Notes

1. Adam Nagourney, and Elizabeth Kolbert, "After the Election: Anatomy of a Loss—A Special Report; How Bob Dole's Dream Was Dashed," *New York Times*, November 8, 1996. Quoted in S. Kraus, *Televised Presidential Debates and Public Policy*, 2nd ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2000): 130.

2. C. Clifford, and R. M. Feezell, *Coaching for Character: Reclaiming the Principles of Sportsmanship* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1997): 100–104.

3. Kraus, *Televised Presidential Debates and Public Policy.*

4. R. O. Weiss, *Public Argument* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995): 177.

5. Associated Press, "Mental Sports Practice Helps by Training Brain, Study Says," *Hobart* (Australia) *Mercury*, January 23, 1995.

Chapter Ten

Reasoning With Your Audience

In our title for this chapter, the preposition "with" is important. There is a difference between reasoning *to* your audience and reasoning *with* your audience. While the former might suggest a demonstration of your own forethought and logical prowess, the latter suggests that you are inviting audience members to become partners in the process of developing, offering, and ultimately accepting or rejecting the reasons that underlie your claims in a public debate. This chapter will focus on this task of developing your arguments, which in many ways can be seen as the heart of your public debate. Through the use of argument, logic, and evidence, advocates in a public debate seek to convince the audience of the superiority of their side in the debate. While argument, logic, and evidence are doubtlessly complex topics that have been comprehensively addressed in other sources,[1] this chapter will address the elements of public reasoning and support that are most basic and most important to those who are debating before a large audience. We will begin with the step of uncovering and using the audience's existing beliefs and attitudes, then move through the stages of gathering information, and finally conclude with specific advice on developing and employing successful patterns of reasoning in the arguments that you develop for your speeches.

First, however, we should focus on exactly what we mean when we say "argument."

What Is an Argument?

Fans of the British comedy show *Monty Python's Flying Circus* might recall a sketch in which a man walks into an office and announces, "I'd like to buy

an argument." As it happens, however, he finds it hard to receive anything but contradictions in response to what he says:[2]

> **Man:** Look, this isn't an argument!
>
> **Other Man:** Yes it is.
>
> **Man:** No it isn't! It's just contradiction!
>
> **Other Man:** No it isn't!
>
> **Man:** Yes, it is!
>
> **Other Man:** It is NOT!
>
> **M:** It IS! You just contradicted me!
>
> **O:** No, I didn't!
>
> **M:** Oh, you DID!
>
> **O:** Oh, no, no, nonono!
>
> **M:** You did just then!
>
> **O:** No, no, nonsense!
>
> **M:** (exasperated) Oh, this is futile!!
>
> **O:** No, it isn't!
>
> **M:** I came here for a good argument!
>
> **O:** No, you didn't. You came here for an argument!
>
> **M:** Well, an argument is not the same thing as contradiction.
>
> **O:** (Pauses) It CAN be!
>
> **M:** No, it can't!
>
> **M:** An argument is a connecting series of statements to establish a proposition.
>
> **O:** No, it isn't!
>
> **M:** Yes it is! 'tisn't just contradiction.
>
> **O:** Look, if I *argue* with you, I must take up a contrary position!
>
> **M:** Yes but it isn't just saying "No it isn't."
>
> **O:** Yes it is!
>
> **M:** No it isn't! (Pauses and looks away, slightly confused)
>
> **M:** (Continuing) Arguments are an intellectual process. Contradiction is just an automatic gainsaying of anything the other person says.

> **O:** (pause) No it isn't.
>
> **M:** Yes, it is!
>
> **O:** Not at all!
>
> **M:** Now look . . .

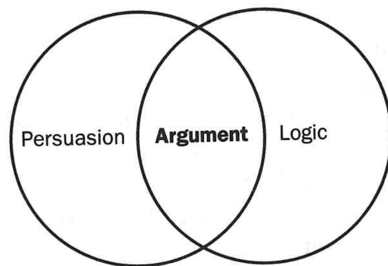
As this humorous sketch shows, the meaning of argument is not always clear and can itself become the subject of argument. We believe that the best way to look at argument is not just as a "connecting series of statements to establish a proposition" but more fully as *the use of reason-giving in an attempt to convince the audience of the truth or value of your perspective*. Specifically, we believe that there are four general principles that need to be kept in mind when applying this definition.

- *First, arguing is not "fighting with words."* When your friend says "I had an argument with my boyfriend" she may well be describing a conflict, but not necessarily a rational one. That is, one may have an "argument" without necessarily making any "arguments." Communication researcher Daniel O'Keefe explained this distinction between what he called "argument_1," which is something that one person can make, and "argument_2," which is something that two or more people can have.[3] In other words, an "argument" conceived as a claim with reasons isn't the same or even necessarily associated with "argument" conceived as a verbal conflict. Because public debate is a cooperative venture designed to explore options and enlighten an audience, it is far more likely to be characterized by arguments_1 rather than arguments_2. As Canadian logician Douglas Walton has noted, "the quarrel is no friend of logic and frequently represents argument at its worst."[4]
- *Second, argument is more than just assertion and contradiction.* The sketch indicates that for argument to get anywhere, it has to be more than simple disagreement. A statement, e.g., "The International Criminal Court is justified . . ." does not rise to the level of argument until it is accompanied by a reason, e.g., " . . . because past examples show that it can be an effective means of deterring human rights abuses." No matter how many times a statement is made, and no matter whether it is shouted or accompanied by fist-pounding certainty, it doesn't become an argument until it is accompanied by information that an audience sees as providing reasons.
- *Third, argument is more than just logic.* Reasons need to be present in order for argument to occur, but at the same time, argument should not be reduced to just the presence of logical reasoning. Instead, argument

ought to be thought of as "motivated reasoning" where the motive is to convince an audience to adopt a new belief. Employing logical reasoning that fails to speak to a given audience (e.g., quoting your country's constitution to a group of anarchists), does not constitute argument as we see it. Instead, argument represents the use of logic in the service of developing audience conviction and this means that it is the subset of audience-relevant logic and reasoning that we are most interested in.

- *Fourth, argument is more than just persuasion.* We don't make arguments just to demonstrate our ability or to hear ourselves speak—persuasion is the ultimate goal. But at the same time, it is only persuasion by means of good reasons that constitutes argument. Repetition may be effective as a persuasive strategy—say something over and over again and it starts to sound like common knowledge—but that doesn't make it an argument. You can "persuade" people with money or the threat of violence—but money and violence do not constitute reasons. Good delivery, eye contact, credibility, confidence, and dynamism are all essential aspects of good communication, but to the extent that they do not offer a reasonable basis for attaching greater truth-value to a claim, they can't be seen as aspects of argument. Persuasion that seeks not just action or recollection, but genuine *conviction* must involve an appeal to the audience's capacity to consider and accept good reasons.

In summary, argument can be seen as assertion and contradiction when accompanied by reasons, logic when motivated by a goal to persuade, and persuasion when accompanied by logical justification. A visual way to consider the relationship between argument, logic, and persuasion is contained in the following figure:



Argument always makes use of logic in the service of persuasion, but it can't be reduced to either logic or persuasion. By focusing on the use of logical reasoning in order to persuade, we are focusing on the most rational means of persuasion and we are focusing as well on applied logic—that is, logic used for a purpose. The next sections will provide a bit more detail about the complementary roles of logic and the audience prior to applying these perspectives to the practical tasks of developing strong and complete arguments for your own public debate.

Informal Logic: The Role of Reasoning

When we first hear the word "argumentation" or especially the word "logic," we may be tempted to envision a formal and mechanical application. Indeed *formal* logic aims toward a mathematical precision such that truth claims can be represented something like this:

$$\forall x, y, z, n \in \mathbf{N}.\ n>2 \wedge x^n + y^n = z^n \Longrightarrow x = 0 \vee y = 0$$

This construction represents formal logic, which carries a consistency and a certainty that permits us to talk in absolute terms about the truth or falsity of claims. Formal logic uses symbols, labels and forms that convert words into abstractions.

Formal logic does not, however, capture the more common elements found when humans give reasons for something. These elements are often captured in the phrase *informal logic*, or the search for the general rules of good reasoning that people use, or ought to use. By calling logic "informal," we don't mean to suggest in any way that it is casual or sloppy, but only to suggest that it eschews mathematical precision in order to include the subjectivities and probabilities that characterize human thinking and reason-giving in most situations. For example, if I make the argument that the death penalty is unjust, there is no way that I can represent my argument in a way that is *true* in any formal sense. Our willingness to see something as unjust is more than a mathematical calculation; it is of necessity a human judgment. But while I can't say that a claim like this is true in a formal sense, I can say that it is more or less assertable based upon the arguments that I have supplied in front of a specific audience. I could, for example, provide the testimony of a respected jurist: U.S. Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun concluded that America's experience showed that the death penalty could never be imposed fairly and consistently and said, as a result, "From this day forward, I no longer shall tinker with the machinery of death."[5] Alternatively, I could cite

examples from the number of individuals who have been put to death only to subsequently be considered innocent based upon new evidence.[6] Or I could present a moral argument that killing is only philosophically justified in immediate self-defense, and as long as life in prison remains an option, the state need never kill a captured prisoner. Any of these arguments in the right situation and before the right audience could provide a reasonable basis for the audience to attach greater belief to the claim. The arguments do not make the claim "true," but by adding justification, they make the claim more likely to win adherence. Because effectiveness depends not upon an absolute truth standard but upon an audience-won sense of reasonableness, an emphasis on the public dimensions of logic is especially suited to a focus on debates before a large audience.

Enthymeme: The Role of the Audience

Effective argument in a public context involves more than "a connecting series of statements to establish a proposition"; to be effective it must also involve the integration of the advocate's reasoning with the preexisting knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs of an audience.

A substantial role for the audience in argumentation has long been recognized. The classic Greek teacher of rhetoric, Aristotle, captured the essential participation of listeners in the construction of good arguments through his concept of the *enthymeme*. Aristotle saw the foundation of formal reasoning in the syllogism—a series of statements, called premises, leading to a conclusion:

Major Premise: All men are mortal.
Minor Premise: Socrates is a man.
Conclusion: Therefore Socrates is mortal.

The enthymeme is sometimes called a "truncated syllogism," because one of the terms is missing. If, for example, the speaker were to say only, "Socrates is a man, therefore Socrates is mortal," he would be depending upon his listeners to supply the missing premise (that all men are mortal). In other words, his enthymeme builds upon a belief or an attitude that is already held by an audience. This belief or attitude is part of the argument, but because it represents knowledge or belief that is already held by the audience, it need

not be expressed explicitly. The utility of the enthymeme, however, is not in saving time. By identifying and adding to what the audience already thinks and knows, the enthymeme creates argument as a joint product of speaker and audience. As we will argue below, the enthymeme is especially fitting for certain types of argument.

For example, contrast the following arguments.

The Scientific Syllogism	The Rhetorical Enthymeme
Major Premise: All electronic products pose a risk of electrical shock.	(**Audience Premise:** Many television programs portray violence.)
Minor Premise: A television is an electronic product.	**Support:** Studies show that an acceptance of simulated violence causes a tolerance for real violence.
Conclusion: A television poses a risk of electrical shock.	**Conclusion:** Television is furthering the spread of violence in society.

The syllogism works because it is based upon an absolute and categorical statement: *all electronic products. . . .* In contrast, the sort of judgments and evaluations that more often characterize the most important human disagreements are less likely to take the form of such absolute statements. By dealing in probabilities and relationships, the enthymeme makes a conclusion that is more fitting to the way in which we usually deliberate about human affairs. Notice that in this case the enthymeme "works" only as long as the audience is willing to agree to and supply the identified premise. Average individuals who own a television might be expected to know and concede that television often portrays violence. A group of individuals who don't own televisions, or conversely a group of television executives who believe that television has increased its responsibility and reduced its level of violence in recent years, would be less likely to concede that belief. Thus, the effectiveness of the enthymeme depends to a great extent upon what the audience is bringing to the table. This, however, does not suggest that a good argument is simply that which the audience already agrees with. Instead, a good argument is an argument that builds off of the *reliable* prior beliefs and knowledge of an audience and supplies *additional justification or implication* for that audience. Furthermore, a good argument is one that

survives criticism (or "refutation") from a reasonable opposition. In this case, the opposition could either question the extent of violence on television or they could question the relationship between portrayed violence and actual violence. In addition, they could question whether a mere tolerance for violence translates into actual violence. For the argument to be effective it would need to surmount these challenges.

Getting More Specific: The Components of an Argument

Earlier, we defined argument as *the use of reason-giving in an attempt to convince the audience of the truth or value of your perspective*, but at this point we need to get more specific about what counts as "reason-giving." What would lead one audience to consider the enthymeme above to be reasonable while another audience would not? The answer to this question requires an elaboration of the components of an argument. It is a good idea to consider these elements, not because we would refer to them explicitly when constructing arguments, but because we should consult them mentally when we are forming, appreciating, or criticizing arguments. Having a model in mind lets you know what to look for, what to strengthen, and what to attack.

The following model defines an argument as *a claim that is warranted by data*. Each of the central terms in this definition, however, requires a bit of explanation:

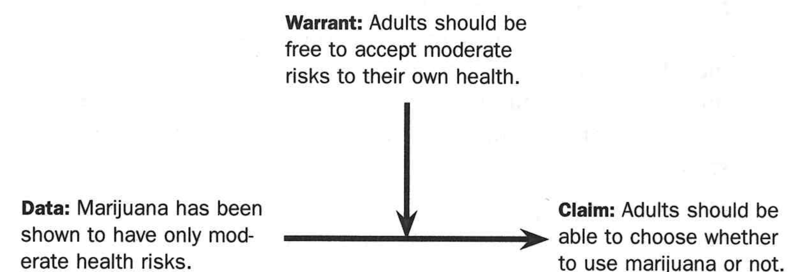
> **Claim:** That which you want your audience to ultimately accept. For the purpose of a given argument, this might mean the knowledge or the conclusion that you would like them to believe when the argument is concluded. For example, *adults should be able to choose whether to use marijuana or not* might be a claim advanced by a side that is urging liberalization of laws against the use of this drug.

> **Data:** Additional information given to the audience in order to support the claim. Words that would reasonably follow "because . . ." are offered to provide the audience with a justification for the claim. For example the information that *marijuana has been shown to have only moderate health risks* might be used as data to buttress the previous claim.

> **Warrant:** An assumption or a logical relationship that connects the data to the claim. The additional supporting information (the data) needs to be logically related to the conclusion that you would like the audience to accept (the claim). For that reason, a connective statement that clarifies that relationship should be expressed or should be clearly implied in a complete argument. In the previous example, the warrant *adults should be free to accept moderate risks to their own health* could serve as a logical bridge between the data and the claim. We would emphasize that the warrant cannot be taken for granted as true—it, too, is arguable.

These three basic elements of argument can be represented graphically using a model developed by Professor Stephen Toulmin:[7]

A Basic Model of Argument



Viewed in this way, it is possible to see an argument as an effort to get an audience to accept a claim by providing them with additional data that is connected to that claim by a clear warrant. Simply seeing this arrangement of statements in the form of an argument, however, does not mean that the argument is valid, or even necessarily strong. Both the data and the warrant could easily be open to question. Depending upon the situation, a given audience could accept them as self-evident or could look for further backing for these elements. For this reason, there are several other elements of the argument that may be present:

> **Backing:** Additional information used to provide further support for the data or the warrant of an argument. For example,

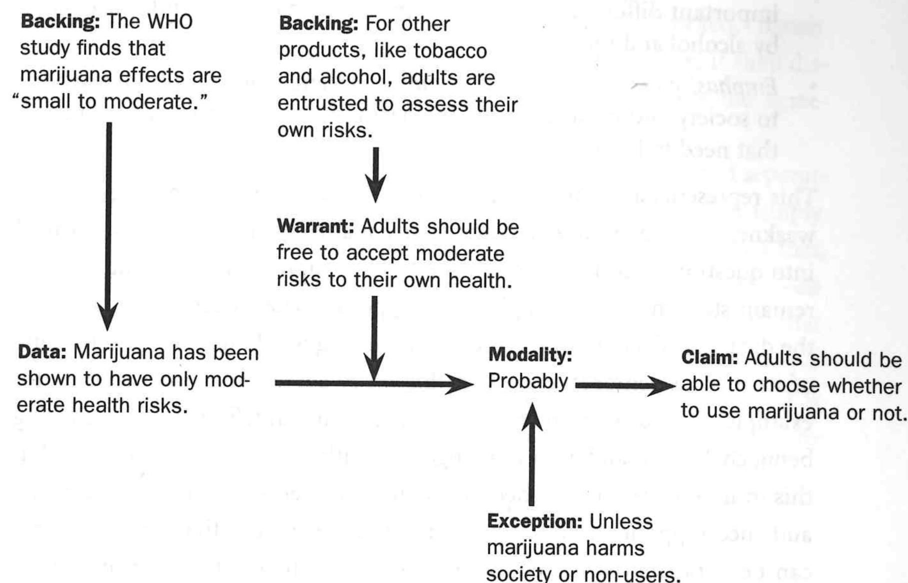
if the claim that marijuana bears only moderate health risks is seen as controversial by a particular audience, then it would make sense to supply research conclusions that document these risks. For example, a World Health Organization study found that most of the effects of marijuana use "are small to moderate in size" and that at current rates of use, marijuana is "unlikely to produce public health problems comparable in scale to those currently produced by alcohol and tobacco."[8] By the same token, if the audience is unlikely to automatically grant the notion that adults should be free to accept moderate risks to their own health, then it would make sense to provide further support for this notion by providing other situations (such as the use of tobacco or alcohol) in which adults are entrusted with similar choices.

Exception[9]: Special circumstances in which the data and warrant would not justify the claim. If the drug could be shown to harm society or individuals other than the user, for example, than this would constitute an instance in which the claim would not be considered true. This component is included as an acknowledgement that claims frequently are not universally applicable and that an honest recognition of a claim's limits can in some circumstances make the claim stronger.

Modality: In the presence of an exception, the claim will not be universally or certainly true and thus a qualifier like "in most cases" or "probably" may need to be added to serve as a limit upon the claim. The modality of the argument answers the question, "How certain are we that the claim is reliable?" The modality can highlight possibilities for qualifying or answering the argument.

We will add these elements to the basic model presented earlier to provide an expanded view of the elements of an argument:

An Expanded Model of Argument



This model will be useful to advocates while they are understanding and evaluating arguments; in a public debate, it will not be as useful when they are expressing those arguments. That is, it wouldn't be wise in all likelihood for public debaters to say "I would now like to present my warrant . . . ," simply because the term wouldn't mean much to an audience that is unfamiliar with Toulmin's model. It would be wise, however, for debaters to think about the warrant, or other elements, when they are thinking about how to defend or attack the argument. A debater who wished to advance the claim identified above could use the model as a mental checklist to answer the question, "How far do I need to go?" In other words a debater should ask, "Will this particular audience require an explicit warrant for my claim? Will my warrant require backing? Will my data be seen as sufficient, or will it, too, require further backing?" A debater wishing to attack this argument would have several options:

- *Question the data and its backing.* Was the World Health Organization study exhaustive? Are there other studies that contradict this result? What is their standard for what makes a health risk "moderate?"

- *Question the warrant and its backing.* Is the choice to subject oneself to a moderate health risk always granted to adults? Should it be? Are there important differences in the risks posed by marijuana and those posed by alcohol and tobacco?
- *Emphasize the exception and modality.* Is there real and substantial harm to society and nonusers (e.g., the harm of driving under the influence) that need to be considered?

This represents a sample of approaches that could be taken in testing the weaknesses of an argument. Once a particular element of argument is called into question, then it would require further support if the argument is to remain standing. For example, if an opponent challenged the backing for the data (the W.H.O. study), then that backing would have to have backing of its own (a demonstration that this study agrees with other studies, for example). The process in theory could continue indefinitely (each backing being challenged and each challenge met with yet another backing . . .) but this infinite regression is checked by the opponents, the situation, and the audience. Opponents do not have infinite time and creativity, not all claims can be *reasonably* disputed, audiences will likely grant some premises as being true without the need for further backing, etc.

In summary, a successful argument is a claim that is reasonably warranted by good data and capable of surviving all reasonable challenges. Because of the central role played by the notion of "reasonability" in this formula, our next subject is to consider the ways of locating and using the premises which underlie that sense of reasonability.

Locating and Using Audience and Opponent Premises

A premise is an element of your argument that the particular audience and opponent are likely to accept without explicit reasons. At first, this notion might seem counterintuitive: "Willing to accept? But if the other side is willing to accept it, then how are we having a debate?" But the fact is that opponents do not have to disagree about *everything* in order for a debate to take place. All debates, and all public argument generally, require some starting points. Two arguers may disagree on whether there should be an international criminal court, but still agree that the world needs *a way* to discourage crimes against humanity. They may agree that the government

has a responsibility to regulate harmful products, but disagree over whether marijuana is a harmful product or not. These areas of agreement are likely to be found in all arguments. As Professor Robert O. Weiss noted, "If two individuals agree about everything, they don't need to debate; if they disagree about everything, they can't debate."[10] Clarifying where the agreements and disagreements lie, then, is essential to good debate.

The issue of locating and using premises is a practical matter of separating the claims you'll need to support from the claims that you will simply need to invoke or imply. One perspective on public advocacy might say that, "since this is a public *debate*, then nothing should be taken for granted—all arguments and claims should receive full support, whether we think that our audience or our opponents will grant them or not." That perspective may sound appropriate, but a bit of thought will quickly reveal that it is logically and practically impossible to support *all* potential elements of any argument. For example:

> The nations of the world should agree to reduce carbon emissions, because that will limit greenhouse gases.
>
> *So, why do we want to limit greenhouse gases?*
> Because that helps us limit global warming.
>
> *So, why do we want to limit global warming?*
> Because that helps us save the polar ice caps.
>
> *So, why do we want to save the polar ice caps?*
> Because that prevents the sea from rising.
>
> *So, why do we want to keep the sea from rising?*
> Because that will protect population centers and save countless lives.
>
> *So, why do we want to protect population centers and save countless lives?*
> Because human life is important and we have an obligation to defend it.
>
> *Why? . . .*

Of course, this exchange could continue indefinitely. But if your opponent is reasonable, the need for further justification will stop at some point. Why? Because the advocates will have reached a *premise*, a point that will be conceded by the advocates and their audience. Exactly where the premise

lies will differ, naturally, based upon the situation. In some situations, the premise in the above exchange would be reached long before the opponent asked why it's important to defend human life: at a scientific conference on climate change, for example, it would probably be conceded by all that significant global warming would be a disaster and attention would focus instead on the means necessary to control it. In other words, the premise would be reached after the first question above.

The essential step in locating premises, then, is to figure out exactly what your audience and your opponent would be likely to concede without further argument. While nothing can substitute for a specific analysis of your own audience, opponent, and situation (see chapters 5 and 6), there are a few general considerations that apply here.

- *Use all available signs.* In most cases, you won't be able to read the minds of your audience and your opponents, and you also will not be able to poll them in advance on all of the specific elements of your argument. However, you can employ your best efforts to consider the motivation for the event ("Why are we holding it? Why did the audience come? What does that tell us about their opinions on this situation?"), the demographics of those who will be there (age, race, sex, etc.), the situation and any recent events that may influence their understanding and their commitments. It is also helpful to ask whether you are debating before an organized group or before an "accidental group" that is drawn together just by virtue of the debate itself. In the former case, it is possible for you to consider the history of decisions that the group has made and stances that it has taken in determining the premises that it will likely hold.
- *Check your assumptions.* Predict carefully and with a knowledge that you might be wrong. Neither demographics nor situation nor personal interest necessarily determine one's point of view. The rich man may support tax increases for the wealthy. The black woman may oppose affirmative action based on race. While we should be sensitive to the likely and predictable stances of our audience and opponents, we should never blithely assume that they hold for each person. The questioning period can be a good time to check and see what premises your opponent is likely to concede ("So, saving money is a good idea, right?"). Even in cases in which we have a good reason to believe that a given premise is reliable in a specific situation, it makes good sense to check that assumption verbally by referring to it in your speech: "... and I believe that we all agree that a rising sealevel covering Venice, Miami and Amsterdam would be a bad thing." Explicitly stating that agreement can serve as a reminder as well. For example, if you were debating in front of members of America's National Academy of Sciences, you could note, "just last year, this body concluded that rapid climate change could have dramatic and far-reaching implications for both human society, and the ecosystem."[11] In this way, you signal that you don't find it necessary to spend time justifying a premise that has already been established.
- *When in doubt, justify.* If you are not sure whether a given premise will be conceded or not, then you are safer offering the argument anyway. Time will naturally prevent you from justifying everything, but if you have a good reason to suspect that some in the audience may find a premise controversial, then turning it into an argument can't hurt. In addition, if you think that your opponent might challenge you on a point, then it makes strategic sense to beat them to the punch by providing an argument for your stance before they get a chance to challenge it.
- *No premise is guaranteed to remain a premise.* One of the most positive, but also most unpredictable, aspects of a debate is that anything can be open to challenge. As long as the debate is being conducted in a setting that allows freedom of expression to its advocates, the debaters can at any time challenge a view that the other side has assumed to be an unassailable premise. They may even challenge a view that the audience would never have expected to need justification. Say, for example, that one team of debaters presumes that their audience and their opponents would support the legal concept of a right to privacy. They believe that the debate will center on the question of "how much privacy?" and not on the question of whether privacy itself is a good thing or not. The audience too, they assume, will think that privacy is a good thing. In the debate, however, they are surprised to learn that the crux of their opponent's case is that "privacy" is a negative concept overall: it breeds a philosophy of isolated individualism and harms the spirit of community. Once questioned, the team's premise that "privacy is good" now has to become an argument in answer to their opponent's challenge. Pressed, they have to think of reasons why the existence of a private sphere might be compatible with community, maybe even essential to community. So: even though premises serve as a foundation for our disagreements, that foundation is never 100 percent reliable. A premise represents our best effort to find a starting point or an ending point for our argumentation, but once challenged, all of the participants who are committed to a debate need to defend their assumptions.