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The Differences between Opinion and Argumentation

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Title: The Differences between Opinion and Argumentation

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1. Introducing the Problem

While one writer suggests that “no one can hope to be a good thinker without acquiring a mature understanding of the nature of opinion” (Ruggerio, 25), in the minds of many people, the differences between the expression of an opinion and the development of an argument remain unclear. Even if the focus should be on the development of an argument, it is often useful to contrast an argument with the expression of an opinion so that we know what is not an argument. In most critical thinking or informal texts in logic or argumentation, the emphasis is almost exclusively on the nature and sometimes the value of argumentation. In these same texts, argument is often identified as superior in value to mere opinion, except that opinion offered by an informed expert.

Any confusion the reader (or audience) might have in separating argumentation from the expression of an assertion remains unresolved, because it is often not considered. It is understandable, given this situation, that students in informal logic courses can be initially confused over any possible differences between argumentation and opinion. For example, sometimes students confuse an opinion with a bad argument and incorrectly evaluate the expression of an opinion as if it were an argument. Also, some students identify opinions with any expression of values and arguments as those devices which rely on "objective" facts of the kind that science is always discovering and using in its documented successes in theories. So, with this set of potential problems in mind, some attempt needs to be made both in informal logic courses and in informal logic texts to separate these two kinds of text or discourse in ways that make some sense.

To suggest a remedy to this confusion, there are two related questions that will be addressed in this paper: (a) What is the expression of an opinion(s)? and (b) How does the expression of an opinion differ from the development of an argument? Both questions may lead us into some kinds of folk psychological speculation, which is not strictly text bound analysis, but it should be understood that this is done without prejudice to the writer of the text.

In responding to the first question, there are four general sources for an answer: (i) the context, (ii) the circumstances or situation connected to the expression of an opinion, (iii) the *telos* or disposition of the person who gives voice to an opinion, and (iv) the structure and content of the text in which an opinion is expressed. These four sources are often intermixed in the same analysis or evaluation of a particular example but considering them separately should help us to understand their interrelations. The process that involves all four aspects, I refer to as opinionation. In following this path, I am denying the claim that “reasoning (inferring, thinking) is a mental process and as such is the province of the empirical sciences of psychology and physiology. Logic does not study mental or brain activity and hence is not concerned with the actual process of reasoning” (Gustason, 1). In response to the second question, the attempt will be to demonstrate how the honorific term, argumentation, deserves recognition as superior to opinionation. On the whole, there will not be as much attention paid to question (b) as to (a)

since it seems commonplace to provide support for the value of argumentation, even though the reasons given could be improved by a contrast to opinionation.

2. What is an Opinion? The Context Response

When someone asks you for your opinion, what they expect is a performative in which the expression of your personal point of view or subjective impression is both a description or perhaps identification of a state of affairs (how you feel about something) and an act in which you give expression to (using your words to perform or give voice to your emotions) your attitudes or beliefs or views. Your opinion is just that, *your opinion*. It is not *your explanation* for that opinion (how you came to that opinion or belief or view), nor your reasons for the opinion that you hold. What you are being asked to do is to engage in a process of opinionating. The game plan is simple: You tell me yours and I'll tell you mine. This is an important exercise that can yield some relevant piece of information about your feelings, views, beliefs or even the ideas that you hold about yourself and the world around you.

On the basis of your honest expression of your opinion, I get to know where you stand, what view you hold or perspective you take on an issue or situation. I get to know how you—subjectively—feel about something. Sometimes your feelings may be deeply felt and other times more superficial. Your opinion is an important piece of information that is limited by the “show and tell” game we are playing. There is no attempt made to make me understand your point of view nor comprehend its relationship to the point of view of anyone else, either an expert or a general audience: there is no attempt to make a comparison to the views of others. However, sometimes your opinions do compare positively to “current public feeling” on some issue or other such that: “Opinions are but briefly held and likely to reflect current public feeling; in many cases they reflect rather what the individual thinks he should feel than what, in fact, he does feel” (Brown, 55). However, in these cases, the opinions you express *may not* genuinely be your opinions. In this case, it may not simply be a matter of honesty but a matter of self-deception.

As a result of the question “what is your opinion?” I may get a response that is controversial, or I may get a conventional response, which *prima facie* lacks any controversy. Opinions are often criticized for being either controversial or non-conventional or being simply the reflection of conventional beliefs. Your opinion may become controversial if I have occasion, disposition or reason to believe that it should be doubted, challenged, not believed or not accepted. In this case, the situation changes as I ask you to defend, support or justify your opinion. You can take this challenge or deny it. If you take the challenge, then the context of our discussion changes from a requirement that you honestly express some view, feeling or belief to one in which you justify this expression. This moves the discussion from opinionation to argumentation. What was required previously was the expression of your personal, subjective point of view. This is a point of view that neither you nor others may be certain is correct or acceptable. Correctness, in this game, is satisfied by your honest expression of your point of view. It is understood, I think, that there is a good deal of self-selection in your honest expression that is part of this process of opinionation such that: “Unwelcome changes in the environment are rejected by the mechanism of denial, or, if taken into the mind, become dissociated and shut off from the main stream of consciousness” (Brown, 221).

Your stature or position of authority may be such that I believe it is appropriate to accept your point of view, not because of the content of the claims made in it but because of who you are or what status you hold. It is because of you that I accept the expression of your opinions as mine. This is true of either the expression of an opinion by an ordinary individual or an expert. We accept the opinion of the expert because of who he or she is and not because of the content of what he or she says. The difference is that the authentic or genuine expert's expression of an opinion is recognized by an audience as based on knowledge and/or experience within a domain in which such knowledge is both possible and tested. Such a knowledge-based expert opinion has a status that is different from an ordinary individual's but it doesn't become better or worse until its evaluation is relative to some further claim inside an explanation or an argument – which is a shift to another context. In both cases, I can choose to hold the same opinion as you but in so choosing, I am not necessarily following any rational process. This may be appropriate for me in my situation relative to your situation. On the face of it, this doesn't make my acceptance of your views either necessarily rational or even right. That which is normatively appropriate may be neither defensible nor ethically acceptable. The task identified in this context is one that is fully satisfied by someone supplying information and giving performance to the expression of a subjective point of view, preference, attitude, belief, feeling, emotion or idea. There is no persuasive force in this situation, unless there is an attempt to use repetition of opinions as the basis for causing someone to change his or her opinions. If this is the case, then the context changes along with the game played and the success of the game according to a particular test or set of tests.

As Socrates and Hume (along with other figures in the history of philosophy) point out, sometimes opinions are expressed in a context where they repeat or reflect conventional beliefs. Depending on the opinions expressed and the actions or decisions, which issue from the authority of these decisions, some opinions can be dangerous. Hume suggests, for example, that those who cling to opinions (in the face of clear counter evidence) fear “destroying that implicit faith and security, which is the bane of all free inquiry” (Perry and Bratman, 194). These opinions can be problematic because this repetition or reflection is uncritical. The conventional beliefs can be based on habit or custom, the consensus of one's own group or the perception of the opinions of the majority. Voice is given to beliefs but these beliefs are not challenged or questioned. For example, Socrates challenges the prosecutor at his trial, Meletus, to question the opinions used to condemn the well-known gadfly. Hume challenges us to find something, other than the customary or habitual opinions of the many, to necessarily link cause to effect, the past to the future and inductive generalizations to their sample observations. In both cases, unchallenged opinions prevail.

Opinion polls measure conventional public opinions. The pollsters do not challenge or question these opinions. It is believed that many political leaders base their decisions on the opinions expressed in these polls. Such authoritative use of these polls is similar to the authoritative use of opinions made by Socrates' prosecutors. It is not the opinions themselves as the mere expression of information or the performance of attitudes that is significant in this context. Rather it is the use of this information that is contentious and potentially dangerous, particularly when these opinions are not questioned challenged or criticized. Authoritative decisions founded on uninformed opinions can be problematic. The challenge presented by Socrates and most other philosophers is to move beyond the mere expression of opinions, the process of opinionation, to the process of skeptical questioning and critical argumentation. This is, however, no easy task. Socrates, in his defense during his trial arguably failed to convince his

prosecutors to move from opinionation to argumentation. He presented them with arguments but for their part they did not respond in kind, rather relying on opinionation.

Changes to the game may require understanding that there are some beliefs, which are central to each of our understandings and dealings with the world and others, which are more peripheral. The following idea has been expressed by William James:

Let us therefore in speaking of the hot place in a man's consciousness, the group of ideas to which he devotes himself, and from which he works, call it *the habitual centre of his personal energy*. It makes a great difference to a man whether one set of his ideas, or another, be the centre of his energy; and it makes a great difference, as regards any set of ideas which he may possess, whether they become central or remain peripheral in him. (Brown, 227)

So, to change the game from opinionation to argumentation may require a fundamental psychological shift in the individual's beliefs and his or her perception of these beliefs. A challenge to a belief supported on the basis of opinion can establish a conflict or clash between "a belief and situation to which the belief seems inappropriate" (Copi, 56) As a result of this conflict, (i) a core belief can be relegated to the periphery, or (ii) as Irving Copi suggests, following C.S. Peirce, "from this collision between situations and beliefs that do not 'fit' them there arises the discomfort of doubt" (Copi, 56) which in some cases may occasion argumentative inquiry. William James identifies the conflict this way:

The individual has a stock of old opinions already, but he meets a new experience that puts them to a strain. Somebody contradicts them; or in a reflective moment he discovers that they contradict each other; or he hears of facts with which they are incompatible; or desires arise in him which they cease to satisfy. The result is an inward trouble to which his mind till then had been a stranger, and from which he seeks to escape by modifying his previous mass of opinions. (James, 59-60)

There are two parts to this conflict-inducing situation. First, it is necessary for the individual to realize that there is a conflict, which some might not be able to do. Second, there is the recognition that the response to the conflict is to move to an argumentative game instead of the continued retention of an undoubted opinion. As Dewey, suggests this is not a normal or usual situation since most of our lives is lived in a kind of comfortable complacency:

...thinking takes its departure from specific conflicts in experience that occasion perplexity and trouble. Men do not, in their natural estate, think when they have no troubles to cope with, no difficulties to overcome. A life of ease, of success without effort, would be a thoughtless life. (Dewey, 138-139)

Finally, unlike argumentation, the process of opinionation takes "possession of the heart and animates us to embrace and maintain it", whereas in the case of argumentation "what is intelligible, what is evident, what is probable, what is true, procures only the cool assent of the understanding; and gratifying a speculative curiosity, puts an end to our researches". (Albert, et al, 189) Opinions are sometimes intended to incite actions, decisions or agreements intentionally, without invoking the mediating influence of reasons or evidence or grounds or warrants. The task is to achieve the end of causing someone to hold my view with the least effort possible and in the shortest possible time. There seem to be no other rules for achieving the persuasive end than the most efficient means used to accomplish the successful expression of my belief emanating from your mouth. It is from the very expression of the opinion itself that someone (either the speaker or the audience or both) is moved to make a decision or act, without the

intervention of deliberation or thought as part of this process. From this perspective, if the decision or action is useful or beneficial for some end that is decided by the person expressing this opinion, then the expression of the opinion has served a good purpose, at little effort or intellectual cost. Politicians, for example, are fond of floating opinions or views that the public either accepts or subjects to critical examination, rendering the opinion open to some doubt. The politician has expended little effort in expressing the opinion and has repeated the efforts of others (sometimes the public and sometimes the news media) in the process of critical evaluation. The politician can then appear to change his or her mind on the basis of the response characterized as “the voice of the people”, a response which may simply be an irrational approbation or condemnation or a deliberative decision. The desired effect, for the politician, is the same either way.

The relationship of argumentation to this view of the expression of opinions is one of augmentation or possibly replacement to provide an intellectual bridge from (a) the expression of a controversial opinion or belief situated in the conclusion of an argument, to (b) the rational support intended to illicit intellectual approval for the conclusion, on the basis of the authority of reason. It should be clear, however, that this might not always be the preferred or even the most efficient way of gaining approval for one’s views or opinions. So, the burden of proof suggests that there needs to be some good reasons for pursuing the least efficient means to achieving some presumed beneficial end. It cannot, therefore, be presumed that argumentation is necessarily always better than opinionation.

3. What is an Opinion? The Disposition of the Linguistic Performance

One writer suggests that the reason why some people are confused about the intellectual status of opinions is that they are not aware that sometimes opinions are expressions of taste and sometimes they are expressions of judgements. Of the first disposition the author suggests “We may share the preferences or find them deplorably vulgar. But we have no business asking someone to defend these statements. No defense is necessary”(Ruggio, 25).

If an opinion is an expression of a judgement then the burden of proof descends on the person giving voice to the subjective point of view and a claim is made that requires justification or support such that: “Expressions of judgement are assertions about the truth of things or about the wisdom of a course of action. It is not impolite or undemocratic to challenge an expression of judgement. Judgements are only as good as the evidence that supports them” (Ruggio, 25). While this provides some insight into the distinctive nature of opinions by identifying how these function for the person who voices the opinion, there are some problems with this view.

First, although expressions of taste may be personal, this does not mean that they can or should always go unchallenged. This is especially true if the expression of taste could constitute a harmful or prejudicial or biased claim, the very expression of which could adversely effect or cause harm to others. That an individual voices the view that s/he prefers to be waited on by a particular kind of person is an expression of his or her personal taste or point of view, the very performative expression of which could adversely effect others from the non-privileged category or classification. Often prejudice begins and ends with opinions, along with the silence of those that could but choose not to challenge prejudicial opinions, even though they recognize the potential damage to others.

Second, Jeremy Bentham identifies a political character who "in the discharge of their functions, arrogate to themselves a degree of probity which is supposed to exclude all imputations and all inquiry. Their assertions are to be deemed equivalent to proof; their virtues are guarantees for the faithful discharge of their duties; and the most implicit confidence is to be reposed in them on all occasions." (Bentham, 79) Following Bentham's suggestion, for some people, the expression of taste could go unchallenged because they believe in some kind of self-authentication or self-authority vested in the person who is both in possession of the opinion and gives voice to it. This assumption seems to be parallel to a kind of property rights in personal opinions such that the implicit claim is that since someone owns or possesses an opinion, this person is free to do anything that he or she wants to do with it, in much the same way that I am free to dispose of my personal property in any way that I see fit. The sense seems to be that ownership in opinions confers both rights and the authority for their use.

Such a belief, sometimes characteristic of those voicing opinions, according to Bentham, is unreliable since it reduces to a questionable or suspect piece of personal testimony that is potentially biased because "testimony thus given affords no legitimate reason for regarding the assertion in questions to be true", and "these assertions ... by men in office who would have us estimate their conduct by their character, and not their character by their conduct" (Bentham, 80). The simple appeal to accept someone's opinions because of their testimony and to accept their testimony because of their character is *prima facie* irrelevant, barring other considerations, because of the failure to support the opinion(s) with any foundation or warrant in relevant expertise or knowledge.

For some writers this kind of self-authenticating authority is characterized as a dependency relation used to establish truth conditions. Opinions are captured in a subjective claim or proposition whose "truth value cannot be determined without considering the knowledge, attitudes, moods and feelings of the person making it" or "truth value is dependent on a particular individual" (Soccio and Barry, 56). By contrast, in the case of so-called objective statements, "the inner experiences of the person making the claim are irrelevant to it" (Soccio and Barry, 56). This leaves open the real possibility of subjective selectivity and even deliberate or self-deceptive distortion in the presentation and appraisal of the contents of these subjective propositions. As well, it makes the appeal as questionable as Bentham's version maintains.

Third, expressions of judgement, like "I enjoyed the movie" need not constitute claims that require justification or support. In some relevant respects, they are like the expressions of taste in that they may have the same intended status on the part of the person voicing the opinion. The purpose or point of expressing a personal judgement may be to simply describe or provide information about a subjective state of affairs, namely what I like or dislike. The problems occur when two or more individuals disagree about what is the correct opinion to hold on some matter or other, whether these are the expression of taste or judgement. In a context in which two or more opposing opinions are expressed about the same entity, all opinions are challenged. Each person challenges the other's opinions. How could anyone even attempt to resolve this challenge in a non-physical, non-violent way? The following example may serve to illuminate this difficulty, which is a prevalent feature of opinions.

Suppose two people are overheard in an art gallery commenting on a large object made from canvas and painted to resemble a large four-foot diameter hamburger. Imagine that we encounter these two individuals in a heated discussion about this representation of a hamburger. We become the unwitting audience to a dispute over the characterization, identification and value of

an object that we can all see quite clearly. Both the participants agree that they are looking at the representation of a hamburger but disagree about whether or not it is a work of art, and as such possesses some inherent aesthetic value. Both agree that art is something that is more than that which is simply "in the eye of the beholder". So, they both agree that one of them is right and one of them is wrong and that the post-modern relativist's response simply will not do since it is not simply a matter of telling different stories about the same object.

It is at this point that Socrates might interject with an attempt to get each person to defend or support their position, not by common wisdom but by reasoned argument with probing questions challenging the consistency of the set of claims made in favour of one position over the other. If our two gallery participants were wise to such Socratic moves and resisted his interesting and thought provoking examples, what then? To get someone to move from opinionation to argumentation is to get them to make a transformation in how they support their belief and ultimately what beliefs they hold. This transformation could happen, however, if both agreed that they were seeking the most efficient means to the same outcome, an outcome that depended on acceptance neither of their prior or antecedently held beliefs.

Fourth, it is the acceptance of the opinions of others as equivalent to reasons or facts or justified claims that produces some of the most serious problems with opinions. Bentham identifies the tendency to uncritically accept the opinions of others as based on what he calls "(i) the weakness of the human mind, (ii) uneasiness attendant upon the labour of examination, and (iii) laxity or laziness in order to save the labour which might be necessary to enable him to see the falsity of it" (Bentham, 238). So, part of the responsibility of deciding accurately how to interpret or whether to accept the use and function of the expression of an opinion of judgement or an opinion of taste falls to the audience of this expression. Some audiences may fall prey to their own critical weaknesses perhaps so that they may be counted a member of the popular group, whose opinions they import and appropriate without question. Without challenging or critically appraising the opinions one accepts from others, one is freed of the labour and attendant uncertainty of challenging opinions as well as the effort required of such questioning. Although it falls to the speaker to clarify his or her intentions in voicing an opinion with suitable qualifications and disclaimers, it falls to the audience to rectify any of their problems in possibly misinterpreting the use and function of the voiced opinion.

Some contemporary writers characterize this situation in ways similar to Bentham listing what they call "attitudinal impediments" that contribute to ineffective reasoning, like: carelessness, lack of interest, the difficulty of the work of reasoning, "pressure to take sides in controversial matters, even when we are ill-prepared to do so" and "vested interests" or "a strong desire for a particular outcome or a preference for one of several possible conclusions that an investigation might produce" (Nickerson, 17). As well, the substitution for argumentation known as rationalization in which we are "using evidence to support a conclusion we have already drawn" (Nickerson, 18) is also listed as a way that some people avoid the challenge of argumentation. It is a challenge to play a game a particular way, to follow a structure in our thought patterns and thinking, to openly elicit a response from an audience of those who could be convinced by what we say to accept our controversial claims. Sometimes this is not what we want to do with our thoughts. Instead we engage in freethinking or brainstorming or simply identifying our beliefs to ourselves.

4. What is an opinion? The content and structure of an opinion

The content and structure of some examples help to illuminate some of the ideas about the constitution and form that opinions often take. Consider the following example in which the statements have been numbered for convenience of reference.

I can never understand why the Irish rate such attention on any day, let alone St. Patrick's Day [S1]. My wish is for that little island to sink into the Irish Sea, taking with it the most bigoted and intolerant people on this planet [S2]. The more offensive Irish are those in Canada and the U.S. who fund the IRA [S3].

To proceed with this example, we can ask certain questions of this piece of text and then respond to it relative to the responses that we are able to support to our critical questions.

[1] Is this an explanation? If the text fails to provide any evidence of an attempt to enhance our understanding of something or to advance our knowledge, then we could respond in the negative to this question. At most, we get a description of one person's attitudes, beliefs and perhaps prejudices. This doesn't tell us anything about the cause or the source of these beliefs only that this individual possesses them. So, it is unlikely that this piece of text was intended as explanation.

[2] Is this the expression of an opinion? There may be some positive evidence to answer this question in the affirmative. For example, S1 gives us information about the emotional state of the writer, what he fails to understand. In S2, the writer expresses his or her wish, preference or point of view that something should happen to an island populated by a people s/he summarily, hastily or sweepingly generalizes as "the most bigoted and intolerant people on this planet". In S3, s/he expresses his or her judgement about who are the more offensive Irish. There is a kind of latent inconsistency or hypocrisy here, of course, which the writer may fail to recognize. The pot is calling the kettle black in the sense that the writer is exhibiting his or her own possible prejudice and bias while identifying and condemning such bias in others. It is not necessary that the expression of an opinion be consistent, although the failure to maintain consistency may be a good reason to challenge an opinion and move the discourse to argumentation.

At the same time, there may be some negative evidence to answer the question in the affirmative since the conditions for the closest non-opinion possibility for the interpretation of this text, namely an argument, are not satisfied. Since an argument contains two essential parts, premises or support, and that which is supported by these premises, a conclusion, it does not seem to be the case that this example contains an argument. But before we finish with this possibility we need to consider the further possibility that there is a missing conclusion that is implied by the contents or ideas in the premises. Is there a component here that is silent and remains to be given voice in the complete and comprehensive expression of the writer's intentions? The hidden or missing conclusion could be something like: *No one should celebrate St. Patrick's Day*. But, is this what the arguer intended? If so, then S1, S2 and S3 must be in support of this conclusion. However, this proposed missing conclusion seems similar to the claim made in S1, which would mean that our attempted re-construction of the argument in the text violates the Principle of Charity while potentially creating the Straw Man problem in that it could serve to create a circular or question-begging argument. The proposed hidden or missing conclusion is identical to one of the premises.

This last possibility identifies one of the features of some opinions, namely, repetition. In an argument repetition is taken to be potentially suspect since it can create an instance of begging

the question, at least in those cases in which the repetition is not innocuous where the repetition is for effect and not to replace reasoning. However, in the process of opinionation, the repetition of the same view, in one or more different ways, can have the desired psychological effect of inciting approbation or compliance. Constant repetition can have the positive effect of breaking down an audience's resistance to the opinion and decisions and/or actions, which issue from it. So, one of the features of an opinion, may be repetition to enhance a strategy that might be called "cumulative circularity", where one opinion is repeated by another similar opinion and so on. Each repetition serves to enhance the non-rational acceptance of the opinion or point of view. So, each repetition cumulates or contributes to the cumulative effect of the whole. From the perspective of the aims and goals of argumentation, this is a negative strategy, or one that commits either a mistake in reasoning or fails to satisfy one of the ethical aims of argumentation—to persuade someone using reasons and not some other less rational means.

So, an opinion can violate certain structural conditions of an argument. An opinion can exhibit some inconsistency. It can exhibit the kind of repetition that sometimes identifies the structural fault of begging the question. One way to identify this structural fault is to employ the flow diagramming techniques to the structure of the passage that contains an opinion. Any attempt to discover clear and functioning implication relations between one statement or sentence and another fails, in the case of an opinion. For example, the second sentence is not entailed by the first and it seems to make no difference to the structure of the passage that the second statement is inconsistent with the first. There seems to be no attempt to structure the reasoning so that this structure has a place in a public domain of discourse, open for an audience to evaluate and potentially agree or disagree with the central claim of the passage, to which other statements are clearly directed as pieces of potential support.

Consider the following example extracted from a newspaper article in the public domain. The suggestion by some people in Quebec that the French language should change to become more gender-neutral generated an unsympathetic response from an official of the French government. The statements in the newspaper article example can be standardized as follows:

P1: Using the term "personne" to refer to both genders is against French judicial traditions.

P2: Using the term "personne" to refer to both genders is against French philosophy.

P3: The term "homme" is normally used to represent "people" in the singular term (even though the term can mean "man").

P4: The French language cannot be bent by Canadians, Quebecers and the United Nations in the name of political correctness.

P5: The French language should not change because of pressure exerted by Quebec feminists.

So,

C: Quebecers are wrong to suggest using the gender-neutral term for "person" instead of the word for "man".

There are several ways that this example could be considered to be structured. For my purposes, however, all that is of interest is that the example does have structure and is not a disconnected set of statements constituted—in a talking to oneself—kind of scenario or authority relation. For example, P1 and P2 could be linked support leading to P4 itself in support of $P5 \rightarrow C$. As well, P3 could be used to support the implication in $P4 \rightarrow P5 \rightarrow C$.

Although we could change the situation significantly if we added a possible missing or hidden premise to the Irish example noted earlier, as it stands there seems no justification for assuming that it is intended as an argument. The author's beliefs and understandings are described more as a reflection of his or her feelings than as any attempt to structure thought towards reasoning in a structured way towards support for a controversial claim. Part of the problem could simply be my inability to "imagine" what the implied or missing or hidden conclusion might be in this case. However, I am reluctant to take the passage any further than an opinion partially because as soon as I do so, I seem compelled to produce a bad argument, one filled with mere subjective feelings, personal attacks, slanted thinking, etc." The author could argue I had misconstrued his or her intentions and made a bad argument out of a perfectly fine opinion. S/he was not trying to persuade or convince anyone but rather merely reflecting on his or her own strongly felt beliefs. What is wrong with doing that, provided that this reflection did not produce any possible demonstrable harm to anyone else?

Both examples contain identifiable bias or prejudice in print. While the writer of the first piece should be challenged to produce an argument whereby this bias could be tested in a public way using acceptable procedures of evaluation, the second writer has produced an argument and we have the structure and the content of an argument to evaluate. This gives us an identifiable test for the views expressed in the second example.

5. Conclusion

What I have provided are some ways that an opinion can be identified in contrast to an argument. However, it is not possible to provide absolute or invariable clues to the identification of an opinion. The domain between opinionation and argumentation is fluid, not fixed. The features of an opinion can be found in some parts of a passage, which otherwise displays the characteristics of an argument. It is often claimed that an opinion can be identified as the conclusion of an argument. So, there is as much integration as segregation between the two domains.

However, once committed to an argument from an opinion, some things begin to change significantly. Generally, more respect is accorded to those who at least attempt an argument, both in terms of the process they follow and the results of that process. There is a sense that the ethically approved open-mindedness goes with argumentation but not opinionation. There is, at least, this association in the minds of many writers of informal logic texts as they tell students why they should muster reasons in support of their positions, why they should argue and why they should attempt to argue well.

Those who express opinions, on the other hand, are not thought to display the same ethically acceptable commitment to open-mindedness, subjecting their ideas to a public test of their veracity in front of a publicly identified audience. This would only seem to be a fair criticism if the person engaging in opinionation (a) shared the valuing of an argument over the expression of their innermost ideas or beliefs, (b) accepted the necessary value of arguing as a way of

improving their reasoning or thinking skills, and/or (c) accepted the idea that reasons could be found to support their opinions. However, it does not seem inconsistent or even irrational for anyone to reject (a) to (c), supposing that opinionation differed from argumentation and had its own values independent of argumentation. What could anyone say to such a person?

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