What is a Community of Argumentational Practice?

Argumentation Schemes

Example Communities of Argumentational Practice

Argumentation Schemes and Communities of Argumentational Practice

Andrew Aberdein

Humanities and Communication,
Florida Institute of Technology,
150 West University Blvd,
Melbourne, Florida 32901-6975, U.S.A.
my.fit.edu/~aberdein
aberdein@fit.edu

Argumentation Cultures: OSSA Conference,
University of Windsor, ON, 4th June 2009
The term *practice* . . . denotes a set of *socially defined ways of doing things in a specific domain*: a set of common approaches and shared standards that create a basis for action, communication, *problem solving*, performance and accountability. These communal resources include a variety of knowledge types: cases and stories, theories, *rules*, frameworks, *models*, principles, tools, experts, articles, lessons learned, best practices, and *heuristics*. They include both the tacit and the explicit aspects of the community’s knowledge. . . . It also embodies a certain way of behaving, a perspective on problems and ideas, a *thinking style*, and even in many cases an ethical stance. In this sense, a practice is a sort of mini-culture that binds the community together.

Toulmin’s Fields

Toulmin never says precisely what counts as a field. He gives examples like law, medicine, science, and engineering. He uses cognate terms like forum of argumentation, rational enterprise, and context. But so far as I can tell, he never gives a precise definition of any of these terms. Since so much of Toulmin’s approach depends upon the concept of a field, the failure to define it carefully seems to me a serious lacuna.


Toulmin’s notion of field raised the specter of relativism, with field-dependent standards of evaluation. The problem becomes more acute if fields are understood as the discourse of a particular community, whose members would be free to set standards.

Toulmin’s Fields

Toulmin never says precisely what counts as a *field*. He gives examples like law, medicine, science, and engineering. He uses cognate terms like *forum of argumentation, rational enterprise*, and *context*. But so far as I can tell, he *never gives a precise definition of any of these terms*. Since so much of Toulmin’s approach depends upon the concept of a field, the failure to define it carefully seems to me a serious *lacuna*.


Toulmin’s notion of field raised the specter of relativism, with field-dependent standards of evaluation. The problem becomes more acute if fields are understood as the discourse of a particular community, whose members would be free to set standards.

Exorcising the Relativistic Spectre

Three anti-relativistic considerations:

1. Overlap between communities, as demonstrated by frequent ‘code switching’;

2. Admissibility of standards drawn from outside the community;

What is a Community of Argumentational Practice?

Argumentation Schemes

Example Communities of Argumentational Practice

Exorcising the Relativistic Spectre

Three anti-relativistic considerations:

1. Overlap between communities, as demonstrated by frequent ‘code switching’;

2. Admissibility of standards drawn from outside the community;

Three anti-relativistic considerations:

1. Overlap between communities, as demonstrated by frequent ‘code switching’;
2. Admissibility of standards drawn from outside the community;
As a rule, if $P$, then $Q$.

$P$.

It is not the case that there is an exception to the rule that if $P$, then $Q$.

Therefore, $Q$.

Argumentation Scheme for Argument from Analogy

**Similarity Premise**  Generally, case $C_1$ is similar to case $C_2$.

**Base Premise**  $A$ is true (false) in case $C_1$.

**Conclusion**  $A$ is true (false) in case $C_2$.

**Critical Questions:**

1. Are there differences between $C_1$ and $C_2$ that would tend to undermine the force of the similarity cited?
2. Is $A$ true (false) in $C_1$?
3. Is there some other case $C_3$ that is also similar to $C_1$, but in which $A$ is false (true)?

If $P$ is false, then $P$ is true. Therefore, $P$ is true.

Gerolamo Saccheri:
‘a very beautiful way of proving these same truths without any assumption’

Girolamo Cardano:
‘the most wonderful thing that has been discovered since the beginning of the world’
Consequentia Mirabilis . . .

If $P$ is false, then $P$ is true.
Therefore, $P$ is true.

Gerolamo Saccheri:
‘a very beautiful way of proving these same truths without any assumption’

Girolamo Cardano:
‘the most wonderful thing that has been discovered since the beginning of the world’
What is a Community of Argumentational Practice?

Argumentation Schemes

Example Communities of Argumentational Practice

Employment of Consequentia Mirabilis

Euclidean Inference

Ethnography: The Azande & the Internet

Consequentia Mirabilis . . .

If $P$ is false, then $P$ is true.

Therefore, $P$ is true.

Gerolamo Saccheri:

‘a very beautiful way of proving these same truths without any assumption’

Girolamo Cardano:

‘the most wonderful thing that has been discovered since the beginning of the world’
If $P$ is false, then $P$ is true.
Therefore, $P$ is true.

Almost certainly the source of [Saccheri’s] inspiration was [an annotation in] the widely read edition of Euclid published in 1574 by Clavius . . . And his attention may have been directed to the relevant scholium by his Jesuit teachers. For Clavius himself had belonged to the Society of Jesus, and it seems that the argument on which he wrote his comment had a vogue among the members in the seventeenth century as the consequentia mirabilis

"Hypothesis. Let there be any number of propositions or assertions—three for instance, $X$, $Y$ and $Z$—of which it is the property that one or the other must be true, and one only. Let there be three other propositions $P$, $Q$ and $R$ of which it is also the property that one, and one only, must be true. Let it be a connexion of those assertions that:

- when $X$ is true, $P$ is true,
- when $Y$ is true, $Q$ is true,
- when $Z$ is true, $R$ is true.

Consequence: then it follows that,

- when $P$ is true, $X$ is true,
- when $Q$ is true, $Y$ is true,
- when $R$ is true, $Z$ is true."

Euclid & Contraposition

To apply this to the case before us, let us denote the sides of the triangle $ABC$ by $a$, $b$, $c$, and the angles opposite to these sides by $A$, $B$, $C$ respectively, and suppose that $a$ is the base.

Then we have the three propositions,

- when $b$ is equal to $c$, $B$ is equal to $C$,  
  \[ [I. \ 5] \]
- when $b$ is greater than $c$, $B$ is greater than $C$,  
  \[ [I. \ 18] \]
- when $b$ is less than $c$, $B$ is less than $C$,  
  \[ [I. \ 19] \]

and it follows *logically* that,

- when $B$ is equal to $C$, $b$ is equal to $c$,  
  \[ [I. \ 6] \]
- when $B$ is greater than $C$, $b$ is greater than $c$,  
  \[ [I. \ 19] \]
- when $B$ is less than $C$, $b$ is less than $c$.  

Common Notion 4.

Things which coincide with one another are equal to one another.


One figure may be superposed on another so that its vertices and edges perfectly coincide. Therefore, the two figures are identical.
Common Notion 4.

Things which coincide with one another are equal to one another.


One figure may be superposed on another so that its vertices and edges perfectly coincide. Therefore, the two figures are identical.
same time, it is clear that Euclid disliked the method and avoided it wherever he could, e.g. in 1. 26, where he proves the equality of two triangles which have two angles respectively equal to two angles and one side of the one equal to the corresponding side of the other. It looks as though he found the method handed down by tradition (we can hardly suppose that, if Thales proved that the diameter of a circle divides it into two equal parts, he would do so by any other method than that of superposition), and followed it, in the few cases where he does so, only because he had not been able to see his way to a satisfactory substitute. But seeing how much of the *Elements* depends on 1. 4, directly or indirectly, the method can hardly be regarded as being, in Euclid, of only subordinate importance; on the contrary, it is fundamental. Nor, as

All and only witches have witchcraft-substance. 
Witchcraft-substance is always inherited by the same-sexed children of a witch. 
The Zande clan is a group of persons related biologically to one another through the male line. 
Man A of clan C is a witch. 
Therefore, every man in clan C is a witch.

Godwin’s Law

Godwin’s Law of Nazi Analogies:
As an online discussion grows longer, the probability of a comparison involving Nazis or Hitler approaches one.


Godwin’s Law is often stated as an explicitly argumentational norm, stipulating that the first person to mention Hitler has lost the argument. As such it may be understood as mandating an answer to the first critical question for the Argumentation Scheme for Argument from Analogy: for most domains, there are always differences between $C_1$ and $C_2$ that tend to undermine the force of the similarity cited, when $C_2$ is Hitler.
Godwin’s Law of Nazi Analogies:
As an online discussion grows longer, the probability of a comparison involving Nazis or Hitler approaches one.


Godwin’s Law is often stated as an explicitly argumentational norm, stipulating that the first person to mention Hitler has lost the argument. As such it may be understood as mandating an answer to the first critical question for the Argumentation Scheme for Argument from Analogy: for most domains, there are always differences between $C_1$ and $C_2$ that tend to undermine the force of the similarity cited, when $C_2$ is Hitler.
Godwin’s Law

General, Italian forces have entered Egypt.

As I expected. This is a foolish move by Mussolini, but like Hitler he will no doubt force his commanders to —

Hey. Godwin’s Law.

Dammit.

You know, this may become a problem.

http://xkcd.com/261/
A satisfactory account of a community of argumentational practice should itemize the schemes employed within the practice, but it should also:

1. track frequency of use for the schemes (including those omitted altogether), paying particular attention to schemes whose use is disproportionate to that in comparable practices;
2. record information, explicit or tacit, about preferences amongst the community with regard to specific schemes;
3. relate each scheme to the context(s) of dialogue employed by the community;
4. where possible, observe how the practice changes with time.
Conclusion

A satisfactory account of a community of argumentational practice should itemize the schemes employed within the practice, but it should also:

1. track frequency of use for the schemes (including those omitted altogether), paying particular attention to schemes whose use is disproportionate to that in comparable practices;

2. record information, explicit or tacit, about preferences amongst the community with regard to specific schemes;

3. relate each scheme to the context(s) of dialogue employed by the community;

4. where possible, observe how the practice changes with time.
Conclusion

A satisfactory account of a community of argumentational practice should itemize the schemes employed within the practice, but it should also:

1. track frequency of use for the schemes (including those omitted altogether), paying particular attention to schemes whose use is disproportionate to that in comparable practices;
2. record information, explicit or tacit, about preferences amongst the community with regard to specific schemes;
3. relate each scheme to the context(s) of dialogue employed by the community;
4. where possible, observe how the practice changes with time.
A satisfactory account of a community of argumentational practice should itemize the schemes employed within the practice, but it should also:

1. track frequency of use for the schemes (including those omitted altogether), paying particular attention to schemes whose use is disproportionate to that in comparable practices;
2. record information, explicit or tacit, about preferences amongst the community with regard to specific schemes;
3. relate each scheme to the context(s) of dialogue employed by the community;
4. where possible, observe how the practice changes with time.
What is a Community of Argumentational Practice?

Argumentation Schemes

Example Communities of Argumentational Practice

Appeal to Expert Opinion

Argument Scheme for Appeal to Expert Opinion

**Major Premise**  Source *E* is an expert in subject domain *S* containing proposition *A*.

**Minor Premise**  *E* asserts that proposition *A* is true (false).

**Conclusion**  *A* is true (false).

Critical Questions:

1. Expertise Question: How credible is *E* as an expert source?
2. Field Question: Is *E* an expert in the field that *A* is in?
3. Opinion Question: What did *E* assert that implies *A*?
4. Trustworthiness Question: Is *E* personally reliable as a source?
5. Consistency Question: Is *A* consistent with what other experts assert?
6. Backup Evidence Question: Is *E*’s assertion based on evidence?