

CRRAR Summer Institute 2009
Reflective summary on *The Concept of Argument* by Hamblin
Pages 224-252
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In this chapter, Hamblin explores the question, “[w]hat are the criteria by which arguments are appraised?” (232) against the backdrop of formal deductive logic. He juxtaposes the main concerns of practical argumentation against those of formal deductive logic and proposes alternative criteria by which practical arguments can be evaluated and rejects two of them because he finds the criteria to be too strong. He rejects both the *alethic* and epistemic requirements and instead accepts the dialectical requirements. Hamblin says that the *alethic*, or truth requirement, is too strong or stringent a requirement because we cannot demand that all ‘good’ arguments be ‘knock-down’ arguments because in many instances “there are good arguments *for* a given conclusion and also good arguments against it. We cannot demand of an argument that it be, all by itself, a knock-down one” (232).

The epistemic requirement, that the argument is *known* to be true is even stronger than the *alethic* requirement because it requires both truth and *knowledge* about that truth. What knowledge entails is both stringent and controversial, so nevertheless the epistemic requirement is even stronger than the *alethic* requirement and should thus be rejected for the same reason.

Hamblin eventually settles on the dialectical criteria which requires that the argument be accepted by the subject. Hamblin says that the dialectical

criteria is advantageous because it places the emphasis on practice rather than theory which is favoured by formal logic (240).

One question which came to mind while I was reading this article was Hamblin's relation to the Pragma-Dialectical school of thought. I am only somewhat familiar with the Pragma-Dialectical approach, however I am familiar that they think that the sole use or purpose of argumentation is the persuasion of a subject or audience. Based on Hamblin's choice of acceptance as the criteria by which arguments are evaluated to be good or bad, it appears as though his views might loosely fall in line with the Pragma-Dialecticians. If I am persuaded by an argument, it would seem that I too accept that argument.

There is one point, however, on which Hamblin might differ from the Pragma-Dialecticians: on page 241 he clearly states "[o]ne of the purposes of argument, whether we like it or not, is to convince" (241). It appears as though Hamblin is leaving room for different purposes of argumentation other than persuasion and that he might even be hostile to the thought of persuasion as the purpose of argumentation. Hamblin seems to be torn between two stances, although it is possible that I am placing too much emphasis on this seemingly off-handed comment. He appears to be torn between the traditional, Platonic, distrust of persuasion and the fact that, in practice, argumentation is often used for the sole purpose of persuasion (i.e. in courts of law). I will be interested to see whether or not there actually is a tension in this paper as the course progresses next week.