批判与论辩：

论辩文写作入门

Introducing Critical Thinking and Argumentation

曲卫国　编著

Qu Weiguo

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Preface: Never take things for granted

1. The Aim of the book

This is a revised edition of the coursebook "Introducing Argumentation." The book is meant to introduce to the 3rd- and 4th- year students or postgraduates of English major some basic concepts and procedures of critical thinking and argumentative writing in their general training in critical thinking and writing.

As a believer in Habermas' theory of communicative rationality, I see critical thinking and argumentation as rational communication. The purpose of critical thinking and argumentation is not to subdue but to communicate to the audience what one claims through justificatory procedures. Although critical thinking and argumentation are written in a separate manner, I treat critical thinking as the core of argumentation. However, not all the argumentations are critical in the Habermasian sense. By juxtaposing the two terms, I want to stress the debt of my book to the critical theories.

While quite a few theories have been referred to, the main theory used in the book is Stephen Toulmin's, and so the theoretical framework is recognizably his. Toulmin's anatomy of the structure of argument is outstanding in helping students develop skills of critical thinking and argumentation. Regretfully, his discussion is rarely introduced in most Chinese English departments, and at best his is treated as a theoretical asset, far removed from the practice of argumentative writing, despite the fact that his theory has been the cornerstone of most American argumentative writing courses for many, many years. My teaching experience has shown such understanding and skills are crucial in the development of critical thinking, not to mention argumentative writing.

However, I have also taken an unusual step to introduce into the book Carl Rogers' theory as a check on the aggressive nature of argumentation. As is shown throughout the book, my aim is not merely to enhance the ability to argue in writing but to promote critical awareness and independent thinking, and in this respect, Rogers' theory, for its stress on fair understanding in the process of interaction, can surely be of help in containing the adversarial nature of argumentation and cultivating a high-level critical sensitivity to others' views.

One point I have emphasized almost in every stage of the book is the notion of relativity, an emphasis that has been proved uncomfortably unsettling but absolutely necessary as far as the students are concerned in my teaching practice because any fixation to a set of ideas or an unshakable belief in the righteousness of a judgment disregarding the context will dysfunction critical thinking ability. In addition to field-dependency in argumentation, a point of relativity upheld by Toulmin, I will highlight the shaping function of a selected perspective in forming a judgment. Perhaps "putting things in perspective" is what I intend in the final analysis. Maybe, this is another reason for introducing Rogerian rhetoric into the book. If we can see things from a

perspective that is definitely not ours, or to use Roger's term, to obtain "emphatic" understanding, we may be able, hard as it is, to distance ourselves from our own preconceptions or prejudices. I believe the notion "relativity", postmodern or whatsoever, does have the desired liberating effect.

It should be stressed that this book is not a book about logic, although there is no denying the role logic plays in critical thinking and argumentation. As I see it, logic is form-focused, and cares exclusively about the formal rules of inference whereas critical thinking and argumentation is more content-based, concentrating more on the interaction or interplay between inference and context, inference and belief system, and inference and audience. In other words, critical thinking and argumentation has more to do with practical inferences. It does not presuppose the truth-value of a premise or a claim but looks at conditions that are supposed to justify the validity of a claim. Although it acknowledges the importance of the logical rules, it does not take the stance that mere correct application of the rules will guarantee the truthfulness of claims. I will argue in the discussions that we should take nothing for granted before we exercise a proper examination of the meaning of a claim, the conditions that contribute to its support, and the underlying assumptions that validate the relation between a claim and its support.

2. The Structure and the use of the book

The book is so structured that the most common concepts or procedures of argumentation are covered. Except for the first and last chapters, the discussion of critical thinking will be integrated into the discussion of argumentation. For a better understanding of the discussion, most of the chapters will start with an orientation, which aims to pave way for the discussions that follow. At the end of each chapter, there are "critical thinking activities" and "writing tasks," and clues to the tasks are provided at the end of the book. I will have also offered some samples of worksheets to facilitate the teaching and learning of argumentation. It has been proved in my teaching experience that worksheets are of great help in compelling students to work on their own.

Relevant theories of various kinds are offered in the disk that is attached to the book, where one can also find some video clips as additional writing tasks and some sample slides for class. By offering readings in the critical thinking activities to the teachers and the students, I intend to show that my discussion is only one way of looking at the issues. There are obviously differences between my interpretations of the theories and the theories themselves. It is highly recommended that the students read the theories in the original. Students are encouraged to reach their own conclusions. If theirs are different from my discussion or the theoretical writings, it is all the more worth celebrating. A sample examination paper and main references are listed at the end of the book.

I believe the best way to learn argumentation is through arguing in writing about a claim, and practice will work magic for us. For the writing tasks, it is preferable to ask students to write outside class so that they can discuss with each other or search for references. It is essential to the success of the writing course to let students use library resources to work on the writing tasks. The point is not whether they can submit anything for the writing class but whether they can submit

things they compose in a critical manner. The use of the library will be conducive to freeing them from preconceptions and opening up a wide horizon of perspectives. It involves much more work when they log on to the library resources.

From the tasks selected in the book, it is not difficult to detect that I choose those of current interest related to the time of my writing the book. It is important for the teacher to find topics of current interest so as to make the writing more real to the students. With topics of current interest, it is easy to arouse the students and for them to find resources in the newspapers and on the Internet, etc. It is advisable that teachers change them for the topics of current interest related to the time when the book is used.

My experience in teaching the course seems to suggest that students' writings will be better focused if they are presented with an essay to comment upon. Reading through the essay and sorting out its claim and support are initial and necessary stages in cultivating one's critical thinking ability. Granting the interactive nature of argumentative writing, it is much more challenging and fruitful for the students to be confronted with some well-developed, powerful argumentative essays. In their responses to them, they can find various kinds of points of departure to start their own arguments. Most importantly, argumentative essays can be guaranteed a relatively fair understanding of the issues in question from the perspectives which are not theirs. The targeted essays will help the teacher with a better grip on the process of thinking on the part of the students, too. The essays in the tasks selected here for each task are meant to provide models to show how the exercises or writing tasks of a more relevant nature to the students are devised.

3. Acknowledgments

Due thanks are given to the people involved. First and foremost, my thanks will go to the extremely lovely and intelligent students in the English Department at Fudan University, without whom it is impossible for me to have such an exciting course, let alone the writing and revising of this book. They have demonstrated an unusual interest in the course and their writings have given me enormous inspiration and encouragement in my preparation for the course and the book. Many of the ideas had been formed when I was discussing or marking their wonderful essays. In fact, some of the examples come directly from their remarkable writings. Their cooperation and responsiveness make the course one of the most exciting moments in my teaching career. Thanks should also go to the editors of this book for their patience and kindness. Last but not the least, my thanks will go to my wife, Chen Liufang, for her unfailing love, and my son, Qu Liuyun, who always challenges my views by engaging me forever in enjoyable but sometimes irritating argumentations to test the practical effectiveness of my theory.

Qu Weiguo
April, 2013

CONTENTS

Chapter One Critical thinking and argumentation

1.0 Orientation

John Godfrey Saxe wrote the following poem based on a well-known Indian fable:

It was six men of Indostan,
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.

The First approach'd the Elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl:
"God bless me! but the Elephant
Is very like a wall!"

The Second, feeling of the tusk,
Cried, — "Ho! what have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me 'tis mighty clear,
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a spear!"

The Third approach'd the animal,
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
Thus boldly up and spake:
"I see," — quoth he — "the Elephant
Is very like a snake!"

The Fourth reached out an eager hand,
And felt about the knee:

"What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain," — quoth he, —
"'Tis clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a tree!"

The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said- "E'en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can,
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a fan!"

The Sixth no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,
Then, seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,
"I see," — quoth he, — "the Elephant
Is very like a rope!"

And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!

MORAL,

So, oft in theologic wars
The disputants, I ween,
Rail on in utter ignorance
Of what each other mean;
And prate about an Elephant
Not one of them has seen!

It is a story that has been repeatedly told since our childhood time. The lesson for the story for many is that it satirizes subjectivism or the one-sided view one tends to adopt in our approach to the world. However, if we re-examine the message in the story from perspectives of critical theories and cognitive sciences, we may find that condemnation of the blind for their subjectivism or the "one-sided view" can be simplistic and unjustified. The conclusions the blind people draw are subjective but they are not ill-founded. They are actually grounded on some good observation of the world they have contact with:

The First approach'd the Elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl:
"God bless me! but the Elephant
Is very like a wall!"

His guess that it is "very like a wall" is a reasonable and well-sustained judgment because his cognitive and social experiences tell him that anything "broad and sturdy" is most likely to be a wall. What makes his judgment seemingly irrational, highly subjective or one-sided is that he only uses his hands to grope for an answer. But is there any essential difference between groping with hands and seeing things with eyes? We can only see things that are available for the sight from a certain angle just in the same way as the blind people can only grope for an answer with the things they can lay their hands on. We cognitize things in accordance with our cognitive and social experiences constructed with the help of our eyes. The six blind people reach different conclusions not because they are ignorant but because each of them constructs a representation of the reality from their respective angles and their past experiences. The fact of the matter is that people that can see with eyes are no wiser because they are equally conditioned by their particularistic past experiences and their unique situations. Because of the perspectival and experiential differences, they also concoct different versions of reality. In a similar manner, perspectives and past cognitive and social experiences dictate our cognition. Therefore, I think Saxe is being unfair when he comments:

And prate about an Elephant
Not one of them has seen!

They have different visions of the elephant simply because they are restricted by their manner of perception. Saxe seems to suggest that if we can get rid of the restrictive manner of perception, we can see the truth, or the real thing. The question is: can we? Are we capable of omniscience?

One of the basic assumptions of critical theories and cognitive sciences is that there are two factors indispensible to our cognition: thinking paradigm and social context. A thinking paradigm which is formed through years of experience dictates our perspective and interpretation of an event. A social context which includes many things, such as motives, interest, audience, etc. determines the positioning of an event with reference to our own life. In other words, our perception and cognition of the world is ineluctably subjective and restrictive, which makes our cognitive experience not essentially different from that of the blind people. The disputes over many things in life and in theory have to do with the differences in perspective and experience. In a sense, we may say that Saxe's description has captured the dilemma not only about the blind but about the people who can see.

This realization of the limitations in perception and cognition is crucial in developing critical thinking and in composing argumentation. Habermas once pointed out that argumentation

is important simply because it is a way to break away from our own thinking paradigm and experience. Through critical thinking and argumentation, we can obtain a multiplicity of perspectives. Thus argumentation should not be seen as merely adversarial or confrontational. It is to enrich understanding, or to reach common understanding:

> to reach common understanding and to coordinate actions by reasoned argument, consensus, and cooperation rather than strategic action strictly in pursuit of their own goals. (1984:86)

In this chapter, we will discuss the basics of critical thinking and argumentation so as to provide a theoretical framework for the book.

1.1 What do we mean by "critical?"

There are many hypotheses and theories concerning the concept "critical". What does it actually mean? It should be pointed and stressed that "critical" here does not refer to what the *New Oxford Dictionary* stipulates as: "expressing adverse or disapproving comments or judgments." Being critical does not mean simply disagreeing or disapproving. "Critical" here means we should never take things for granted. Perhaps, Ruth Wodak's discussion can give us a better idea:

> Basically, "critical" is to be understood as having distance to the data, embedding the data in the social, taking a political stance explicitly, and a focus on self-reflection as scholars doing research (2001: 9)

It is important to note that she touches upon several key points in the discussion: the first point is distance, i.e. to be critical is to keep a distance from what you are to analyze and discuss. In other words, being critical requires a certain level of disinterestedness. The second point is embedding or contextualization, i.e. we need to put the issues under discussion in perspective. Being critical in this sense requires a dynamic or historical approach, taking into account social, political, economic and many other factors. The last point is self-reflection, i.e. to be critical is to be aware of one's own limitations. Being critical in this way requires one to be aware of one's own preconceptions and biases.

However, there seems to be a paradox here. According to the cognitive science, one sees the world inevitably through his/her own frame of mind. In other words, one can never have the distance which Wodak believes to be the essential step in being critical, and that failure indicates the practice of embedding, contextualization, and perspectivization is selective. Like the blind men in Saxe's poem, one tends to choose a perspective one is most habituated to when one tries to tackle an issue. Toulmin states that there is no such a point from which we can make observation free from the human subjective experience:

> The pursuit of objectivity in the human sciences no longer depends on our ability to find a uniquely correct standpoint from which to arrive at proper judgments. No such unique viewpoint is to be found, and we are back where we started. (2001: 243)

In his analysis, even statistics cannot be immune from the subjective human factors because fair as the numerical reality seems, the questions in a questionnaire are prepared by the human beings, the people selected for the questionnaire are chosen by the human beings, and most importantly, even if we use the computer software to analyze the data, what is counted as a valid answer is decided by the human beings. So, how can one be critical or distant when one is trapped inescapably in his/her own thinking paradigms?

Toulmin's answer to that is reservedly optimistic, claiming that we can make an effort to counter our biases, i.e. to contain them:

> In the social sciences as elsewhere, the problem of achieving objectivity is that of learning to counter our own biases. It requires us to make explicit, and to make allowances for, the interests and values that we ourselves bring to our research — whether this involves the intellectual activity of constructing social theories, or the practical activity of improving the institutions in which we ourselves participate. (2001:71)

Perhaps the key word in the quotation here is "explicit". Only by making values we resort to or the process of our analysis explicit can we be sensitized to the biases that possibly lurk somewhere in our minds.

Habermas in a different context puts forward the concept of communicative rationality, visualizing the procedure of justification or argumentation in terms of communication. He argues that rationality is an intersubjective concept that involves communicating reasoning to the audience. Hence, for any claim to stand, one needs to subject that claim to an open or explicit communicable procedure, which is called procedures of justification. To be critical is to follow an explicit communicable procedure so that other people know on what rational basis an argument works and is justified. Any argument that does not have an explicit communicable procedure accessible to the audience cannot possibly be critical and rational.

With the concept "critical" as the core component, our approach to argumentation is an integrative one based on what Wodak's, Habermas's, and Toulmin's theories. We understand that the critical nature of argumentation can only be guaranteed through a procedure-based approach. Only by following an explicit communicable procedure of justification can the rationality of our argument be established. We stress that the purpose of critical thinking and argumentation is not to beat the opponents but the habituated ways of thinking, which are only beatable when they are subject to rigorous procedural examination. We see critical argumentation as a procedure composed of a basic set of steps: 1) definition, i.e. how the key terms in a claim are understood; 2) type of claim, i.e. what kind of justificatory procedure is required for the claim; 3) evidence, on what grounds the claim is constructed; 4) warrant, i.e. how a claim and the supportive evidence are related.

1.2 Theories

Our discussions on procedures in critical argumentation are based chiefly on two theories, given the practical nature of the book. The first one is Toulmin's argument theory, mainly developed in his two books: *The Uses of Argument* (1958) and *An Introduction to Reasoning* (with Rieke and Janik, 1979). Toulmin's theory is very popular in America, and the teaching of argumentative writing in America is mostly founded thereon. The most striking feature of his theory is that he manages to do away with the daunting technicalities of the traditional logic and rhetoric, explicate clearly the basic procedures of argumentation, and capture precisely the mechanism that constrains the inference process.

The other is Carl Rogers', who is usually not related to any trend of critical theories at all. We have discussed in the previous section that to be critical does not simply mean to beat the other opponents but to beat our habituated way of thinking. Rogers' theory offers insights into how to free ourselves from our own thinking paradigms. Rogers suggests that in disputes, we should not jump to any conclusion before we reach a careful, optimally impartial, and empathetic understanding of each other. That is in fact the essence of communicative rationality. As far as critical argumentation is concerned, Rogers's theory has proposed some very feasible guidelines in developing decent understanding of others' views and optimal respect for anyone who disagrees with us. With his theory of interaction, we may visualize argumentation not as a form of adversarial interaction but a congenial and rational communication, which requires both parties to demonstrate clearly their inferential processes for the claims they challenge or defend. Explicit procedures are indispensible for empathetic understanding. Since Young, Becker and Pike introduced Rogers's theory in 1970, it has exerted great influence on many rhetoricians in America.

1.2.1 Stephen Toulmin's theory

Stephen Toulmin (1920–2009) taught in many Western prestigious universities, such as Oxford University and Leeds University in Britain, Columbia University, Stanford University, University of Chicago, California University, Santo Cruz, and University of Southern California in America. To a certain extent, it is a daunting task to classify Stephen Toulmin, who has made significant contributions in so many fields. Marx W. Wartofsky has made the following comments on his career:

> His intellectual career is a daunting one if one has to cope serially with Toulmin the natural philosopher, Toulmin the ethical theorist, Toulmin the philosopher of clinical medical practice, Toulmin the theorist of rhetoric, Toulmin the historian of concepts, Toulmin the virtuoso of cognitive psychology, Toulmin the historical sociologist of the interface between science and politics, Toulmin the student of Wittgenstein, Toulmin the historian of the physical sciences, and of evolutionary biology, and of medicine, Toulmin the philosopher of practical reason and of rhetoric, Toulmin the culture historian.[1]

1 WARTOFSKY M W. Stephen Toulmin: An Intellectual Odyssey[J]. Humanities, 1997, March/April, Volume 18/Number 2.

His most influential publications concerning argument are *The Place of Reason in Ethics* (1950), *The Uses of Argument* (1958), and *An Introduction to Reasoning* (1979) with Richard Rieke and Allen Janik. The one that has changed the writing curriculum in many American universities is *The Uses of Argument,* introduced and popularized by Wayne Broekriede and many other American scholars.

Toulmin's theory is a reaction against the traditional logic, which he believes is disconnected with real life situations. While there is no denying the rigour or nicety of the traditional logic, Toulmin thinks it shies away from the complexities of inference in real life. It tends to replace the real life world with a pure and simplistic formal or mathematical reality, which, being devoid of content or "substance", makes intellectual life acontextual and ahistorical:

> A mathematical problem is not a quandary; its solution has no time-limit; it involves no steps of substance. As a model argument for formal logicians to analyse, it may be seducingly elegant, ...(1958: 127)

Elegant as it is, it has lost its explanatory power in real life situations since it does not engage substance, and it has thus achieved a self-defeating autonomy:

> In fact, as we shall discover, the science of logic has throughout its history tended to develop in a direction leading it away from these issues, away from practical questions about the manner in which we have occasion to handle and criticize arguments in different fields, and towards a condition of complete autonomy in which logic becomes a theoretical study on its own, as free from all immediate practical concerns as is some branch of pure mathematics. (1958: 2)

For Toulmin, and in fact for many others, logic should be concerned with the actuality of life, being content-based rather than purely form-centred. Arguing for a substantive logic, he claims that logic should be able to illustrate the process of inference of real-life issues:

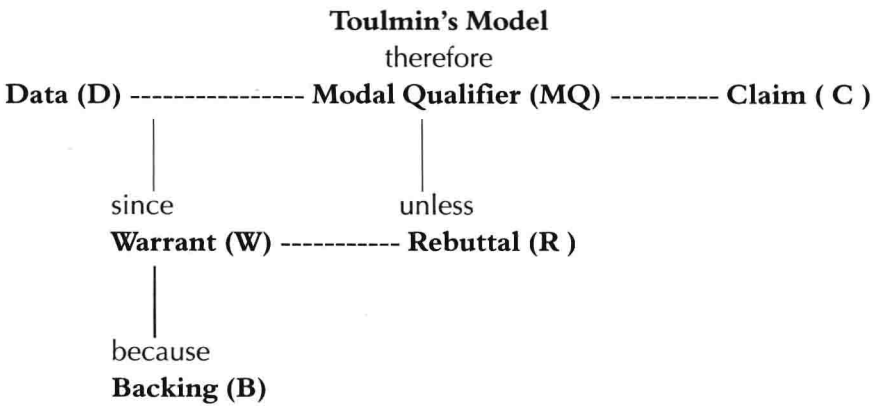
> Logic is concerned with the soundness of the claims we make — with the solidity of the grounds we produce to support them, the firmness of the backing we provide for them — or, to change the metaphor, with the sort of case we present in defense of our claims. (1958: 7)

Toulmin's framework of argumentation that is based on his hypotheses of substantive logic inference involves six basic elements with three of them playing the pivotal role in the process of reasoning. The six elements are

1) Claim,
2) Data,
3) Warrant,
4) Backing,
5) Modal qualifiers, and

6) Rebuttals.

Briefly put, in argumentation, we first make a claim (1) or a statement about a certain event or issue. The claim is based on data (2), which provide essential support for it. The relevance of the data to the claim is established by the underlying assumptions called "warrants"(3), which are in turn built on backing (4). Given the fact that a claim cannot be true in all circumstances, appropriate modal qualifiers are needed time and again to contain the claim. In other words, the strength of a claim is subject to many factors. Any change in the factors may lead to a fluctuation in the strength of the claim. Modal qualifiers (5) are there to guarantee the context-specificity of the claim. To secure the strength of a claim, it is often advisable to take into consideration some possible rebuttals (6), which, if properly handled, will add to the strength and validity of a claim. Toulmin in his book *The Uses of Argument* illustrates how his model works in the following diagram:



According to the diagram, when we have D, we will have C since W establishes the relevance between D and C, and W is, in turn, supported by B. Yet in the light of the actual situation, C may be toned down by MQ. Unless MQ grows to such an extent that leads to R, the claim will stand. In the six-element diagram, data, claim and warrant are crucial.

We may use Toulmin's example to illustrate how this model works. Here we have an argument with a claim (C) which says:

Russia would probably violate the proposed ban on nuclear weapons testing.

The claim is made on the basis of the data (D) that Russia has violated 50 out of 52 international agreements. Since past violations are symptomatic of probable future violations (W), or in other words, since Russia has violated most of the agreements in the past, it is likely it will violate this one again. Such assumption is based on the fact that other nations that have such a record of violations have continued such action. Expert X states that nations that have been chronic violators will always continue such acts (B). However, as Russia observed two in the past, the claim cannot be a one-hundred percent certainty (MQ). So we need the modal qualifier "probably" to tone down the certainty of the claim. The claim will stand unless Russia regards the