he settles, by a process of elimination, on the standard he describes as dialectical. (Incidentally, his own method of argument is an exemplary piece of dialectic, beginning with the purely deductive, alethic thesis, rejecting it for the epistemic antithesis, and finally proposing a synthesis in the form of acceptability.)

Having resolved the matter of criteria, Hamblin does not return to the question of what an argument is. But then, indirectly, he *has* answered it, not via inquiry into the criteria of appraisal, but by implicitly applying criteria one by one to the classical model of an argument. He does not, in this respect, explicitly give a dialectical *definition* of argument, as found for example in Walton (1990), Johnson (2000), van Eemeren & Grootendorst (2004), or Walton & Godden (2007). The more overtly dialectical approach adopted by these writers places less emphasis on the individual premise-conclusion object, and more on the *process* of argument or *argumentation*: an interchange leading to, ideally, the resolution of dispute. From this dialectical perspective, argument and arguments are what people do when they argue, and/or what they produce in the process respectively.

The identification of argument with dialectic gives rise to a potential confusion – an ambiguity even – between, on the one hand, the practice or process of arguing, and, on the other, the product of the practice. (See discussion below §§24–26). There are some who deny the process-product dichotomy, and/or posit a third meaning of argument, qua abstract object, not necessarily produced by acts of argument (Simard-Smith & Moldovan 2011; Hitchcock 2007; Goddu 2011).[67] Some

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[67] Simard-Smith and Moldovan deny the ambiguity and argue that the only meaning of argument is that of an abstract object.

such abstract sense of argument would be needed to explain the notion of 'the same argument': say, the same sequence of premises and conclusion. Unless it is denied that one and the same argument can be advanced by more than one individual, and/or in different contexts, the third meaning of argument as an abstract object needs to be accounted for, and acceptance by the participants in any 'dialectical system' can hardly be a satisfactory criterion of appraisal. Only if it can be shown, or is stipulated, that arguments are the token acts or output of individuals in particular contexts of dispute or persuasion, etc., is it plausible to base appraisal on the acceptability of the premises and inference received from the participants in the interchange in which the argument occurs.

The act/process and object/product senses that are given to 'argument' by different commentators and, in association with different theories of argument, are the source of much debate. In the coming sections my aim is to build the case for an account of argument which takes the *object* sense as the basis of the definition, and dialectic as a context within which arguments, as objects, may be advanced and challenged. Obviously arguing is rightly thought of as an activity or practice, and we call the activity 'argument', or 'argumentation', in a mass, generic sense. We also speak of certain acts as 'acts of argument': acts that consist of arguing in one guise or another. But I challenge the view that individual arguments are themselves primarily speech acts, and the related view that they are exclusively the *products* of acts of argument. Instead I take an argument to be the *object* of an act only insofar as it can be advanced or propounded or thought through, but not to the point of its being dependent for its identity upon being advanced, propounded, or thought through by an actual arguer. An argument may be advanced more than once, or never advanced at all. The propounding of an argument is an act, and involves certain contributory acts, notably reason-giving (or premising) and concluding, deducing, etc., which Searle (1965) and Hitchcock (2007) rightly classify as assertive acts. There are other acts too that may contribute to lengthier argumentations – questioning, challenging, supposing (for the sake of argument), etc. But the advancing or propounding of an argument – the act of arguing – is not itself an argument in the account I propose. Nor do I subscribe to the view that 'an

argument', 'the argument', 'X's argument', etc., are ambiguous between an act and an object sense. *Arguments* (and argument-parts) are the object of acts of *argument*: there is no ambiguity of reference between those two uses.

This position is by no means universally accepted, especially among argumentation theorists, pragma-dialecticians, and many proponents of informal logic. I proceed in the next short chapter to examine a sample of what may be called pragmatic definitions of argument.

CHAPTER FOUR: Pragmatic accounts

23.   Act or object?

Symptoms of the act-object ambiguity are much in evidence in the opening chapter of Vorobej (2006: 1):

> An argument is a social activity, the goal of which is interpersonal rational persuasion. More precisely, we'll say that an *argument* occurs when some person – the *author* of the argument – attempts to convince certain targeted individuals – the author's *audience* – to do or believe something by an appeal to reasons, or evidence. An argument is therefore an author's attempt at rational persuasion. Arguments admit of either oral or written expression, and the statement, or public presentation of an individual argument, is typically a fairly discrete communicative act, with fairly well-defined temporal or spatial boundaries. *Argumentation*, on the other hand, is the more amorphous social practice, governed by a multitude of standing norms, conventions, habits, and expectations, that arises from and surrounds the production, presentation, interpretation, criticism, clarification, and modification of individual arguments.

Here Vorobej refers to an argument almost exclusively as an act, and moreover as a public act. He could hardly be more emphatic on this point in the above extract, where an argument is presented as a form of social activity, an attempt at persuasion, a token of the wider practice of argumentation; and so on. It is a case of high redefinition. It excludes cases where argument is conducted in private – for example, arguing to oneself – without having as its defining goal any 'interpersonal rational persuasion'. 'Argument' in the mass-sense of the term, means all of these, uncontroversially. But in ascribing these descriptions to individual *arguments*, Vorobej is saying more than this. He emphasises this individuality further by saying that arguments are fairly discrete, and spatio-temporally defined. But in practically the same breath we find his individual arguments sliding into apparent object roles: objects of expression, production, presentation, criticism, and so on. Are we to take it that these individual arguments are still discrete spatio-temporal *acts*, and that it is acts therefore that are presented, produced, expressed, etc.? The familiar act-

object relation, and the distinction that goes with it, is strained by this account, leading to an intrusive ambiguity. Acts of presenting or producing have objects, namely what is presented, what is produced. An (act of) argument can be performed by presenting an argument; that is a natural way to think of the act being performed. But 'argument' cannot have the same meaning in both occurrences in the previous sentence. There is a similar equivocation when it comes to the last sentence of the Vorobej extract. This may seem a narrow, quasi-grammatical point, but the ambiguity lurking in many definitions of 'argument' (including the above), is not. It can result in a serious conflation of categories and consequent obscuring of meaning if it is not resolved.

Vorobej also casts arguments as objects of both interpretation and criticism, which indeed they are. It is in these roles that arguments are chiefly of interest in this thesis, and in which they are central to critical thinking. To be sure, an act can be interpreted and criticised. 'An attempt at rational persuasion', for example, may be criticised (appraised) by an audience as a success or a failure, or interpreted as a straw man or a clever use of analogy. In general, an act of attempted persuasion can be judged to be well expressed, sincere, devious, and so on. But it cannot coherently be appraised as valid or sound or true. These predicates apply to objects, in the sense of *that which* the author presents in his or her attempt to persuade. To do justice to Vorobej, he does acknowledge the distinction, although belatedly and somewhat half-heartedly:

> Being composed of propositions, arguments, too, therefore are, in part, abstract objects. More precisely, arguments occur when individuals *use* certain ordered pairs of abstract objects in a particular way while engaged in an exercise in rational persuasion. (Vorobej 2006: 9)

It is unclear what 'in part' is intended to mean here, although the impression it gives is that the object-sense of argument is subsidiary to that of the act-sense. But it may also, or instead, mean, that an argument is an abstract object only in virtue of its parts, the constituent propositions which, when used for argument purposes, form the objects of an act of argument.

Either way, the view I take is the reverse: that the primary sense of 'argument' is the object-sense, and the act of arguing is performed by presenting an argument: the object of the act. Vorobej says that arguments 'occur' when the arguer 'uses' an ordered set of sentences in a particular way. Is he saying that *in part* the argument is the proposition-set – i.e. the proposition-set is one *part* of the argument – and the other the act of arguing which defines it as an argument? Or is he saying that the ordered pair of objects, the proposition set, *is* an argument, ready, so to speak, for use for an argumentational purpose? If the latter, then the argument must be essentially independent of the act, and Vorobej must be saying that the object is an argument even when not expressed, presented, used, or interpreted. If it is the former, then there needs to be some explanation as to the extra ingredient that transforms the object into an argument. For whilst it is reasonable to suppose that we recognise arguments primarily by their use, or context, even to the extent that the concept of an argument may be comprehensible only in relation to its customary use, it does not follow that an object-pair used as an argument is different from the same object-pair not used as an argument – for example as a list of items of information. An obviously analogous question can be asked with regard to single propositions. For it could be argued that we understand the concept of a proposition only in relation to acts of asserting (something), or states of believing or knowing (something) – i.e. as the objects of so-called propositional attitudes. But it would be wrong to conclude from this fact about our powers of conceptualisation that a proposition *is* an assertion or belief. The same goes for an argument, the only difference being that in the case of 'argument' we have just the one English word to serve both needs.

Products of practice

In many contemporary accounts the act-object relation is construed – and the ambiguity allegedly resolved – by defining an argument as the *product* of the act (practice, process) of argument. Johnson (2000: 12) states unreservedly:

The term 'argument' can be used to refer either to the process or to the product of that process.

Similar views are expressed by Fogelin (1985), van Eemeren (2004), Freeman (2009), and, as we have seen, Vorobej. Most incline to the act or process as the primary sense we assign to an argument. There are others, however, who recognise the dual meaning of 'argument' as act and object respectively, but give primacy to neither. Goddu (2011: 87) takes this line.

> [R]estricting ourselves to talk of arguments as acts on the one hand and objects on the other in no way supports the intellectual or ontological priority of one aspect of argument over the other.

The view that an argument is the product of the act, practice, or process of argument has received much attention in recent times. I turn there next, with particular reference to Ralph Johnson's (2000) work: *Manifest Rationality: a Pragmatic Theory of Argument*. Most of the critical focus of the subsequent sections of this chapter is on Johnson's account of argument, partly because of the influence it has had in the field of informal logic, but mainly because of the forthright statement it gives of the position I oppose.

24. Johnson's pragmatic account

Johnson's pragmatic theory of argument (as he describes it) is famously summed up in the following short extract:

> An argument is a type of discourse or text – the distillate of the practice of argumentation – in which the arguer seeks to persuade the Other(s) of the truth of a thesis by producing the reasons that support it. In addition to this illative core, an argument possesses a dialectical tier in which the arguer discharges his dialectical obligations. (Johnson 2000: 168)

This is a strong and complex claim, and deserves the attention it has received, favourable and otherwise. There has been plenty of both. In the 2002 summer edition of *Argumentation* (16: 263–309), four respondents – Hansen, Tindale, Hitchcock, and Groarke lined up to challenge Johnson's account of argument from

various standpoints, all but one citing the above definition for special attention. Whilst I recognise many insightful and provocative ideas in Johnson's study, ultimately I, too, find its conclusions untenable.

The definition has two parts, one relating to the illative (reason-giving) core, the other to the additional tier in which the arguer responds to the Other. The role of the Other is essential in this. That is not to say that an argument cannot be conducted in soliloquy. The Other might on occasions be the agent, or some anonymous audience; and the dialectical obligations can be met by inwardly anticipating objections and counter-arguments, just as if they were challenges put by actual others. However, Johnson is emphatic that the pre-eminent function of argument is: 'persuading someone of the truth of something' (Johnson 2000: 149), so that if argument extends to self-persuasion, inquiry, consolidating beliefs, etc. these are derivative functions and it is only from persuading others that we learn how to persuade ourselves. 'In other words', Johnson says: 'the public precedes the private, as elsewhere in language' (ibid.). On this reckoning, it would follow that the natural forum for reason-giving (as argument) is dispute. If there is no resistance or challenge to a claim, there is no need to give reasons for it, hence no need for argument.

In Johnson's account the twin components of the argument – the illative core and the dialectical tier – do not represent two stages, a reason-giving stage followed by a dialectical one, along the lines of a speaker giving a talk and then taking questions. The whole argument is informed by its persuasive purpose. If the illative core were isolated, by having its dialectical tier removed, what would remain would not have the character of an argument, in the sense Johnson has in mind. What he terms 'the argument itself' is not the illative core, although the illative core is the component which houses what might be thought of as the arguer's basic case. The argument *itself* is shaped by the dialectic obligations, and without them it is in his view incomplete or unfinished.

Johnson (2000: 150) also insists that it is function that gives argument its form, and not vice versa.

> Given its purpose as rational persuasion, the structure of argument follows. That is, because I wish to persuade the Other by reason, I recognize that the claim I make must be supported by reasons or evidence of some sort. It is standard practice to refer to this material as the argument's premises. Hence, an argument initially appears as a premise-conclusion structure: A set of premises adduced in support of some other proposition that is the conclusion.
>
> […] But when we consider the full implications of the fact that the arguer's purpose is to persuade rationally, it becomes clear that there must be more to an argument than just this illative core. The practice of argumentation itself, as well as any instance of it, takes place against a background of controversy. To argue is, we all realize, to enter into a space shared by many others also interested in the same issue, many of whom take a different position. The illative core is meant to initiate the process of converting them, persuading them of the arguer's position. In this context, more will be required to achieve this than just the material in the illative core.

Adapting Johnson's own metaphor of a product,[68] we can think of the illative core as a kind of raw material that is fashioned into a full argument by the (typically opposing) forces at work in the practice of argument(ation). In that sense it is the product of the practice.

To test the definition, as I interpret it, consider the following scenario. (It is not Johnson's example, but I think it illustrates the definition fairly, if critically.) The Government, let's say, is making the case for a change in the extradition treaty it has with another country, and the Opposition is proposing an amendment to the Bill. The Opposition case is the one we are considering, but to meet Johnson's conditions, it must be examined in the context of the debate, the dialectical context. Suppose, for simplicity, that the main plank of the Opposition case for an

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[68] Not his alone: it is a commonplace term to use for the object side of the supposed ambiguity of 'argument'.

amendment is that under the Bill the extradition arrangements would be one-sided, making it easier for the other party to the treaty to extradite residents from the UK than for the UK to obtain extraditions in return. The dialectical tier, in this case, is plain. To be appreciated fully the Opposition argument must be seen as a *response*, not merely a stand-alone, premise-inference sequence – or what Johnson refers to as the 'P+I model' (ibid.). It must rebut the Proposition; but it must also, according to Johnson, anticipate objections to its own case. One very obvious 'dialectical obligation' would be to represent the proposal accurately; not to distort or exaggerate its recommendations, or minimise obvious benefits. So, for example, the Opposition cannot claim that the treaty would be one-sided in virtue of some clause that is not in the *proposed* treaty; or that the Opposition represents in an inaccurate way that makes it seem more one-sided than if fairly represented. This would be a failing on the Opposition's part to meet a dialectical obligation, a failure known as *ignoratio elenchi*. If in addition it made the Government's argument an easier target for refutation, it would deserve censure as a straw man.

25. The argument itself, and the core

Johnson (2000: 134) refers to the whole or finished argument as: 'the argument itself, best represented as the product (or the distillate) of the process'. This is to distinguish the product from the act, the argumentation. But it also distinguishes the argument as a whole from its illative core. This core is not, in Johnson's account, the argument *itself*. This, I suggest, runs counter to the more familiar idea of a 'core' as something *within* a larger whole; its centre or main ingredients(s) with extraneous elements peeled away; and of 'the argument itself' as having that sense of encapsulation. For example, in referring to a novel I might have in mind the whole complex of events and characters, setting, plot, preface, illustrations (if any), etc.; or I might just mean the bare story-line, in which case I would emphasise this by calling it 'the story itself' to distinguish it from the full literary (or even physical) *product*. Johnson appears to be taking the former line, analogous to someone's saying: 'No, you can't isolate the story from its setting like that. The novel *itself* is a mix of all these factors; the interplay between them, the background. If you

subtract these you have a different novel – maybe *no* novel.' In this analogous case of course we have the benefit of separate words by which to identify the whole product and the core elements respectively. The '*story* itself' and 'the *novel* itself' pick out quite different objects, whereas 'the argument *itself*' carries the burden of multiple connotations, one of which, according to Johnson, is the whole with all its dialectical accoutrements; the other by contrast, the inner core. This latter sense of 'argument itself' is commonplace in the literature of informal logic and critical thinking, where texts are analysed and reconstructed to reveal the underlying structure of the argument. From this conception Johnson's definition is something of a departure. Interestingly there is an outdated use of 'argument' to mean the bare plot of a chapter or story.[69] This may seem inconsequential in fixing a definition; but it is at least consistent with the natural way in which we conceive of the argument *in* a text; amenable to extraction from the larger, more elaborate context.

None of this, of course, prohibits Johnson (2000: 168) from defining these terms as he does, i.e. stipulatively: 'As I said at the outset, I am clear that (my) definition is stipulative; it is my recommendation about how we should understand and define the term.' His defence of the recommendation is that, whilst it does not purport to identify the sole or correct meaning of 'argument', it does locate the mid-range on a spectrum of applications; or in Johnson's own more colourful terms: 'a kind of penumbra – a centre with wings' (ibid.). Drawing on his imagery, I take this to mean that Johnson's conception of argument takes centre stage; with other meanings of 'argument' lying to either side. Johnson identifies some of the other applications of the term which might be found on the spectrum: proofs, scientific theories, advertisements, and (curiously) jokes.

Proto-arguments

Johnson also consigns to the wings what he calls 'proto-arguments', by which he means arguments that lack a dialectical tier and/or that have not been produced

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[69] In Spanish, *argumento* is still used to refer to the plot of a literary work.

through any practice of argument(ation), or used for rational persuasion. These bare entities would include for example classical syllogisms; or, as Johnson (2000: 170) puts it, 'specimens that are presented as paradigms of argument in the traditional view'. Johnson refers to these as 'ground-floor' arguments; unfinished; 'incomplete products'; 'works in progress' (ibid.). He also identifies them with the 'reasoning consisting of the illative core alone' (ibid.).

Without some clarification, this notion of proto-argument is unsatisfactory. For one thing it is a confusion of at least two different ideas. One is the idea that in a complete or fully developed argument there is some kind of base unit of reasoning, an initial move, on or from which the dialectical practice proceeds. In that respect it is almost a temporal distinction. We can imagine someone stating his or her case – a claim and some reason(s) to commend it – and then going on to defend it against objections or anticipated challenges. But there is a potential problem with this, in that the core argument that is initially stated may be wholly persuasive on some occasions; and the only response that it meets with is acceptance of the conclusion on the grounds given. Under those circumstances the dialectical obligations would have been met as soon as the reasons(s) for the claim were first given: in other words by the illative core. Moreover, in such a case, the distinction between the illative core and the argument *itself* collapses, since they are one and the same.

There is a second, possibly milder problem, in that the initial move in an argument may not be an argument of any description. It may be a question, an answer to a question, or a plain assertion. If the assertion, or the answer to the question, is challenged, what ensues may be developed into argument, in the fullest sense, but without any initiating illative move. One way to deal with this is by simply allowing that the illative core can occur later in the exchange: say, at the first point at which one of the participants supplies a reason for a claim. On the face of it there is no obvious objection to this: a core does not have to be at the beginning of a sequence of objects. (Typically it is not; 'core' has the connotation of a centre more than a beginning.) But if a proto-argument can play the part of a response in a larger argument that is already underway, then arguably it belongs to the dialectical tier

not the initiating move. Between these two objections we see the possibility of an illative core with no dialectical tier; and a dialectical tier that has no illative core. There is a blurring of the distinction between core and tier, and therefore between proto-argument and argument as the product of argumentation.

This blurring is not fatal because Johnson can, and as we have seen does, fall back on the idea of a spectrum, in which 'argument' can have other meanings besides the central meaning he assigns it. The counter-examples may be dismissed as rarities, with the paradigm case being the one where the proto-argument is just the launch-pad for the larger argument, and incomplete without the dialectical superstructure.

> What my position comes down to then is that the central case of 'argument' is the entire structure composed of the illative core and the dialectical tier that has emerged in my investigation. I propose that this will be understood as the paradigm case of argument, the sense of the term over which policy is made, particularly policies regarding argument evaluation and criticism. ... [W]e can simply understand that a piece of reasoning containing only what I have called the illative core is an argument in a derivative sense; it does not occupy the central part of the spectrum. (Johnson, 2000: 170)

It is right that Johnson should regard his definition as stipulative, rather than standard. What he is stipulating is not so much which conception of argument should occupy the central range of the spectrum, but which spectrum, if any, we should be considering in the first place. By the same token, he is failing to address the scale of the ambiguity that surrounds 'argument'. Hitchcock (2002: 288–89) puts it more bluntly by charging Johnson's account, as it stands, with circularity. There is some justice in this. If an argument, as well as argumentation, is understood as essentially dialectical, then it is almost trivially correct to require a dialectical tier for any argument in the central, defining part of the spectrum. It likewise follows that argument will be predominantly a product of practice. 'To avoid objectionable circularity', Hitchcock (2002:289) observes, 'we need to remove the reference to the practice of argumentation'. But this effectively knocks

the stuffing out of Johnson's definition, opening the door to other cases and occurrences of argument. Hitchcock continues (ibid.): 'Removing from the definition of argument any reference to the practice of argumentation, in order to avoid circularity in the definition of the practice, has the consequence that arguments occur in other contexts than argumentation.'

Another way to state this objection, less severe than the charge of circularity, is that Johnson is selective with regard to the area of interest in which argument is investigated. Stipulating the area of interest has the effect of determining the 'spectrum' on which different cases of argument are considered. If, by contrast, a spectrum were selected by a deductivist, we could expect to see deductive arguments at the centre, with types such as probabilistic reasoning, argument from analogy, and inference to the best explanation relegated to the 'wings'. The criteria for identifying and classifying arguments may be heavily coloured by the views one has on the criteria for appraisal, just in the way that interpretations of individual arguments may be coloured by the same theoretical or methodological presuppositions. There is a telling hint of bias of this sort in the short quotation given above in which Johnson (2000: 170) associates 'the paradigm case of argument' with 'the sense of the term *over which policy is made*, particularly policies regarding argument evaluation and criticism'. It is pertinent, if *ad hominem*, to remind ourselves that Johnson's discipline is informal logic; his object of inquiry natural-language reasoning; his theory of appraisal anti-deductivist. The aspirations of informal logic determine the policy that in turn determine the sense given to 'argument' within that discipline. It is part of the policy of informal logic to exclude, or set to one side, artificial constructions such as those logicians use to define deductive validity, on the grounds that they are not naturally occurring, and/or have no practical purpose, such as Johnson's 'persuading Other(s) of the truth of a thesis'. The paradigm examples of argument used for traditional logic – which Johnson calls 'proto-arguments' – are very different from the 'paradigm case' to which Johnson refers in his definition as the argument *itself*. The objects logicians study are not manifestations or distillates of any practice (or if they are, this it is irrelevant to their evaluation). They are instances of valid and invalid forms. The

subject matter of informal logic is more varied, and more representative of what people do *with* argument in everyday contexts. In particular the arguments in the corpus investigated by informal logic are not all, or even predominantly, deductive in character – at least on the surface. It follows that most arguments in the corpus are not valid, and must be evaluated under different criteria from those studied by formal logicians or – for a deductivist – reconstructed in a deductive form. The 'policies' for setting these criteria will inevitably dispose informal logicians to conceive of argument in a certain way, and so tend to make stipulative claims about what argument really is, or at least how it should best be perceived. It is inevitable because in order to analyse and evaluate an argument it is necessary to be clear about what it is one is evaluating. Johnson's definition may reveal as much about the discipline of informal logic as it does about the notion of argument *itself*, understood in an everyday sense. It will be recalled that Goddu (2007), in a sceptical analysis of the notion of 'real' argument, makes a similar observation. (See the Introduction above.)

What is the 'distillate'?

There is an obvious distinction between the text of an argument – a speech in a debate, say – and *the* argument which underlies it. So understood, *the* argument (or argument itself) is something found *in*, extractable *from*, whatever form of presentation the argument has: the text. Furthermore, this need not be anything actually used, or expressed. It could mean – and in many contexts does mean – a line of reasoning that is common to multiple acts of argument, or modes of expression, or practices; or to none. The purpose of formalising a natural-language argument is precisely to penetrate below the surface language to reveal the reasoning *in* the text. It is that reasoning (in the object-sense) which is either valid or invalid, sound or unsound, etc.

That, as we have seen, is not Johnson's concept of 'the argument itself'. It might be thought that what he means by 'the distillate of the practice' is what Fisher (1988b; 2001) means by the reasoning extracted from a putative argument-text – but that

would be a misreading of Johnson. An argument, Johnson (2000: 168) says, is *itself* 'a type of discourse or text', and it is that which he also designates as 'the distillate of the practice of argumentation'. But surely this is a conflation. Consider the fragment of dialogue from *Lord of the Flies*, quoted at the head of Chapter 2, where Jack is angrily challenging Ralph's authority:

> (1)   'And you shut up! Who are you anyway? Sitting there
>
>   telling people what to do.'
>
>   'I'm chief. I was chosen.'
>
>   'Why should that make any difference? Just giving orders
>
>   that don't make any sense...'

The context is a dispute. But within the dispute there are rudimentary lines of reasoning, including:

> (2)   I'm chief. I was chosen.

This, it may be said, is Ralph's actual argument in response to Jack. But it is an argument within a wider argument whose implicit conclusion is that Ralph has the right to give orders. In that respect (2) might be said to meet the requirements of an argument under Johnson's definition. First, it seeks to persuade another by producing a reason for the truth of a thesis. The thesis is that Ralph is chief, the reason that he was chosen.[70] The 'Other' is Jack; the agent is Ralph.[71] Second, there is a clear illative core, which with minimal change to the text, can be standardly represented with the usual kind of covering assumption:

> (3) I was chosen and therefore I am chief; therefore I can give orders.[72]

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[70] An incidental point is that (2) could be construed as an explanation; or as an argument *and* an explanation. It is another symptom of the defeasibilty of interpretation of texts as arguments.

[71] Johnson (2000: 10) actually refers to both parties in such an exchange as 'agents', presumably because they both partake in the production of arguments through their respective involvement in the argumentation: 'the matrix I propose is composed of three elements: (a) the product – argument, (b) the process – arguing, and (c) the agents – the arguer and the other'.

[72] In this case the covering assumption might be: 'Whoever is chosen is chief' *vel sim*.

Third – and essentially for Johnson's account – Ralph can be seen to have discharged his dialectical obligations, by responding in a rational manner to Jack's challenge to his (Ralph's) authority. Fourth, there is a process or practice of argumentation, represented by (1), and the wider dialogue of which it is part. Of this, according to Johnson's definition, (2) is evidently the product, the text, and the 'distillate'. But in this case (2) is also the illative core, or at least Ralph's actual expression of the illative core. It is more apt, therefore, to identify the illative core with (3), since it is only under a charitable interpretation such as (3) that (2) is anything more than a pair of unrelated sentences. Fifth and last, we have the dialectical tier, which is supplied by the relation of the core to that part of the dialogue to which the core is a response, namely Jack's challenge. This effectively *gives* (2) its 'dialectical tier'.

The question to which I therefore return concerns Johnson's notion of the argument itself, which in his account is not (2) (or (3), but (to repeat) 'the entire structure composed of the illative core and the dialectical tier' (Johnson, 2000: 170). For, according to Johnson's definition, the argument is incomplete or 'unfinished' without the dialectical tier. To capture the whole argument it would thus be necessary to show that the claim, 'I'm chief', is not merely a conclusion from a single premise, but a response to the rhetorical question: 'Who are you anyway?' Ralph's whole argument might then be interpreted along the lines of

(4)   Who I am, since you ask, is chief and I am chief because I was chosen, and because I am chief I am entitled to tell people what to do.

This would discharge Ralph's dialectical obligations and thus include the requisite dialectical tier. But (4) is not the 'argument itself' since, again according to Johnson, an argument is a 'text or discourse'[73] and there is no such text or discourse as (4) that is produced by either of the parties in the dispute. An alternative

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[73] It is not altogether clear how Johnson intends 'text' and 'discourse' to be understood; but it is plain that they must at least relate to the same content, with the text, say, being the manifestation of the discourse. Accordingly I take Johnson's 'text' to mean either the discourse, or the *text of* the discourse.

interpretation of the definition would be that (4) is a text of the 'distillate' of Ralph's side of the argument within the dialectic. I suspect that this is close to what Johnson had in mind as the distillate but, if so, it then seems be an unnecessarily overblown account of what is really a very simple point – namely that we recognise (2) as an argument because of the dialectical context in which we find it. (2) is not the illative core so much as a subordinate or contributory argument in a larger, complex argument of the order of (4) within the wider context of the dispute (and the wider context still of the narrative). Nor is (2) necessarily the *product* of a process of argumentation represented by (1). (2), construed as (3), is an argument. The justification for construing (2) as (3) is found in the context, but then (3) is also an argument – feasibly a valid argument – in its own right. The context does not *produce* the argument; the context shows that on this occasion a pair of sentences is being *used* as an argument. The term 'argument *itself*' then has the more usual connotation of what can be extracted from the text and evaluated on its own account without further reference to the context – for example whether being chief does follow from being chosen (as chief). If 'chief' in that context is an elective office, then it does follow. There may be other relevant judgements to be made about the *use* of the argument in the particular context of (1), such as whether it 'wins' the dispute for Ralph, or meets Jack's challenge effectively. Both are relevant inquiries to make in a critical appraisal of a 'real' argument text, but the question of whether or not the core – (2), construed as (3) – stands up to scrutiny is a relevant question in its own right. In the view I take it is the baseline question, and precedes the others in the critical evaluation of an argument.

26. Critique of Johnson's account

One objection that might be levelled against Johnson's definition is that he uses ordinary terms, not only stipulatively, but also eccentrically. 'Distillate' is another word for 'extract'. Both words have the natural sense of the argument *itself*, as opposed to the *text* itself – something at the level of a complex proposition. There is apparently no place in Johnson's theory of argument for an entity of that sort. Hitchcock (2007: 118) levels the following criticism at Johnson's account:

Johnson's definition differs from the definition proposed in my chapter in at least two additional respects. It restricts arguments to actual discourses or texts rather than considering them as abstract objects that may be unexpressed. And it requires that their authors have as their purpose to persuade an intended recipient to accept a thesis on the basis of the reasons supplied, whereas the definition proposed in the present chapter leaves undetermined the purpose for which someone might express an argument.

This is a fair criticism. Johnson does restrict argument in the way Hitchcock claims. That is not to say that Johnson's pragmatic theory and concept of argument taken together are inconsistent. It is more a case of his definition's being a creature of his theory, and leaving unexplained other conceptions of argument that cannot and should not be overlooked. In particular Johnson claims that proto-arguments – which as we have seen correspond closely to the illative core of a fully-fledged argument – are *derivatives* of what he calls arguments. It is not altogether clear what 'derivative' means in this use, but I assume it is similar to the way in which a précis or abstract is a derivative of the longer and more expansive document. Johnson actually uses the words 'incomplete' and 'unfinished' of arguments which lack a dialectical tier.[74] If that is the right analogy, however, it reveals a difficulty for the concept of proto-argument. A précis is not the whole of the text of which it is the précis; but it is a whole précis; and, if it is a good précis, it is an expression of the import of the text. Unless, as part of its definition, a proto-argument is a poor, somehow deficient, reflection of what is at the core of the argument – 'incomplete' in that sense – there is no good reason why the précis of an argument, should not be as much an expression of an argument, as is the text of which it is the précis. We would not say that the main clause or central claim of a complex declarative sentence was not a sentence. Consider the sentence:

> (5)   We had a meeting and by a show of hands I was chosen to be the chief with authority to give orders

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[74] Johnson (2000: 170): 'I am suggesting that they be viewed as incomplete products, as works in progress...'

If we strip aside the subordinate elements we do not have an unfinished *sentence*. The core claim,

(6)   I was chosen

is a fully formed sentence. It may be derived from (5) in the sense of being a digest of it. But it may just as well be said that (5) is an elaboration of (6). Both are complete sentences, and their message is essentially the same message, the statement of historical event. This is not grounds for labelling (6) a 'proto-sentence' in relation to the finished product. It is hard to avoid the suspicion that the notion of a proto-argument itself is a 'derivative' of Johnson's theory: an argument *must* have a dialectical tier because arguments are products of argumentation. This is another way perhaps to put Hitchcock's charge of circularity. If alternatively – and in my view more intuitively – we start with the notion of a basic argument form, with dialectical embellishments to meet the needs and reflect the context of particular (actual or notional) disputes, then the core or proto-argument would have a different role in the theory, without being a different object. What Hitchcock refers to as abstract objects may be just the same entities that Johnson (2000: 144) calls 'proto-' or 'core' or 'ground-floor' arguments, the difference being that they are arrived at from different directions. In Johnson's account the proto-argument represents an incomplete sketch or outline of a more elaborate (or complete) product. Under that description the proto-argument is necessarily tied to that particular product, and the practice whose product it is. But from a different perspective – starting with the core – we can think of the same argument as an object there to be expressed, employed, presented, elaborated upon, etc., in one way or another, or in none. In that sense the proto-form may be conceived of as something on or around which a more complex, dialectically responsive 'product' may be constructed – the product then being the *text* itself as opposed to what it expresses.

What are we to say of (4)? Is there not a sense in which (4), or what it represents, is a product of the practice, given that (4) is a reconstruction of the whole dialectically contextualised argument? But if (4) is the product of any practice it is the practice

of interpretation. It is what the interpreter (in this case myself) *makes of* the argument. It would be correct to call (4) a 'distillate', but that is not how Johnson uses the term. His distillate is the product of the arguer's (or arguers') making.

Recall the earlier example in §25. The argument was that:

(7)   the proposed treaty is one-sided and therefore it should be amended.

According to the scenario this would qualify as a proto-argument under Johnson's definition, unfinished until it is supplemented by the demands of the interchange. In Johnson's definition 'the argument itself' is therefore something of a synthesis of acts and objects. It is a one-voice argument in that it is one speaker's contribution, but it is distilled from the practice of engaging with others, and is therefore incomplete without what it inherits from and gives to the dialectic. This point is made by Hansen (2002: 269):

> So although Johnson insists that an argument is a product, he sees that arguments eventuate from a process, and his concept of argument inherits both elements of a product and elements of a process. It is not too far-fetched, I think, to hypothesize that Johnson has forged a new concept of 'argument' out of two distinct traditional senses of 'argument.'

I am rather less impressed than Hansen by this synthesis. The core, too, would be an element of the whole – if anything were. But for Johnson it cannot qualify as the whole argument, or the product of the practice. For, by Johnson's lights, it is stripped of the requisite relation to the Other. Johnson's enlarged notion of 'argument itself' as a synthesis of act and object, plus dialectical commitments, conflicts with what most people would naturally take the term to mean: either the underlying reasoning identifiable *within* a text or discourse which can be extracted and evaluated, or that which an author puts forward in the text , but which could be put forward in a different manner or by a different author, or by none. In that light the distinction is not so much between complete and incomplete argument as between the expression of the argument and the argument expressed.

27. Object or product?

It can be seen from the foregoing that there are two quite different perspectives on the object-sense of an argument, yielding correspondingly different conceptions. Chapter 1 began with the standard, logician's definition of an argument as a suitably ordered set of propositions or sentences. It was seen that as an object of assessment for validity this minimal condition is sufficient. That is because the question of whether the last object in a sequence is consequent upon the others can be asked and answered without any reference to its source, purpose, or context. Any finite set of declarative sentences can thus be designated a simple argument by imposing the following order on it:

(8) $\quad < \{s_1, s_2, \ldots, s_n\}, \{s_{n+1}\} >$

or by assigning roles to the constituents. This can be entirely arbitrary, but that flies in the face of the intuitive idea that arguments are the objects of certain acts – things that human agents propound or construct for a purpose. Indeed, the basic form of argument represented by (8) is derived or abstracted from the more ordinary notion we have of arguments in use, in which the audience can recognise an actual or 'real' conclusion, and actual or 'real' reasons. At the same time we do not conceive of a conclusion merely as the last item in a list, nor do we conceive of a reason merely as any item that precedes it in the list. We conceive of these as objects *drawn* (as conclusions) or *given* (as reasons), respectively. In sum we recognise arguments as expressions of these acts, and not just as ordered lists of sentences. Nonetheless, what we recognise *in* the text as the argument *itself* is an object consisting of a set of propositions expressed by a sequence of sentences. What the critical enquirer does, in order to interpret the text as an argument, is to list and label the constituents in some conventional manner that facilitates objective assessment. Hence, the object that we *designate* as an a argument for critical inspection is the same sort of object whether its parts are designated arbitrarily, or on the basis of interpretation of the text of a so-called 'real' argument.

It is only in the latter case, however, that it is pertinent to talk of an argument as the object of an act – of argument (or argumentation) that is, as opposed to evaluation. The nature of the relation between the act and the object is central to this thesis. On the one hand the act of argument is just an act of presentation or advancement, with the argument qua object being simply *that which* is presented. Under that relationship the argument itself is independent of the act or at least detachable from it conceptually – insofar as the same argument can be presented once, more than once, or not at all, and it may be evaluated in the same way whichever of these circumstances might be the case. What Johnson and others want to say is that the act is one of *production* – a practice or process from which (to use Hansen's word) arguments 'eventuate'. The difference could not be more pronounced. In particular, the ground-floor[75] notion of an argument as a set of propositions is rendered incoherent if arguments are defined as products of particular acts, a point that Goddu (2011) takes up in his criticism of Johnson's concept of argument, and of the process-product dichotomy with respect to argument.

Process and product

Goddu (2011: 76–77) observes that the practice-product ambiguity found in many words depends upon: (a) there being a sense of the word whereby the word refers to an activity; (b) a sense whereby it refers to 'an object or thing'; and (c) that: 'the object or thing is in some sense the result or outcome of the activity'. Whilst he readily accepts that there are words that exhibit this ambiguity,[76] he questions, rightly in my view, whether it holds for 'argument'. He adds that

> without the distorting lens of these labels we [would be] in a much better position to provide accurate answers to some of the fundamental questions of argumentation

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[75] I use the term 'ground-floor' as Johnson does to mean the core, only not with the negative overtones that the term has for Johnson.

[76] Taking an example from Max Black (1946: 177), Goddu (2011: 76) compares 'science' with 'argument' and concludes that they are different with respect to the ambiguity claim. I am not convinced that Black is claiming full-blooded ambiguity. Black talks rather of a 'shift of emphasis'.

theory—what exactly are arguments-as-objects and how exactly are they related to acts of arguing. (Goddu 2011: 86).

I agree with Goddu's claim that, in the context of argument, the labels 'process' and 'product' have a distorting effect on the way in which we conceive of arguments as objects. Still, I would suggest that Goddu himself invites a confusion between, on the one hand, act-object *ambiguity*, and on the other the process-product *relation*. The former is established if the word in question meets conditions (a) and (b) alone and, as Goddu rightly observes, 'argument' fulfils those conditions. But that does not establish that the right terms for the relata are 'process' and 'product', without invoking the relation identified by (c). But if in the act-sense 'argument' is a process (practice, activity), and in the object-sense its resultant product, the so-called ambiguity really resolves into a distinction between the two grammatical forms of the noun. The process from which an argument results (in Johnson's account) is not itself *an* argument: it is *argument* (or argumentation[77]), the practice of arguing. Compare the word 'building', which can likewise be seen to have both a process and product meaning. The process of building, that produces *a* building, is not normally referred to as 'a building'.[78] Likewise, the relata involved in an act of argument are not two meanings of the same expression, but the respective meanings of two semantically distinguishable expressions; but that is not a lexical ambiguity.

Having said that I am not seeking to contest Goddu's central thesis. On the contrary, the above comments are more in the spirit of a point of clarification. I concur with Goddu in the separation he sees between acts of arguing and objects we call *arguments*. Of course, it cannot be denied that the *practice* of argument brings to the attention of others reasons to persuade them of the truth of this or

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[77] Van Eemeren & Grootendorst (2004) blur even this useful distinction by referring routinely to particular episodes of discourse as 'argumentations', or with an indefinite article in the singular.

[78] People might occasionally say something like: 'That's a building I wouldn't want to live through again', meaning a particular bad experience, or a difficult process; but it would strain standard use. It is a different sense of 'building' from that in, e.g. 'The building of the pyramids took a long time', because 'the building' there refers to the generic process that 'the building of the pyramids' and 'the building of the Shard', etc. have in common. It is the countable act-sense which is non-standard. The building of the pyramids is an act.

that proposition, the rightness of this or that position, the desirability of this or that course of action; and so on. But what are claimed as reasons, and what are drawn as conclusions, are not *produced* by giving them as reasons or drawing them as conclusions. People do, it is true, talk of producing reasons for some conclusion; similarly we talk of producing evidence. But in neither of these cases does 'produce' have the meaning of create or manufacture, which is how it is understood in Johnson's definition. Indeed, if evidence were 'produced' in that sense it would not be evidence in the legitimate sense. To produce reasons or evidence in the legitimate sense is to *come up* with them, to present or provide them. If the *fact* that it is dark is given as a reason not to go out, the *fact* that it is dark has not been 'produced' by the speaker, it has been used.

Against arguments as products

Goddu proceeds by asking, rhetorically, what sorts of things might emerge as products, under the product-of-the-process hypothesis. He starts with propositions:

> Suppose you hold that arguments-as-objects are sets of propositions. Should you accept that these sets of propositions are the product of acts of arguing? No. Propositions are abstract objects, either eternal or atemporal, and not the subject of production. Hence, whatever is the product of acts of arguing, if there is such a product, it is not the set of propositions that is an argument. (Goddu 2011: 78)[79]

There is little that would tempt anyone to suggest that a *mere* set of propositions is an argument. For a start, to be an argument, the set must be an ordered set, or more accurately an ordered *pair* of sets (as in (8) above). So, if the set is to be thought of as the product of any act, the act would merely be a grouping or pairing or ordering of the set under some principle. But Goddu is not saying that any set of propositions is an argument; he is saying that it does not take an act of argumentation to create the set of propositions, ordered or otherwise. And that is surely right. Propositions, as he says, are abstract objects, the meanings of

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[79] See also Simard-Smith & Moldovan (2011).

sentences. When Sam says, 'The tide is out', as a reason for claiming that the island is reachable, he produces the utterance, but he does not produce (or create) the *meaning* of the sentence. The sentence has that meaning, and he uses it with that meaning, to give the reason, namely *that the tide is out*.

But, to pursue Goddu's question, does the notion of arguments as products fare any better if we bypass talk of propositions, and consider arguments directly at the level of language, i.e. does the arguer produce the sentences which express the premises and conclusion, and hence the text of the argument? The pair of sentences,

(9)   The tide is out. We can get to the island.

can be uttered as an argument and, if sufficient context is known, recognised and understood as an argument by the audience or critic. (For example, (9) could be interpreted as an argument if it were part of an overheard conversation between some people interested in going to an island.) Can Sam be said to have produced *anything*? In one undeniable sense he has done so – insofar as he has ordered and uttered the sentences which serve to propound an argument on this occasion. In that sense (9) is his text. The particular token utterance, relating to that particular location and addressed to that particular Other, is Sam's doing, and is a product of the conversation only in that restricted sense. The token utterance gives expression to a token argument, then, to that extent it is a product of the practice.

However, even this concession to Johnson is problematic. The objection is not that this product-sense cannot be given, but that it is not by any means the only sense we give to 'argument'. This was the basis of Hitchcock's complaint: that Johnson failed to take account of other, and perhaps more central, conceptions of an argument. For one thing, his definition does not make any accommodation for the notion of an argument as an object of appraisal.

As mentioned previously a text like (9), which has no distinctive form other than that of a pair of sentences, is not an argument at all, as it stands. (9) can be

interpreted as an argument if the interpreter or critic has enough information about the context to warrant that construal. Even without access to the context it might reasonably be supposed that the best explanation for these two sentences being uttered in succession is to argue *from* the first *to* the second.

(10)   The tide is out and *therefore* the island can be reached.

(10) is *an* argument, insofar as it is a standardly expressed argument. But that does not mean that it is necessarily *Sam's* argument nor that it, (10), is the product of whatever Sam was up to when he uttered it. Let's suppose (9) was a response to someone's saying that the island was out of reach. In that context it might just as well be said that (9) was a counter-assertion or point of fact. In that context Sam might just have said:

(9')   The tide is out,

and his words could still be construed as an argument, with the counter-assertion that the island *can* be reached left unsaid. To construe (9) – or (9') – as (10) is to construe it *as* an argument. To construe (9) as (10) is also to construe it as a pair of sentences the second of which is implicitly *claimed to follow* from the other, and as such an object that is open to critical appraisal of a particular sort – valid if the relation of following from obtains, and sound if the first sentence is also true.

Supposing that the critic's interpretation on this occasion is correct, it might be thought that since (10) has the linguistic form of an argument standardly expressed in English it is somehow *closer* to the underlying argument than (9) and/or (9'), which have no overt argument form. But this is not right. (10) either is or is not a correct interpretation of (9), and that is all. It is a correct interpretation if what Sam is doing when he utters the two sentences is asserting the first as a warrant for the second, and it is a misinterpretation otherwise. What it is right to say is that the text of (10) is *literally* an argument, standardly expressed, whilst (9) is *literally* just a pair of sentences. The key point, to repeat, is that (10), or any other interpretation, even if it is a correct interpretation, is not the argument *itself*. I stress this because

it is very easy to conflate interpreting a text with extracting an argument.[80] The interpreter is simply setting down what he or she understands the author to be saying or thinking. But the interpretation is not itself the extracted argument, it is just another expression of the text. Even if the text of an argument is already in a standard form, and needs no reconstruction, we still interpret it by recognising it as an argument. In such a case we take it, as it were, at face value.[81]

The confidence we have in our methods of standardising or formalising informal texts naturally gives the impression of getting 'closer' by revealing the form more plainly. We have to have that confidence if we are to pursue appraisal of natural-language argument critically and methodically. But no one pursuing that goal should be under the illusion that his or her interpretation of the text is identical with the argument per se. The argument is an abstraction. If the interpretation is good, both it and the original text express the argument, just one more standardly or formally than the other.

A general objection

This last point, with echoes of Goddu's claim that arguments are abstract objects distinct from processes or their products, invites a general objection. If arguments are abstract in that sense, *how* do we grasp them? Surely our ability to grasp an argument is both dependent upon, and fully explained by, our capacity to understand certain sentences in a language. If the latter is so, then there is no need to invoke propositions as well. This would be a valid objection if it were contended that we do grasp the abstract object rather than (or even as well as) understanding the sentences. The import of the previous few paragraphs has been that we do not get any closer to grasping the abstract object than is afforded by our understanding of the text or utterance, and our endeavour to set out more plainly the argument its author is understood to be propounding. The closeness of the interpretation to the original text is dependent on context and charitable assumptions, not on any

[80] To 'extract' here has the sense Fisher (1980; 2001) gives it, of identifying an argument in a natural-language context.
[81] Even a formal argument needs interpretation relative to context.

claim to grasp the underlying argument itself, the shared meaning that exists if the interpretation is good. That account does not *invoke* the abstract object: the abstractness emerges unbidden, as it were, from the talk of recognising the argument in a text, and what it is that is understood in the text as an argument. If the argument were identical with the text, there would be no interpretation needed.

Johnson, as we have seen, gives no account of an argument in this abstract sense. In line with Goddu and Hitchcock, I find this both a restriction on the intuitive notion of an argument as object, and a misrepresentation of the nature of the act-object relation. Above all, Johnson is wrong to relegate what he calls the illative core to the position of an unfinished prototype. The illative core, I contend, is the argument, and the dialectical obligations are merely a feature of the context by which the core is recognisable as an argument. On that view, as suggested earlier, Johnson's characterisation of arguments as products of practice can be put down to an elaborate way of saying that a text is the expression of an argument only in relation to its context of utterance, a context which is typically, though not invariably, dialectic. Certainly it is in the nature of arguments to occur in dialectical contexts. But many arguments have no dialectical context, unless we include *implicit* dialectical or disputational contexts (Hitchcock 2007: 103). For example, it was seen that so long as there was some context which made sense of giving (9′) as reason for claiming that the island could be reached, that would make it plausible to interpret (9) as an argument. It is not necessary for anyone to have disputed the conclusion for this condition to be met. What might be said is that the very act of giving reasons in support of some claim or assertion, is to tacitly acknowledge the possibility of opposition, and since all arguments consist of reason-giving, all arguments have at least an implicit dialectical overtone. In more Johnsonian terms, *we* might say that all arguments are marked by the obligation to give reasons in response to actual or envisaged contrary positions, questions, or doubt. But since it is in the so-called illative core that the reasons for the conclusion are found, this point would hardly be welcome to Johnson.

28.   Interim statement

In the preceding sections I have examined the object-sense of argument from two distinct perspectives. The first is the critic's, from which the argument emerges as an object of evaluation. From that perspective the object is just an ordered pair of sets of sentences concerning which it can be asked whether the second is consequent upon the first . The second perspective is that of the (actual or notional) proponent, from which the argument is the object of an *act* – in short the act of *propounding* the argument. Propounding an argument is an essentially *assertive* act, and typically public.[82]

Assertions have *objects*: those things which are asserted. In the case of propounding an argument the object is naturally more complex than the object of a plain assertion, though the act-object *relation* is the same in both cases. However, the act of propounding an argument can be partitioned into: 1) an act of asserting premises and, 2) the act of drawing a conclusion. (See §6 above.) These contributory acts of argument also have objects: 1) what is asserted as a premise and, 2) what is drawn as a conclusion. That is not to say that in the act of drawing a conclusion, the object is identical with what is asserted. Drawing a conclusion, to be sure, is an assertive act. But if (after asserting the premises) all that were asserted in the act of concluding were the conclusion, an argument would be no more than a conjunction of propositions.[83] In Chapter 6, I return to the question of *what* is asserted in propounding an argument.

As for the *acts* of argument, it is plain that they are assertive. Before any conclusions can be drawn in this thesis about the act-object relation as it pertains to argument, an account in needed of the same relation vis-à-vis assertion. That is the topic of Chapter 5. It is necessarily something of a digression from the central topic, argument, but its relevance will emerge in Chapter 6.

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[82] Even if we argue silently to ourselves, by laying out reasons and then concluding something from them, we perform an (albeit inner) act of assertion.

[83] More precisely, it would be a sequence of one or more propositions, and one other.

CHAPTER FIVE: Assertion

The study of grammar, in my opinion, is capable of throwing far more light on philosophical questions than is commonly supposed by philosophers. Although a grammatical distinction cannot be uncritically assumed to correspond to a genuine philosophical difference, yet the one is *primâ facie* evidence of the other, and may often be most usefully employed as a source of discovery. ... [I]n what follows, grammar, though not our master, will yet be taken as our guide.

 *The excellence of grammar as a guide is proportional to the paucity of inflexions, i.e. to the degree of analysis effected by the language considered.

Bertrand Russell (1903: 42 and *footnote)

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29.   Preliminary remarks

Asserting, like arguing, is an act, something people do, usually but not necessarily with words. *An* assertion – an instance of asserting – is also an act. As Davidson (2001: 110) unremarkably observes: 'An assertion is an utterance, and it is the speaker who *makes* the assertion'. Expressed in this way, the assertion may be considered the object of an act of someone's making. But we must tread carefully with this form of words, commonplace though it is. The reference to an assertion as an *object* of someone's making should not disguise the fact that making an assertion means performing an act. The expression has the same kind of sense as 'make a move', which means simply to *move*, or to move something, e.g. a piece on a chessboard. Wittgenstein famously exploited the analogy by referring to linguistic acts as moves in the language game.[84] An assertion is such a move, but it just means the asserting of something. Notwithstanding the nominalised form, 'an assertion', 'this assertion', 'Sam's assertion', etc. refer to acts.

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[84] E.g. Wittgenstein (1953: §49).

This is not to deny that acts are objects. The very fact that we may refer to acts of assertion by means of noun phrases accords them object status, even when the purpose of referring to them is to distinguish their referents from objects of the more familiar sort such as tables, chairs, or trees. Whilst it would be wrong to say that acts are not *really* objects simply in virtue of being the referents of nominal terms, this alone can, in some cases, seem a tenuous qualification for object status. Wright (1983: 26) observes that 'English abounds with noun-phrase constructions. Surely we cannot give them all ontological significance. It seems incredible that beyond rivers, people, buildings and plants, etc. the world also contains such things as sakes, behalves, whereabouts, …'.   An example Wright considers is: 'I did it for John's sake'.[85] But Wright is deliberately singling out 'stylistic nuances' which, he says, 'it is madness to credit with any substantial philosophical significance' (ibid.). Assertions are not among these. A speech act may be at the fringes of what we intuitively think of as an object, but it is clearly not as obviously outlandish as a sake or a behalf.[86] It might still be objected that we cannot say all the same things about assertions and statements that we say about those objects that Austin (1962: 8) facetiously called 'moderately sized specimens of dry goods', or 'the things which the ordinary man says he "perceives"'. However, the fact is that we can and do talk about many things that fall short of our intuitive notion of objects in *just* the way that we talk about those we consider to be entirely ordinary. But clearly we can refer to acts, quantify over them, assign properties to them and, as already noted, cite them as objects of generic acts such as making (doing, performing, committing). It is also arguable that acts are perceptible, without distorting what 'the ordinary man' means when he says he perceives 'ordinary' objects. I can witness an act being performed, record when and where I saw it happen, qualify it adjectivally, e.g. as violent, or mistimed, and so on. Acts of assertion, no less than acts of violence (or kindness or stupidity), meet these criteria. If I hear a speaker uttering a sentence with a force which I recognise as assertive, it is not 'madness'

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[85] Hale (1987: 22) makes a similar point backed by some of the same examples.

[86] A 'sake' or 'behalf' might be held to be *beyond* the fringe because so little can be said about it or done with it, or because a phrase like 'for John's sake' is a semantic unit that one should not try to break down into components, each with its own proprietary reference to an object.

to say that I have heard his or her assertion, or witnessed the act. In short, classing an assertion as an act is no obvious bar to its being an object. The one does not exclude the other. Nor is there any ambiguity in this. To be sure, 'assertion' is ambiguous, but this is not where the ambiguity resides. An assertion is an object in the above sense *in virtue* of being an act, not as *opposed* to being an act.

The well known act-object ambiguity of 'assertion' comes from its use to mean what is asserted when an assertion is made. It rests not only on two senses of 'assertion' but also two senses of 'object', one being the sense in which acts of assertion *have* objects. In the case of an act of assertion, the object is just what is asserted, without which an assertion cannot be made. In this respect the verb 'assert' is strictly transitive. Whereas we can say, for example, that X smiled, or X swam, we don't ordinarily say, 'X *asserted*' without a grammatical object, revealing the thought that there must be something asserted even if not specified. Yet we also use and make sense of the expression: 'X made an assertion', where the reported act does not specify any asserted object. There is no difficulty, in other words, in understanding the *concept* of an act of asserting in detachment from what is asserted. The verb 'assert' has *some* meaning without a grammatical object, yet an act of argument cannot be *made* without asserting something.

What is asserted (in an assertion)?

What is asserted, it is said, is an intentional object, and the act an intentional act. This does not mean that the act in question is always or necessarily performed with intent, although it may have that property, too. In the case of asserting it is a fair assumption that assertions are made intentionally even if the intention is to deceive. A person might assert something with the intent to warn the public, or to embarrass an opponent, or simply to express a view or judgement – or, of course, to perpetrate a lie. There may be occasions when an assertion is made unintentionally, but if there are it will have no serious impact on what follows

here.[87] 'Intentional' in the present context has the sense of the directedness that certain acts and mental states – thoughts, beliefs, wishes, etc. – have at or towards some object. (See, for example, Searle 1983; 2001.) Sam's (presumed) state of belief when he asserts that the tide is out 'has an object', so to speak, to which his mind is turned, his thought directed. The question is *what*? If we take that to be just what he believes, then the proposition, *that* the tide is out (at or around the island), would be the natural answer.

Searle for one, however, would correct this use of 'object' on the grounds that the proposition that the tide is out (at *t,l*) is the *content* of the belief, not its object. For Searle this preference arises from his objection to the notion of propositional attitudes, which imply an attitude *towards* the proposition. Searle argues (2001: 36) that 'If I believe that Clinton is president my attitude is toward Clinton, not toward the proposition. The proposition is the *content* of my belief, not the object.' In other words, Searle is locating the object of the belief or thought in the actual person of Clinton: not, that is, in *what* the agent believes, but in what (in this case who) his belief is *about*. This leaves us with the question of what the belief itself is: in other words, what is believed by the agent about Clinton. For, in general, if a person is thinking of some object, he must – typically if not invariably – be thinking something *about* the object. (Prior 1971: 131.) That something is what is thought (believed) with respect to whatever or whoever the thought (belief) is about. For Searle (1983: 18) the latter is the intentional object, and is an 'ordinary' object as opposed to, say, a proposition or a property. If we ask what is believed *about* Clinton, the answer that most readily comes to mind is

(1)   that he is president.

(1) looks like a reference to the proposition that Searle calls the *content* of the thought (belief), the only difference being the anaphoric subject, 'he'. However, this difference is crucial, since it relates what is thought to the actual subject – the

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[87] One sense in which I might 'unintentionally assert' something is when I say something that is reasonably *taken* as an assertion. I have been careless, perhaps, in allowing my utterance to appear assertive.

ordinary *object* – Clinton. (1), as a reference to what is thought, really corresponds to 'is president', for this is what is thought (said, believed) of Clinton. If we think of the question in terms of the parsing of the sentence,

(2)   John thinks (believes) that Clinton is president,

we do not find an *object* corresponding to what John is said to be thinking about Clinton or anyone else. We have only the phrase, 'is president', which is not the name of any ordinary object. We are pushed towards what Prior (1971: 132) calls 'the old game of nominalising':

> a 'that' is introduced in a position where it is tempting to see it as forming the name of an abstract object. *What* does Othello think of Desdemona? *That* she is unfaithful. Often, indeed, these 'that' clauses are interchangeable, or almost interchangeable, with other more familiar quasi-names of *abstracta*.

What Prior means in the last sentence are expressions like 'musicalness', an example he takes from Cook Wilson, which can allegedly be substituted for a reference to the predicate in a sentence like: 'Jones is musical'.[88] There is not much difference, Prior says, between 'musicalness' and 'that he is musical' as predicated of Jones. But he takes issue with Cook Wilson for identifying a clause such as: '*that* he is musical', when said of Jones, with: 'that Jones is musical.' Prior's opposing view is that 'to say *of* Jones that *he* is musical is to say (*tout court*) that *Jones* is musical; or to use the other forms: to *ascribe* musicalness to Jones is to *assert* Jones's musicalness' (Prior 1971: 133). (This last point, which hints at the *directness* of the relation between asserting and what is asserted will be of significance in following sections.)

Abstractness is not eliminated by the collapsing of the complex relation between sayer (thinker), object, and predication, to a single that-clause. Prior goes on to say that 'the suggestion of an abstract *designatum* is here, as always, a trick, whether it is done by '–ness' suffixes or '–that' prefixes' (ibid.). However, he does not consider

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[88] The example Cook Wilson (1926: 114-117) uses is 'Jones is a good artist'.

these 'everyday-speech devices' misleading; nor does he consider them altogether dispensable. 'Their use', he says, 'need not involve us, any more than the use of 'abstracts' need involve us, in any "Platonizing", i.e. seriously intended nominalising of verbs and similar forms' (ibid.). For the record I would agree that there is no need to read any serious ontological significance into the nominalising of verbs; also that abstract designata are probably indispensable – certainly convenient. As I said in §7, it is not any part of the aim of this thesis to argue for or against the existence of propositions, or of abstract objects generally. That is a big but different issue. My interest in what Prior is saying above concerns the relation of object to act in assertion, which has obvious parallels with objects of thought. What comes out clearly from the above part of Prior's analysis is that the act-object relation is direct: the object is just what is asserted, however designated.

A note: 'object' and 'content'

Applied to Searle's analysis of the belief that Clinton is president, the identification of the object of the belief with the referent of a that-clause would appear to take the ground out from Searle's distinction – the distinction, that is, between Clinton (object), and the whole proposition (as content). If the proposition is what is believed, then what is believed, as a unit, is both object and content. Searle argues that in the case of belief the right designation is 'content', with 'object' reserved for entities around which the content is framed. In respect of a formulation such as

(3)   S's belief that Obama is president

I might choose to conceive of S's belief as a complex object 'containing', as it were, the proposition that Obama is president. That would have some meaning in a sentence of the form: 'S *asserted* his belief that Obama was president', wherein what is asserted is understood *as* the content of S's belief. One can refer to it that way. But one can also say that S asserted *what* he believed, namely *that* Obama was president. What S asserted and what he believed are the same thing in simple object terms, but *qua* content of S's belief and *qua* object that S asserted, they differ perceptibly in sense.

I shall examine the idea of beliefs as objects of assertion in §36, but for present purposes I merely raise it merely to question whether there is any useful distinction to be made between the designation 'object' and 'content' in relation to acts of assertion, states of belief, and the like. To keep the answer short, I doubt that there is. Whilst the two terms may offer different ways of apprehending the act-object relata, ultimately they refer to the same things. Following the example of many I shall treat them as interchangeable, but with a preference for 'object' in the light of the present thesis.

30. Objects of assertion

> Any time a speech act is successfully performed at least three things are involved: A person, an act of uttering a sentence with a certain illocutionary force, and a proposition. The proposition is said to be the *object* of the speech act. (Ulrich 1976: 116)

Recalling Davidson's not dissimilar statement that an assertion is an utterance, and it is a speaker (author) who makes it, we find two objects related to the same act: what is uttered and what is asserted. In the first case the object would certainly qualify as 'ordinary', something audible, readable, repeatable, changeable, and so on. Utterance, accordingly, is an ordinary act performed by speaking or writing or, in the most basic sense, making a noise. In any event, utterances must have objects: something must be uttered, even if it is only a howl. My concern here, however, is restricted to meaningful utterances and, furthermore, to utterances whose objects are sentences (or expressions that go proxy for sentences). In the standard case, an assertion is performed by uttering a sentence with assertive force.

It hardly needs saying that the object of the assertion is not the same as the object of the utterance. I don't assert a sentence, except insofar as I utter a sentence assertively. The respective objects are different, even though the act of assertion is

an act of utterance.[89] One difference, just mentioned, is that a sentence is an ordinary object, and exists in the most ordinary sense. Indeed, if a sentence is uttered it must exist in the most ordinary sense. For if it doesn't exist it cannot be uttered. The object of a thought or a belief, and likewise of an assertion, need not exist in the ordinary sense. That, as most philosophers seem to agree, is a mark of intentional objects. It is also a mark of what most people would tend to conclude naturally if they reflected on the things mental states can have as objects. We can think of things that don't exist, even things that couldn't possibly exist; just as we can think or assert things that are not true. The same does not go for acts generally. Anscombe (1965: 6) makes the point nicely by observing that

> I can think of a man without thinking of a man of any particular height; I cannot hit a man without hitting a man of any particular height, because there is no such thing as a man of no particular height.

Analogously I can think of a sentence without thinking of something with, say, particular words in it. For instance, I could be thinking of the first sentence of tomorrow's *Guardian* newspaper, which has not yet been written. I could be trying to think of (searching in my mind for) a sentence with which to start a speech. But I cannot utter a sentence without uttering something with actual words in it. This is not surprising: uttering is a physical act.

What of assertion? There are ways to say that I can assert things that don't ordinarily exist, like a state of the tide that does not obtain at the time of my asserting that it does.[90] If uttered assertively at such a time, 'The tide is out', purports to be a fact, when the fact *that* the tide is out does not exist. *That* the tide is out, we say, is not true. Hence the object of my act of assertion is a falsehood. There is no need here to argue as to whether this (or any) falsehood *exists*, or in

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[89] Prior (1971: 14) comments that 'while we do speak of 'uttering' sentences we don't generally speak of 'saying' them....(I)n telling someone what somebody said (e.g. that he said that grass is green) we do not *ipso facto* tell him what sentence he uttered but only tell him something which perhaps entails that he uttered *a* sentence.'

[90] That is, I can assert that the tide is in a state that it is not in; or I can assert *something* that is not a fact.

what sense if any it has being. We can say with some confidence that it is not a 'thing', as in physical object. With the same sort of confidence I am able to say that it is not a fact. We can use 'object' in many contexts in which 'thing' would be inappropriate. Something can be the object of my attention, for instance, but hardly a *thing* of my attention (Crane 2001). If it is allowed that intentional objects need not exist, the distinction between asserting and uttering becomes plain. I cannot utter a non-existent sentence; I can assert a non-existent fact, i.e. a false proposition. To that extent Ulrich's identification of a proposition as the object of an assertion stands its ground.

As Anscombe's 'man of no particular height' shows, an object of thought can also be indeterminate. Adapting this to the current example, someone might be thinking, not *that* the tide is in, or that it is out, or that it is somewhere in between, but simply wondering which state it is in. In that situation it could be said that the object of the person's thought is *the height of the tide*. The height or state of the tide is neither true nor false: it is high or low; in or out. Likewise with asserting, stating, or believing. If I state that the tide is out, I am stating the height of the tide. The height of the tide is no particular height, but it is *something* that can be asserted, and it is asserted by assertively uttering the sentence: 'The tide is out'.

It might be inferred from this, though wrongly, that there must be two kinds of intentional object: those that exist and those that do not, translating in the case of propositions to those that are true by corresponding to facts, and those that do not correspond to any fact. On that account the object of Sam's assertion would be one thing – a fact – if the tide was out at the time of utterance, and something else – a falsehood – if it was not out. But that cannot be any part of the identity of what Sam asserted, which is quite clearly the same object whether it happens to be true or false. The truth or falsity of the assertion is *ex post facto*: the object of the assertion is just the state Sam says the tide is in, and it answers that description whether the tide was out or not. A fact, in this respect, is like an object in the ordinary sense. 'Object' in the intentional sense is not an ordinary object. Here I

concur with Crane (2001: 342-43) in 'denying ... that there is or can be any substantial conception of intentional objects'. Indeed, he continues:

> There is no necessary condition which something must meet in order to be an intentional object, in the sense of there being something substantial that all intentional objects in themselves have in common. There can be no substantial conception of intentional objects, since there is nothing entities have to be, in general and in themselves, in order to be intentional objects. Intentional objects, considered as such, have no nature.

What Crane does not deny is that intentional objects nonetheless have a capacity to be shared or repeated. What one person believes or asserts, another person can believe or assert too. More generally,

> two people's thoughts can have the same intentional object, when they are thinking about (looking for, desiring, contemplating etc.) the same thing. To say that something is an object for me does not imply that it cannot be an object for you. (ibid.)

This feature of the object-hood will assume importance shortly. For now, and throughout, the concern of the thesis is with the nature of the relation more than the nature of the object. The important point is that two different acts or states can stand in the same relation to the one object. I can *dispute*, for example, what you *believe*.

'A grammatical feature'[91]

If intentional objects are neither ordinary objects, nor private mental entities, then some other account of what they are, and how they relate to intentional acts or states, is needed. One approach to this apparent dilemma appears in Anscombe (1965). First of all she takes the primary use of 'object' to be that which is found in contexts such as 'object of desire', 'object of worship', and so on. She claims, interestingly, that this use of 'object' predates its use for individual things, such as

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[91] The phrase is the subtitle of Anscombe (1965): 'The Intentionality of Sensation: a Grammatical Feature'. The page numbers that follow refer to Anscombe (1981), in which the paper is reprinted.

the contents of people's pockets. Second she draws on the grammar teacher's traditional notions of direct and indirect objects. In the sentence 'John sent Mary a book', the direct object is 'a book'. To teach the grammatical point, the teacher asks: 'What did John send Mary?' On receiving the answer, 'the book', the teachers says: '*That's* the direct object'. Of course, the lesson is flawed. John did not send Mary a linguistic object, a *phrase*, nor did he send her what the phrase represents, which is no particular book. If John sent a book, then there must have been a book that he sent. But whichever book it was, the phrase 'a book' does not give it.

Anscombe asks: 'does any phrase that gives the direct object of an intentional verb in a sentence necessarily give an intentional object?' Her answer is 'No' (Anscombe 1981: 9). But that does not take away the insight that the question gives into the relation between act and object, whether intentional or otherwise. It is that, rather than any substantive answer, that is its value, at least for present purposes. The insight is revealed by the following 'argument' (for which Anscombe gives acknowledgement to Gilbert Harman). It proceeds by amending the original question to: 'What does the sentence say John sent Mary?' or 'What is John said to have sent Mary?', thus adopting the standpoint of reported speech. The answer now still fails to equate the direct object with what John sent, which is neither a phrase nor what the phrase stands for. But, as Anscombe (1981: 8) says, the phrase is an answer to the question. In her own words:

> Given a sentence in which a verb takes an object, one procedure for replying to the question: "What is the object in this sentence?" is to recite the object phrase. If putting the object phrase in quotes implies that the object - i.e. what John is said to have sent Mary, ... is a piece of language, that is wrong; if its not being in quotes implies that something referred to by the object phrase is the object, that is wrong too. To avoid the latter suggestion one might insist on putting in quotes; to avoid the former one might want to leave them out. One is inclined to invent a special sort of quotes; but the question is how the phrase within such new quotes would function - and if we understand that, we don't need a new sign. So ends the argument.

Reporting acts

I shall draw on the insight provided by Anscombe's 'argument', to introduce a notion of object that I shall refer to as 'paragrammatic'. An object is paragrammatic if its relation to the act whose object it is lines up with the relation of the direct object to the verb in a sentence used to report the act: for example,

(4)   Sam asserted that the tide was out.

(5)   Sal broke the window.

The common feature I am claiming for both acts is that they relate to their objects *directly*. What Sal broke was the window; what Sam asserted was the low state of the tide. Both the objects may be referred to, not just in specific terms, but indeterminately as well:

(4')   Sam asserted something.

(5')   Sal broke something.

Anything Sal might have broken could be substituted for the object in (5'). This could include physical objects, like windows and plates, but also abstract objects such as silence, promises, or (sporting) records. In each case something is done to the object, or has some effect on it.[92] The nature of the effect is variable. The window or plate, of course, is changed permanently. The record that was broken – e.g. a *distance* someone jumped to break the record – is itself unchanged; but the breaking of it makes it an old (past) record. These are different and perhaps dubious senses of 'change'. In the case of the assertion, it is arguable whether the object undergoes any change at all, other than some form of Cambridge change. (See §5 above.) Before something is asserted it is not the object of that assertion; after, it is. But it is the same proposition. The same would apply to the sentence used to make the assertion: uttering it does not change its shape or structure or add words to it. Does it change it by giving it meaning? I think that is very hard to

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[92] An obvious objection to this use of terms like 'acting upon', with respect to abstracta, is addressed in the next section.

answer. On the one hand it is the same sentence before and after being uttered; on the other, it has undergone some change insofar as has been contextualised by the utterance.

The point of the comparison, however, is not to suggest that, in all acts corresponding to transitive verbs, the act has the same sort of effect on the object. On the contrary the relationship can be marked by very different effects, varying both in kind and in degree, down it would seem to zero. What we learn from the grammar of sentences that report acts is that where there is an appreciable effect it is mirrored by the relation of the verb to the direct object. That grammatical relation, however, is found in all sentences with transitive verbs that report acts. In (4) what is said to be asserted by Sam is *that* the tide is out. The whole *that*-clause is the direct object; the whole proposition is the intentional object. It is true, there are other ways to parse (4), which are not so apparent with (5). In Prior's discussion of objects of thought, and in Searle's analysis of beliefs, alternatives were considered, one being that the object is something *about* which an assertion is made. On that score (4) might be understood as

(6)   Sam asserted, of the tide, that it was out,

(7)   Sam attributed outness to the tide,

and so on. But since neither seems to better (4), least of all for simplicity, there seems little to be gained by deconstructing the object in this way. Nor does either (6) or (7) achieve what Searle requires of an intentional object, i.e. that it be something ordinary or in the world. The tide is a familiar concept, but not an ordinary object, certainly not a physical one. Thinking about the tide is not like thinking about Clinton. Probably the closest 'ordinary' object of thought connected with a tide is a sea, which has varying tidal states. Must we then say that the sentence reporting Sam's act says, of the *sea*, that it is at low tide? Arguably this is a reasonable interpretation of (4). But it is not a report of *what* Sam said (as in what he uttered). To go back to the beginning, an assertion is the utterance of a *sentence* and, as Anscombe would seem to be suggesting, we get our best shot at

apprehending the object of the act by reciting the phrase which is the direct object of the sentence reporting the act. It is this directness of the corresponding (i.e. *para*grammatic) relation that I take forward.

31.   The paragrammatic object

The direct object of (4), which reports the act, is a that-clause. The (paragrammatic) object of the act is the referent of a that-clause, the meaning of the sentence uttered in order to make the assertion. As such it is an abstract object, the asserted proposition, unlike the broken window, which is a physical object of a physical act. Nonetheless, in the sense in which I am using 'paragrammatic' the two objects stand in the same relation as one another to the respective acts: the window is broken by Sal; that the tide is out is, as a whole, is asserted by Sam.

This invites an obvious objection which needs to be addressed. It is that an abstract object cannot literally have anything done to it – nor, arguably, have anything directed at it – since it has no spatio-temporal location. Nor, it is argued, can an abstract object undergo change as a result of an act being performed in respect of it, because only concrete entities can enter into the kind of causal relationships which effect change. It would follow that asserting something cannot be an action *upon* that which is asserted, if that which is asserted is an abstract entity – unless, perhaps, 'upon' is being used metaphorically. Taken a step further, this would be an objection to there being objects of assertion in addition to acts of asserting. If we do not already subscribe to the view that there are propositions, then we have no grounds to give any ontological weight to the 'something' in (4') or the corresponding named object in (4). It would not be enough to fall back on the idea that no actual assertion can be performed without *something* being asserted. According to the objection, 'Something is asserted' would simply be a notational variant of: 'There is an *assertion*'. If that is right then quantification over things asserted, as against assertions themselves, drops out.

Whilst I agree that asserting does not change or 'act upon' the paragrammatic object in any but the thinnest sense, not all 'doing to' is unquestionably causal. If I assert a proposition, or think of a number, that is a case of my doing something to something else: the proposition or number. Something comes to be true of what I think or speak about that wasn't true before, without the thing itself being any different for it. But even if we discount this kind of attenuated notion of interaction, it surely does not follow that there is nothing more to be counted in connection with an act of assertion than the assertion. Indeed, the very denial that asserting can effect any change on what is asserted, on account of its being abstract, seems to make as much space for an *object* as would a claim that asserting *can* cause change to it. For the 'something' to survive an action unchanged it would have to be the same something whether asserted or not, as indeed I am claiming. Moreover, if there is nothing answering to the description of 'object of assertion', it could not intelligibly be said that two or more people might make the same assertion – not, that is, unless 'assertion' has another meaning besides the simple act-sense of *asserting*. In the act-sense, 'X's assertion' refers to something done by X at a particular point in time. As such, the assertion cannot be duplicated by Y. If 'the same assertion' were taken to mean the same act, it would not mean the *very* same act, for part of the identity of the act would be its agent. At most it would mean the same sort of act. When we say that X and Y made the *same* assertion, we generally mean that X and Y asserted the same thing. So, if

(8)   There is an assertion

 really exhausts the meaning of

(9)   Something is asserted

then the occurrence of 'assertion' in (8) does not have the simple sense of an act. It has either the sense of object-other-than-act, or a hybrid sense or composite sense: an act of asserting *something*. In other words, to say that (8) and (9) are no more than notational variants of one another, is effectively to concede that 'assertion' is ambiguous. That, however, is hardly a revelation. As many philosophers and

linguists would agree, 'assertion' swings quite freely between an act-sense and an object-sense.[93] Bernard Williams puts it as follows:

> 'Assertion', like 'belief', has an act/object ambiguity: it may refer to what someone
> asserts (the content of the assertion), or to his asserting that content. (Williams
> 2002: 67)

What I am calling the paragrammatic object could be said to correspond to the object sense of 'assertion': what someone asserts. However, it is an unsatisfactory way to make the distinction. For one thing, it would suggest that we could talk with clarity about asserting an assertion. Searle (1968: 422) discusses just such a formulation, with regard to statements (see §34 below). The fact that we feel some reservation about talking of assertions of assertions is because the word does not have these two sharply distinct meanings. Because our language has the facility to refer to acts as objects, we see an act-object ambiguity in many words for acts when what we are really seeing is an ambiguity in the word 'object'. The point of introducing the notion of the paragrammatic object is in part to resolve the ambiguity by revealing that this is its source. I return to the ambiguity in some detail in §33. First, however we need to examine the other common linguistic form by which we apprehend assertions, namely reference.

32.   Referring to assertions

It was noted earlier that, in addition to reporting acts, we can locate nominalised expressions for acts in the position of grammatical objects. For example, we can say:

(10)   Sam made *an assertion*.

But (10) means no more than that *Sam asserted* (something). Thus, whilst the noun phrase 'an assertion' completes the sentence syntactically, there is no particular object to which it refers: no individual act, nor anything specifically asserted. Using a Fregean distinction, we can say that in the context of (10) the phrase 'an

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[93] As well as Williams, see Searle (1968); Haack (1976); Alston (1996).

assertion' at most *indicates* an object. An expression that merely indicates an object can fill an argument place without necessarily saturating the function whose argument it is. McLeod (unpublished: 17):

> For Frege, a sign which only indicates an object confers generality upon any semantically complete sentence in which it occurs. When, in a semantically complete sentence, a first-level concept word has its argument place filled by a sign that only indicates an object, the first-level concept is doing the saturation, rather than being saturated.

'An assertion' is a concept name, but because what is nominalised by it is a strictly transitive verb – viz. 'asserted (...)' – it necessarily stands in need of completion by a term for what is asserted. From the necessity for such completion, I have argued that there is a paragrammatic object corresponding to what is asserted, typically, though not exclusively, the referent of a *that*-clause.

When we refer to a particular assertion, we are still referring to an act, but to an act that by its nature incorporates an object, for example,

(11)   Sam's act of asserting that the tide was out.

But this is equivalent to

(12)   Sam's assertion that the tide was out,

which, as well as being an act of Sam's making, may also be a subject of predication, the subject of a sentence such as:

(13)   Sam's assertion was a mistake.

From the above, we can see that the nominalised form, 'assertion', has both a simple and complex meaning. The complexity is in turn the source of the ambiguity. We can refer to an assertion under either meaning. In the simple, detached sense the term is an abstraction: it is just what an assertion of x, an assertion that p, an assertion that q, an assertion by S, an assertion made yesterday, etc. all have in common. Under the object sense – at least according to Williams – it is whatever is

asserted. But being an object in that sense entails being asserted, giving a third meaning of the order of 'asserted object': a synthesis of act and object.

Synthesis

Under this complex meaning, an assertion is an individual act (with a spatio-temporal location) *composed* of the act and the asserted object, such as the state of some tide. An object such as the state of a tide is not an assertion, although that would appear to be contested by Williams and others, if the statement above is taken in a strong or literal sense. A state of the tide is, however, what is asserted when some speaker asserts it; and so it is an element in a complex relational object of the form:

(14)   S's assertion of *w*

where S is the agent, *assertion* an intentional act, and '*w*' *what* is asserted, namely the paragrammatic object.[94] The nominalised form of (14) permits assertions to be spoken of as objects (or subjects) of comment or criticism as in (13) or, for example in: 'Sarah was persuaded by *Sam's assertion* to cross to the island'. I can make reference as well to Sam's assertion with or without specifying what Sam asserted as in (13). If someone were to ask which assertion I meant, I could say: 'His assertion that the tide was out', which may or may not individuate it, for that would depend on whether Sam had asserted the same thing more than once on different occasions. That is one answer. But alternatively I could say: 'The assertion that Sam made standing right here at midday today', which would individuate the act without the object's being specified.

But nominalisation has another effect, too, as we have seen. It merges the act with its (grammatical) object, into a singular but complex denotation, meaning the act

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[94] A more standard form of referring is: 'S's assertion that *p*',. but that presupposes that all asserted objects are referents of that-clauses. It would preclude for example the asserting of a right. (14) covers both. If it so happens that the object of an assertion is a proposition that *p,* then (14 is just 'S's assertion of (the proposition) that-*p*'.

and its object combined: a complex *object* (of reference). The point could be shown symbolically as a synthesis of act and object– for example:

(14')   *w*-assertion

Analysis

By contrast, a sentence like (4) gives us the basis for analysis by *reporting* the act. The verb form 'assert', from which 'assertion' derives, represents a detachment of the act from the object. Consider the way sentence structure is analysed by branching tree diagrams:

Fig. [1]
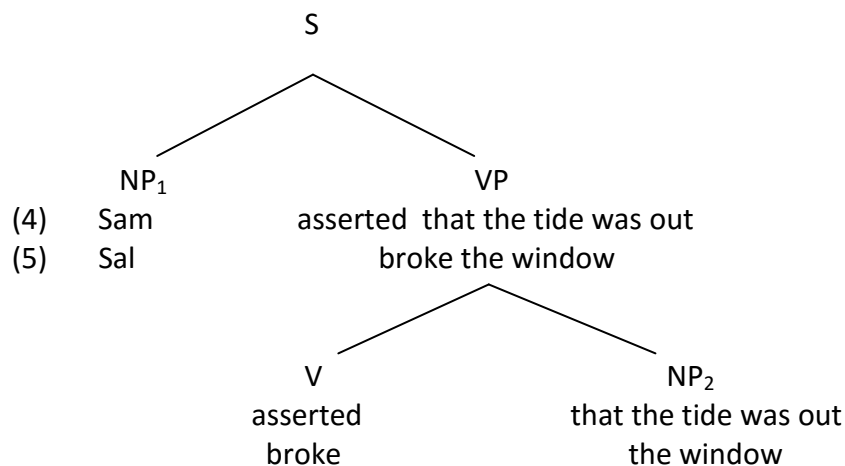
The higher-level analysis reflects the relation between the agent, and the act as a whole. It is a subject-predicate analysis, and it is this relation which is nominalised (synthesised) in expressions like (12), which refer to (rather than report) intentional acts. Only in the deeper level of analysis given by the lower branch is the act-object relation exhibited. What the 'VP' in (4) refers to is the act of assertion performed by Sam with respect to the state of the tide – its being out. In (14') it is the '*w*-assertion'. What the 'V' refers to is the act in detachment from the object, 'NP$_2$', the paragrammatic object. The same analysis can be given to (5), where the paragrammatic object is a window, broken by an act performed by Sal. Whilst it would be absurd to suggest that something asserted and something broken are qualitatively alike, the point being made is about the structural relation. What the

second branch of the tree diagram represents is the detachment of the act from the object leaving nothing, as it were, in between. That is what I mean by the claim that the relation is *direct.* The act engages with the object in such a way that there is no effect upon it other than its being asserted. The change is simply in that before the assertion the object was not asserted; afterwards it is. But it is the same object that it would have been if not asserted, or if asserted by someone else, or by the same person at another time. These two features of the relation are of the utmost importance in understanding what is referred to by a complex denotation such as (12).

The efficacy of (4) as a guide is that it assists analysis and disambiguates the term 'assertion' as it features in a complex denotation like (12). The subject-verb-object structure of sentences which report individual acts – including the reporting of speech acts – has a separate word or phrase for the act and the object.[95] The verb maps discretely on to the act, the object term on to what is asserted. In Davidson's words: 'Sentences in indirect discourse' (of which (4) is an example) ' ... wear their logical form on their sleeves' (Davidson 1968: 142).[96] Whether Davidson means this to have quite the same import as I take from it, it makes the point nicely: an analysis based on the basic S-V-O structure of a report-sentence such as (4), provides a model of an assertion.

< S, ASSERT, *w* >

The analytical question of what an assertion is divides into two questions: What does S *do*? – assert – and: What does S *assert*? – *w.* When it comes to the question of which of these is 'the assertion', the answer cannot be the latter *alone*, although ordinary usage would suggest otherwise. Reference to acts and objects of assertion, or to assertions and their contents, are notoriously ambiguous. Many philosophers accept and accommodate the ambiguity, without detriment to their arguments. But for present purposes that is not an option. The act-object ambiguity

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[95] Presumably this is what Russell meant in the footnote to the passage quoted at the head of this chapter.

[96] See further discussion on this point, and Davidson's analysis of reported speech in §37 below.

– whether it pertains to argument or to assertion – cannot be ignored or left unresolved. Before I can proceed to the arguments in the concluding chapter, where acts of argument are defined in terms of assertion, a careful examination of the ambiguity is required.

33.   The ambiguity thesis

It was seen in the foregoing chapters that 'argument' has a form of ambiguity between the act or practice of arguing, on the one hand, and the complex of sentences (or propositions) which we refer to as *an* argument, on the other. That ambiguity, it was seen, largely resolves itself into the mass sense of the noun, by which we refer to the activity of arguing, and the countable form which much more commonly means the individual argument, or arguments. So the distinction between an act of argument and an argument is quite transparent. What we refer to as 'an argument' is not usually what the proponent of an argument does, but what he or she propounds. The only regular exception is when 'an argument' means a dispute, and even then it is not really a reference to an act. In sum, the prevailing sense of 'an argument', 'this argument', 'X's argument' is an *object* sense.

'Assertion', as we have seen, has a different and more divisive ambiguity. It, too, has a mass sense which relates to the act of asserting. But unlike 'argument', it does not lose that sense when used as a countable. As we have seen, 'an assertion', and 'an act of assertion' mean broadly the same thing. Even when coupled with what is asserted, as in (12) the primary reference is to the act. Sam's assertion is what Sam *performed* with respect to the proposition. However, what a speaker asserts is also routinely referred to as 'an assertion', 'S's assertion', etc. in much the same way as what an arguer propounds is referred to as 'an argument'. Whilst I take the object-sense of argument to be the correct one, the object-sense of 'assertion' is problematic.

The act-object ambiguity is not confined to 'assertion'. Ulrich (1976: 112), who contests the ambiguity, introduces it as follows:

> According to a tempting and widely held view, the nominalizations of what might be called 'illocutionary verbs' (verbs which stand for illocutionary acts) are systematically ambiguous between alleged ' act' and 'object' senses.... I will call this the 'ambiguity thesis'.

I shall follow Ulrich in referring to the view that 'assertion', 'statement', 'claim', etc., properly have both these senses, as the ambiguity thesis (AT). Proponents of the thesis, as we have seen, include Williams, Searle, Haack, and Alston. Some of these focus on the ambiguity of 'assertion', some 'statement', but the issues are in all relevant respects the same for both words.

As I have argued previously, the act-sense of 'assertion' is unobjectionable. However, there is also a prima facie case for the object-sense, insofar as people routinely identify statements, assertions, beliefs, etc., by their content and not by the act they perform in asserting something. Consider the question,

(15) '*What* was Sam's assertion?'

The most natural response is: 'that the tide was out'. It is not 'the uttering of a sentence.....'. The latter may be *correct* but by conversational norms it would be regarded as the wrong answer, because it would misinterpret the question. If all that the claim of act-object ambiguity rests upon is this, then there is no question that it obtains, for in that context the word 'assertion' may indeed refer to what is asserted. It would not be much of an objection to say that this is *just* a form of words, or a manner of speaking, for it is manners of speaking and differences in use that create ambiguities.

We speak of *resolving* ambiguity by identifying a context in which one particular meaning is exhibited as opposed to another. Some predicates ascribed to an assertion imply that the subject is an act, and some the asserted object. William

Alston (1996: 14), makes the case as follows, beginning with practically the same statement as Williams:

> Suppose I assert that the tree is dying, and you respond: "That's very true." What is the antecedent of your 'that' – my act of asserting that the tree is dying or what I asserted, namely that the tree is dying? Clearly the latter. A natural way of spelling out "That's very true" is "What you said is quite true", or "Yes it's true that the tree is dying." While "Your act of asserting that the tree is dying is true" doesn't have any ready interpretation. Note that the availability of "Your assertion is quite true" doesn't help to make the choice just because of the ambiguity noted above; "your assertion" could be either your act of asserting or what you asserted.

'*Your assertion* that the tree is dying is true' does have a ready interpretation, since assertions, like propositions or sentences, are judged on the basis of their truth or falsity. That is the basis of the ambiguity. What is the antecedent of your 'that' when you say 'that's true' in response to an assertion that *p*? The right answer is what you asserted, since *an asserting* is not something of which truth or falsity can strictly speaking be predicated. It may be qualified adverbially as, say, truthful or sincere (i.e. truthfully or sincerely performed), but that is a different judgement, because the act could arguably be 'truthful', and certainly 'sincere', without the content's being true, if it was what the speaker believed.

Williams, too, introduces the ambiguity in the context of the relation of assertions (and beliefs) to truth. Given that assertions are subject to truth norms – they are 'expected', 'supposed' etc. to be true – it is clearly a fair *objection* to an assertion that it is false. But it is not the only objection, even if it is the most fundamental or basic objection. According to Williams (2002: 67), an objection can be raised against an assertion because it is 'rude, tactless, or reveals a secret'. On each of these latter counts the objection is against the act of asserting. But whilst it is true that rudeness etc. can be conveyed by adopting a particular tone or manner, there are certain items of content, too, that are inherently rude or tactless to assert. Hence, even though it is for the act of asserting that a speaker is held responsible, what is asserted can also determine whether or not the objection is fair. It might be brave

to assert *p*, cowardly to assert *q*, deceitful to assert *r*, and so on. Galileo's assertion that the earth moves was a brave (or perhaps reckless) *act*, but neither description would be apt without the content that made it so. Williams acknowledges this interplay.

'Assertion' belongs to a general cluster of nouns, which have the same broad duality of meaning. 'Belief' as we have seen is one such. So too are 'judgement', 'thought' – even 'proposition'[97]. We equate a thought with what a thinker thinks, as well as with the mental act of thinking. I might speak of 'sharing thoughts', 'having the same thought as someone else'; even of 'a thought that hadn't occurred to me', clearly distinguishing between a thought as an inner process, and some distinct object (propositional or otherwise) that may or may not have been the product of the thinking, or *what* the thinker had in mind. On this score, it may be argued that ambiguity just comes with the nominalisation of transitive verbs: a price paid for the convenience of being able to refer to, and assign predicates, to acts. Nor is the ambiguity confined to speech acts, mental states, etc. (Ulrich 1976). Most if not all English verbs may be transformed into nouns for the purpose of reference: 'collection', 'selection', 'invention', 'discovery', 'arrival', 'shot', 'placement', 'building', 'reference' are all nouns that derive their meaning from verbs. In cases where there is no special cognate form or affix available, the verb itself may often double as a noun: 'a good *catch'*, 'a steep *climb'*, 'a lucky *find'*, 'an easy *read'*, 'a quick *drink'.*

It is interesting to note that the predominance of one sense over the other varies from case to case. There is no hard and fast rule for nominalised verbs in general. 'A collection' can mean the act or process of collecting, but is more commonly used for the set of collected objects. 'A departure' on the other hand, or 'a shot', seem to have the stronger connotation of acts. Less clear-cut are 'catch' and 'climb'. Primarily, as nouns, they denote acts; but a boatload of fish might be referred to as

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[97] In the non-philosophical sense a proposition can be both an act of proposing and what is proposed.

'a good catch', or a sheer rock face as 'a difficult climb'. Then again, 'climb' is not standardly a word for a rock face, or 'catch' for a quantity of fish. But 'collection' standardly is a word for a set of things that are or have been collected. Compare 'The collection took most of the year to complete', with 'The collection is now on display at the local museum'. Compare also 'The building fell behind', with 'The building fell down'. 'Assertion', it would seem, carries the two senses in more or less equal measure.

Interpreting the thesis

There are two ways in which a reader could take Williams' statement of the ambiguity thesis.[98] The words 'may refer to...'(or Alston's 'can be...') could be construed either strongly as legitimising the use of 'assertion' to refer to what is asserted, or weakly as a mere fact *about* usage: an observation that speakers commonly use the word 'assertion' to mean what is asserted. If what Williams means is just the latter, then the case is made, as the examples under the first point show. Two assertions, for example, might be referred to as 'the same assertion' if they have the same content. But if all that is implied by the ambiguity thesis is that people routinely say one thing to mean another, its whole import is philosophically uninteresting. It would leave the thesis open to the objection that the use of 'assertion' to mean the content of the assertion is no more than misuse or shorthand: that the phrase 'the same assertion as...' *really* means 'an assertion with the same content as ...'; and the sentence, 'S's assertion was false', *really* means that what S asserted was false. It would be surprising if the ambiguity thesis claimed no more than this. On the other hand it would be much more puzzling if it was intended literally and without qualification. For then it would simply be wrong. In the following passage Williams himself effectively rules out the stronger interpretation:

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[98] To re-quote the extract: '"Assertion", like "belief", has an act/object ambiguity: it may refer to what someone asserts (the content of the assertion), or to his asserting that content.' (Williams 2002: 67).

Falsehood is certainly an objection to an assertion; intuitively it seems to be a more basic objection than these others, ... It might be thought that there is a simple explanation of why it is more basic: falsehood is a property of the content and not of the act, and therefore the objection of falsehood is an objection to the content, not to the act. But this would be a straightforward mistake. What A asserts, the content of his assertion, may equally be what B supposes or C denies; it is just a content, what Frege called 'a thought.' If it is false, it is false in all these connections or presentations, but its falsehood is an objection only in A's case, not in B's or (least of all) in C's. Though the objection to A's assertion is grounded in a fact about its content, the objection is to his asserting it. Equally, we cannot say that the other styles of objection to someone's assertion are objections only to his act of assertion and are not grounded in its content – it is the content, after all, that makes it in the circumstances offensive, tactless, or whatever. (Williams 2002: 67–68)

This passage cuts the ground from under a strong reading of the ambiguity statement that Williams has made just a line or two earlier. What A asserts, B supposes, and C denies are the same object, but only the first is the content of an assertion. So, as Williams rightly points out, only the first is open to objection *as* an assertion, for the obvious reason that only A's utterance *is* an assertion. How then can what A asserts be an assertion – i.e. the referent of any phrase denoting an assertion – given that what A asserts is identical with what B and C suppose and deny respectively? Let's say A asserts that the tree is dying, and as Williams suggests, C denies it. We cannot say that what C denies is 'a denial', even for C, if it were also 'an assertion' for A, for that would make it a different object in respect of each act. Nor is what A asserts a supposition, even for B. In fact the whole notion of sameness becomes incoherent if the object-sense of 'assertion' or of 'denial' or of 'supposition' is thrown into the mix, alongside the act sense. A necessary condition for the *sameness* of the object of all three acts is their being wholly detached from the acts, each of whose (identical) object it is. Whatever the object of an assertion *is* – a proposition, or as Williams suggests a (Fregean) Thought – it is quite distinct from the act; detachable from the act without loss of identity.

The 'straightforward mistake' to which Williams refers also has echoes of Geach's treatment of what he (Geach) calls the 'Frege point':

> A proposition may occur in discourse now asserted, now unasserted, and yet be recognizably the same proposition. This may appear so obviously true as to be hardly worth saying; but we shall see it is worth saying, by contrast with erroneous theories of assertion. (Geach 1965: 449)

Geach considers the point in connection with a valid argument, say, an instance of *modus ponens*. There a sentence, *p*, occurs twice, once as a simple premise, and again as antecedent of the conditional. But in only the first of these does *p* have the force of an assertion. As the antecedent of the conditional it is not asserted but supposed. If the argument is propounded, therefore, *p* is asserted once and supposed once. But what is asserted is identical with what is supposed because, as Geach points out, the validity of the argument depends upon the uniformity of meaning between occurrences of the same term. But whereas *p* is both *what* is asserted and *what* is supposed, 'the assertion (that p)' and 'the supposition (that p)' do not mean the same. So *what is asserted* cannot be a complete meaning of 'assertion', as it would if Williams' formulation of the AT were taken literally.

One way to reach a resolution, as already suggested, is to locate the ambiguity in the meaning of the 'what' of 'what is asserted' rather than simply in the meaning of 'assertion' itself. Putting it another way, the expression 'what is asserted' is ambiguous between the strong reading and a weak reading of Williams' statement of the AT. On the strong reading, the 'what' clause is grammatically equivalent to a relative clause, namely: '*that which* is asserted'. But that which is asserted on one occasion may be supposed or denied on another, preserving the complete detachment of the object from the act. But 'what is asserted' (or Williams's 'what someone asserts') can be construed with the grammatical form of an indirect question: i.e. with 'what' as an interrogative pronoun (McDowell 1977: 163).[99] The

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[99] 'A phrase of the form "the reference of x" can be understood as equivalent to the corresponding phrase of the form "what x refers to", either (i) in the sense in which "what" amounts to "that which" (which yields the official Fregean use of "Bedeutung") or (ii) in the sense in which "what" is

distinction is a fine one, and disguised in English. It is more clearly marked in classical Latin because after the relative pronoun the dependent verb takes the indicative but after the interrogative pronoun the verb is subjunctive. So, applied to speech acts, *id quod dicitur* means: 'that thing which is said' – the strong meaning – whereas *quid dicatur*, means 'what is said' (by someone). 'What is said' in the latter sense gets its meaning from its being the object of the act.[100] We can extend this to assertion. It is constitutive of *what is asserted*, in the '*quid dicatur*' sense, that it is the object of an act of assertion. The act 'enters into the object', so to speak; and so it cannot be identical with what someone else supposes or denies, although the propositional content may remain the same in each case.[101] So when Williams (2002: 67) states that the word 'assertion' may refer to what someone asserts the charitable interpretation would be that he is using 'refer' in the latter sense, given that otherwise he would be taking up two contradictory positions in quick succession.

In considering these two interpretations – the strong and weak readings of the AT – we can see the alleged act-object ambiguity of 'assertion' passes over into an ambiguity of 'what', and accordingly of 'object'. What is asserted is one object – the simple, paragrammatic object. The synthesis of act and object is another, complex object

(16)   S's assertion of *w*

We have a choice whether to construe 'w' as *that which* S asserts (but others might deny) or as just as *what is asserted* in S's assertion which cannot therefore be identical with *what is denied* in someone's denial.

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an interrogative pronoun. In this second sense, "what x refers to" gives the form of an indirect question, something suitable to follow "know" where knowledge of truths is what is meant.'
[100] I am indebted to Richard Gaskin for this suggestion.
[101] See also Gaskin (2008: 160-62)

Object and content: a further note

In the preceding sections, 'what is asserted' has mainly been taken to be the object of an assertion (in the act sense). But the same object, as already remarked (§29) is often referred to as the 'content of the assertion'. Williams blurs any distinction there might be by saying that 'assertion', in the object-sense, 'may refer to what someone asserts (the content of the assertion)' and in the act-sense, 'to his asserting that content' (Williams 2002: 67). On that score 'the object' and 'the content' are indeed co-referential. Moreover, the same ambiguity applies to 'content of the assertion' as to 'what is asserted', since the content of an assertion on one occasion can be the content of a denial on another – and so on. It has been acknowledged that in referring to what is asserted by one term rather than the other, there is arguably a different sense given to 'the assertion' – *act* in relation to its object, *complex object* in relation to content. On the other hand, the use of 'content' to mean what can be asserted (and not just what is asserted) is so standard in philosophy that little significant difference, in use or meaning, can be driven between it and 'object'.[102]

34. Searle on structural ambiguity

Another take on the AT comes from Searle (1968). Searle holds the ambiguity to be 'structural', meaning grammatical:

> The word "statement" is structurally ambiguous. Like many nominalized verb forms, ('statement') has what traditional grammarians would call the act-object or process-product ambiguity A modern transformational grammarian would say that it is structurally ambiguous as it has two different derivations from (phrase markers containing) the verb "state". ... "Statement" can mean the act of stating or *what is stated*. (Searle 1968: 422)

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[102] Frege, for instance, wrote: 'Not every content can be turned into a judgement. [...] The content of what follows the content-stroke must always be a possible content of judgement' (Frege 1879: §2).

Here, for reasons connected with the aims of his paper,[103] Searle's focus is on statements, rather than assertions. I shall talk about statements, too, for the purpose of my response, but on the understanding that what applies to stating applies in equal measure to assertion.

There are two arguably conflicting claims Searle makes in this paper. The first is the recognition that such ambiguity as there is is grammatical in origin rather than lexical. This is an important observation: it distinguishes the act/object ambiguity from that of words like 'bank' and 'bank', which are ordinary homonyms with no cognate form in common. By contrast 'state' – and likewise 'assert' – do not each have two meanings, one from which the act-sense, and another from which the object-sense, derive. The source of the lexical meaning of 'statement' is a verb that has no ambiguity. The fact that the nouns 'assertion' and 'statement' can function as the subjects of different sentences, and have various things said about them, does not by itself generate ambiguity. After all, we can use the gerundial form, 'stating' ('asserting') in exactly the same syntactical role as 'statement', without any ambiguity. For example:

(17)   Sam's stating that *p* was foolish.

That gives both phrases an object-status in the grammatical terms Searle describes, but does not confer a change of meaning on 'statement', any more than it does on 'stating'. Yet, as we have seen, Searle concludes, quite explicitly and as strongly as Williams, that 'statement' can *mean* either the act of stating or what is stated.

Searle's argument for the object sense rests on the following examples of contexts or situations which, he claims, distinguish the two meanings:

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[103] The title is 'Austin on Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts'. In the paper Searle is challenging certain aspects of this distinction, arguing that it does not cure all the deficiencies of the constative-performative distinction. Statements are therefore more germane to Searle's argument than assertion would be, since assertions more obviously have (assertive) force. Still, on the issue of structural ambiguity, this difference does not come into play.

(a) The statement of our position took all of the morning session.

(b) The statement that all men are mortal is true.[104]

To emphasise the difference between the two occurrences of 'statement' he claims that you cannot say:

(c) The statement that all men are mortal took ten seconds.

But you can say:

(d) The statement of the statement that all men are mortal took ten seconds,

adding that what (d) means is that it took ten seconds to *make* the statement, or that the act of stating (that all men are mortal) took ten seconds to perform. On the basis of these examples he then invokes the distinction between the 'statement-act sense' and the 'statement-object-sense' (Searle 1968: 422).

If this is an *argument* for a strong object sense of 'statement' it is a poor one. It is all very well to stipulate and give names to senses in order to explain *why* you can, allegedly, say one thing but not another, but that does not establish *that* you can say one and not another. Such rules as there are to permit or prohibit certain utterances are not set in stone. Searle infers that there are two senses of 'statement' from the assumption that you cannot say (c) but you can say (d). But that premise depends in turn on there being two distinct senses of 'statement' – otherwise all the speaker of (d) is doing is repeating himself. At best this is a weak abductive argument; at worst it is circular.

Searle introduces the ambiguity to challenge Austin's distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts, and in particular what he calls Austin's 'discovery' that statements are illocutionary acts as much as any other more

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[104] Searle numbers these 1 and 2. I have avoided confusion by changing to letters for Searle's examples. For reference purposes I have also extended the lettering to (c) and (d) in what follows.

obviously performative utterances. The discovery holds for the act sense but, he argues, not for the object sense.

> The failure to take into account the structural ambiguity of 'statement', however, had very important consequences for certain other parts of Austin's theory of language. For since statements are speech acts, and since statements can be true or false, it appears that that which is true or false is a speech act. But this inference is fallacious, as it involves a fallacy of ambiguity. Statement-acts are speech acts, and statement-objects (as well as propositions) are what can be true or false. [...] Propositions but not acts can be true or false; thus statement objects but not statement acts can be true or false. (Searle 1968: 423)

This presumably is the explanation for the prohibition on saying (c). The statement that all men are mortal is a 'statement' of the sort that can be true or false. So, being neither an act nor an event it cannot be said to have a time-location, or duration. What is certainly true is that *propositions* do not have duration. We cannot say that a proposition took ten seconds. But a proposition is not a statement, nor is it an assertion, as Searle has no choice but to concede. We might say that a proposition took a certain amount of time to express – that is to *state*. In other words, *what is stated* may take time to state. But isn't 'what is stated' precisely one of the meanings that Searle allots to 'statement' under the structural ambiguity claim, (just as Alston and Williams both take 'what is asserted' to be one of the meanings of 'assertion')? Of course 'statement' is used conversationally with the strong sense of what is or can be stated, i.e. a proposition or assertible. (It is also used to mean a declarative sentence.) But in the precise philosophical context in which Searle is writing it is simply imprecise to rest any strong assignment of meaning on this usage. A statement is not a proposition, except in the sense of a stated proposition. Since there are two perfectly good terms to hand to mark the difference, it seems an unnecessary confusion to countenance the *stating* of *statements*.

Searle is evidently aware of the danger of conflation. Echoing Geach on the Frege Point, Searle (1968: 424) says: 'Of course what is stated, a proposition, can also be

the content of a question, of a promise, the antecedent of a hypothetical, and so forth. It is neutral to illocutionary force, so "statement" is not synonymous with "proposition" ...'

But what is Searle's 'statement-object' if it is not a proposition; or its equivalent, *what is stated*? To extricate his account from the problem posed by this question, Searle spells out the two senses he gives to 'statement', qualifying them as follows:

> The statement-act
>
> = the act of stating.
>
> = the act of stating a proposition. ...
>
> = the act of making a statement-object.
>
> The statement-object
>
> = what is stated (construed as stated)
>
> = the proposition (construed as stated).

But this does not sit well with his strong ambiguity claim, especially with respect to the posited statement-object sense. Searle admits that in the characterisation of the statement-object, he is obliged to add the phrase, 'construed as stated' parenthetically to 'what is asserted' and likewise to propositions. But as soon as his definition of the statement-object has to be qualified in this way, the claimed distinction between act and object sense is weakened. To say that the statement-object must be *construed as stated* comes uncomfortably close to saying that it must be construed as a statement in *the act-sense*, or with some act-sense added. Drawing on the discussion in the previous section, either the statement-object is just an *object* – that which (*id quod*) someone states or it is already what (*quid*) someone states, and needs no construal as such. It would seem that in order to distinguish between a proposition and statement-object it is necessary to attach the statement-object to the act in some way – or subordinate it within the complex object of which it is (merely) the content. On the other hand, if we allow that the

object can be *construed* as stated but still remain conceptually distinct from the act of which it is construed as the object, then it is hard to see how the object differs in essentials from a proposition. Searle identifies the object sense of 'statement', but seems confused over the status of the object, sometimes implying that it is independent of the act of stating (so can be denied etc), sometimes that it is not so independent. But the right position is that 'what is stated' is ambiguous between these two senses, so that we should recognize both, just keep them clearly distinct.

If what is stated (a proposition) is not a statement when it is *not* stated – as when it is the object of some other speech act, or of none – then nor is it a statement when it *is* stated. It is merely *what* is stated; and would be the same thing, *ex hypothesi*, if it were unstated. Neither stating nor not stating changes *it*. But the same goes for an object *construed* as stated, since *it* could alternatively be construed as promised, or as asked, or denied, or as the antecedent of a hypothetical, and so on, all without change to itself. *Construing* the statement-object 'as stated' makes no more alteration to its identity than actually stating it does. The object remains a proposition, but now a proposition expressed, or rather *construed* as expressed, with the force of a statement. The force is no part of the object, but is supplied by the context of utterance, or by the sentence in its context of utterance.
To maintain its status as the object of the act, with the bare sense of 'what is stated (asserted)', it is necessary to conceive of the proposition in complete detachment from the context of utterance.

In summary

The act-object ambiguity, on examination, is as much an ambiguity of 'object' – in the context of the ambiguity thesis – as of 'assertion'. It resolves into a distinction between, on the one hand, the simple detachable object that X asserts (but Y may deny and Z may suppose) and, on the other, the act-involving sense where what is asserted takes its sense in part from the act whose object it is. What is important for the present thesis is the recognition that there is a detachable sense, distinct from the act-involving sense. Earlier I termed it the paragrammatic sense, the sense

mirrored by the verb-object relation in report sentences. The act-involving sense is important because it allows an assertion to be referred to in respect of *either* its content *or* its performance, so that we can say both: 'The assertion was true' and: 'The assertion was reckless', without misuse in either case.

But what is important for this thesis is that there is an object-sense under which what is asserted is, so to speak, its *own* object; independent of its act-involving sense. The importance of this will emerge in Chapter 6, when the acts and objects of argument are re-examined in the light of acts of assertion.

35.   Assertions of what?

We are accustomed to generalising the form of assertion as

(A)   S's assertion that *p*,

casting *what is asserted* as the referent of a that-clause. But in keeping with the characterisation of the act-object relation as direct, and the object of the act as an independent unit, it is arguably more perspicuous to refer to the whole as:

(16)   S's assertion of *w*

This has already been proposed.[105] (16) has the further advantage of accommodating objects of assertion that may not have propositional form. It is therefore a broader characterisation than (A). With this in mind Robert Brandom (1983: 640) makes the following observation: 'In the usual sense, one asserts that the circumstances expressed by a declarative sentence obtain. But one can also assert one's authority or rights. This broader normative usage will be invoked here to explain the narrower linguistic one.' It could be argued that examples like Brandom's are untypical of what we mean by 'assertion'; or that asserting a proposition is the paradigm case, and any other application of the word 'assert' should be seen as derivative, even figurative. It could also be objected that

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[105] See §32 above: item (14).

asserting one's right or authority is just equivalent to asserting *that* one has a certain right or some authority, so as to restore the primacy of (A) as a representation of the act-object relation in assertion. However, it would seem that one can assert a right without saying anything and, in particular, without saying anything explicitly declarative. But then so can assertions 'in the usual sense' be made without saying anything, for instance by nodding one's head, raising a hand, or ticking a box. We can still construe acts like this as assertion, in suitable circumstances, and do not say that what is asserted is a nod or a tick. A person could be described as having asserted his right to remain silent during an interrogation by conspicuously refusing to speak: folding arms, pursing lips, etc. In other words the right is asserted, and the person is asserting *it*. But equally a person's *pointed* refusal to speak may be interpreted as an assertion *that* he or she has the right to stay silent (if that is the person's reason for behaving in that way). Actions are sometimes said to 'make a statement', in this sense. Likewise if I utter the sentence 'I do not have to say anything if I don't want to' then, on one interpretation at least, I have asserted *that* I do not have to say anything, but on another I have asserted the right directly.

In the extract from *Lord of the Flies* (at the head of Chapter Two) Ralph asserts his authority by ordering Jack to let Piggy speak. He asserts that he has the authority by asserting that he is chief and that he was chosen. Likewise an employer might assert her authority to dismiss a member of staff in an explicit manner, by saying: 'I have the authority to dismiss you', or implicitly by saying: 'You're fired.' To say to an employee 'You're fired' is to assert in plain terms that the person being addressed is dismissed. But the authority that is asserted is not the same object as the meaning of 'You're fired'. If the speaker has the authority, then that authority has been asserted by the act of saying the sentence assertively. It is the perlocutionary force of the utterance that effects the dismissal. The *illocutionary* force is the asserting (exercising) of authority. These overlapping ways to describe what is going on are not going to settle the question of whether the broader usage is explanatorily prior to the more 'usual' one, as Brandom is suggesting. But, since

there are expressions other than that-clauses that we meaningfully use to denote some objects of assertive acts, their significance should be accounted for.

Rights are perhaps more illustrative of the relevance of the broader use. Compare the following two reports:

    (18)   Carla asserted her right to appeal.

    (19)   Carla asserted that she had the right to appeal.

There is little to be achieved by contesting which of these reports features the 'correct' description of the object that is asserted. If (18) and (19) are different acts, there is no question to answer. But if, as we are supposing, they report the same act, then both contain a reference to the same (asserted) object. In (18) the object may be identified as Carla's right of appeal; in (19) the object is the meaning of clause, 'that Carla had the right of appeal'. On the paragrammatic account the object is just what is asserted and is the same object however represented or described. So whether we call what is asserted in (18) and (19) the *object* Carla asserted, or the *content* of her assertion, we refer to the same thing. But there is a confusion arising from the use of these terms interchangeably. For whilst Carla's right of appeal sits well with the designation 'object', it does not sit well with the notion of content. If we ask 'What was the content of Carla's assertion?', we find a more natural answer in (19), because embedded in (19) there is a an expression of what she asserted. 'Asserting a right', by contrast, does not necessarily translate into any sort of expressive performance. In other words,

    (20)   an assertion *of w*

is not necessarily reducible to

    (21)   an assertion *that p*

For although we can and do speak of the assertion of a right, etc., we do not normally refer to anything as 'the assertion *that* a right'. Once it is seen that there are objects of assertion that can be referred to other than by a that-clause, the

question can be expanded to the more general one about the content of assertions. How does the object, *w*, equate to what Carla asserted as reported in (19), namely

(22)   that she (Carla) had the right to appeal

This, it is *reported*, is what Carla said in making the assertion, and thus would be a reference to the content of her assertion that she had the right, etc., as well as to the object of her asserting. (22) is not, of course, what Carla said verbatim. Nor need it bear any linguistic resemblance to what Carla said in order to fulfil the function of referring to the *right* that she asserted. She might have said the words, 'I have the right to appeal'. But alternatively she might have said: 'See you in court'. Hence (18) reports what Carla asserted, more or less regardless of how the assertion was *expressed*, and (22) refers to *what* she asserted likewise. Indeed, the phrase, 'what Carla said' would refer to the expression she gave to the act. The phrase, 'what she meant' would be a reference to the content. That is effectively what it means to say (as in §33 above) that 'the content' and 'the object' of an assertion refer to the same thing. But at the same time it reveals some of the difference in sense, or in the perspective from which one term is more or less apt than the other.

I think that the value of Brandom's observation is not so much that the 'broader normative usage' is more explanatory, but just that it is more inclusive. Both a right and a proposition can be asserted directly. The complete assertion in either case can be referred to as in (20): 'an assertion *of*...'. Despite some awkwardness, this also includes: 'an assertion of *that-p*', if *that-p* is what is asserted – i.e. if a sentence, *s*, is uttered assertively to mean 'that-p'. On this analysis the word 'that' is relegated to a grammatical marker, without semantic significance. It will be argued in the final chapter that a similar treatment can be given to 'so' as the marker of what is inferred, deduced, or argued *for*.

Other putative objects of assertion

There is another class of objects that feature in reports of assertion. These fall under the broad heading of states of mind or propositional attitudes, notably belief. We also speak quite naturally of asserting opinions, views, preferences; and more. MacFarlane (2011: 2), for instance, cites 'expressing an attitude' as one of four generally accepted definitions of assertion. It is true that in most if not all cases these putative objects may also be transposed into statements. 'X asserted a preference for...' may just be a way of reporting that X said *that* she liked some particular thing better than another. Also, it can be argued that expressing an opinion is not *asserting* an opinion, but asserting something that happens to be what, in someone's opinion, is the case. (It does not even need to be one's own opinion: X may assert an opinion expressed by Y.) But usage is not decisive. It is a moot point whether 'asserting an opinion' (or a belief) means quite the same as asserting the object of the opinion or belief. For one thing, the ambiguity applies to 'belief' and 'opinion' as much as it does to 'assertion'.

Interesting as it would be to examine these 'objects' on a case-by-case basis, it would be neither practical nor relevant in the present context. I shall therefore confine the discussion to a single case study, namely belief, and more particularly to the role Appiah (1985; 1986) gives to belief in his definition of assertion.

36.   Assertions of belief

Appiah (1986: 3), under the chapter heading, 'The Essentials of Assertion', sets out his case as follows:

> Assertion is the speech act by which we communicate our beliefs, ... the means our language provides us for letting other people know what we believe.... In this case, of course, the fellow creatures are speakers of our language, and the action is utterance. We can call the belief whose communication is the purpose of standard utterances of a declarative sentence, the belief that sentence 'expresses'. Then, since to know what a sentence means is to know how it is used, we can say that people know what a declarative sentence means in a certain language if they know

what belief an assertoric utterance of that sentence in that language expresses, whether uttered by them or by others.

Should we take this to mean that in a particular act of assertion the *object* of the act – what is asserted – is a belief held by the speaker? The relation may not be quite as direct as that: Appiah says that acts of assertion *communicate* beliefs. The act itself, Appiah is clear, is an utterance, with which there is no quarrel. *Its* object – what is uttered in a standardly expressed assertion – is a declarative (assertoric)[106] sentence. It would follow from this that the uttering of a declarative sentence is also 'the means our language provides' for communicating our beliefs. (Of course, uttering sentences is a means to other ends besides that of asserting beliefs.)

If Appiah is right, then Sam's *belief*, at the time of Sam's utterance, that the tide was out, is what his *utterance* (provided it was assertoric) communicated. The act is given expression in the standard way by Sam's uttering the sentence:

(23)   The tide is out.

Does Sam do something else then, besides uttering the sentence when he makes the assertion? Yes and no. On the one hand Sam uses the words with a certain force, which would not be present were he merely mouthing the words, or using the sentence for some other purpose than asserting something. So asserting that the tide is out is a different act from, say, uttering (23) as an example of an English sentence. On the other hand, if Sam wishes to communicate his belief that the tide is out, then isn't it the case that all he needs to do is say, in ordinary tones: 'The tide is out', and the conventions of the language will do the rest for him? So, by socio-linguistic convention, an audience hearing or reading a declarative sentence, without any accompanying indication to the contrary, is entitled to expect that the speaker at least *believes* – arguably knows – the sentence to be true.

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[106] Appiah's choice of 'assertoric' over 'declarative' may be said to make the point more trivially; but then 'declare' and 'assert' are not so different in meaning.

In the above extract Appiah might appear to be taking this line by speaking of the belief that the standard utterance of a declarative sentence 'expresses'. He rightly hedges his remarks with the cautionary quotation marks around 'expresses'. He is less careful in the following extract (Appiah 1985: 147) where he says:

> In English it is relatively trivial to say what belief a sentence expresses. Where a sentence contains no token-referential expressions, we can usually pick out the belief that it expresses by calling it the belief that S. 'Snow is white' expresses the belief that snow is white. [...] For sentences containing token-referential *expressions*, the problem is a little more difficult.[107]

I do not think that the main problem here is with token-referential expressions. The root problem is the deeper issue of the act-object relation embodied in the concept of belief, just as it is in assertion. If Appiah's basic tenet is correct, that a belief is what is expressed in a typical act of assertion, then the belief is an *object* in what I am terming the paragrammatic sense of 'object'. But belief is also an act (or state) of believing. And 'believe' in turn takes a direct object whose referent is what the speaker purports (and/or is understood) to believe when asserting something. In short, an *assertion* is an act of expressing a belief that such and such is the case. (This is quite close to what Searle implies in his schema representing assertive speech acts: $\vdash \downarrow B(p)$, to which he adds: '...the psychological state is Belief (that *p*)' (Searle 1979: 13).[108]

But this structural analysis leaves 'belief' ambiguous in just the way that Williams, Alston, and others say it is (along with 'assertion'). Appiah does not address the question of the ambiguity either of 'belief' or 'assertion', but his account runs into

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[107] Appiah (1985: 149) adds: 'I am developing the view that assertion is the expression of belief'. There he is clearly using 'expression' in the sense of *expressing*. He reaffirms this view in no uncertain terms (1986: 11): 'Assertion, to recapitulate, is the expression of belief'.

[108] However, Searle is not quite saying that a belief is asserted. His is more the claim that Belief (which he capitalises) is a kind of accompanying state to the act of asserting, which is characterised also by a commitment to the truth of a proposition. He adds that 'belief' (and 'commitment') 'are intended to mark dimensions ... so to speak determinables rather than determinates.' (He says this because he wants to allow degrees of commitment, and hence degrees of assertiveness.) Nonetheless, Searle is unequivocal is his statement that belief is a state; it is the proposition (*p*) that is expressed, and presumably therefore asserted.

it, as all must. A belief (B(*p*)) that is expressed or communicated by assertion is both the object of an act of assertion *and* the act or state of believing (that *p*). On Appiah's account the object of Sam's act of assertion would be his belief that the tide (at the time) was out. But here is the complication: the content of Sam's belief is the object of Sam's assertion, with or without the mediation of the belief. The question that I would put to Appiah, then, is what exactly the term 'belief' *refers* to in the context of its being expressed and communicated. Plainly it is not Sam's act or state of believing that the tide is out. You cannot assert a *state* of believing, other than in the sense of asserting that you are in that state. Sam is not asserting *that* he believes that the tide is out. That would be a different assertion. So, if what a speaker asserts is a belief, then what he asserts is *what* he believes, the *object* of his act or state of belief. To be sure, it would be reasonable on the hearer's part to infer that Sam believes what he says – that he is in that psychological state – or even to expect that he *knows* it to be so (Williamson 1996; 2000).[109] But he is not asserting his believing or his knowing. He is asserting *what* he believes (or knows). What he asserts is not mediated by his believing it: if what he asserts is what he believes, then he believes it *and* asserts it. But if he disbelieves the same thing, and asserts it anyway, what is asserted is none other than what he would have asserted if he had believed it. In short it is not Sam's belief that Sam asserts.

Is it not an objection that 'belief' is no less ambiguous than 'assertion' and, moreover, that 'what is believed' has the same strong and weak senses of 'what is asserted' (see §33), so that what a person asserts is coloured by being what he believes (if he believes it)? I think that whilst it is true that what he asserts is coloured by being what he also believes – after all, it is a fact *about* what he believes – that is no reason to conclude that what he asserts is his *belief*, even if he does believe it and asserts it in the belief that it is true. In short, we assert propositions, not beliefs.

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[109] See the normative account of Williamson (2000: 238) in which assertion is defined by the constitutive rule: assert *p* only if you know *p*.

There are question marks also over the view that expressing beliefs is characteristic of assertion, since assertion is also the means by which we very often express what we do not believe, including what we positively disbelieve. This does not even require the speaker to be lying. Many acts of assertions have no connection to belief. This is the case, for example, when someone is asserting something he or has been told to assert, but might not wholeheartedly believe: a 'party line' or official doctrine. It also happens, in a different sense, when a person *knows* something, especially by direct acquaintance. Sam observes that the tide is out and asserts what he observes as a reason for setting off to the island. The passing on of a fact or item of knowledge does not require any intervening or concomitant act of stating a belief. *Knowing* the tide is out is a different state from believing that the tide is out. Sam may have arrived at the sea-front believing that the tide was out – let's say on the basis of what someone had told him – but then seen for himself that it was indeed out. Had he asserted that the tide was out just before acquiring the knowledge, and again just after, his assertions would have had the same content, but would have been made on the basis of different mental states. We may think of knowledge and belief alike as states of mind. But whereas knowledge is a factive state, belief is a propositional attitude. (See discussion in Williamson 2000: 21–23). But what is believed or known respectively – the content – is no different on that account. Both states relate to propositions. A state of belief obtains whether or not the proposition is true; whereas a state of knowledge obtains only if the proposition is true. But it requires an objectively situated informant – someone who knows the truth value of the proposition – to make the distinction.

Do we say then that the object of the assertion – what is asserted – is in the one case a belief and in the other an item of knowledge? Or, alternatively, that when what is asserted is knowledge, it is also a belief – just a true, and/or fully warranted, belief? People *do* say these things. The question is whether such a form of words can be taken literally: whether a belief or state of knowing something can

actually be *asserted*.[110] What we are once more seeing is the confusion that follows from failing to maintain a strict distinction between acts (states, attitudes), on one side, and their objects on the other. To assert is an act; to believe and to know are states. Propositions are their objects – or *among* their objects.[111] Thus I may assert, know, and believe or disbelieve (that) *p*, without affecting the independent identity of *p*. To say that someone is 'asserting knowledge', or 'asserting a belief' is a colloquial way of saying that the person is asserting *what* he or she also knows, or believes (disbelieves); not that he is asserting his state of believing it. Conversely, to say that someone believes what he asserts does not literally mean he believes his asserting of it, but that he believes *it*.

An adverbial account of asserting belief

The sentence,

> Sam asserted a belief that that the tide was out

has a superficial subject-verb-object form, with the belief as the object. For example:

> (24)   X asserts [X's belief [that *p*]]

But a model like this could be taken to represent, not X's asserting that *p*, but X's asserting that X believes that *p*, which as noted earlier is a different assertion altogether, having a different object from that of the assertion *that-p* simpliciter. What is wanted is a model that would show unequivocally that Sam asserts *what* Sam believes, not *that* he believes it.

Consider the following situation, which is parallel in certain relevant respects, in which X has been told what to assert by someone else, for example by a head

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[110] In fairness to Appiah, it must be repeated that he does not say baldly that people assert beliefs, but rather that, e.g., they communicate them by asserting. On that I am in agreement with Appiah, but would argue that the effect of breaking the direct connection is to sideline belief (as suggested in the next section).

[111] I add this because I am largely ignoring applications such as knowing *of* or *about,* and knowing *how*, or believing *in*, and so on.

teacher, to inform the students, that the school will be closed the next day. X may simply say to the class:

(25)   The school will be closed.

But he or she might alternatively say:

(26)   The head has told me tell you that the school will be closed.

This is obviously a different assertion from (25), although the message embedded in it is the same. The message is that the school will be closed, which is a proposition, and the same proposition whoever asserts or instructs others to assert it. But there are other more contextualised descriptions that can be given retrospectively to what the teacher asserted, and hence other more contextualised ways to report the act of asserting. As well as

(27)   X asserted that the school will be closed,

one could report that

(28)   X asserted what the head teacher had told her to tell the students.

The object of the assertion 'that the school will be closed' is the same object as 'that which the head teacher told X to tell the students.' We are back, therefore, to the source of confusion that we have repeatedly seen obstructing analysis of expressions referring to the objects of acts – that is, between stronger and weaker readings of 'what X asserts'; and we see it replicated in descriptions like, 'what X believes' and, analogously, 'what X was told to assert'. There are qualitative differences between expressing or asserting *what one believes*, and expressing or asserting *what one is told* to say. But the parallel is easy to draw and more interesting than the differences. Being in a state of *believing that-p* compares with a state of *being under instruction to say* (something), in that both are circumstances or conditions under which an act is performed. The confusion enters when the circumstances are implicitly absorbed into the reference to the object. What a third party knows about the circumstances will naturally influence the way he or she describes the object: 'what X thinks', 'what X knows', 'what X has been told', 'what

X concluded from the evidence', etc., whilst the referent may be identical under each description. Hence the reference to X's belief in (28) will remain ambiguous.

I suggest that the ambiguity can be resolved by referring to the belief tangentially – i.e. *adverbially* – leaving the object, as it were, exposed directly to the verb. If X believes that the tide is out, the tree is dying, or snow is white, these are the objects of X's believing, so that in asserting one of them X would, in Appiah's words, communicate X's *belief*. Amending the form of the description to

(29)   X asserted what X believed

is no solution. Instead we can employ the form

(30)   X [in the circumstance of X's believing that *p*] asserted that *p*.

Likewise:

(31)   X [in the circumstance of being told to say that *p*] asserts that *p*.

The common factor is that X asserts that *p*. Moreover, (30) eliminates any lingering act-object ambiguity; and allots each element in the complex its proper category – act, *direct* object, and accompanying circumstances respectively. The circumstances are notes in the adverbial phrase in the square brackets. This, I suggest, captures the customary meaning of the commonplace form of words: 'X asserted his/her belief...'

With some adjustments this analysis could be applied quite generally. Sam may assert that the tide is out in the *hope* that it is so. That is clearly different from asserting his hope – i.e. that he hopes the tide will be out. A person may assert something in the belief that it is so, but at the same time hoping it is not, without either attitude having any impact on what, per se, is asserted. The states of mind modify the act, rather than qualifying the object.

In conclusion

Contrary to the way we often report some acts of assertion, asserting does not have states of mind or attitudes as its *direct* objects. Assertions have as their objects the *same* objects (contents) that certain states of mind and attitudes have; but it is the object of the attitude which we assert, and not the attitude we have towards it. What a speaker asserts is *that p*, not a belief that *p*, or knowledge *of p*; nor is it a perception or realisation that *p*, nor a hope or wish that *p*, nor any other attitude towards *p*. In the case of a hope or wish or fear etc. it is very obvious that, whilst these mental states may accompany the making of an assertion in some instances, they are not its object; nor do they mediate between it and its object. Since it stands in the same relation to the asserted proposition as any other attitude, there are no obvious grounds for making a belief an exception.

Of course an attitude (or attitudes) may be expressed *along with* the asserted proposition. To that extent there is nothing objectionable in Appiah's basic claim that assertion is an *expression* of belief, so long as 'expressing a belief' is in that case construed as asserting what is believed. An attitude towards *p* may be expressed without the attitude being asserted; and if the attitude to *p* is asserted, it is no longer an assertion that *p*. Suppose X asserts that *p* whilst actually believing that *p*: then X's belief that *p* is expressed, obliquely, by the asserting that-*p*.

Fig [2]

ASSERTION   → B(that-*p*)

that-*p*
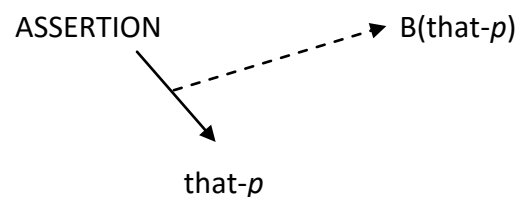
37. Asserting *that*

Finally, to complete the investigation of assertion, and the act-object relation it embodies, I return to an issue discussed in §35 – namely the role of the word 'that'

in the most usual manner of reporting acts of assertion: asserting *that.* Take, for example,

(32)   S asserted *that* the tree was dying

This reports what S asserted, though not necessarily what S said. In fact there is no requirement at all for a reporter or commentator to employ the words spoken by S, in reporting what S said or asserted. If S said (assertively) 'Der Baum stirbt', then (32) would not be false. S might even have pointed at the tree with one hand and drawn a line across his throat with the other, without (32) being any less apt a report of the act of *assertion*, though not so apt a report of the *saying* involved in making it.

'That' has the effect of reducing what follows it to a structural description of the content of the assertion. However, traditional grammatical concepts are not helpful here. In (32) the word 'that' is hard to classify satisfactorily, not obviously functioning as a determiner, nor as a relative pronoun, nor obviously a relative adverb. The *New Oxford Dictionary of English* settles on *conjunction*, in other words a sentence-connective. But no connective is required between a verb and its direct object. The act, as reported, engages directly with the object. How, then, should we interpret the function of 'that' in reports of individual assertions?

An answer is famously proposed in Davidson (1968): 'On Saying That'.[112] Here Davidson is referring to indirect discourse generally – that is *saying* – rather than assertion in particular, although he extends the account to assertion at the end of the paper. His general analysis is based on the statement:

(33)   Galileo said that the earth moves.

First we assume that there is an expression that Galileo uttered such that, if I said 'the earth moves', Galileo's words would make him and me 'samesayers'. We need not be bothered by any envisaged problems of translation, since we take the

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[112] Reprinted as Essay 7 in Davidson (2001).

premise on board *ex hypothesi*. It is plausible anyway that two people who speak the same or each other's language, can for the most part restate in their own words what the other has said. Then if I say 'The earth moves', followed, or preceded, by the sentence, 'Galileo said *that*', I will have picked out what Galileo is reported to have said in (33), and added that Galileo said it (Davidson 1968: 141–42). Thus the function of 'that' is broadly that of a demonstrative pronoun, replacing what Galileo said with a singular object term. This is obviously a welcome proposal from my perspective, since it chimes clearly with the essential directness of the act-object relation.

Reports like (33), according to Davidson, effectively divide into two separate sentences:

>   (34)   Galileo said that. The earth moves.

or

>   (34')   The earth moves. Galileo said that.

 Davidson (1968: 142) summarises the proposal thus:

> Sentences in indirect discourse... consist of an expression referring to a speaker, the two-place predicate 'said', and a demonstrative referring to an utterance. Period. What follows gives the content of the subject's saying, but has no logical or semantic connection with the original attribution of a saying.

The importance of the last sentence here is crucial, and novel, as Davidson observes. It is also what is of most significance in the present context. It separates the sentence giving the content from the main clause reporting the act. The content sentence in (33), namely 'the earth moves', is not subsumed in the sentence that ends in 'that'. Davidson refers to the latter as 'the sentence whose truth counts' (ibid.). I shall refer to the latter as the D-sentence – D for 'Davidson' or for 'demonstrative' (or, conveniently, both). A D-sentence just has the form:

>   D: X said that

The rather unnatural sequence of sentences in (34) can be explained, Davidson suggests, by switching 'that' to 'this', which has the same demonstrative function. Just as we say: 'This is a joke', and then tell it, or 'This is an order', and then give it, we can say: 'This is what Galileo said', and then say it, in some appropriate way (Davidson 1968: 143). 'That' has the same function in (34').

The analysis is extended, if sketchily, to reports of assertions. Davidson introduces the example: 'Jones asserted that Entebbe is equatorial', and claims:

> If we parallel the analysis of indirect discourse, (it would) come to mean something like this: 'An utterance of Jones' in the assertive mode had the same content as this utterance of mine: Entebbe is equatorial.' The analysis does not founder because the modes of utterance of the two speakers may differ; all that the truth of the performative requires is that my second utterance, in whatever mode (assertive or not) match in content an assertive utterance of Jones. (ibid)[113]

What I take from this is as follows: first, we can extract an analysis of assertion from the form of indirect discourse; second, that (33) should not be analysed as a complex sentence, with the sentence after 'that' cast as a subordinate clause. (33) is a sentence with S-V-O form, reporting an assertive utterance whose object is whatever is asserted, however it is paraphrased or referred to. The D-sentence has the same structure whatever is asserted. Indeed, as proposed in §30, it has the grammatical structure of any sentence reporting an act: breaking a window, climbing a tree, and so forth. On Davidson's analysis the latter might be reported as:

(35)   Here is a tree. X climbed *that*.

That-clauses

It would appear that Davidson's analysis eliminates that-clauses, by removing the 'that' from its relational position, and assigning it the role of direct object in the D-

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[113] Here Davidson uses 'this' in the way he says is functionally equivalent to 'that'.

sentence announcing the act: 'S said that'. The elimination of that-clauses, however, leaves some loose ends, especially when applying Davidson's analysis to more challenging examples than his own somewhat selective ones. Take:

(36)   S asserted that the tree was dying,

as a supposedly accurate report (by a reporter, R) of S's corresponding act of assertion. How are we to proceed with this? Not, without qualification, as

(37)   The tree was dying. S said (asserted) that,

for (36) is ambiguous with respect to tense. The most natural assumption to make on hearing (37) would be that S has said: 'The tree is dying', which flies rather in the face of samesaying. By the time of R's reporting the assertion, there may be changed truth conditions: the tree may have finished dying, and be dead. If 'the tree *was* dying' was what S said – suppose, for example, he was vindicating himself for having cut it down – the correct reference to the object of the reported act would be:

(38)   that the tree *had been* dying.

Again, however, this would not translate into the 'that' of a D-sentence if the requirement for samesaying were applied literally. Arguably this could be set aside as trivial or superficial. It's just a peculiarity of English that the tense of the main verb influences that of the subordinate verb.[114] In the deep syntax the report is generated as 'He said that the tree is dying'. All the same the opacity of reference in indirect discourse is a well-recognised problem for notions such as samesaying – and for other reasons besides tense. Samesaying, for example, would require that the tree referred to by S be the same tree that R has in mind when specifying the referent of his 'that'. 'The tree is dying' is a type-sentence, applicable to any tree that may or may not be dying.

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[114] It doesn't arise in German, for example, where the present tense is retained (though in the subjunctive) as (e.g.): *er sagte, der Baum sterbe*, or in the vestigial English subjunctive: 'X said that the tree *be* dying'. (We even see, in a slightly different form: 'The tree was said *to be* dying.') But in modern English, the tense of the subordinate verb gets changed when we move to utterance, just as a quirk of the language.

These difficulties do not arise in respect of Davidson's examples because what Galileo said, and what Galileo is reported as saying, are both expressed conveniently in the continuous present. Moreover, the subject term of Galileo's actual utterance, and Jones's assertion, are proper names – the earth, Entebbe – so that there are few if any problems of indexicality to compromise the success or failure of samesaying. Galileo says the earth moves, in one or other form of words; the reporter says the earth moves, in another. They are samesayers almost trivially. Davidson should be aware of these issues. They are too obvious to miss, yet he does not venture an application of his analysis to examples in which they surface. Instead he remarks, rather mysteriously:

> We would do better, in coping with this subject, to talk of inscriptions and utterances and speech acts, and avoid reference to sentences. For what an utterance of 'Galileo said that' does is announce a further utterance. Like any utterance, this first may be serious or silly, assertive or playful; but if it is true, it must be followed by an utterance synonymous with some other. The second utterance, the introduced act, may also be true or false, done in the mode of assertion or of play. But if it is as announced, it must serve at least the purpose of conveying the content of what someone said. (Davidson 1968: 143)

I cannot see how this would address the issue, since what is uttered or inscribed *is* a sentence. S does not *say* (or assert) an utterance. S utters a sentence whose meaning, in the context of the utterance, is what S says, and what R refers to as 'that'. The solution, I would argue, is not to be found in shifting the focus from sentences to utterances, which would set an even more exacting criterion of 'same-*uttering'*. However, Davidson paves the way to a much simpler expedient in the last sentence of the quotation: 'The second utterance ... must at least serve the purpose of *conveying the content* of what someone said.' This makes no mention of same*saying*. It might be argued that conveying the content is all that samesaying is. If I say, 'It's raining', and you say, 'Es regnet', then, provided the utterances are indexed appropriately (a very important proviso, obviously) we are samesayers. I can say to you: 'That's exactly what I said'; and that would be true. However,

synonymy between different languages is an idealised example, practically as idealised as samesaying itself. My utterance (in English) and yours (in German) are a case of samesaying not merely because they have same content, but because your sentence and mine are presumed to *mean* the same. Conveying the content of what someone said need not involve uttering a synonymous sentence. A *description* of the content may serve the purpose just as well, if it fairly answers the question:

'What did S say (assert)?'

Without the requirement of samesaying, this question may be answered with the phrase:

(39)   that the tree was dying,

understood now as a description of what S said at the time. This does not stray far from Davidson's basic strategy. We could then restate (36) as follows:

(40)   S asserted *this*: (*that*) the tree *was* dying

The 'that' is omissible, hence the brackets. Either way, 'the tree *was* dying' is situated in apposition to 'this', and represents *descriptively* what S said (in the past or present tense) at the time of the original utterance, because the tree *was* allegedly dying (or had been dying) at that time. If 'The tree *is* dying' was true when S said it, 'the tree *was* dying', is true now, when R says it; and, as we have seen, 'The tree *is* dying', might not be true now. However, to recap, 'The tree was dying' might not be what S *said*, so that prefixing it with 'that' is a way of making reference descriptively without necessarily laying claim to synonymy. (39) identifies the object of S's assertion whether S was speaking in the past or present tense.

This revision may seem inimical to Davidson's project, since it appears to reinstate 'that' in its original position in indirect discourse, and therefore to defeat the object of the exercise. That would be a mistake. As Davidson himself makes clear, the 'that' of indirect discourse is interpreted in his analysis as a demonstrative, and can thus be expressed as well by 'this' as by 'that'. So long as the object-expression is

understood, not as an utterance but as a description of its content, the crux of Davidson's account is preserved. *That the tree was dying* is structurally the object of the act, and '*the sentence whose truth counts*' is true, as required, if what is juxtaposed with it does correctly describe what S asserted. The device of samesaying may then be seen as an heuristic, rather than an actual procedure (which is quite possibly how Davidson intended it anyway). For it remains the case that if the reporter, R, could – in the ideal or paradigm case – paraphrase what S said sufficiently to establish 'samesaying', as in Davidson's somewhat selective examples, then 'S said that' would be true. In any case, what is said by S may be apprehended just as squarely by description. There is more than one way to apprehend the object of the assertion (or, more generally, of saying): one is to *say* it, as the speaker does, by uttering the sentence in direct speech; the other to describe it as the reporter does.

I say 'describe' rather than 'name'. The difference does not have great significance in the present context, but it has some. It is a fairly common view that that-clauses name propositions; or, that that-clauses are names for the objects of propositional-attitude verbs. Either way, 'that the tree was dying' designates what S asserted, and what R reports S as having asserted. Prefixing a declarative sentence by 'that' effects its transformation into a name (Cresswell 1985:73). But there are different ways of apprehending or designating the object (content) of an assertion. According to King (2007: 128–29), there are at least three 'linguistic devices' which would serve the same purpose, namely of designating the object of an assertive act, state of belief, etc. Adapted to the present example these might be rendered:

a)   'the dying-state of the tree';

b)   'the proposition that the tree was dying';

c)   'that the tree was dying'.[115]

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[115] King's examples are: 'logicism', 'the proposition that arithmetic reduces to logic', and 'that arithmetic reduces to logic'.

The first of these King classes as a name, the second a description; the third a that-clause. As I have already noted, there does not seem to be a great deal hanging on these distinctions, but following King we can at least agree that objects of an assertion or belief etc. may be designated in various ways. What King classifies above as a name, for instance, is close to what Russell (1903) termed a propositional concept.[116] None of the above is a paraphrase, let alone synonym, of the sentences which the respective speakers would have uttered. I propose, therefore, a modified Davidsonian analysis whereby the requirement of samesaying simply be replaced with a criterion of same-*designating*, or adequately describing, what is asserted when an act of assertion is performed. The designation, as we have seen, can be highly indeterminate. All that is necessary for same-designation is that the corresponding D-sentence be true. If all R knows is that S asserted something about some tree, he is still entitled to report that *that* – something about a tree – is what S asserted. As Davidson happily accepts, there is practically no limit to the degree of indeterminacy that a designation of what was said or asserted may have in a true report of the act in question:

> What follows the verb 'said' has only the structure of a singular term, usually the demonstrative 'that'. Assuming the 'that' refers, we can infer that Galileo said something from 'Galileo said that'; but this is welcome. (Davidson 1968: 144.)

38.   Concluding remarks

What is welcome to Davidson in the above account is welcome here, too. It puts a seal on two important points that I take forward to the next chapter: first, that acts of assertion relate to the objects directly; second that the objects of assertion are detachable from the acts whose objects or contents they are. Davidson's insight helps to establish a clear and unambiguous separation between the act of assertion and its object. We can refer to the object of an assertion without necessarily specifying what its *content* was. We can name the object in various ways and with

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[116] 'If we consider, say, "Caesar died", what is asserted is the propositional concept "the death of Caesar".' (Russell 1903: §478).

varying degrees of specificity, right down to zero – that is, with a pronoun. If there is shared knowledge between speaker and audience of what someone said or asserted, the object can be referred to anaphorically as 'that'. But even if not, it follows from someone's having performed any act of assertion that he or she has asserted *something*. We know that much through our understanding of the nature of the act and see it reflected in the structure of sentences reporting particular acts.

The above discursus on assertion does not stand on its own. Its purpose is to lay the ground for the concluding chapter in which the *acts* of argument are re-examined in the light of their essentially assertive character, which in turn throws light on what arguments *are* – that is, objects of assertion. It turns out, on the account I propose, that the objects of acts of argument are just what the logician designates as objects of evaluation – sets of propositions, ordered and indexed for assessment as valid or non-valid. What are extracted on interpretation from the texts of 'real' arguments are the same propositions with the same designations, and amenable to the same criteria of appraisal.

In the short concluding chapter I make three proposals which claim this equivalence between the objects of the assertive acts of argument and the inert objects of evaluation.

CHAPTER SIX: Assertion and argument

39. Proposals

'Argument' covers a wide range of speech activity and discourse, under which fall a number of more particular acts, including, but not limited to, reason-giving (premising) and concluding. These have been referred to as 'acts of argument' in that they contribute to argument, but also because their objects are the constituents of *arguments*. This takes us back to Searle's point (1979: 13) that concluding, inferring, and deducing are speech acts belonging to the class of assertives, but distinguished from simple assertives by the relation they bear to other elements in the context, or the rest of the discourse. That relation is the crucial element in the account that follows.

It should be added that these acts are not speech acts exclusively. Inferring can be conducted without speaking, and without doing anything that would amount to articulating or propounding an argument. For an argument I need a premise (or premises), and *to argue* – to advance an argument – I need to give (assert) the premise(s). Reason-giving is the force of argument. Without it there is no argument. There is even a sense in which we can refer to the premise(s) of an argument as *the argument*, for example when asked the question, 'What's your argument for (against) such-and-such?' What we give in reply is a reason or reasons:

> (1)   My argument for C is that A[117]

C is what is concluded, but A is what makes C a conclusion rather than a plain assertion. It would be less natural to say: 'C is my argument from A'. However, it would not do to make too much of this asymmetry, for 'reason' and 'premise', too,

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[117] Note that '*A*' here is an abbreviation of the *conjunction* of premises $A_1,...,A_n$. In other words '*A*' represents a premise which is either non-conjunctive or a conjunction of premises (finite in number).

are relative terms. There must be something for which a reason or premise is given, even if it is not asserted. No speech act is a premise in its own right.

Premising

To give something as a premise is to assert it. As Brandom says, asserting is a warrant for further assertions. But I can assert something without its being a premise of any argument. Either way it is the same assertion with the same illocutionary force and the same content whether or not I make a premise of it. Premising in that respect has the *plain* force of assertion. It lays ground for inference, but the inferring of something from it doesn't alter either its assertive force or its content.[118]

As noted in Chapter 4, Hitchcock (2007: 107), drawing on Searle's taxonomy, defines a simple argument as

> a sequence of three objects: a speech act *c* of any type concerning some proposition, an illative such as the word "since" (in its inferential sense), and a set *P* of one or more assertives.

Hitchcock argues that reason-giving must be an assertive act in just the sense Searle gives to the classification, which Hitchcock abbreviates to: 'expressing ... a commitment to the truth of a proposition' (ibid.). His justification for the claim that reason-giving is essentially assertive is a somewhat selective application of the 'therefore' test, allegedly showing that non-declarative sentences do not make good sense in the premise position. But the test is unnecessary, given that in any actual argument premises are *purportedly* true. On the principle of charity a critical audience will assume (unless they have reason to think otherwise) that a person propounding an argument at least believes, if not knows, that the premises are

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[118] In anticipation of the objection that some steps in an argument are not assertive, but suppositional, I am referring here to direct reasons, and not indirect ones such as assumptions made for *reductio*. If, in an argument from the assumption 'not-p', it is concluded that *p*, the premises – qua *reasons* for 'p' – can hardly include 'not-p'. If 'not-p' leads to absurdity it is the assertion *that* 'not-p' leads to absurdity that establishes 'p'. If it is still objected that indirect premises are nonetheless premises, which is a fair point, then I restrict my claim, that premising is essentially assertive, to direct premises.

true. Indeed, if the purpose of propounding an argument is to establish the truth of a conclusion – or to persuade others that it is true – the premises must have a truth-purport (even if in fact they are false). Whilst the logician is concerned only with validity, for which the condition of truth of premises is not necessary, the critic of actual argument will approve only *sound* arguments – one of the reasons why Hamblin (1970: 224–52), wrongly in my view, questions the value of logic as a tool of appraisal for natural-language arguments.

If the speech act of premising is asserting – and I follow intuition in concurring with Hitchcock that it is – then the standard expression of a premise is a declarative sentence, its meaning a proposition. So the first of my three proposals may be summarised:

> P1   The act of premising (reason giving) is an act of assertion. Its object is
>   a proposition, A

Note that from here onward, 'A' will represent either a single premise or a conjunctive premise ($A_1,...A_n$).

Concluding

Hitchcock, as already noted, does not make the same stipulation for concluding. He says (above) that concluding is a 'speech act of any type *concerning* a proposition', but not necessarily an asserting of it. Concluding, he suggests, may consist of *expressing admiration* (e.g. for a painting) or, in another example, of *suspecting* something, the correctness of a theory, say.[119] Concluding on that count would be any expressive act and among the objects expressed could be feelings, suspicions, etc., as well as judgements. But it is a long step from there to claiming that concluding can ever be non-assertive, especially if, as Hitchcock concedes, it must

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[119] Hitchcock (2007: 107) claims that these acts – i.e. arguments – can be schematised as follows: <express admiration for Picasso's *Guernica,* since, {assert that Picasso's Guernica brings home in a vivid way the horrible consequences for the innocent of aerial bombing in contemporary warfare}> <suspect that Goldbach's conjecture is correct, since, {assert that mathematicians have found no counter-example in 200 years of trying}>.

still 'concern' a proposition. I am not sure how one would *express* admiration without an assertion being implicit in the expression – something equivalent to or conveying the same content as: '...(therefore) I admire the painting'. Even then, it is questionable whether 'I admire *x*' could be counted as the expression of a conclusion that follows from premises. Feelings can be had without any need of reasons. What would follow, in the proper sense of what the reasons support, would be that the painting is admirable for the reasons given. But that is plainly an assertion.

However, Hitchcock is right to note a difference between reason-giving and conclusion-drawing – premising and concluding – and it is this that I take him to mean by saying that concluding concerns a proposition, without necessarily asserting it. His mistake, I think, is to locate the difference in the act, rather than in its object. Concluding, I would argue, is no less assertive than premising, but there is a difference in what is asserted in each case. What is asserted in an act of premising is, straightforwardly, a premise. But, in an act of concluding, what is asserted is not the conclusion – not directly. It cannot be just that. For if, in the wake of the asserted premises, all that were required of concluding were the *asserting* of the conclusion, the form of the propounded argument would be indistinguishable from that of a mere *conjunction*.

Our long-running example,

> (2)   The tide is out *and* we can get to the island,

is true if both conjuncts are true, but it cannot be judged either valid or sound on that score. This is no surprise since (2) is not an argument. The compound sentence cannot be assessed for soundness or validity without some indication that one of the sentences is claimed or supposed to follow from the other. The standard way to give such an indication is to insert 'so' (or some equivalent marker) in front of the sentence that is claimed to follow from the others:

> (3)   The tide is out; so we can get to the island.

However, given that in the actual propounding of an argument the premises are *asserted*, the 'so' does not replace the 'and' but augments it. The importance of this was intimated in Chapter 1, and now it can be seen why. In any actual act of argument *two* things are said (and done). To make that explicit we say:

(3')   The tide is out *and so* we can get to the island.

The inclusion of 'and' might be considered no more than stylistic, for which reason I have sometimes placed it in brackets. A punctuation mark has the same logical import, and (3) is no less conjunctive than (3'). However the 'and' emphasises the conjunctive form of a propounded argument and, at the same time, signals that (3) is truth-bearing. (3) is true, as a whole, if and only if the argument it represents is sound. To establish that, however, the 'so' must be understood not as a sentence connective – as it is often classified in textbooks – but as a *marker*, signalling that what follows it is not just asserted but asserted as following from whatever has been asserted before it. A plain act of assertion can be reported by saying:

X asserted *that*-A.

An act of concluding (inferring, deducing) can be reported by saying that

X asserted *that so*-C.

which, though ill-formed grammatically, makes the point that C is asserted, not flatly, but as a claimed consequence of the asserted proposition, A. In that sense 'so' is adverbial, modifying the assertion by indicating the relation within which it is made. Again ungrammatically, we might say:

X asserted C *so-ly.*[120]

With this in mind, the key point is that *so*-C, not just C, is what X asserts. *That*-C is what X concludes (infers, deduces) from whatever has been given as premise(s). The whole compound assertion can then be reported:

X asserted that [A *and so*-C]

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[120] A similar idea was discussed in §36 with respect to asserting a belief.

In other words, in propounding an argument, X makes a number of assertions, whose objects are propositions $A(A_1, ..., A_n)$ and an assertion *to the effect that* C follows from A. I say 'to the effect that' rather than saying simply that X asserts that C follows, because X does not actually assert *that* C follows from A. Preceding a sentence with 'so' *expresses* the relation; it doesn't *assert* it. (A similar point was discussed in Chapter 1, §2, with respect to conclusions being 'claimed to follow'.) The argument is valid if C *does* follow, and sound if, in addition, A_1, A_2, etc. are all true. But what X asserts is a conjunction which is true if and only if the argument it represents is sound. This can be seen if we parse the example (3) as follows:

(3'')   [The tide is out] *and* [so we can get to the island]

We can now see why the act and expression of argument is assertive in character, but without the conclusion itself – i.e. what is concluded – being asserted directly. What is asserted is what is meant by 'so we can get to the island'. But this is an incomplete expression, unless the premise to which the conclusion is implicitly related by 'so' is specified. When specifying *what* the conclusion *is* we can omit the 'so', or replace it with 'that', upon which it is *simply* assertible, independently of the reason(s) from which it may have been inferred in some act of argument. If we ask what is asserted, therefore, in the act of concluding, inferring, etc. we need to produce something equivalent to the conditional formed from the premise(s), as antecedent, and the conclusion, as consequent:

(4)   *If* the tide is out we can get to the island.

Needless to say, (4) is not an argument, nor is asserting (4) the same as asserting (3), which *is* an argument. Nonetheless, (3) and (4) have much in common, to the extent that if (3) is valid, then (4) is true (and vice versa). This is the basis of the deduction equivalence, or deduction theorem.[121] 'Equivalence' does not imply that asserting a conditional is the same act as propounding an argument – a confusion

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[121] Read (1988: 21) expounds the theorem as follows: B follows from $A_1, . . . , A_n$, A iff (if A then B) follows from A1, . . . , A. Read claims the theorem leads to invalid arguments coming out as valid. But that debate is beyond the remit of this thesis. Here the equivalence between the validity of a simple argument and the truth of the corresponding conditional is taken as intuitively obvious.

that Hamblin (1970: 232–33) appears to make when he claims that deductive argument is (objectionably) 'hypothetical'. (See §16 above.) Where Hamblin was correct was in saying that 'If A then C' was not a real argument, but at best a hypothetical one (ibid.).[122] That, however, is because 'If A then C' is not an argument at all, but just a part of one: the part where it is said that *if* the single premise, 'A', is true, then so is 'C', which, in the argument, is expressed '...so-C'. The second, albeit provisional, proposal that I make is then as follows. (I will state it first and then offer a clarification, before moving to the third proposal.)

P2   An act of concluding is an assertion equivalent to asserting a conditional: If A then C.

An anticipated objection

The idea that in the act of propounding an argument the conclusion is not asserted – or asserted conditionally – might seem counter-intuitive. Surely, when I argue I don't assert *that* C follows from A: what I assert is that C, the proposition that is claimed to follow from my premises. That C is asserted would seem almost a self-evident objection in the case of a complex argument, where the intermediate conclusion of one argument is also the premise to a further conclusion. So, for example, the conclusion that the banknotes I am tendering are forgeries, inferred from the observation that they have duplicate serial numbers, may in turn be asserted as a reason for a charge of attempted fraud. Now being a premise, the intermediate conclusion *must* be asserted for the purposes of the further argument. But in any case, the objection might run, neither argument is fully propounded until the conclusion has been asserted, albeit on the strength of the premise. Another way to press the objection might be to say that in the many cases where an argument is expressed without any explicit inference indicator ('so', 'therefore', etc.), the conclusion apparently carries the same assertive force as the

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[122] I have substituted 'A' and 'C' for Hamblin's 'P' and 'Q'.

premise(s), especially when the conclusion is expressed first, ahead of the reasons. Take, for instance,

(5)   These notes are forgeries; they all have the same numbers.

We also find arguments in which the inference indicator[123] is prefixed to the premise(s):

(6)   These notes are forgeries *since* they all have the same numbers.

Surely, one might think that, in these cases, as in many others, the conclusion is straightforwardly asserted, and its object is the asserted proposition.

Response

I do not deny that concluding is *assertive*. What I do deny, and see no way to avoid denying, is that asserting a conclusion is all that there is to concluding. For, as already observed, an argument is more than a plain conjunction, and propounding an argument is more than *asserting* a plain conjunction. Two things are asserted, but one at least must be asserted with respect to the other, or there is no argument. That is the force of 'so' in (3), and, for that matter, of 'since' in (6), for the relations they indicate are the converse of one another, not two different relations. The question is therefore: how can both positions be accommodated? How can concluding C be equated with asserting C without reducing arguments to mere conjunctions?

The answer, I now argue, emerges from the previous chapter. It does not lie in differences between the *acts* of asserting and concluding – I am committed to the claim that concluding is a species of assertion (in the act sense) – but in how we refer to their objects. In short, 'what is *concluded*' can have the same kind of

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[123] In critical thinking syllabuses a distinction is often made between 'reason indicators', ('because', 'since', etc.) and 'conclusion indicators', like 'so', 'therefore'. Collectively these are 'argument indicators' (Fisher 2001:23). 'Inference indicator' is potentially ambiguous. I use it like 'argument indicator', i.e. to indicate where inference is going on rather than exclusively as a prefix to the conclusion.

ambiguity as was seen in 'what is asserted'. (See §33 above.) What is concluded can be understood as 'that thing which X concluded – but which Y might have asserted as a premise, or Z denied altogether', and so on. That would be a bare object-sense of 'the conclusion', i.e. what was termed the paragrammatic object in §31. But as with assertion generally, there is also a qualified, act-involving sense where 'what is concluded' has its identity, at least in part, from being the object of a specific act of concluding. On that basis, then, I do not simply assert the bare object (the non-act-involving object). I have *concluded* that-C, by asserting it *as* a conclusion – i.e. as conditional upon the premise(s), A*.*

Of course, if I assert (A) *and* (C if A)*,* I am *committed* to C*.* But that is a different matter, and proposal P2 is not incompatible with that. What P2 proposes is that giving expression to the act of concluding is *equivalent* to asserting, that *if* A, then C*.* In that respect concluding does not involve asserting C, but it does commit me to C*.* It also warrants my subsequent asserting of C on the strength of the argument – for example as a premise of a further argument. But by then the first act of argument itself is complete, and any subsequent assertion of C is a separate act.

The whole act: propounding an argument

The above account of concluding falls into line with the standard definition of argument given by Copi and others (§1), in which one proposition is 'claimed to follow' from the other(s) in the set. An *act of concluding* is the asserting of one proposition in relation to another (or others). We also call it drawing a conclusion or inferring. Concluding, as proposed in P2, reduces effectively to asserting a conditional whose antecedent has already been asserted in the act of premising. So, from P1 and P2 it would follow that the act of propounding an argument is a complex assertion, its object a complex proposition, basically a conjunction, standardly expressed

(7)   A (and) so C

The import of P2 was that what is concluded cannot just be C because that would ignore the significance of 'so'. The import of 'and' (though omissible as implicit) is that in a real argument the premises are asserted, i.e. given, and not just hypothesised. A whole act of argument occurs when the two acts are co-ordinated: that is, performed in sequence. Premises are given and a conclusion claimed to follow. Reflecting this, the third proposal is:

P3   The act of propounding an argument is a complex assertion. What is asserted is a conjunction of the premises: A, and a conditional: *If* A, C

40.   The argument as object

There are three levels on which we encounter argument. One is the act of arguing which consists of asserting premises and drawing conclusions. It is an assertive act, in part and whole, the whole act being the propounding of the argument. On the second level is the text: the sequence of sentences which gives expression to the act, and which may rightly be seen to be a product of the author's making. Third, there is the argument *itself*, or underlying argument – what is propounded (and thereby asserted). This last is the object of the whole argument-act. The text, of course, is also the object of an act. It will be recalled that for Johnson (2002) the text (or discourse) is what constitutes the argument *itself*, the product (Johnson also refers to it as the 'distillate') of the act or practice. It cannot really be denied that the *text* of an argument – at least of a 'real' argument – is a product or creation on some author's part. At the very least the text represents the author's choice of how to express the argument, and is 'productive' in that way. But when it comes to the question of what we mean by 'the argument *itself'* we find again the ambiguity of 'object' hovering over the terms – the ambiguity between the simple-object sense and the act-involving sense.

Returning to the start of the thesis, it was seen that there was another perspective altogether from which to conceive of arguments, namely the critical perspective. From that perspective an argument is an object of appraisal. That is not to say that there are two distinct meanings of 'argument', one for the author, another for the

critic – although that is all but the view of those who draw a distinction between 'real' and 'made-up' arguments. Obviously what the author propounds (if there is an author) is one and the same object as that which the critic judges.

The orthodox line in critical thinking (though variously expressed) is that arguments are products of the arguer's making, and that the extracting of *the* argument is an exercise in divining author-intention, author-meaning. That is why the principle of charity plays a crucial role in the interpretation of texts as arguments. If there were no author, actual or notional, there would be no relevant part for the principle of charity to play in the task of identifying or classifying arguments. What the critic of a 'real' argument takes to be the object of appraisal is what he or she takes to be the object of the author's act (or acts) of argument. What, by contrast, the logician takes to be the object of appraisal need be no more than a set of sentences or propositions, ordered and indexed to enable assessment on the basis of validity. On that conception there is no requirement for any *act* of argument, actual or notional, to play a part. Understandably, these may appear to be quite disparate objects, to which the descriptions 'real' ('natural') and 'made-up' aptly apply. But if logic is to play the appropriate part in the theory and practice of critical thinking that its claims to rigour require, some point of intersection between the two perspectives needs to be found.

The aim behind the three proposals, P1–P3, was to identify an argument – the argument itself – as the object of an act. We come to the object, not surprisingly, by way of the contributory acts of premising and concluding. These, to recap, are assertions. Their objects are propositions, their expression sentences. What is propounded is an argument. How it is propounded is assertion. What is asserted is a conjunction:

> (8)   A*, and (if A, C)*   (P2)

This last, of course, is not what is uttered in making the assertion. To assert the content of (8) the standard form of natural expression is

(9)   A (and) *so* C

But there is another way to conceive of A and C in relation to the respective acts.

Intersection of the perspectives

In an assertive utterance of (8), 'A' has the act-involving sense: 'what is asserted'. 'C', on the other hand, has the act-involving sense of 'what is concluded (from A)', in virtue of its being prefaced by 'so'. If we go back to Copi's (logician's) definition of an argument, 'C' has the sense of 'what is claimed to follow (from the premise(s))'. And if we place 'C' *with that sense* in the schema

A ; C

we have the logician's object of appraisal: the object of what Sainsbury refers to as an argument *claim*[124] (see §3)

(10) $A \vDash C$ (or: $A \nvDash C$)

or in plainer terms:

(10')   'A ; C' is valid, (or : 'A ; C' is *not* valid.)

In (10) A and C have no act-involving sense. They are propositions simpliciter, which may be asserted in acts of argument, or not asserted at all. In that bare sense, however, they are constituents of the object of appraisal. We have *derived* 'A ; C' from an examination of the act of argument by taking from the act the act-involving sense, and from there abstracting a non-act-involving sense – the set of propositions, one designated as that which is supposed to follow from the others.

When the logician designates a proposition as a conclusion, and the rest as premises, he gives them the non-act-involving object-sense they require for the purpose of appraisal. What a critic working on 'real' argument, or products of practice, extracts from a text on the basis of interpretation, is of the same order as

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[124] As suggested in §3 'argument claim' has the meaning of an *evaluative* claim.

that which a logician designates as an argument for the purposes of formal evaluation,

A ; C

I consider this to be an important result for critical thinking, though not perhaps a welcome one for those who persist in the view that formalised, deductive argument and 'real' argument are chalk and cheese, and need to be processed and appraised in markedly different ways. What arguers propound are 'real' arguments with or without the inverted commas. We come to them from two perspectives only to find the same object at both destinations: a set of propositions, one of which is claimed to follow (supposed, purported, etc.) from the others. That conclusion, as far as it goes, may seem trivial and academic, but it has one very important consequence for the method and practice of critical thinking. I contend that it paves the way towards the theoretical underpinning of a thoroughgoing deductivist approach to the appraisal of natural-language arguments. With that in mind, the next section signals a return to appraisal.

41. Appraisal

One of the key planks of critical thinking methodology is the view that 'real' arguments – i.e. actual arguments propounded for purposes other than exemplification or study – do not lend themselves to appraisal by the standards applied in classical logic, validity and soundness. There are understandable reasons for this position – though I contest it – not least that most arguments found in natural-language discourse are neither valid nor sound, and if those standards were applied without qualification, few specimens would pass the test. Conversely, those that would past the test without modification would probably not count as 'real'.

Let us look back briefly to the issues raised by Hamblin and others. Among the reasons Hamblin gives for rejecting formal appraisal criteria are these: 1) The arguments to which formal criteria apply are 'hypothetical', by which he means that their premises need not *be* true – less still known to be true – for validity to be

assigned. 2) If the premises are known to be true – as they must be if the argument is to have any *practical* worth – then the conclusion must be known to be true also, for validity (and hence soundness) to be determined. But then Hamblin argues that knowing the truth of the conclusion prevents the 'passage' from premises to conclusion from being independently assessed. Therefore, in short, Hamblin finds the criterion of *validity* too weak and that of *soundness* too strong, and proposes instead that the best measure for approval of the premises and the reasoning is the dialectical criterion of 'acceptability'.

There is a long tradition behind the application of dialectical criteria to argument. In the *Topics* Aristotle makes frequent reference to the *endoxa,* variously translated as 'accepted', 'reputable', or 'common' views. The Stoic logicians, too, as noted earlier, held premises to be propositions 'adopted by *agreement* for the establishment of a conclusion'.[125] But dialectic is not so much a form of argument as a context in which argument takes place, including some that is monological, and some that is disputational.[126] The strategies for success in persuading others – for which acceptability is necessary and at times sufficient – do not, as Aristotle would have said, prove anything or lead to knowledge. Adjudicating a debate and assessing soundness of reasoning are not alternative ways of evaluating the same argument. To be sure, it is a good policy in negotiation and conflict resolution to seek agreement on the basic premises, admissibility of evidence, standards of proof, etc. But when it comes to the proper evaluation of an argument, it is not acceptability by the audience that determines the strength of the reasoning or truth of claims but the strength of the argument and truth of claims that determine the acceptability of the argument.

Of course there are critical questions that relate to the rhetorical as well as the logical features of argument texts. There are also critical questions that concern the ways in which simple arguments link with others to form complex chains of

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[125] Sextus Empiricus: *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* Book 2: 135.

[126] 'Monological' is used here to mean single authorship, emanating from one source, as in the Greek *monologos* rather than carrying any of the baggage of the modern derivation, 'monologue'.

reasoning, or deal with anticipated objections, or respond to counter-arguments. These are among the many superstructural features of argumentation with which the critic must deal, and are no less important for being superstructural. But because most natural-language argument is complex, much of the work of analysis in critical thinking consists of mapping the connections between main and intermediate conclusions, and may not penetrate below the surface level of the simple arguments.[127] A 'good' argument must perform well on all levels, of course. But complex chains of reasoning, like all chains, depend on each link being sound, and they break, as the old adage says, at the weakest one. The truth of the main premises in a complex argument ultimately depends upon the warrant they receive from other arguments in the chain. The need for rigour in evaluating each step is multiplied by this inter-dependence, making it imperative that the standard for approval sets the bar as high as possible. It is generally accepted that deductive soundness is the highest that the bar can go.

Non-deductive standards

An apt slogan for the prevailing doctrine in critical thinking (as discussed in Chapter 2) might be: 'Non-deductive standards for non-deductive arguments'. Alec Fisher (2001) writes:

> We saw earlier that there are different kinds of reasons, which have to be judged
> differently (for truth, credibility, acceptability ...). In the same way different kinds of
> inferences have to be judged by quite different standards. [...] Although, of course,
> every argument aims to provide support for its conclusion, some arguments are
> meant to be more 'conclusive' than others. (Fisher 2001: 111)

Some reasoning, Fisher continues, is 'meant to be' deductively valid (ibid.), but by no means all. He cites the familiar standard required by criminal law, whereby a guilty verdict must be established beyond reasonable doubt. From there we may move down through (mere) balance of probabilities, plausible grounds, limited

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[127] For examples of mapping exercises, see Copi (1962: 43ff).

support, and so on. Bowell and Kemp devote a chapter each to deductive validity and inductive force, the one an absolute standard, the other variable in degree.

But how does the critic know, in every case, how conclusive an argument is *meant* to be? Some arguments, of course, *are* more conclusive than others – although in my view, pace Fisher, that means that some are conclusive and some are not. If an argument is conclusive that is all the critic needs to say. It is not necessary to add that the author *meant* to argue conclusively as well as doing so! The question of what was meant is pertinent only when a supposed argument is found less than conclusive, for then the principle of charity comes into play. (See §§ 11-12 above). At the extremity the question becomes: How conclusive does an argument have to be to be deemed an argument at all? The critic has the option whether to judge the argument as a failed attempt to meet a certain intended (meant, agreed) level of conclusiveness, or as a qualified success in meeting some lesser but arguably acceptable standard. Only in the ideal circumstances where the text of an argument plainly exhibits its logical form can it be said with confidence that it 'aims' for this standard or for that. Ennis (2001) acknowledges these problems of identifying and classifying, and finally evaluating arguments.[128] But acknowledging a problem does not solve it. Worse, the acknowledgement undermines confidence in the procedure, and respect for rigour and consistency of the discipline.

42. Natural language deductivism –NLD

There are, however, no similar, compromising pressures on the practice of classical logic, for the simple reason that only objects which are amenable to assessment for deductive validity are considered for appraisal. Though not the predominant view, this has prompted some commentators (e.g. Thomas 1986, Groarke 1999, Botting 2015) to argue for a deductivist programme for the analysis and evaluation of natural language argument (NLD). According to Groarke, NLD is the view that all arguments should be understood as attempts at deductive argument.

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[128] See also Butterworth & Thwaites (2013: 201).

Recall the example discussed in §10 in connection with charitable interpretation :

> (11)   These banknotes are forgeries since they all have the same serial numbers.

This argument can be interpreted as an attempt at deduction by assuming that the author expected the audience to know that non-counterfeit bank-notes have different numbers. The assumption is broadly deductivist because the addition of the implicit premise would effectively make the argument valid – or at least expressible as a valid argument.[129] But even if valid, (11) will not be a *sound* deduction, because the added premise is almost certainly untrue. First – as noted in §13 – one of the banknotes might be a genuine one; second the duplicate numbers might be the result of a printing fault and not, therefore, a forgery. Critics of NLD could say with some justification that whilst (11) is unsound, it is not a bad argument. As an abductive argument it is quite strong, given that forgery is a likely explanation for defective banknotes. So the maxim of charity would rule against a deductive interpretation. Ennis would claim that we should settle for a lesser standard than deductive soundness, on that realisation.

Opponents of NLD, notably Govier (1987) and Johnson (2000), claim in more general terms that deductivism results in turning all arguments, whatever their surface form, *arbitrarily* into deductions. Thus, to give a rather simplistic example, an inductive argument, judged to exhibit the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy might be construed instead as a deduction, and judged to be valid by simply adding the premise that past regularities will hold in the future. Similarly an argument to the conclusion that torture is wrong, since it inflicts pain on another, could be covered by the added premise that any practice which inflicts pain on another without his or her leave is wrong; and so on. But there are no more grounds on which to make these assumptions about the *intended* form of reasoning than any other. It is ultimately speculation.

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[129] In practice it is quite hard to formalise (11) as a strictly valid argument.

With Groarke, I think the charge of arbitrariness can be met. But more importantly, abitrariness is not a defect in NLD, any more than it is in the practice of classical logic. The arbitrariness in logic allows the logician to take any ordered set of propositions to be an argument, with the last member in the sequence designated the conclusion. That is a strength not a flaw. Its 'great advantage', say Bergmann et al. (2004: 9)

> is that it sidesteps the problem of having to give an account of how plausible a line
> of reasoning has to be to count as an argument, or how likely it is that a given group
> of sentences will be taken to support a designated sentence...

Logic treats all such sets as deductive arguments and assesses them for validity. NLD treats all arguments as *implicitly* valid, and assesses them for soundness – not out of charity, but as a means to evaluation. The procedure is simple – a point noted by NLD's supporters and detractors alike. For any recognisable argument,

A ; C

ask the question: What is the minimum logical addition to the premises that would be required to make it *expressly* valid? If it already has a valid, non-enthymematic form, the answer will of course be: nothing. But in the usual way of things a natural-language argument will require some supplementation, or 'assumption ascription' to be deemed valid. Groarke considers the following example:

(12)   Jones is a politician, so he is not to be trusted.

'Faced with such an argument', Groarke says, 'we have no difficulty recognizing that it contains the unexpressed premise "No politicians can be trusted".' But, here I think Groarke is inviting an obvious objection. Suppose we ask him: '*Recognised* on what basis?' Surely not in order to approve of the argument. On the contrary, noting the assumption simply draws attention to the author's appeal to a dubious stereotype. It shows what is wrong with the author's argument, if treated as valid, not what is right. Of course we knew that already, without the manoeuvre. But (12) is just an illustrative example. In practice the plausible interpretation of (12) would

be that it not a serious argument at all. If the author of (12) were challenged for implying an unwarranted generalisation in an *attempt* to argue deductively, he or she might well respond: 'I wasn't trying to *deduce* anything. I was poking fun, making a point.'[130]

I would take issue with Groarke for unnecessarily presenting NLD in terms of *attempted* deduction. The same would go for 'assumption' if that means the author's assumption. These manoeuvres compromise the objectivity that NLD has the potential to bring to argument appraisal. Objectivity comes with asking what is required of the text for validity to be exhibited? That is a different question from: 'What is attempted, or intended, or assumed?', which, so much of the time, cannot be answered with any more than an educated guess. The most plausible guess as to what a proponent of (12) might be assuming, if arguing deductively, is

(13)   *no* politician is to be trusted?

But on what grounds would the *critic* ascribe this assumption to (13) other than to show the argument is unsound? In accordance with the principle of charity, (13) should not be assumed. Nothing as strong as (13) is required for (12) to be valid.

Groarke very rightly raises this point himself (which makes it more surprising that he sees any need to talk in terms of 'attempt'). He invents a special-case scenario in which Jones denies being a politician, so that if he *is* a politician, he is lying and arguably therefore not to be trusted. The point of the scenario, if far-fetched, is that a sweeping generalisation like (13) is not needed if the connection between the premise and conclusion happens to be of a more particular nature. If we are asking what *must* be assumed for the validity of (12) – the logical minimum – (13) is not it.

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[130] As noted earlier, Hamblin (1970: 225) make a similar point about 'nailing a fallacy ... The perpetrator cannot be convicted of a fallacy until he can have an argument pinned on him. And what are the criteria of that?'.

The observations Groarke makes in the following extract in my view go to the heart of the of the analysis-appraisal problem. For that reason I quote a substantial extract:

> In assigning unexpressed premises, we can distinguish different possibilities. A 'logical minimum' is the minimum claim necessary to ensure a valid inference. In some cases, it is the most plausible unexpressed premise, but there are many cases in which context or common practice clearly suggest that an arguer is committed to a stronger claim which is, in pragma-dialectical terminology, the 'pragmatic optimum.' In the example above [my (13)], the logical minimum is the claim that 'If Jones is a politician, then he cannot be trusted' – a claim which is not equivalent to the claim that 'No politicians can be trusted' (the first but not the second is, for example, true if Jones has always denied that he is a politician, and *this* is the only reason why he cannot be trusted if he is). In the absence of some explicit indication that this idiosyncratic assumption is the basis of the proposed conclusion, it is reasonable to assume that it is the latter generalization about politicians which drives the inference. It can, therefore, be designated as the pragmatic optimum.
>
> We can see that it is always possible to deductively reconstruct an argument which is not transparently deductive by noting that any arguer is committed to the statement that 'If the premises of my argument are true, then the conclusion is true.' This follows directly from the implications of the speech acts 'argument' and 'assertion,' for an arguer who argues for some conclusion C on the basis of some set of premises purports to believe both that C is true and that her proposed premises *justify* this belief. ... In this sense, their argument declares that they believe that these premises imply the conclusion, and that the conclusion is true if the premises are true. It is perhaps worth noting that they are committed to the latter conditional not merely in the sense of material implication, but in the stronger sense that they must believe that there is a relationship between their premises and their conclusion which makes it reasonable to base a belief in the latter on a belief in the former. (Groarke 1999: 6)

Comments

Assumption ascription based on basis of the *logical minimum* (LM) is not a charitable interpretation of the text. It is not a judgement, on the critic's part,

about what the arguer is attempting to do, or intends to say. It may coincide with what the arguer is attempting, as Groarke says above. But it need not, and should not be guided by guesswork. Indeed, it need not be guided by anything other than the minimum requirement for validity. Assumption ascription is in that respect an entirely arbitrary move. For any argument,

A and so C,

the logical minimum requirement for validity is

LM: If A then C.

On that principle any enthymeme whatsoever is validated by the rule of modus ponens, for example:

(14)   A: Jones is a politician.

LM: If Jones is a politician he is not to be trusted.

C: Jones is not to be trusted

What, it might be asked, is the justification for adding LM? The answer is that it reflects what is asserted in the acts of premising and concluding, as explained in my §§31-40, and endorsed by Groarke in the above extract, where he states that the requirement for arguments to be supplemented up to the logical minimum 'follows directly from the implications of the speech acts "argument" and "assertion"' (ibid.).

Here, I suggest, is where any lingering worries about the arbitrariness of NLD can be dispelled. The assumption that arguments are implicitly deductive is not groundless. What is asserted in the standard expression of an argument *naturally* has the form:

A, and if A,C

which – as an argument for C – is valid.

NLD and appraisal

If all arguments are construed as valid, as a matter of procedure, the question of appraisal turns on whether or not the argument in question is sound. Can the logical minimum for validity be assumed without absurdity, obvious falsity, or unwarranted generalisation? These are matters for critical discussion, investigation, and ultimately judgement. NLD does not displace these: it merely provides a modus operandi for extracting, interpreting ,and reconstructing putative arguments from natural-language texts. The hardest aspect of argument reconstruction in the orthodox approach to critical thinking is assumption ascription, because it depends on first deciding what sort of argument the text contains, and hence what criterion or criteria are applicable to its appraisal. As we have seen, some arguments score differently according to their presumed classification. The same argument may score well as an argument to the best explanation, but fail as a deduction because it is invalid. NLD applies one criterion only: deductive soundness, and measures arguments by the degree to which soundness can be maintained with validity assumed. Critical judgement is no less necessary; it is simply directed uniformly to the objective assessment of the premises, explicit and implicit.

The practical details of applying NLD are outside the scope of this thesis, although they deserve more attention in the text-books than they generally receive. The objective in the thesis has been to give a clear account of what an argument is, on the one hand as an object of evaluation and, on the other, an object of the (complex) act of argument. The endorsement that this gives to a deductivist programme in critical thinking is a welcome consequence.

43. Summary and postscript

A deductively valid argument is one whose conclusion cannot be false if the premises are all true. The paradigm example is *modus ponens*:

MPP: A, (A → B) ; B

I have argued that the *objects* of the two acts that constitute the act of propounding an argument– premising and concluding – are equivalent to the *premises* of MPP, presented earlier as

(8)   A*, and (if A, C)*   (P2)

expressed in various ways but standardly as

 (9)   A, and so C

But this is no coincidence. The form of expression that argument can take in natural language discourse has unlimited variety. It must also be said that the degree and nature of the support that ordinary everyday argument provides for the conclusion – and/or is *expected* to provide – varies significantly. Deductivist reconstruction does not *make* all arguments alike; it *treats* them all alike. But as far as the object of the act is concerned, its form is *naturally* deductive – deductive by virtue of the nature of the act.

Asserting (8) – by uttering (9) – commits the author to C*.* However, like Searle (2001), I do not take this to mean that the rule of modus ponens determines the nature of the act of argument performed by asserting that A *and if* A *then* C. The rule of modus ponens – the fact that it is a rule – is as much determined by the self-evident commitment that asserting (8) gives to C*.* As Searle puts it:

> The so-called rule of modus ponens is just a statement of the pattern of an infinite number of independently valid inferences. ... *If you think you need a rule to infer q from p and (if p then q) then you would also need a rule to infer p from p.* [...] *We need to distinguish between entailment and validity as logical relations, on the one hand, and inferring as a voluntary human activity on the other*. (Searle 2001: 19, 21 [his emphasis])

Assertively uttering an instance of

(7)   A (and) so C

also commits its author to the truth of the corresponding instance of (8), simply by virtue of the nature of assertion. In other words, in the propounding of any argument, a proposition with the form of (8) is *claimed* to be true, which it is (as already noted) if and only if the argument itself is deductively sound. Since the objects of assertion have a purport to be true, the objects of acts of argument have a purport to be to be sound.

In this thesis I have sought to give an account of the act-object relation as it pertains to argument. If it is correct on the main points, then it seems to me to provide a firm theoretical basis for a deductivist methodology in critical thinking and related disciplines whose subject matter is natural-language argument. I have approached the *object* we call 'an argument' from two perspectives which between them define what arguments are. One perspective relates to the act arguers perform when propounding arguments. The other relates to the act that the critic performs when appraising arguments. In much critical thinking literature these perspectives are seen to conflict, leading to different conceptions of argument, and hence varying standards and criteria of evaluation. I claim to have shown that the perspectives in fact intersect and yield a definition of argument which in all essentials matches the object logicians designate as arguments and assess for validity , viz.

> a set of propositions, one of which is claimed to follow (validly)
> from the others.

For critical thinking this has pedagogical as well as theoretical importance. A deductivist notion of argument would open the way to a more prominent role for traditional logic in the methodology of analysis and appraisal. For many practitioners and commentators working in the discipline that would be an unwelcome U-turn. In my view, however, after long involvement in the teaching and assessment of the subject, some critical *rethinking* is overdue. An infusion of logical concepts and techniques into the critical thinking syllabus would be a start.

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