3.1: Responding to an Argument

Your long time romantic partner comes to you and says, “You don’t love me anymore.” You just stand there. Stunned. Too startled to speak. Hearing you not say anything your partner turns around walks away saying, “That’s what I thought.”

What just happened? By you not answering, your partner assumed you agreed with the statement. Your failure to engage in an argument implied that you had nothing to contradict the statement. Your failure to clash led to the belief that you agreed with the statement, thus no argument.

If you do disagree with someone’s statement, you need to learn how to clash with him or her.
If we look at this interaction through the lenses of this text, your partner is considered the pro-side, because they have made the claim that you don't love them. They have presented their argument which in this case is just the statement of the claim “You don't love me.” You, the con-side, must now respond or else the pro-side’s position is upheld automatically. Why?

“Silence means consent”

*The maxim is Qui tacet consentiret: the maxim of the law is “Silence gives consent”.*

– Sir Thomas Moore

There is a famous maxim that states, “Silence means consent.” That is if the pro-side makes an argument and the con-side says nothing, the implication is that the con-side agrees with the pro-side. There is no controversy, thus no argument.

I was writing a letter that was going out to all the members of an organization to which I belong. I sent out a final draft to the nine committee members for one last check. I heard from three of them. I did not hear from the other six members so I reasonably assumed that they had no objections.

Now I agree that in a social situation, silence could mean that the person is merely tired of arguing. They still may not agree, but they no longer want to spend the time or energy fighting. In a structured argument, however, it is important for those who disagree to fulfill their responsibility and respond to the initial argument. If not, then the argument is over.
Clash occurs when there is a disagreement. In an argument, responding to the pro-side is referred to as clash. When the pro-side presents their argument and the con-side says nothing, there is no clash. Only when the con-side makes their argument against the pro-side then clash occurs and we have a genuine argument.