4.4: Types of Claims

There are three types of claims: claims of fact, claims of value, and claims of policy. Each type of claim focuses on a different aspect of a topic. To best participate in an argument, it is beneficial to understand the type of claim that is being argued.

A Claim of Fact

A Claim of Fact asserts that something quantifiable has existed, does exist, or will exist. The center of controversy in a factual claim is over the reasonableness of the fact in question. In other words, a claim of fact debates whether the statement of the Claim is correct or incorrect, valid or invalid, true or false. In making such implications, we reason from something that is known to something that is unknown. Claims of fact also focus on cause-to-effect relationships.

The goal in arguing for a claim of fact is to gain audience acceptance that something that is currently not accepted as fact or that something that is currently considered a fact, should no longer be considered as such. The goal in arguing against a claim of fact is to get your audience to deny acceptance of some proposed new fact, or to defend the status quo that something that is a fact should remain so. Claims of fact may be assertions about the past, present, or future.

Past claims of fact tend to deal with the assigning of motive or responsibility for historical actions. Examples are: “General Custer was responsible for the massacre at the Battle of the Little Big Horn,” or, “Democrat policies caused the rise of terrorism.”

Present claims of fact tend to deal with events of current importance. Examples are: “There is a God,” “Divorce is causing increased juvenile crime,” “Video games lead to the increase of violence among teens,” or “Climate change is exacerbated by people.”
Future claims of fact deal with making predictions about the nature of future events; such as: "Tuition at community colleges will be increased next year," "Oil prices will continue to rise" or, "The Tesla Model 3 will become the best-selling sedan in the United States."

Claims of fact are quantifiable. That is, establishing the correctness of factual claims depends heavily on empirical verification. Such verification, or evidence, usually consists of using some combination of sensory data (sight, smell, touch, sound, and taste). We will be examining how we find quality evidence to support our arguments in another chapter.

**A Claim of Value**

A **Claim of Value** asserts qualitative judgments along a good-to-bad continuum relating to persons, events, and things in one’s environment. If you construct a position claiming that something is good or bad or one thing is better than another, you’ve made a claim of value. Examples of claims of value are: “The Wizard of Oz is the greatest movie of all time,” “Snowboarding is the greatest way to spend a vacation,” or, “Indian food is the best food of all.”

The center of argument in a value claim is over the criteria used in making the judgment. Value claims call into question a standard of comparison: bad as compared to what, good as compared to what, superior as compared to what? All judgments we make are opinions that compare two or more items and assert that one of the items is, by comparison, the better one. For instance, “Coke is better than Pepsi,” “Natural gas is our best energy source,” and, “George Washington is the greatest President of all time.” How do you define words like “better,” “best,” and “greatest”? And more importantly, do you and the person you are arguing with, define them identically. If not, that difference has to be resolved first with agreed upon definitions of these key terms. Then you can begin your argument.

In our everyday decisions, we make many kinds of value judgments. Our own experiences reveal how difficult it often is to empirically quantify these judgments. Your parents ask you not to associate with a certain person because he or she is a “bad influence.” You go to a certain college to get a “good” education. You buy a certain car because it is “better” than other similar cars. What is a “bad” influence, a “good” education, a “better” car? These words have no universality or common understanding. This puts you in the position of having to define how value judgments are made in a particular situation, to argue for that definition, and to assess how well the person/thing being judged meets that definition.

For example, with the claim “Abraham Lincoln is the greatest President ever,” the advocate would have to prove either, or both that Lincoln meets the criteria for a great President, which involves arguing for the criteria as well as judging his play against that criteria AND that he meets the criteria better than any other President, which involves comparing and contrasting his presidency to other Presidents.

A person’s values are often called into play when a person is arguing morality. Since value claims cannot be empirically supported, our arguments with others tend to be qualitative and without much factual support. One significant problem in social argumentation is that we tend to view claims of value as claims of fact, and thus we shift the focus of argument from good and bad to true or false. Value claims are the hardest on which to reach consensus because of the lack of objective criteria.

A major problem we often face is that we frequently argue Claims of Value as if they are Claims of Fact. Look at the...
following claims.

- Law and Order is the best program on television.
- Barack Obama was a great President.
- Abortion is morally wrong.
- The Lakers are better than the Celtics.

All of these claims are claims of value. We tend, however, to often debate them as if they were claims of fact, or "true or false" statements. Instead of getting others to accept our position as having the same validity as theirs does, successful conflict resolution demands that one of us abandon our "false" position and accept the other's "true" position.

We do this without the universal criteria necessary for such "truthfulness" to be argued. We expect that others will accept our value judgments as "true," without the empirical data necessary to prove such judgments. This is why social argumentation breaks down into quarreling and bickering, and why we have such a difficult time getting along with others who see the world differently than we do. Because most values are personal, and because the process of argumentation calls for one side or the other to abandon a value, constructive conflict resolution is hard to achieve when debating value claims.

### A Claim of Policy

A Claim of Policy asserts that something should or should not be done by someone about something. It proposes that some specific course of action should, but not necessarily will, be taken. The key word in a claim of policy is the conditional verb "should" which implies that some action ought to be taken, but not that it must or will be taken. For instance, "The United States should send a manned expedition to Mars," or "Students should read the assigned text material before the instructor lectures on it."

Policy claims are analyzed by locating the sub-claims of fact (the need for a policy change in the status quo), or value claims (the desirability of making such a change) inherent in the policy claim.

For example, the following claim has been advanced, "All professional athletes should be randomly drug-tested." We can analyze this claim by first finding the sub-claims of fact, which center around the need for drug testing of athletes. We might discover the following: drug use among athletes has increased, drug use affects athletic performance, athletes are role models for youth, and other methods to discourage drug use have not worked. In order to discover the sub-claims of value, we need to discuss the desirability of drug testing on athletes. We might discover: athletic performance will be greatly improved if we have mandatory drug testing, fans will have greater respect for athletes if they submit to drug tests or random drug testing is the best way to deal with drug use in sports. We can now debate the original claim using these sub-claims as the major arguments that will determine pro or con adherence.

With a claim of policy, the pro-side in a debate must establish a need in the system for a change and desirability of their approach. The con-side only needs to defeat one of the two to defeat the claim.

Remember,
• Claims of fact are quantifiable statements that focus on the accuracy, correctness or validity of such statements and can be verified using some objective evidence.

• Claims of value are qualitative statements that focus on judgments made about the environment and invite comparisons.

• Claims of policy are statements that focus on actions that should be taken to change the status quo.