

The layouts of Arguments Reflective summary

Stephen Edelston Toulmin in this chapter discusses what structure arguments should have. As such Toulmin is trying to see whether there is a connection between argument structure and logical form. He argues that there should be no relationship between logical form and argument validity, since he does not think that logical validity is important for argumentation. Toulmin explain that there is a difference between the claim/conclusion, which we are trying to establish, and facts which are foundations for the claim, which Toulmin calls data. Facts are also called data. Warrants are a license or a permission to go from the datum to the conclusion; i.e. they justify the conclusion. Warrants need support. And the type of support they require is different from field to field. His point is that there are different kinds of warrants. Warrants are general and need to be established in different ways than facts (100). Toulmin stresses the importance of how argumentation and warrants are field dependent. That is, the type of information and warrant required will vary from mathematics to questions of morality.

However, Toulmin is aware that sometimes when one challenges an assertion it is not always clear whether he/she is challenging the warrant or requesting for more datum. It is possible to confuse the question of *what have you got to go on* (data)? to *how do you get there* (warrant) (99). Further, Toulmin explains that the backing of warrants need not be made explicit, whereas the data of an argument needs to be. Data must be produced if there is to be an argument at all, whereas backing is only brought up upon request or when the argument is challenged. Toulmin points out that some warrants must be accepted without further challenge if argument is to proceed. However, if certain warrants need to be accepted, then why not call them data? Is this where the confusion occurs between data and warrant, as was mentioned earlier by Toulmin.

Another crucial point that Toulmin makes in this chapter is that, is that narrowing arguments to deductive validity is too narrow of a framework to work with. He thinks that, for instance, that syllogistic arguments are too restrictive. The argument that <Socrates is a man; All men are mortal, So Socrates is mortal> is confusing since the premise that all men are mortal is not clear whether it is a fact or report. This deductive form of argument conceals from us the distinction between warrant and backing. Toulmin states, that “the practical economy of this habit may be obvious; but for philosophical purposes it leaves the effective structure of our arguments insufficiently candid” (112). Another fundamental problem that Toulmin has with the deductive model of arguments is that it ignores the ways in which warrant are field-specific. For the form of the argument <All A’s are B’s> can always be replaced by any argument without taking due consideration to the context of argument, and as such it is seen as “true regardless of the field, holding good equally of ‘al Swedes are Roman Catholics’, ‘All those born in British colonies are entitled to British citizenship’...” (112). I agree with Toulmin’s rejection of formal validity because I think that formal validity ignores how argumentation is embedded in context. A valid form may work for a specific type of but it cannot be assumed that it works for all because it has a valid form.