Summary: Hamblin is concerned in this chapter to set out the nature of arguments. He argues that arguments are not merely entailment-relations between propositions, and that the theory of argument is not the theory of validity. Formal logic, on his view, has little if anything to say about arguments, either by way of analysis or evaluation, because he holds that not all arguments are deductive, that there are good arguments that are not formally valid, that there can be good arguments for and against a given conclusion, and that formal validity is not sufficient to guarantee the goodness of an argument.

   The formal logical conception of an argument and of the logician's role in argument evaluation is therefore mistaken. Hamblin proposes to come at the question of the nature of arguments by way of identifying the criteria for good arguments. He sets out three sets of criteria – alethic, epistemic, and dialectical – and argues that the dialectical are the best criteria. They reflect our ordinary evaluations of arguments better than the other sets of criteria do, and they make the most sense of real argumentative situations.

   The *alethic* criteria are that the premises must be true; they must imply the conclusion (in some sense of "imply" not restricted to that of formal entailment); the conclusion must follow reasonably immediately (there are not too many missing premises and argumentative steps); and that unstated premises must be of a specified omissible kind. These criteria capture a standard of the goodness of arguments corresponding with an idea of pure logic.

   However, the standpoint of pure logic does not bear directly on the question of whether participants in an argumentative exchange ought to accept an argument; the features of the argument that make it good must be cognitively available to them in some way. Hamblin identifies a set of *epistemic* criteria to capture this sense of the goodness of arguments: the premises must be *known* to be true; the conclusion must follow *clearly* from the premises; unstated premises must be such that they are taken for granted by the participants; and the conclusion would be in doubt in the absence of the argument at hand.

   The above two sets of criteria do not speak to the persuasive nature of arguments, though. One of the purposes of arguments is to convince someone of a conclusion, so the criteria of the goodness of arguments ought to reflect that. Hamblin's final set of criteria, the *dialectical*, which is the set that he endorses, are that the premises of an argument must be accepted; the passage from the premises to the conclusion must be of an accepted kind; unstated premises must be accepted as omissible; and the conclusion would not be accepted in the absence of the argument. (This acceptance-talk refers primarily to acceptance by the audience at whom the argument is targeted.) These criteria reflect the persuasive nature of arguments.

Reflection. Hamblin makes a very good case for the independence of formal logic and the theory of argument. Furthermore, his strategy of coming at the nature of arguments by way of identifying criteria of good arguments grounds the theory of argument in the practice of giving arguments, which any theory ought to do to some extent, but Hamblin's strategy threatens to presuppose the very thing that it seeks to establish: the criteria for the goodness of arguments must be grounded in some conception of what arguments are, and what they are for. It threatens to beg the question, therefore, to use them to establish the nature of arguments.

   Despite the potential question-begging, though, the conception of argument that Hamblin is working with seems plausible enough to me. Whether the dialectical criteria are really better than the epistemic ones is an open question for me, though; the epistemic do seem too strong, as Hamblin claims, but the dialectical criteria, framed in terms of *acceptance* rather than rational *acceptability* seem to me to be too weak. Some hybrid set of criteria might do the trick.