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ARGUMENTATION ETHICS & STANCES

In 2004, comedian John Stewart made a now famous appearance on the CNN television program, *Crossfire*. Framed as a “debate” show, *Crossfire* featured discussions with people representing stark positions on the right and left of the political spectrum. The hosts, Paul Begala and Tucker Carlson, invited Stewart on the show to promote his new book, *America: A Citizen’s Guide to Democracy Inaction*, but Stewart used the appearance to challenge the hosts for “doing theater when you should be doing debate.”¹ Stewart claimed the hosts failed to live up to their “responsibility to the public discourse” by serving as “partisan hacks” who were “hurting America.” According to Stewart, the hosts touted their respective party lines rather than being citizens who generated creative solutions to societal problems. When CNN President, Jonathan Klein, canceled *Crossfire* in 2005, he cited Stewart’s appearance as partially responsible for his decision. According to the *New York Times*, Klein remarked that he “agree[d] wholeheartedly with Jon Stewart’s overall premise” about the need to move away from “head-butting debate shows.”²

Stewart’s critique seemed rooted in a particular set of **argumentation ethics**, or guidelines for moral conduct when arguing, evident when he discussed the hosts’ “responsibility.” Ethics, broadly conceived, address questions of right and wrong or moral and immoral behavior. Argumentation ethics, then, guide how arguers ought to generate and exchange arguments as moral members of a community.

Related to ethics, Stewart also critiqued Begala and Carlson for their **argumentation stance**. Whereas ethics address your individual conduct in constructing and communicating arguments, stances are a relational feature of the debate situation concerning your interaction with others. Argumentation scholar Wayne Brockriede defined stances as comprising arguers’ “attitudes toward one another, their intentions toward one another, and the consequences of those attitudes and intentions for the act itself.”³

Chapter 2 discussed the “what” of argumentation by addressing the components of any given debate situation. Ethics and stances, on the other hand, refer to the “how” of argumentation by addressing the approach and manner in which people argue. As

ARGUMENTATION ETHICS:

Guidelines for moral conduct in argumentation

ARGUMENTATION STANCE:

An arguer’s attitude and intention toward co-arguers and audiences

such, ethics and stances are a normative dimension to argumentation and debate, offering guidelines for how we should conduct ourselves.

Because of their normative nature, ethics and stances both address the tension between freedom and responsibility. They rely on the freedom of the arguer, meaning you may choose whatever stance you like and whether to heed ethical guidelines. But those choices have consequences for yourself and others. Thus, you also have certain responsibilities as a community member. As you will discover in this chapter, the same content could produce different results if it is advanced using a different ethical guideline or a different stance. And our ethics and stances influence our credibility; if you often violate ethical guidelines, others may be unwilling to debate with you or not trust you. Beyond the outcomes or effectiveness of argumentation, ethics and stances also address the obligations you have in the very act of arguing. That is, we should heed ethics or adopt a particular stance because it is the right thing to do.

It is important to address ethics and stances now, near the start of your skill-building journey, because they occur before you even translate ideas into a spoken or written argument. To help you make more informed choices, this chapter will first explore some ethical guidelines for argumentation and debate while raising some challenging questions for today's pluralistic society. We will then turn to three common argumentation stances and their consequences. The content in this chapter is designed not to give you a "right" answer but to encourage reflection on how you ought to argue with others in everyday life. By the end of this chapter, you should be able to make informed choices concerning ethics and stances when deciding how to argue.

ARGUMENTATION AND DEBATE ETHICS

As noted in the previous section, our freedom to say and do what we want often conflicts with our obligation to do the right thing. Ethics are especially important in situations when doing the right thing (or not) has a direct impact on other people. You have likely encountered ethics in a variety of contexts—there are ethics of academic honesty when writing papers for classes, ethics of the road when driving, and ethics of gaming when playing online with others, to name a few. The same is true of argumentation and debate.

It's often the case that an *effective* argument (one that achieves your goal) or an *appropriate* argument (one that fits the audience, sphere, or situation) may not be an *ethical* argument (one that follows guidelines for moral conduct). For example, appealing to guilt when getting your friends to do something might gain their adherence and may follow the norms of conduct for a personal sphere but it might not be an ethical tactic. Similarly, breaking into your co-arguer's workplace to steal their strategy documents might give you the upper hand in a debate and may be a quid-pro-quo form of counter-attack but that doesn't make it the ethical choice and, as we learned during Watergate, it may be illegal.

Although ethics are important to argumentation, there is not a universal ethical code. Ethics may differ depending on culture, community, and nation. Moreover, just as spheres of argument have different norms for appropriate and effective argumentation, they also have different norms for ethical argumentation. You may know people who think that name calling is perfectly ethical and good-humored when arguing in a personal sphere

FIND YOUR VOICE

IDENTIFYING ETHICAL GUIDELINES

Before reading the guidelines this chapter proposes, reflect on your own experience. What ethical guidelines have you tended to follow? Why? Where did you learn or cultivate these guidelines? Have there been times when a co-arguer violated

your personal guidelines for ethics? If so, how have you responded? Being aware of ethics helps build your personal character and enables you to more effectively respond to those who may follow different guidelines than you.

with friends but, even if that's the case, those same people likely avoid that argumentative tactic in technical spheres such as the classroom or workplace. This ethical contrast was illustrated in the early years of *Saturday Night Live* when Dan Aykroyd and Jane Curtin would present a Weekend Update segment called "Point/Counterpoint." They would speak in a tone of voice you'd expect for a public affairs program but engage in name-calling and personal insults, epitomized by the statement Aykroyd commonly used to begin his counterpoint: "Jane, you ignorant slut." The humor of the skit derived entirely from the violation of ethical principles for that sphere; the satire reinforced the ethical norm.

Ethical criteria also differ within personal, technical, and public spheres. Presidential debates are a telling case. In the United States, presidential candidates have no *a priori* ethical guidelines apart from turn-taking and equitable time.⁴ Serbia specifies these same guidelines for its presidential debates but also expressly prohibits interruptions by other candidates while Nigeria goes further to proscribe certain kinds of arguments, noting for instance that "direct attack on the personality of candidate will not be allowed and we will strive to ensure that the highest sense of decorum is maintained by the candidates."⁵ Argentina, which staged the country's first presidential debates in 2015, offered even more robust ethical guidelines for its candidates: transparency, equality, construction of a public good, good faith, and freedom.⁶ The ethical guidelines differ even though they are all public sphere debates involving presidential candidates.

Despite a lack of consensus concerning *which* ethical guidelines to follow, most people would agree that argumentation and debate should follow some. Stop here and use the Find Your Voice feature to consider your personal guidelines for argumentation ethics. Following that, this section proposes five guidelines for consideration in Western societies. We use the label "guideline" to emphasize that there may be exceptions in certain situations rather than viewing them as inflexible rules that must be applied equally in all cases. As we explore each guideline, use the explanation to consider why and when it might be worthwhile.

Ethical Guideline 1: Honesty

Honesty is one guideline for ethical argumentation. Honesty is a broad category that involves numerous behaviors. Honesty demands accurate representations of information. Making up statistics, taking information out of context, or misquoting sources are all dishonest acts, and hence unethical. So is plagiarism, or using other people's ideas as your

own. Even when plagiarism happens unintentionally (e.g., forgetting to properly cite our research), it still demonstrates a lapse in ethical judgment.

Honesty also may require you to be candid and direct rather than passive aggressive or beating around the bush. Implying rather than stating claims may be an unethical act when used to manipulate others. People may also conceal their true intentions when arguing or may emphasize their arguments as other-oriented when they are really promoting self-interest. In your own experience, you can likely tell when people are misrepresenting their intentions. This may be ethical if they frame it as a win-win situation (your interests and theirs are satisfied), but it may be unethical if they are dishonest in their motives.

Honesty sounds like a good guideline in theory but the actual practice is more complex, as the following questions reveal:

- Does honesty still apply when it would physically or mentally harm another? Consider parents who conceal information from children to protect their interests. Under what conditions is this ethical or unethical? Should parents always answer a child's question with honest arguments?
- Does honesty also apply to argumentative omissions? If you know information that will harm your case and you intentionally refrain from sharing it, are you being dishonest? If the goal of debate is to come to the best decision on the proposition, then it seems important that audience members and co-arguers are provided all possible information that might help reach that decision but some people don't deem sins of omission unethical.
- Does honesty require arguers to recognize counter-arguments and the quality of support? Is it unethical to cherry pick evidence? For instance, President Trump claimed in his first press conference on February 16, 2017, that "I don't think there's ever been a president elected who, in this short period of time, has done what we've done." He supported this claim, in part, by noting "a new Rasmussen poll just came out just a very short while ago, and it has our approval rating at 55 percent and going up."⁷ This support was true—the poll did capture this approval rating—but there were 10 other polls around the same time that gauged his approval between 39 and 48 percent.⁸ Clearly, Rasmussen was an outlier, so was it dishonest for Trump to rely on this support?

Ethical Guideline 2: Respect

Respect, like honesty, is also an ethical choice that includes many sub-considerations. One common element is to treat your audience and co-arguers as equals whose time, presence, and ideas you value. Actions such as name calling, personal attacks, or a lack of preparation all compromise the respect you have for others in a debate situation. These are unethical because they dehumanize your co-arguers and audience members.

Respect also involves being aware of other cultures and perspectives. At a basic level, the style of debate common in Western societies—direct statements, linear progression, confident and concrete language, eye contact—does not translate to all cultures. In Japan, for instance, many arguers are more circular and indirect in their reasoning, using analogies and stories to develop implied claims.⁹ It might be disrespectful to enter

a debate situation with people from a different culture and expect them to conform to your own style.

Additionally, being respectful means avoiding discriminatory behavior toward other individuals and cultures. Language that demeans a person or group of people is unethical even if the people aren't present to hear it. This applies to arguments grounded in racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, ageism, and other qualities of social identity such as religion or socioeconomic status. Regardless of their impact on the effect of your argument, their very utterance is morally concerning.

Finally, respect also extends to audience members and co-arguers. Listening attentively and giving arguers a fair opportunity to communicate their ideas is often an ethical act. But, it goes beyond just sitting silently waiting until your turn to pounce; it includes a good faith effort to engage and a willingness to give someone the benefit of the doubt. Assuming the intentions of others may be unethical, particularly to the extent that it leads to prejudice and bias.

The mutual respect among arguers and audience members can create some ethical challenges:

- Does respect limit how you can respond to arguers who disrespect others? Consider a scenario in which someone gets flustered in a debate with you and responds to your argument by saying “that’s retarded.” This response is disrespectful to people with disabilities but it might be equally disrespectful for you to critique (i.e., personally attack) the speaker for saying that. How should you handle violations of this guideline while maintaining it yourself?
- Does respect require due diligence in preparing for the consequences of your argumentation? For example, Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* chose to publish political cartoons depicting the Muslim prophet Muhammed in 2005. Meant as an argument against self-censorship, this decision was met with an international backlash among Muslims for not respecting the cultural view that visual depictions of the prophet are blasphemous. The newspaper defended its action by touting the principle of free speech but many felt it was unethical for disrespecting another culture and the ensuing riots and protests resulted in lost lives.¹⁰ Should the newspaper have known the consequences of these arguments and, if so, should they have refrained from publishing them?

Ethical Guideline 3: Consistency

A third ethical guideline for argumentation and debate is consistency. To contradict oneself—to advance a claim at one point in time and then advance an opposite or modified claim at another point in time—may be immoral, especially if it (intentionally) confuses or misdirects others. To preach one thing and practice another is also a violation of ethical consistency, as is calling on your audience members to take a particular action but failing to do so yourself. Hypocrisy is a cardinal sin of debate that undermines an argument and casts doubt on the ethics of the arguer.

In contemporary politics especially, accusations of “flip-flopping” are commonly used to critique someone’s character. In the 2004 election campaign, President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry both attempted to exploit this perception. In the first presidential debate, Bush contrasted his leadership on the Iraq War with Kerry’s, arguing “The only

thing consistent about my opponent's position is that he's been inconsistent. He changes positions. And, you cannot change positions in this war on terror if you expect to win." Kerry responded by arguing that Bush was inconsistent with his policy toward North Korea, declaring Bush's policy to allow North Korea to obtain nuclear weapons as "one of the most serious, sort of, reversals or mixed messages that you could possibly send."¹¹ Setting aside the fact that these personal attacks are likely unethical themselves (see the previous guideline about respect), Bush and Kerry both addressed consistency as a virtue that makes for ethical argumentation.

However, consistency as an ethical guideline also brings with it some difficult questions:

- Does consistency mean you can't change your mind? Recall that one of the benefits of debate is that it helps people expose error and find the best ideas. Consistency, however, suggests you should be steadfast in your beliefs. How do we determine if and when inconsistency is unethical rather than a sign of mature growth and development?
- Does consistency mean people must always argue what they personally believe? One of the joys of argumentation is that it allows people to play with ideas, to take different perspectives, and even argue things they don't personally believe. Consistency, as a virtue, would imply that these actions are unethical. If it *is* ethical to play devil's advocate or take another side of a controversy, must the arguer offer a disclaimer stating so?

Ethical Guideline 4: Accountability

A fourth guideline is accountability, or being responsible for your argumentation. Accountability is particularly challenging online, where anonymity shields individuals. While eliminating such anonymity is unrealistic, you might promote your own accountability in this environment by asking yourself if you'd still advance the argument with your name and picture attached to it. If not, you probably should refrain from doing so.

Accountable arguers don't always avoid mistakes but are willing to take responsibility when they do. When you contravene ethical guidelines or harm others with your argumentation—whether intentional or not—accountability means you admit your fault, apologize, and strive to avoid the same mistake. For instance, it is likely that something you've posted through social media has, at some point, offended someone else. In such cases, accountability means you should apologize for your conduct and make amends. *VICE* emphasized the need for accountability in our online lives through their humorous article, "The Five Stages of Getting Publicly Shamed on the Internet." According to the article, Stage 4 is "the carefully worded statement" meant to quell the storm.¹²

While accountability is generally a good policy, we might test the scope of this guideline:

- Does accountability mean that violations of ethics are always in the eye of the beholder? To what degree does intent matter when it comes to ethical

violations? For instance, if you unknowingly use erroneous support or if you unintentionally offend someone, must you still take responsibility for those arguments? Given that some people are more sensitive to particular ethical guidelines than you might be, who decides when you've violated them? We'll consider these questions explicitly with our Everyday Life Example later in the chapter.

Ethical Guideline 5: Courage

Courage is a final ethical guideline. Courage may seem at first a personal choice rather than a matter of ethics. However, courage (or a lack thereof) can have moral implications. People are often bullied or isolated if they violate norms or advance unpopular arguments. While persecution is unethical itself, courage suggests it might be just as unethical for someone to bend to the pressure from others. To be courageous, then, means you have the resolve and strength to argue in the face of adversity.

New Jersey Governor Chris Christie offers a compelling example of courageous argumentation in response to Hurricane Sandy in October 2012. More than two months after Hurricane Sandy reached the eastern seaboard, the U.S. House of Representatives had still not passed a relief package.¹³ When the House postponed the vote until after the holiday recess on January 15, Christie delivered a speech critiquing Republican leaders—members of his own party—for delaying the aid package. Christie argued “the House of Representatives failed that most basic test of public service and they did so with callous indifference for the suffering of the people of my state.” Later, he asserted: “Shame on you. Shame on Congress.”¹⁴

This was an ethical choice because Christie stood up for democratic values in the face of adversity and argued what he believed was right rather than staying silent for the sake of popularity or party unity. Some conservatives criticized Christie for dividing the Republican Party, and this speech may be the reason Christie was not invited to the 2013 Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC).¹⁵ Christie likely knew ahead of time that he would be ostracized for his actions but upheld honesty and courage, claiming “I’m a guy who tells the truth all the time.”¹⁶

Courage can create some ethical challenges in its own right:

- Does courage foster recklessness? Aristotle argued that any quality taken to its extreme raises concerns. An excess of courage, then, could cause argumentative recklessness in which people don't censor their thoughts at all. How should arguers balance a desire to speak their truth with the need for self-censorship?

The five guidelines above offer a framework for ethical argumentation that you can use in a variety of contexts. While these ethical guidelines are useful for everyday life, the bullet points throughout the section have indicated how they might engender some challenging applications. The Build Your Skill feature offers additional opportunities to consider trade-offs between ethics and effectiveness. Then, consider the first Everyday Life Example in this chapter that further explores the difficulties of ethical argumentation.

BUILD YOUR SKILL

EXPLORING ETHICAL GUIDELINES

For the following scenarios, consider what ethical guidelines might be violated. Then, consider how you would personally respond and why.

- A. As you leave class, you hear your co-arguers discussing their strategy for an upcoming debate against you. Knowing that you won't get caught, is it ethical to stay outside the door and listen to them?
- B. You find statistics in one source that really help support your argument but you also find a source that questions the research methods used to gather those statistics. Is it ethical to use the statistics at this point?
- C. Your friend presents a case to you about the poor quality of your significant other. You believe your friend lacks credibility because you know his girlfriend has a history of cheating on him. Is it ethical to advance this counter-argument?

Everyday Life Example 3.1

Adria Richards's Tweets

Richards's Tweets (March 17, 2013): "Not cool. Jokes about forking repo's in a sexual way and 'big' dongles. Right behind me #pycon." [3:32 p.m.]¹⁸

"Can someone talk to these guys about their conduct? I'm in lightning talks, top right near stage, 10 rows back #pycon" [3:34 p.m.]¹⁹

"Code of Conduct #pycon <https://us.pycon.org/2013/about/code-of-conduct/>" [3:40 p.m.]²⁰

Source: Twitter/@adriarichards

Everyday Life Example 3.1 also illustrates some challenges of following ethical guidelines in everyday life. In March 2013, Adria Richards was listening to a presentation at a tech conference when two men behind her engaged in sexual innuendo through tech jargon. She was offended and felt afraid,¹⁷ so she took their picture and Tweeted it with a shaming statement. Read three of her tweets and consider if and how ethics are implicated.

One of the two men in the photo was fired from his job, which he credits to the tweet, and posted a statement to *Hacker News* about the situation (including an apology) under the pseudonym "mr-hank."²¹ This situation led many people to address Richards—with both support and condemnation—through her Twitter account and various online discussion forums. When someone targeted Richards's employer through a DDoS attack, she also was fired from her job. She blames mr-hank and commented to journalist Jon Ronson that mr-hank "was saying things that could be inferred as offensive to me, sitting in front of him. I do have empathy for him, but it only goes so far." She elaborated that, "If I had a spouse and two kids to support, I certainly would not be telling 'jokes' like he was doing at a conference. Oh, but wait, I have compassion, empathy, morals and ethics to guide my daily life choices."²²

The situation raises some challenging questions for a multicultural and interconnected world:

- Was Richards decision to post her argument to Twitter courageous? Honest? Respectful?
- Was it unethical for mr-hank to make sexual jokes to a male friend and, if so, on what grounds? What expectation of privacy do and should our arguments have? To what degree should mr-hank be accountable to someone who is not the intended audience for his argument?
- Was mr-hank's decision to post his statement to *Hacker News* courageous? Honest? Respectful?
- Is the public shaming of Richards a taste of her own medicine or unethical argumentation? If unethical, on what grounds? (To assess this, you might consult Richards's tweets and read some of the comments to them.)

The ethics of social media arguments are especially important for a few reasons. First, they can have substantial reach and repercussion, being difficult to sweep away. Through the Library of Congress and the Internet Archive, many posts live on forever even if you delete them from your account. Second, social media tends to be truncated arguments and, thus, may rely on ideas and depictions that are oversimplified or unflattering. Especially when representing other people, you should carefully consider the consequences of your arguments. And, third, social media represents a bizarre confluence of personal, professional, and public spheres. Our debates often mimic personal sphere debates with few rules for engagement but our networks likely involve people from all three spheres. As a result, we may be less cautious or thoughtful than we should be.

Ultimately, argumentation and debate ethics require you to not just heed moral principles but to pause and consider the potential effects of your arguments. The next section explores how these consequences are also affected by argumentation stances.

ARGUMENTATION STANCES

Argumentation stances refer to the attitude and intention an arguer chooses to adopt toward others. We will explore three main stances: competitive, manipulative, and cooperative. These are not, by any means, the only options but they capture three common stances individuals use when arguing. How do you know what stance you or someone else is using? To help you answer this question, our exploration of each stance will consider its goal and tactics.

As described below, the three stances represent extremes of each kind. Keep in mind that an arguer may not embody a particular stance in its entirety. When arguers don't go to the extremes, they hint at their stance based on how they approach the debate situation and how they enact their argumentation, as Everyday Life Example 3.2 will illustrate near the end of the chapter.

Competitive Stance

Read the following front page headlines from September 27, 2016, and try to guess what they are characterizing: “Fight Night” (*USA Today*); “Showdown” (*Philadelphia Enquirer*); “A Pitched Battle” (*Columbus Dispatch*); “A Testy Opening Round” (*Los Angeles Times*); “Clashing Visions over Nation’s Future” (*Chicago Tribune*); “A War of Words” (*Seattle Times*); “Clash of Styles” (*Dallas Morning News*); “Two Debaters on the Attack” (*Boston Globe*); “Candidates Press Pointed Attacks in Acerbic Debate” (*New York Times*); “Trump, Clinton Trade Fierce Blows” (*The Wall Street Journal*); and “Hesitant at Start, Clinton Sought to Leave Trump Out Cold” (*New York Times*). By the end of the list, it should have been evident that these headlines all describe the first debate on September 26 between presidential candidates Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton.

COMPETITIVE STANCE:

Arguers pursue self-interest by overpowering their co-arguer(s) and audience(s)

All of the headlines reflect a **competitive stance** toward argumentation. In this stance, arguers use arguments instrumentally to achieve their goals by defeating co-arguers and gaining submission from the audience.

The *goal* of debate from a competitive stance is for an arguer’s ideas to prevail by overpowering others. Competitive argumentation tends to view debate as a zero-sum game: If one person’s ideas prevail, the other person loses. In some extreme cases, the goal for debating is nothing other than debating and showing your linguistic power (you know, those people who like to argue for the sake of arguing).

There are numerous *argumentation tactics* that may signal a competitive stance:

- **Coercion and verbal force.** A competitive stance is often an effort to exert power. Arguers might use tactics of force that prevent others from communicating, such as interrupting, shouting down speakers, or outright censorship. A competitive stance might also involve verbal aggression, such as a raised voice, name calling, or combativeness and divisiveness.
- **Treating others as objects or means to an end.** A competitive stance frequently views audience members and co-arguers as objects to be overcome or as means to an end. This tactic may be somewhat innocuous, evident in a simple disregard for perspective taking, but it might also involve outright hostility towards the viewpoints of others. At its worst, a competitive stance might dehumanize other people through verbal abuse designed to achieve the arguer’s goals.
- **Close-mindedness.** A competitive stance typically involves arguments with strong qualifiers (e.g. claims that are “certain” or “obvious”) and arguers demonstrate little or no openness to new ideas and risk of self. Arguers using this stance tend to have a response to every possible counter-argument and they rarely listen to and integrate information that challenges their ideas.
- **Lack of respect for rules and ethics of engagement.** A competitive stance tends to view debate as warfare, leading some arguers to believe that anything goes. Motivated to destroy their enemy, they care little for guidelines of decorum or ethics. If rules *are* established, competitive arguers may try to find loopholes or exemptions or even change those rules during the debate. A competitive stance may seek to deny others fair or equal footing to participate.

At this point, it should be evident that a competitive stance is pretty common in everyday life even if it isn't taken to the extreme.²³ Just consider the language people often use to describe argumentation and debate: We characterize debate as a “battle” between diametrically opposed “sides.” We “attack” others' arguments and employ “strategies” comprised of “offensive” and “defensive” tactics. We seek to “destroy” their ideas. It's likely that you yourself have used language like this to characterize debates you've had with friends and family members.

Political candidate debates in the United States are a good example of a competitive stance because, as rhetorical scholar David Zarefsky has explained, “the focus in political debates is on winning by not losing, or by cleverly scoring a hit against the opponent.” What is more, Zarefsky notes that the viewing audience at home is complicit insofar as their main concerns are: “Were there any major gaffes or blunders? Were there any great one-liners or sound bites? If not, the debates are dismissed as inconsequential.”²⁴ In this stance, argumentation becomes an instrumental tool for achieving victory. This explains why the headlines at the start of this section all signaled debate as competition or warfare.

At the extreme, a competitive stance is quite problematic and would lead arguers to violate numerous ethical guidelines: respect for others, honesty, courage, and accountability. This is arguably why many commentators raise concerns about competitive debate programs, such as *Crossfire*, and about the overall state of public argumentation in society.

Manipulative Stance

Whereas a competitive stance employs force, a **manipulative stance** employs trickery. In this stance, arguers use arguments instrumentally to achieve their goals by manipulating co-arguers and audience members into agreement.

The audience is victimized by both competitive and manipulative arguers but the relationships between the stances are different; competition involves overpowering others to eliminate choice while manipulation involves ensnaring others who provide willing assent.

The *goal* of debate from a manipulative stance is for an arguer's ideas to prevail by beguiling others. Manipulative argumentation approaches debate not as competition or warfare but as opportunity. Argumentation becomes a means to an end that benefits the interests of the arguer. Brockriede characterizes this stance as “seduction” and observes that it provides an *illusion* of the “right to choose” while in reality limiting or eliminating this choice.²⁵

Numerous *argumentation tactics* may accompany a manipulative stance, some of which parallel a competitive stance:

- **Misuse of support.** A manipulative stance frequently misrepresents or withholds support to make a claim appear stronger or more appealing. Additionally, a manipulative stance might ground claims in irrelevant support, such as appeals to ignorance (i.e., a lack of contrary evidence), popularity, credibility, or tradition. While these may be appropriate in some cases, they often misdirect the audience's attention. Additionally, bullshit, as a mode of discourse, often falls under a manipulative stance. Bullshitters aren't liars per se because they are indifferent to the truth, saying whatever will further their goals in the moment.²⁶

MANIPULATIVE STANCE:

Arguers pursue self-interest by misleading their co-arguer(s) and audience(s)

- **Appeals to emotions and credibility.** A manipulative stance might entice others through appeals to the emotions or to the credibility of the arguer. A few common appeals are flattery, or excessive praise, of the audience and appeals to fear that override critical thinking. Emotional and character appeals do, of course, have a place in argumentation and not all of them are manipulative. However, a manipulative stance involves arguers who knowingly and intentionally exploit others' emotions to get their way.
- **Close-mindedness.** As with a competitive stance, a manipulative stance also involves being close-minded with little or no openness to new ideas and little risk of self. Manipulative arguers won't likely impose their position through force, but they may change the subject when challenged, evade answering tough questions, pass the blame to others, and talk their way out of factual contradictions and inconveniences.
- **Lack of respect for rules and ethics of engagement.** As with a competitive stance, a manipulative stance also shows disregard for certain rules and ethical guidelines. Arguers using this stance might blatantly disregard such rules, particularly concerning honesty and respect, or strive to bend them.

A manipulative stance may be less common than a competitive one but it is still fairly widespread in everyday life. You could likely recall some instances in which you have used this stance yourself, perhaps through appeals to fear or guilt. This stance pervades personal spheres because we are more invested in those relationships (so we avoid the forcefulness of a competitive stance), but we are still selfish beings who want to achieve our goals. Beyond personal spheres, a manipulative stance could also be evident in technical spheres like the courtroom—what the Broadway musical *Chicago* called the “razzle dazzle” of oral arguments—or public spheres like national politics.

Advertising frequently exemplifies a manipulative stance through tactics that intentionally deceive consumers. One common argumentative maneuver in advertising involves advancing, as Richard Williford explains, “bewildering claims” that are “supported by restrictions found in tiny print at the bottom of the ads.”²⁷ This is especially concerning for advertising aimed at children, who don't have the capacity to think critically about the arguments. Arguers using this stance care little for these misrepresentations because the focus is on their own interests.

As with a competitive stance, a manipulative stance likely would violate numerous ethical guidelines, chief among them honesty, respect, and accountability. For these reasons, it is best to avoid a manipulative stance.

Cooperative Stance

Unlike the force of the competitive stance or the deceit of the manipulative stance, a **cooperative stance** promotes a multilateral relationship among arguers and audiences to foster choice. This stance considers argumentation and debate a means of learning and seeks to find the best answer, even if that means the arguer abandons his or her original position.

COOPERATIVE

STANCE: Arguers pursue mutual-interest by treating their co-arguer(s) and audience(s) as equals

Josina Makau and Debian Marty note that arguers using this stance “recognize that their views can only be enlightened by as comprehensive and open an exchange as is possible.”²⁸

The *goal* of debate from a cooperative stance is to ensure the best ideas prevail. Cooperative argumentation approaches debate as a communal act designed to test ideas, explore truth, and arrive at solutions. This is not to say that the two other stances never find their way to the “truth” but rather that a cooperative stance is motivated by this endeavor. From this stance, argumentation may also be an end in itself: a ritual of community affirmation and involvement. From this view, the goal isn’t to argue for the sake of arguing but to argue for the sake of the community and personal empowerment. For example, many white women in the 1800s signed petitions against slavery not only because they expected their argumentation to bring about emancipation but also because it was a means of female political empowerment.²⁹

A cooperative stance may be signaled by numerous *argumentation tactics*:

- **Open-mindedness and risk of self.** A cooperative stance frequently involves openness to others’ ideas. Participants using this stance are more likely to promote learning and personal transformation as a result of debate. There is, of course, a difference between vulnerability and weakness; to risk oneself requires in many cases more strength and courage than being rigid in your beliefs.
- **Empathy and understanding.** A cooperative stance involves treating others as individuals with unique perspectives, interests, experiences, and ideas. Empathy, or sharing the feelings of others, is one tactic in a debate that might signal a cooperative stance. Especially in public spheres, competitive and manipulative stances rarely serve as *civic* acts of participation because the focus is so strongly on the individual. Using a cooperative approach more fully emphasizes the controversy’s relationship to all community members.
- **Respect for rules and ethics of engagement.** A cooperative stance tends to promote fairness and equality in a debate, making sure the rules are followed. Cooperative arguers also demonstrate concern with ethics to a higher degree than those using a competitive or manipulative stance because they are not primarily motivated to win.
- **Faith in co-arguers and audience members.** A cooperative stance often places faith in others to follow the rules, be empathetic, and demonstrate open-mindedness. It’s important to note here that the focus is on faith—conviction without proof—rather than mere belief. Cooperative arguers confronted by competitive or manipulative arguers may get rattled but are unlikely to lose their faith in the potential of their fellow humans.

You should not be surprised that a cooperative stance is, in many cases, a more productive mode of argumentation than the other two. Returning to the opening anecdote of Jon Stewart’s appearance on *Crossfire*, it becomes clearer now that he was asking the hosts to use a cooperative rather than competitive stance, to replace dichotomous and contentious argumentation with a more generative approach to controversies.

TABLE 3.1 ■ Argumentation Stances

Stance	Goal	Common Tactics
Competitive	Prevail through force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coercion and verbal force • Treating others as objects or means to an end • Close-mindedness • Lack of respect for rules and ethics of engagement
Manipulative	Prevail through deceit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misuse of support • Appeals to emotion and credibility • Close-mindedness • Lack of respect for rules and ethics of engagement
Cooperative	Find the best outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open-mindedness and risk of self • Empathy and understanding • Respect for rules and ethics of engagement • Faith in co-arguers and audience members

In the present day, science offers one place where arguers often use a cooperative stance.³⁰ Many scientists are bound by the empirical world and must provide evidence for their claims. Argumentation, then, becomes a way of testing and sharing ideas among peers, not for selfish gain but for the benefit of the community. As such, most scientists are transparent about their methods and conclusions, not manipulatively concealing information. And, many scientists are open to the possibility that their discoveries are wrong or incomplete, risking their own beliefs for knowledge's sake.

Despite its productive nature, cooperative argumentation is not very common in everyday life. You may perhaps recall some experiences in which you used this stance, such as when resolving a conflict with a significant other or family member, but those instances are likely fewer and farther between your uses of competitive and manipulative stances.

Table 3.1 summarizes the three stances. As you consider how these stances function in everyday argumentation, you might keep in mind the following observations:

- **The three stances are not mutually exclusive.** It might be the case that an arguer uses the goal of one but the tactics of another, such as taking perspectives not to learn from others but to win. This mixture of stances makes it more challenging to debate others because you might not know their intentions and, thus, often need to be vigilant even when the tactics seem pure.
- **The three stances are not exhaustive.** Although they represent common stances to argumentation, there are other approaches that arguers might pursue. For instance, people who are paid to argue (e.g., a public relations specialist, a

FIND YOUR VOICE

ARGUMENTATION STANCES

Consider scenarios in which you might use each of the three stances. Are competitive and manipulative approaches ever the best choice? If so, in what spheres or situations? Also consider what and how much you're willing

to risk when you argue. In what spheres or situations should you be vulnerable to change? The more aware of the choice of stance you have, the more productive your argumentation can be.

marketing executive, a speechwriter) may not fit any of the categories because they aren't pursuing their own personal gain through force or deception but also aren't risking their own belief.

- **The three stances are not always matched by co-arguers.** Using a particular stance doesn't mean your co-arguer will follow suit and sometimes you might need to address your co-arguer's stance as part of the debate. Cooperative arguers might be especially vulnerable to those using the other two stances. When faced with a stance that tries to take advantage of you, arguers often need to find strategies (such as critical thinking) to defend themselves or shift the arguer to be more cooperative.

Our Everyday Life Example in this section will illustrate how a cooperative stance enhances a debate's productivity. For this example, we'll consider an exchange from the Reddit bulletin board, "Change My View" (CMV). On CMV, people post statements they believe to be true and invite others to change their view. If an arguer is successful, the original poster (OP) will award a delta (Δ), the mathematical symbol for change. The topics are quite varied, from "toe socks are silly and probably not comfortable" to "it is impossible for the human race to overcome bigotry" to "18 wheelers shouldn't be allowed on the road."

The goal of CMV aligns quite nicely with the goal of cooperative stance arguers: "CMV is a sub-reddit dedicated to the civil discourse of opinions, and is built around the idea that in order to resolve our differences, we must first understand them. We believe that productive conversation requires respect and openness, and that certitude is the enemy of understanding."³¹ It's also important to note that OP's are supposed to be open to change, as outlined in Submission Rule B.³² Responders, on the other hand, are not required to have such openness. Their main rules are that they "must challenge at least one aspect of OP's stated view (however minor), or ask a clarifying question," "don't be rude or hostile to other users," and "refrain from accusing OP or anyone else of being unwilling to change their view."³³ Community members can enforce these rules but all participants have the freedom to use any stance they wish.

Included below is a debate between Zzzmessi1 and Ghost_of_John_Galt on the policy proposition that "sports should not have a place in American universities." As you read the debate (copied directly from the website), identify the stance each arguer is using by considering which tactics and goals from Table 3.1 seem evident.

Everyday Life Example 3.2

Zzzmessi1 and Ghost_of_John_Galt, "CMV: Sports should not have a place in American universities," 2017³⁴

1 **Zzzmessi1 (OP):** I believe that sports in America should be similar to the club system that exists
2 in Europe. Collegiate sports distract from the fact that the focus of any institution of higher
3 education should be education.

4 Many universities in America use sports as a way of building a brand that is based little on
5 academics or campus life outside of sports. With the high tuition prices we have now, this level
6 of branding, especially from public colleges, pressures students to take on large amounts of
7 debt in order to join this sports culture.

8 In addition, sports have diverted students' time within college to watching games and joining the
9 parties associated with them. This can often come at the expense of academics or professional
10 skills.

11 The larger role of sports in an institution can also divert resources away from these
12 academic programs in favor of "big" sports like basketball and football that can often be
13 unprofitable. This mixing of sports and academics creates a conflict of interest that can
14 interfere with athletes' academic life, as it is in the interest of the schools to keep them
15 eligible at all costs. This should not be a concern for universities, especially taxpayer-funded
16 public universities.

17 While I do admittedly enjoy collegiate sports, they have turned into an industry that has very
18 little to do with education, as recent attempts to unionize by NCAA players shows.

19 **Ghost_of_John_Galt:** Of the top 10 unis in the world, the US has six.

20 Link [[https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2017/world-
21 ranking#!page/0/length/25/sort_by/rank/sort_order/asc/cols/stats](https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2017/world-ranking#!page/0/length/25/sort_by/rank/sort_order/asc/cols/stats)]

22 Of the remainder, Oxford and Cambridge also have sporting programs and I can't be bothered
23 googling the other 2.

24 Given that, what makes you think that sport is a negative in terms of distraction from education?

25 **Zzzmessi1:** I wasn't aware that those two have programs, but my main issue with college
26 sports is how they've become a large industry that schools consider necessary to building
27 their brand. Sports contribute little to the overall brand of Oxford and Cambridge, while
28 they seem completely involved in schools like Alabama and North Carolina. The level of
29 entanglement between colleges and sports creates a distraction because many students
30 are now choosing schools based on big sports programs, rather than academic quality
31 and fit.

32 **Ghost_of_John_Galt:** But your OP didn't limit it to Alabama and North Carolina. It was all US
33 universities. Given the lack of correlation between sports and poor academic performance, why
34 should they have 'no place' in any US university, merely because Alabama maybe concentrates
35 too much on sport?

36 **Zzzmessi1:** The problem goes deeper than just the few schools I named as examples. Almost
37 every non-liberal arts school has sports teams that schools use as an attraction for students
38 who now consider sports a necessary component of the typical college experience. In order to
39 compete for these students, colleges need to have programs in "big" sports. As for the situation
40 in Europe, colleges very seldom rely on sports to create their brands.

41 **Ghost_of_John_Galt:** But it clearly doesn't harm the academic results of certain schools, yes?
 42 But you still think it has 'no place'?

43 Let's turn this around - what evidence do you have that it harms US universities, given their
 44 stellar worldwide results?

45 **Zzzmessi1:** From what I've found, the correlation between sports and decreased academic
 46 performance is minuscule, at most. I see that the problems with sports are more or less
 47 byproducts of party culture that would continue to exist without sports in the US. Thanks for
 48 pointing this out. Δ

49 **Ghost_of_John_Galt:** Thanks mate! Have a wonderful day/evening.

Source: Zzzmessi1 and Ghost_of_John_Galt, "CMV: Sports Should Not Have a Place in American Universities," Change My View, Reddit, May 20 2017, https://www.reddit.com/r/changemy-view/comments/6ccukh/cmv_sports_should_not_have_a_place_in_american.

The exchange intimates two of the three stances but largely represents a cooperative approach. A manipulative stance is least evident insofar as the arguers don't use deception or trickery. However, the participants hint at a competitive stance when they display certainty (lines 2-18, 26-31, 41-42) and respond to each and every argument with a counter-argument. Ghost_of_John_Galt seems more competitive than Zzzmessi1 by using the OP to trap Zzzmessi1 in potential shifts or contradictions (lines 32-33, 41-44).

Nevertheless, both arguers generally utilized a cooperative stance, albeit through different tactics. Ghost_of_John_Galt sought understanding by using questions rather than statements to gather further responses (lines 24, 33-35, 41-44) and cited a credible source to support the claim that a majority of the world's "top 10 unis" have substantial athletic programs (lines 19-23). Zzzmessi1 used hedgers—"I believe," "seem," "from what I've found"—and qualifiers—e.g., "can," "almost," "more or less"—to delimit claims (lines 1, 9, 28, 36-37, 40, 45, 46) and admitted to learning new things (lines 25, 46-48). These tactics are more encouraging to co-arguers and foster a more open debate than you might find with a competitive stance.

Zzzmessi1's Δ to Ghost_of_John_Galt underscores the power of argument stances. A different respondent, whose profile has since been deleted, advanced virtually the same claim as Ghost_of_John_Galt just five minutes after Ghost_of_John_Galt but did so through a competitive stance. For instance, this person argued, among other things:

- "The culture of having parties and watching sports would exist anyway. College students just want an excuse to get drunk and have fun—if that means watching the Texans or the Cowboys instead of the Longhorns, that's what will happen.
- While I do agree that athletes are often passed through the academic system too easily in order to keep the eligible, I think you are looking at the problem the wrong way. The issue is an ethics issue with the professors and administration that getting rid of sports won't fix—as long as there is something to be eligible for, people will get shoved through."³⁵

Interestingly, Zzzmessi1 ultimately conceded that the party culture would continue absent sports to Ghost_of_John_Galt but not to the person making this point explicitly. Could this be because this person used a competitive stance, evident through the certainty of claims and phrases that attacked Zzzmessi1 like "I think you are looking

at the problem the wrong way” or, later in the debate, “The problem at the core of your argument . . .?”

Research about CMV supports this conclusion that the choice of stance, and the argumentation tactics within it, matter to a debate’s outcome. Chenhao Tan et al. found that arguments receiving a Δ tended to be longer posts, cite credible (linked) evidence, use “calmer” language, and choose words that were different from the words in the OP’s original argument.³⁶ These qualities represent a cooperative approach to finding the best answer and, thus, are more productive and inviting for resolving disagreement. Although this outcome best applies when all arguers are open-minded, it shows how tactics common to a cooperative approach can be more ethical and effective.

Summary

In your argumentation and debate, you will need to make choices about how to engage others, particularly concerning what ethical guidelines you will follow and what stance you will use. This chapter has offered five ethical guidelines for consideration: honesty, consistency, respect, accountability, and courage. The chapter then outlined three argumentation stances—competitive, manipulative, and cooperative—that capture the intentions and

attitudes arguers might have toward others within a particular debate situation.

Awareness of these choices enables you to argue more constructively. More importantly, the Everyday Life Examples show how you can use the guidelines here to change the culture of debate in your everyday life, to make it less combative and angry, and to ensure all participants are treated like people rather than objects.

Application Exercises

Identifying Ethics & Argument Stances: Read two other CMV debates (one with a delta and one without) at <https://www.reddit.com/r-changemyview/>. What ethical concerns, if any, do the debates raise? What argument stances do the OPs seem to assume? The respondents? How do you know?

Promoting Cooperative Stances: Read one of the transcripts from the 2016 presidential debates between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump (available through the American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/debates.php>) and consider the following prompts:

- Identify where each candidate uses the various stances (competitive, manipulative, and cooperative) and determine which is most common. *Hint: The most common stance for one candidate might differ from that for the other.*
- Evaluate each candidate’s choice of stance, considering the debate context, the nature of the audience, and the co-arguer’s stance.
- For instances of a competitive or manipulative stance, consider how (if at all) you could revise the argumentation to be more cooperative.

Key Terms

Argumentation Ethics 47
Argumentation Stance 47

Competitive Stance 56
Manipulative Stance 57

Cooperative Stance 58

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