

Book review

Good Arguments. Making Your Case in Writing and Public Speaking. By Richard A. Holland Jr. and Benjamin K. Forrest. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017, xvi + 138 pp., \$18.00 paper

This is not too long, nor too short a read: it can be long enough for those who disregard a good amount of technicalities in one's discourse, but perhaps too short for those who enjoy a good "argument" for all the wrong reasons, which nevertheless the meaning of the term in this book does not entail. "Good arguments" is, firstly, about setting our vocabulary straight, since the book is not looking for an "argument" of any sort. Instead, it proposes that we pay heed to the argument in people's routine reasoning: in other words, do not jump for its first meaning when you browse the word "argument" in the dictionary, even if on a daily basis a good quarrel inspires us more than a good logic.

The authors exemplify from the onset how an argument is understood as "a presentation of reasons that support a belief or claim", and in so doing they delineate the main parts of an argument in the Greek deductive fashion, *i.e.*, if "All men are mortal" and "Socrates is a man", then "Socrates is mortal". In this logic, the first two phrases are conveniently the premises of the argument that concludes with Socrates' sorrowful fate. But, and here the authors are not merely stating the obvious, our everyday logic is hard on us precisely by pointing in this context to the fallacy of our routine reasoning, where the conclusion/claim stands on its head: Hey, people say, we know that Socrates was mortal (conclusion)... because he was "only" a man (premise). We reckon that Aristophanes would have thought the same about the philosopher, and indeed he showed this in a less generous manner when he depicted Socrates as one of the characters in his 5th century B.C. comedy *The Clouds*.

The problem with this common, hasty reasoning is that, contrary to the step by step construction of the Ancient Greek logic, the latter lacks the consistency of a good argument by jumping to conclusions instead of amounting to them. This is a fallacy that allows for the other kind of "good" argument, which is not proposed in this book, but nevertheless stresses the perils of such fallacies: there are a good number of people throughout biblical history who did not die, which implies that Socrates was not mortal just because he was, after all, only human.

This kind of logical inconsistencies, the authors show, are not false judgments as usually thought: they are just that, inconsistent arguments, as it is pin-pointed in the very introduction; later on, the book explains why a really good argument should be a "systematic account of reasons in support

of claims/beliefs". Right after showing, in the first chapter, why it is crucial for a communication to be based on solid argumentation, the second chapter resolves that an argument necessarily involves 3 stages: "stating the essential elements of the argument"; "stating its main claim up front", and ensuring that "all premises are connected to the main claim". These would be the a-priory constituents of a solid argument.

So far, these would be the same three stages of a good dispute, for one cannot have a disagreement without fallacies, allegations, and pretenses. However, these are in themselves precisely the a-posteriori ingredients of a quarrel. The rather German sense that is incumbent on a good argument springs from a tradition of logical criticism, and just like with *Nachweis* ("proof" as argument), *Grundlage* ("motive", "basis"), and *Auspizien* ("sign", "mark"), it requires that all the clear phases of the argumentation be taken into account in order to avoid illogicality or redundancy. The sense of want that an a-posteriori reasoning carries is also grasped in the second chapter of the book (the "Reasoning and Logic" part), and it is subsumed to a kind of empirical reasoning based on inductive arguments: while it uses evidence in establishing facts, inductive logic fails to do justice to those necessary steps which are supposed to rule out fallacies. And we all know how experiments often lead to accidents in their aim to find the truth while going from particular events to general laws, and not the other way around.

Thus, a suitable question here is if indeed a good argument should not be based on experience as well? Moreover, would relativity destroy the pretense/premise of a good argument in the deductive way? This book feels the need to address this accumulative power of inductive arguments, and in so doing the authors point to the perils of reducibility in going from particulars to universals by recommending the counter-example to all possible examples proposed by this model. In so doing, we reckon, they eminently satisfy all curiosity related to the hidden possibility and promises of a world dominated by inductive reasoning. The authors put it simply, but revelatory, as they prove that not all inductive arguments follow the particular to universal pattern: "All dogs are mortal. All cats are mortal. All bears are mortal etc. Therefore, this creature is also probably mortal, even though I have no idea what kind of creature this is" - in other words, even though I am yet to experiment on it in the lab/on the field.

This being said, this book is a much expected and easy to follow synthesis of centuries long efforts and mutations in the realm of logical reasoning, much more so as in the following chapters it discusses both the laws of logic ("the law of identity", "noncontradiction", "the excluded middle", etc.) and logical fallacies, be they formal ("affirming the consequent and denying the antecedent") or informal ("begging the question", "*ad hominem*" and "*ad*

populum” fallacies, “inappropriate appeal to authority”, “the straw man”, “the red herring”, etc.).

All these terms and the discussions around them might seem intense, and perhaps quite impossible as a routine pursuit, but in fact this exercise can please both the astute reader and the more relaxed student: the first can benefit from its exposé of logical laws and fallacies with the posh definitions and illustrations thereof; the latter is not, however, caught in the middle, as the reading flows so much easier with the help of many elucidating annotations begirding the nine chapters of this book.

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