

Chapter 5

Evaluating Relevance and Commitments in Rhetorical Straw Man

In the previous chapters, we have shown how the straw man consists in a distortion of the commitments resulting from the Original Speaker's previous moves. The various strategies we have summarized in Chap. 4 point out how the meaning of another's words can be distorted using different tactics, so that he can be held committed to a viewpoint that he actually never maintained. Almost all such techniques are aimed at increasing the quoted party's burden of cancelling the attributed commitment, and at the same time minimizing the risk of being accused of not behaving honestly from a communicative point of view (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992, p. 52), namely being classified as a bad interlocutor (Aristotle, *Topics* 164b, 9). However, in Chap. 1, Sect. 1.1.3, we have noticed how direct quotations differ from indirect ones and how the problem of interpretation needs to be addressed differently in the two cases. In cases of direct quotation, the quoter is responsible for the addressee's interpretation (providing the original context and co-text), while in indirect quotation the quoter provides already an interpretation for which he is responsible. The cases we have analyzed so far concern various strategies of straw man that can be used mostly in dialectical contexts, in which the opponent corresponds to or defends the interests of the quoted party. The strongest strategies in such contexts are related to direct quotation, as the burden of cancelling the commitment (i.e. rectifying or challenging the quotation by providing evidence) is shifted onto the quoted party.

In Sect. 4.4.1 of Chap. 4 we have noticed, however, that a straw man attack can be carried out also by means of indirect reports, a strategy that is effective in rhetorical contexts, in which the standards used for assessing a quotation are usually less stringent. Instead of altering the quote or its context (thus affecting the interpretation of the quoted move), the speaker can summarize or interpret the viewpoint of the Original Speaker in a way that it is easier to refute. The indirect quotations or mixed quotations can be altered by manipulating the content explicitly conveyed (Sect. 4.4.1) or the presuppositions of the move (Sect. 4.6). In the latter case, the manipulation can be directly related to elements directly quoted (definitions of the words used). In the former case, the manipulation consists in a description of the

Original move or moves that results in a viewpoint more subject to possible criticisms. The reporting party is not constrained by the interpretive limits of a quote. He can rely on a statement or a series of statements of the Original Speaker and provide his own interpretation thereof, without referring to a verbatim reproduction of the Original utterance. This rhetorical strategy is essentially related to the problem of relevance. As van Eemeren and Grootendorst put it, “A party’s attack on a standpoint must relate to the standpoint that has indeed been advanced by the other party” (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992, p. 125).

In this chapter, we will analyze in detail the straw man strategies based on *indirect reporting* of a party’s viewpoint (Capone 2016). We will show how the argumentative notion of relevance introduced in Chap. 3, Sect. 3.5.7 above can be developed further and used for assessing the fallaciousness of these attacks. In particular, the presumptive approach to relevance will be investigated by taking into account the possible inferences that can be based on the various presumptions available and used for providing an interpretation of the quote. For this reason, not only are the presumptions assessed linking the quotation to the context (for evaluating correctness of a quote), but also the inferential steps leading from a statement to its interpretation (for evaluating the acceptability of an indirect report). We will describe relevance as a sequential concept referring to the number of premises and intermediate arguments to connect a move (the interpretation of a move in this case) to the issue or claim discussed or to be proved (the original move in this case). In Chap. 3, Sect. 3.7, we have discussed relevance in relation to the interpretation of a move in its context. In this chapter, we will develop this notion of relevance from an evaluative perspective in terms of inferential distance (Walton and Macagno 2016) of an interpretation (report) from the original move(s). In this sense, our focus will be on already interpreted moves, which we will refer to as “position,” “viewpoint,” or commitment. This approach will allow us to represent the straw man within a dialogue model expressly designed to help identify, analyze and evaluate straw man arguments, or arguments that are even suspected of committing the straw man fallacy, whether they really do or not.

Our way of presenting this formal dialogue model is typical of the current way of modeling argumentation using formal dialogue structures in artificial intelligence. This formal dialogue model is built to provide a means of extending the analysis of the straw man fallacy presented in the previous chapters. These chapters presented a system of diagnosis for the straw man fallacy focused on how to interpret and reproduce the Original move, so that its communicative intention is not distorted. This chapter builds on these presuppositions and starts from the interpreted moves, developing a formal structure that can be used to evaluate arguments where a straw man fallacy (and more precisely the indirect report variant thereof) is suspected to have been committed, and to identify some rhetorical aspects of straw man argumentation.

After presenting some examples of “rhetorical” (indirect report) straw man attacks, we will show how they can be assessed based on the concept of relevance developed in Walton and Macagno (Macagno 2008; Walton and Macagno 2016). We will use the notion of commitment to connect the assessment of straw man

fallacies with the instruments provided by formal dialogue systems (Hamblin 1970, 1971; see also Uckelman 2013). After introducing these systems, we will set out a formal dialogue system STRAW₁ designed to be useful for identifying, analyzing and evaluating straw man arguments. In this paper, a straw man argument is defined as a special kind of attack on a prior argument, which we call the target argument, or the target of the attack. We will show how the formal dialectical system STRAW₁ can be used to carry out the logical task of identifying, analyzing and evaluating all the examples of the straw man fallacy presented in this chapter. Finally, we will illustrate how the dialogue model is not only useful for logic, but for rhetoric as well. We will outline five straw man rhetorical techniques that can be used both for helping us identify and understand the straw man as a fallacy, and for illustrating how such argument can persuade a target audience. In this sense, we can show both how to detect and attack a straw man argument. This chapter shows how logic and rhetoric are intimately connected, and that important lessons can be learned from the way in which they are related to each other.

5.1 Rhetorical Straw Man: Distortions by Reporting Viewpoints

As mentioned in Chap. 4, Sect. 4.4.1, a viewpoint can be manipulated by means of indirect reports. The speaker does not quote verbatim (or allegedly verbatim) the Original Speaker's words, but rather summarizes and reports his viewpoint. He provides an interpretation that is then attacked. In a dialectical scenario, this move is subject to more possible counterattacks, as the Original Speaker corresponds to the interlocutor who can immediately challenge the interpretation. In contrast, in a rhetorical setting a countermove is more problematic. The Original Speaker is not usually the interlocutor. Instead, the addressee of the indirect report is an audience that cannot reply immediately and confront the speaker with evidence of the actual viewpoint. In this sense, in a rhetorical context, the risk of incurring the burden of "proving" the exactness of a quotation or the correctness of an interpretation thereof is lower, or rather, the standards of scrutiny and the rules of dialogue are less stringent than in an adversarial dialectical exchange (Allen 2007; Slob 2002, pp. 126–128; Tindale 2015, Chapter 3). An argument in a rhetorical context does not necessarily need to carry with it a high "dialectical tier," i.e. an anticipation and defense against existent or possible objections (Johnson 1996, 2000, pp. 164–169, 2003). For this reason, the distortion of the Original Speaker's words by means of an indirect report and the consequent attack thereon or criticism thereof can be considered as an effective rhetorical strategy, while a poor dialectical move. As a result, we label it the "rhetorical straw man."

One of most famous examples of the rhetorical straw man is President Nixon's so-called Checkers Speech, often given as an example of the straw man fallacy (Rottenberg and Winchell 2011). During his campaign for vice president in 1952,

the accusation was leveled at Nixon that he had illegally appropriated \$18,000 in campaign funds for his personal use. Responding to this attack in a televised speech, Nixon told the story about a dog he had been given as a gift by a supporter (Rottenberg and Winchell 2011, p. 315):

Case 5.1: Nixon's Checkers

We did get something, a gift, after the election. [...] It was a little cocker spaniel dog, in a crate that he had sent all the way from Texas, black and white, spotted, and our little girl Tricia, six years old, named it Checkers. And, you know, the kids, like all kids, loved the dog, and I just want to say this right now, that, regardless of what they say about it, we are going to keep it.

This argument can be classified as a straw man fallacy because his critics in their attacks had not criticized his receiving the dog as a gift. However, Nixon indirectly reports their viewpoint as a criticism against the donated dog. Therefore, it could be objected that his reply attacks a straw man. By shifting to an emotional appeal about the little girl and the dog, Nixon had deflected attention away from the need to reply to the original criticism about misappropriation of campaign funds, drawing attention to the portrayal of himself as an attentive and loving father. In Sect. 5.7, a closer analysis will examine whether a straw man fallacy was committed.

A second example of the use of the straw man technique in political rhetoric by an American president is given by Bizer et al. (2009):

Case 5.2: Bush Rejecting Racism

For example, when discussing the war in Iraq, United States President George W. Bush stated, "There's a lot of people in the world who don't believe that people whose skin color may not be the same as ours can be free and self-govern. I reject that. I reject that strongly."

Bush's argument makes himself look good by making him appear to be on the right side in attacking a racist view, which is indirectly reported from an unknown alleged opposing party. But there is a problem. Bizer and colleagues (2009) classify this example as a classic straw man argument, offering the following comment:

Obviously, not even Bush's harshest critics would make such a preposterous claim that people with a certain skin color cannot self-govern. However, after hearing the views of Bush's critics mischaracterized, an individual might infer that Bush's argument is, in fact, the sound one.

The clue to what is both clever and wrong with Bush's argument is the key phrase "a lot of other people" – a kind of hand-waving phrase that fails to specify even the name of the person or persons holding the view being attacked, much less than offering any quotation giving the specifics of the view maintained.

According to the aforementioned authors, (Bizer et al. 2009) in an example from the 2008 Democratic primaries, candidate John Edwards used the straw man technique to attack fellow candidate Barack Obama's stance that insurance companies and the government should negotiate regarding health care. This is a third example of a straw man argument used in American politics.

Case 5.3: Obama and Medicare

During a debate in Des Moines, Iowa, Edwards stated, “Some people argue that we’re going to sit at a table with these people and they’re going to voluntarily give their power away. I think it is a complete fantasy; it will never happen.”

The previously mentioned authors offered the following comment on this example (Bizer et al. 2009):

To be sure, Obama would never have suggested that any company would simply “give its power away” voluntarily. But it is conceivable that a viewer of the debate might feel that Edwards’ position on the issue is stronger after hearing his stance compared to a distorted, absurd version of Obama’s stance.

Here again notice the key hand-waving phrase “some people” in Edwards’ argument (Aikin and Casey 2011).

Our fourth example, cited by the *New York Times*,¹ is drawn from a speech given by President Obama. In this excerpt, Obama conveyed the impression that there were many people in Washington urging him to do nothing to address any of the economic or national security problems in the country.

Case 5.4: Obama’s Too Ambitious Plans

“There are those who say these plans are too ambitious, that we should be trying to do less, not more,” Mr. Obama told a town-hall-style meeting in Costa Mesa, California on March 18 (2009). “Well, I say our challenges are too large to ignore.”

The problem in this case was that Obama did not specify who is making these statements about his plans being too ambitious, or exactly what they were saying. Here we see a new variant on the hand-waving terminology: “there are those who say.”

The fifth example is similar to the previous ones. The next day after the previous example, President Obama was quoted as putting forward the following argument in Los Angeles.

Case 5.5: Obama Focusing on “Their Problems”

I know some folks in Washington and on Wall Street are saying we should just focus on their problems. It would be nice if I could just pick and choose which problems to face, when to face them. So I could say, well, no, I don’t want to deal with war in Afghanistan right now; I’d prefer not having to deal with climate change right now. And if you could just hold on, even though you don’t have healthcare, just please wait, because I’ve got other things to do.

In this case, the problem is that Obama doesn’t specify who these people on Wall Street and in Washington are, or offer any quotation or other evidence giving specific details of what they said or what their position is. Hence, Cooper, with considerable justification, classified this example as a straw man argument. She added that like most straw man arguments, Obama’s are not complete fabrications, but they do represent a certain recognizable kind of tactic of argumentation often

¹Cooper, H. (2009, May 23). Some Obama Enemies Are Made Totally of Straw. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/24/us/politics/24straw.html> (Accessed on 13 December 2016).

used by politicians. They begin with a statement to the effect that some people say this or that, and then they knock down the straw men have set up. But if we are given no idea, except a very vague and sweeping one, of who these people are and what they said, there is no way to determine whether the attack on the target argument is justifiable or not.

The last case that we will consider is the example discussed by Bosanac (2009, p. 393) as a clear instance of straw man fallacy in legal argumentation, which we analyzed in Chap. 4 above. The excerpt, reported below, is from the prosecutor's closing argument in the bank robbery case of *Barker* (at 1025).

Case 4.9: Open all the banks

I submit to you that if you can't take this evidence and find these defendants guilty on this evidence that we might as well open all the banks and say, "Come on and get the money, boys, because we'll never be able to convict them." The prosecutor's argument was that if the jury were not to convict the defendant, the community would have to open all the banks. The court did not find this argument appropriate, stating, "it is beyond the bounds of propriety for prosecutor to suggest that unless this defendant is convicted it will be impossible to maintain law and order in the jurors' community."

Bosanac classified this argument as an instance of the straw man fallacy and it is not hard to see why. An argument used in a court of law must be relevant, meaning that it must carry some probative weight in relation to the issue set for adjudication at the opening stage of the trial. This case was a criminal trial, and hence the issue to be decided was whether the defendant was guilty of the crime of bank robbery or not. The not very plausible and marginally relevant argument that if the defendant is convicted it will be impossible to maintain law and order in the community carries little or no probative weight on one side or the other on the issue of whether he committed the bank robbery as alleged by the prosecution. What this argument has done is in effect to reframe the issue and present the evidence on both sides as incriminating the defendants so clearly that their acquittal would be ridiculous and even dangerous for law and order. Instead of addressing the defendant's case and evidence, the prosecutor describes and judges it at the same time, presupposing that the evidence against the defendant is crystal clear and that the issue under discussion is only how to punish the defendant, not how to judge him. In this sense, he is manipulating the viewpoints not only of the defendant, but also the common ground of the jury, who is faced with an issue (*status quaestionis*) different from the actual one (Braet 1999; Heath 1994; Pullman 1995). Instead of deciding whether the defendant committed the bank robbery, the prosecutor takes the positive answer as already granted (by everyone, including the jury) and stresses only the punishment of this crime.

Considering the cases above, we can draw some important distinctions concerning the assessment of the various types of rhetorical straw man:

- (a) The attacked viewpoint is related to the original one, but is distorted. In Case 5.3, Obama's view is represented as "companies are expected to voluntarily

give their power away.” Obama actually claimed that he intended to bring interest groups around a big table to negotiate the issue of health care.

- (b) The attacked viewpoint is only remotely related to the original position. In Case 4.9, the prosecution’s argument concerns the defendant’s claim that he is not guilty. However, the prosecution takes for granted that the evidence provided in defense of the accused is insufficient.
- (c) The attacked viewpoint is not related to the original position. In Case 5.1, Nixon addresses the fact that his dog has been donated, not the issue concerning his misappropriation of campaign funds. The only relation that can be possibly found is that the dog is part of and allegedly representative of the donations that Nixon kept for himself.
- (d) Attacking fictitious (not assessable) opposing viewpoint. In Case 5.2, Case 5.4, and Case 5.5, the position attacked cannot be compared to any actual viewpoint, as the speaker introduces a generic source (opponent) holding the reported and attacked view. In this case, it is not even possible to assess the argument.

While the strategies falling under (a) above consist in omitting qualifications, and can be assessed by comparing the actual statements with the reported one, the other cases need to be evaluated according to different criteria. The strategies of (b), (c), and (d) can be all assessed according to the criteria of relevance (Walton 2003b), namely by taking into account how a premise (or argument) is related to the conclusion (or the original viewpoint) at stake in the dialogue. In both (b) and (c), the problem of relevance concerns how the attack can be related to the actual opponent’s claim or argument. In (b), the defendant’s view is presupposed as insufficient to prove innocence. In (c), the dog may be considered as a part of the “misappropriated funds.” The criterion of relevance works differently in (d). The strategy of creating a fictitious opposing viewpoint cannot be even considered as a misrepresentation of a statement, as it is impossible to assess it overall, given that such an opposing position cannot be attributed to any specific Original Speaker. The problem of relevance in this case is broader, as it is the overall relevance of attacking an invented position to the discussion that need to be evaluated.

5.2 Relevance as Inferential Distance

When an argument changes the original issue, so that the claim made in the argument is not the original one that is supposed to be proved or disproved, the problem with the argument is one of relevance (Macagno 2008, 2016; Walton 2003a; Walton and Macagno 2016). The rhetorical straw man is an attack on an indirect report, an interpretation of a viewpoint, which needs, by its very nature, to be related somehow to an original viewpoint. However, the relatedness of an interpretation to the original move (or statement) – or more generally of a premise to a conclusion – needs to be distinguished from the relevance of the attack. In other words, the fact that a relation can be found with the original viewpoint does not mean that the straw

man attack is relevant thereto. In order to address the problem of relevance, we need to distinguish the notion of relevance that we are using from other accounts and to define it in argumentative terms.

5.2.1 *Argumentative Relevance*

In order to analyze the problem of relevance in rhetorical straw man strategies, we consider Case 5.3 above. The original statement and the attack are represented as follows:

- Edwards: Some people argue that we're going to sit at a table with these people and they're going to voluntarily give their power away. I think it is a complete fantasy; it will never happen.
- Obama: The health reform should be negotiated at a "big table" that would include insurance companies and drug companies

This case illustrates the problem of distinguishing topical relevance from argumentative (or rather probative) relevance. Both the attack and claim attacked are about a negotiation with big companies, namely they are about a common discourse topic (Giora 1985; Kellermann and Sleight 1989). We need to distinguish at this point two concepts of relevance. A proposition P is *topically relevant* to a proposition Q if P shares subject-matter (discourse topic) overlap with Q , considering that the topic can be either explicitly stated or is underlying the whole discourse (Giora 1985; Van Dijk 1976; Walton 1982). For example, P is topically relevant to Q if both are about oranges. The problem is that on the topical relevance view, the discourse topic does not correspond to a viewpoint (an interpretation of a move), but merely to a noun phrase (negotiations; oranges, etc.). In this sense, topical relevance risks corresponding to the notion of local coherence, i.e. is limited to the sentence level (Giora 1985, p. 710).

To assess the cases above, we need a different notion of relevance, which is called argumentative or probative relevance. A proposition P is *probatively (or argumentatively) relevant* to a proposition Q if there is a sequence of argumentation pro or con Q that starts at or contains P . Probative relevance has to do with whether you can prove Q by an argument containing P . Two text segments can be about the same explicit or underlying discourse topic (topically relevant) and coherent, but not probatively relevant. This concept of relevance is scalar: a premise can be more or less relevant to a claim depending on the number of intermediate implicit premises needed to bridge the inferential gap. Sometimes only an implicit argument warrant (Toulmin 1958), i.e. a defeasible major premise grounded on argument maxims (Stump 2004), needs to be retrieved. Sometimes more premises are needed, namely further implicit inferential steps need to be reconstructed. Such steps can be defeasible, as they may conflict with the hearer's accepted or acceptable premises (McGuire 1960, 1966), namely with his existing assumptions (Petty and Cacioppo 1986, p. 68; Petty et al. 2004, p. 127). For this reason, when the "inferential distance" between a premise (proposition P) and a conclusion (proposition Q)

increases, the relevance of P to Q decreases, as the possibilities that a required inferential step is not accepted grow. When P is “inferentially distant” from Q , it is more likely that it fails to strengthen or weaken the acceptability of Q .

The two concepts of topical and argumentative relevance can be bridged by the notion of “pragmatic” relevance, namely relevant to the purpose of a move or dialogue, addressed at Chap. 3 (Sects. 3.6, 3.7, and 3.8). If we consider the dialogue not as an interconnected set of sentences concerning the same topic or related topics, but in terms of acts aimed at pursuing a global purpose (Van Dijk 1977), “topical” relevance needs to be determined pragmatically in terms of what a move is attempting to achieve in a dialogue. In this view, relevance needs to take into account the contribution of a dialogue or discourse move (Macagno and Bigi 2017) to a joint communicative purpose (Van Dijk 1977), or, better, its appropriateness to a conversational demand (Dascal 1992, p. 45, 2003, Chapter 10; Dascal and Katriel 1979). On this perspective, the discourse topic to which the various discourse moves need to be relevant becomes the problem at issue for the participants to the discourse or conversation (Dascal 2003, pp. 218–219).

5.2.2 Relevance and Straw Man Attacks

The account of probative relevance in Sect. 5.2.1 can be used for assessing when a rhetorical straw man is reasonable or mischievous. We consider our Case 5.3 above, and notice how Edwards’s attack is related not to Obama’s claim, but rather to the possible intentions that can be inferred from his proposal (convincing the big companies to give their power away). We represent this type of attack in the following Fig. 5.1:

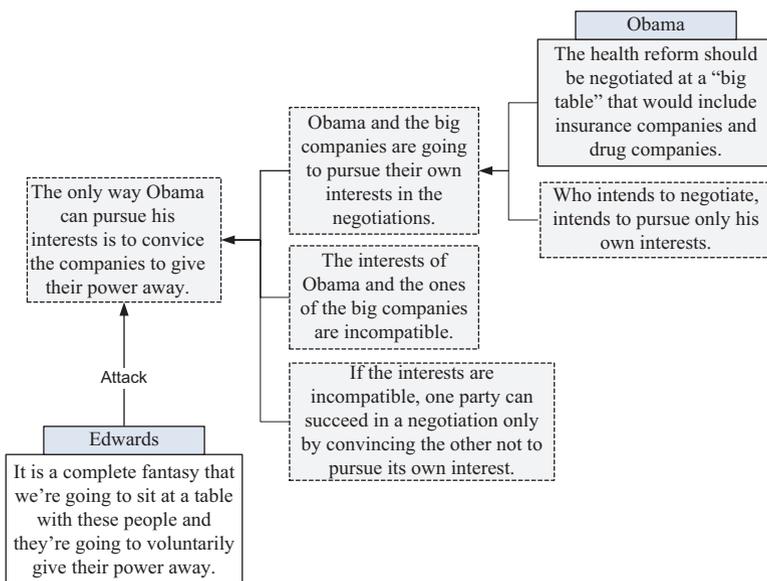


Fig. 5.1 Relevance in Case 5.3: Obama and medicare

In this case, the attack is directed against one of the possible conclusions that can be possibly drawn from Obama's claim (a possible inference). This conclusion is drawn from the original claim and a set of implicit premises (indicated in dotted boxes) that can be highly controversial, and for this reason cannot be taken for granted without altering in a suspicious way the audience's commitments (the common ground). The very nature of the negotiations (pursuing only one's interest) and more importantly the characteristics of the difference between Obama's and the companies' interests cannot be considered as shared (by Obama, at least). Edwards modifies the implicit, dark-side commitments of Obama and the audience, and presents a conclusion drawn from highly controversial premises as an inference grounded on shared and accepted information. Edwards thus manipulates the whole perception of the confrontation between Obama and the insurance companies.

The same analysis can be applied to Case 5.1 above. The straw man can be reconstructed by showing the difference between the original accusation against Nixon and Nixon's counterattack:

- New York Post: Rich campaign donors are buying influence with Nixon. Nixon had illegally appropriated \$18,000 in campaign funds for his personal use (transportation, hotel expenses; airmail and long-distance phone charges; gifts; expenses for the material for radio and television broadcasting; maintaining a luxurious lifestyle, etc.) (Morris 1990, pp. 633–634).
- Nixon: We did get something, a gift, after the election. [...] It was a little cocker spaniel dog. I just want to say this right now, that, regardless of what they say about it, we are going to keep it.

The original attack concerned a very serious issue, namely the problem of “buying influence.” The headline of the article was “*Secret Rich Men's Trust Fund Keeps Nixon in Style Far Beyond His Salary,*” and its communicative purpose was to accuse Nixon of accepting contributions from rich campaign donors (“a millionaires' club”), who transferred money to a fund for his personal expenses in order to influence his future political decisions. In his reply, Nixon did not address the problem of the morality of keeping and using a secret fund for his expenses. After pointing out that this was for him the only ethically acceptable means for paying his campaign expenses, that he had not kept or used any money for his personal use, and that his lifestyle was modest, he gave the impression that the only gift that he received and accepted was the dog. The straw man can be represented in the following Fig. 5.2:

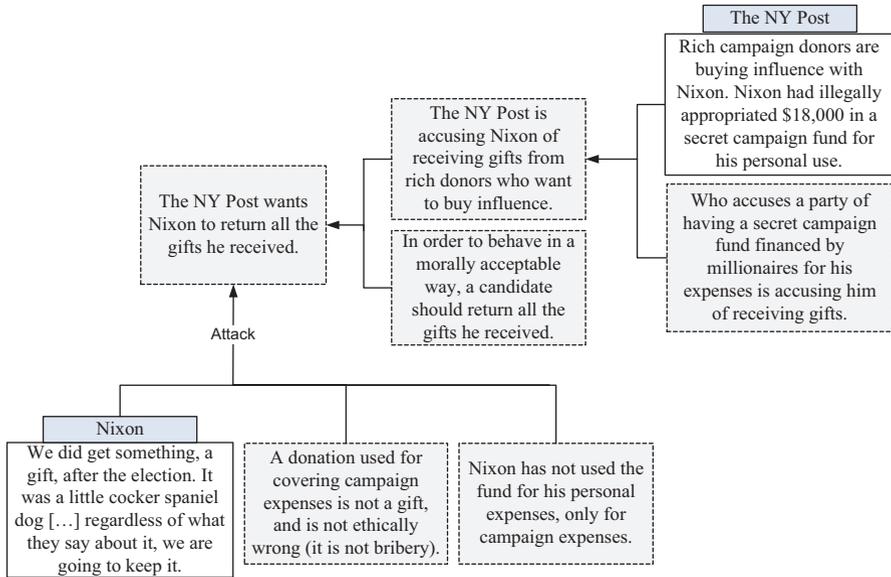


Fig. 5.2 Relevance in Case 5.1: Nixon’s Checkers

Nixon’s strategy is twofold. Nixon takes for granted that the accusation of the Post is based on the tacit premise that it is immoral to use donations for personal expenses. This premise taken for granted is different from the one underlying the NY Post’s argument (and the commonly accepted one), i.e. that secret donation from millionaires are dangerous as they can be considered as attempts to buy influence. This implicit premise reframes the attack, which is now an attack directed against “donations for personal uses,” i.e. personal gifts, and not against a secret fund in which money from rich donations was transferred (regardless of its use). This move allowed Nixon to defend himself (taking for granted that using donated money – regardless of their source – for campaign expenses is morally good), and counterattack his opponents. By claiming that his only gift was a dog, and pointing out that, according to his opponents, he should not keep any personal gift, he implied that his opponents want him to return the dog.

In this case, the irrelevance of the attack can be understood from the various inferential steps linking the original statement to the attacked claim. The problem with this straw man is that the best reasonable way to connect the original statement to the one indirectly reported by Nixon is to take for granted premises that cannot be considered as shared. Also in his case, irrelevance hides a subtler manipulation of commitments (Macagno and Walton 2014, Chapter 5; Rocci 2005).

5.2.3 Relevance and Manipulation of the Issue Under Debate

Case 4.9 above is more complex to analyze than the other two cases. The prosecutor’s reply can be considered as an argument from consequences, or more precisely, a fallacy of addressing the consequences of the truth or falsity of a statement instead of the problem of its truth or falsity in itself (*ad consequentiam*). In this case, the prosecutor’s duty is to establish the defendant’s guilt by means of evidence, not by considering the effects of his acquittal or conviction. For this reason, the argument is a straw man, whose irrelevance is due to the dialogical context, which establishes the nature of the issue at stake (establishing guilt or innocence). However, we can analyze the argument more thoroughly, and bring to light the premises that the prosecutor is taking for granted without being shared by the jury, let alone the defense attorney. We represent the straw man and the attacked position as follows:

Defense: Defendants cannot be considered guilty of committing the bank robbery. They have an alibi, the evidence presented by the prosecution is only circumstantial, and the expert testimony cannot be admitted to testify.

Prosecution: If you can’t take this evidence and find these defendants guilty on this evidence that we might as well open all the banks and say, “Come on and get the money, boys, because we’ll never be able to convict them.”

The implicit premises taken for granted can be represented in the following Fig. 5.3:

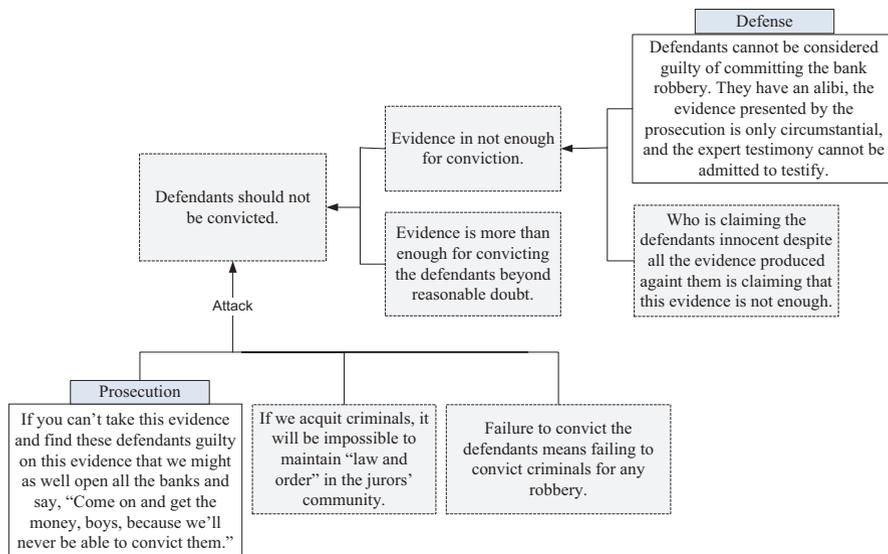


Fig. 5.3 Relevance of Case 4.9 (Open all the banks)

The prosecutor's straw man is irrelevant for two reasons. First, he manipulates the issue under discussion, modifying the purpose of the legal debate. In this sense, the move is pragmatically irrelevant, as it attributes to the interlocutors a purpose (assessing the consequences of a decision) that is not the shared one (assessing the facts and determining guilt or innocence). This pragmatic irrelevance was investigated in the dialectical tradition under the stasis theory, generally attributed to Hermagoras of Temnos (Braet 1999; Heath 1994; Hohmann 1989; Nadeau 1959).² Second, it manipulates the defendant's argument, taking for granted premises that cannot be accepted by the defense or the jury. By taking for granted the evidence as incriminating the defendants beyond any reasonable doubt, the prosecutor reports the whole defendant's argument as claiming that the accused should be acquitted despite the evidence is enough to prove them guilty.

5.2.4 *Criteria for Assessing Relevance*

This treatment of rhetorical straw man in terms of relevance is based on a specific argumentative approach to relevance. Relevance is defined as inferential distance (Walton and Macagno 2016), namely the number of argumentative steps needed to reach an intended conclusion in a discourse or dialogue, and is regarded from a twofold perspective. On the one hand, it is represented in terms of argumentative relations between an argument (and more generally dialogue move) and the joint communicative purpose (the topic or the possible conclusion that can set a common dialogical goal), which is represented propositionally as a conclusion. On the other hand, it is evaluated in terms of acceptability and defeasibility. On this view, an irrelevant argument is either a) an argument that cannot be related to the ultimate conclusion, and thus cannot provide any evidential weight to it (it is unacceptable as an argument), or b) an argument that requires more implicit and defeasible inferential steps to support the intended conclusion (greater inferential distance). In the first case, an irrelevant argument is a dialogically incoherent argument, namely a failure to contribute to the shared common goal of the conversation (such as in Case 4.9) (see Rocci 2005). In the second case, the argument incurs a higher defeasibility, as more steps involve a higher possibility of being subject to default if the implicit

²On this view, a speech designed to persuade an audience must be built around some ultimate proposition (*stasis* or *status*) (Cicero, *De Inventione*, I, VII-VIII) that is meant to be supported or attacked by the argumentation throughout the whole speech. Such propositions consist in assessing the facts, the definition, the qualification, and the procedural issues of an alleged offence (Kennedy 1963; Pullman 1995). For example, when charged with armed robbery, the defendant may deny the fact that he took the property. He may deny that the act was stealing by claiming that the property was his own. He may admit the robbery but argue that it was justified or that there are some mitigating factors (claiming that he was forced to do so). Finally, he can claim that the Court has no jurisdiction or appeal to procedural issues. In the aforementioned case, the prosecutor ignored the status of facts and moved to the issues concerning the procedural/social dimension (what happens if the jury makes an unreasonable decision).

premises conflict with the shared ones (such as in Case 5.1, Case 5.3, and also in our analysis of the premises underlying Case 4.9). In this case, irrelevant arguments are regarded as arguments grounded on either unacceptable or unaccepted and unsupported premises, leading to conflicts resolved by disregarding the new contradictory and unsupported propositions. In this sense, the straw man is not only evaluated considering the correspondence of an interpretation to the original statement, but more importantly its “inferential distance” therefrom.

5.3 Straw Man, Commitments, and Dialectical Games

As seen in the sections above, a rhetorical straw man consists, as the straw man built from unfaithful quotes, of a manipulation of the interlocutor’s commitments. However, while in the dialectical (or direct quotation) straw man the manipulation is carried out mostly through an alteration of contents directly conveyed (the quoted words), rhetorical straw man is a mostly implicit strategy. The implicit commitments are manipulated, including the conversational purpose of the interaction or the information commonly shared by the audience. In Chap. 2, we investigated the notion of commitment, which is crucial for our analysis of straw man as an interpretive strategy. In this chapter, we will show how commitments can be used for developing formal systems of dialogues for assessing dialectically possible straw man strategies.

5.3.1 *Commitments and Position*

When Hamblin first used the notion of a commitment store in building his mathematical models of dialogue, a commitment store was seen simply as a set of propositions (Hamblin 1970, 2008). Later, in Walton and Krabbe (1995) distinctions were drawn about different kinds of commitment. The explicit commitments, the so-called light-side commitments, were propositions in one party’s commitment store that could be viewed by all the parties to the dialogue at any time. Implicit commitments, the so-called dark-side commitments, were also recognized, commitments that are not on view to the participants, but have to be derived by inference from the explicit commitments.

To fully investigate straw man fallacy, it is necessary to introduce the idea that not all of an arguer’s commitments can be found from specific quotations of what he went on record as claiming during the dialogue exchanges, or even before that in documents that may be brought forward as evidence. In some cases, what are reasonably taken to be commitments of that arguer can be inferred indirectly from such explicit commitments. A kind of commitment set is needed to do justice to these ideas. This commitment set can be compared to a knowledge base of the kind currently used in artificial intelligence, made up of a set of so-called facts, or atomic

propositions, and a set of rules that can be applied to the facts to draw conclusions from them by inferences. This is the kind of construct we need to more fully model the straw man fallacy. We need a commitment set that is comparable to a knowledge base, because it contains not only factual propositions, but also rules of inference used to draw conclusions from these propositions using them as premises. The need to consider this inferential aspect is made clearly apparent in the argumentation scheme for argument from commitment (see the variant Argumentation Scheme 1.3: Argument from inconsistent commitment on p. 21).

To accommodate these notions, we define the set of an arguer's commitments in a dialogue as an arguer's *position*. A position is composed of a knowledge base containing not only propositions, but also inferential rules that can be used to derive implicit commitments from the explicit ones. An important property of a position is that it can be changed during the course of a dialogue as argumentation continues. Indeed, in some instances it is actually necessary for it to change as new evidence comes in, or as the arguer's position is attacked by counterarguments that demonstrate the need for modifying an original argument, or even for retracting it altogether. Three characteristics of an arguer's position distinguish it as a special kind of knowledge base. First, since the position is open, and subject to revision, in most instances concerning the straw man argument that we will attempt to evaluate, the knowledge base is therefore incomplete. Second, the position changes as the dialogue proceeds in which arguments are put forward and attacked, and other kinds of moves are made, such as taking on new commitments or retracting commitments. Third, an arguer's position may be inconsistent. That is, it may contain pairs of propositions that are negations of each other, or in some instances two commitments may be put together as premises of an argument that leads to a conclusion that is the negation of another proposition already present in the commitment store.

5.3.2 *Commitment Stores and Inference Engine*

One problem for the straw man fallacy is that the knowledge base containing an arguer's commitments may be quite large, especially if it is based on some text of a speech the arguer has made, or even a book that the arguer has written. So practically speaking, in real cases, it may be no small task to try to determine fairly what an arguer's commitments really are, or can be reasonably taken to be. Clearly, a search has to be made through the documents, or other resources in which the argument arguer's commitments are expressed, in order to fairly determine whether a given argument is an instance of the straw man fallacy or not.

A device from artificial intelligence called an inference engine that could potentially be helpful for assisting with such a search has been described in (Walton 2013, pp. 267–281). Simply put, an inference engine is a computational device containing a set of facts and a set of rules that can be applied to these facts (Poole and Mackworth 2010, p. 80). Such devices are designed to answer a question from a knowledge base. The inference engine applies the rules to the so-called facts while at the same

time it tries to prevent inconsistencies from arising as the operation of deriving new facts by drawing inferences from the previous facts and rules is carried out. The simplest inference engine of those outlined in Walton (2013) is designed to find implicit commitments of a particular kind. Suppose an arguer has gone on record as expressing commitment to a proposition P_1 , and is committed to the conditional proposition if P_1 then P_2 . In such a case, it would be reasonable to say that the arguer is implicitly committed to proposition P_2 , even though he has never gone on record, in the knowledge base, having explicitly stated that a proposition P_2 is true, or otherwise expressly indicating his commitment to P_2 . To give an example of a simple kind of search, the inference engine might only have a few valid rules of inference, such as the deductive rule *modus ponens* or the defeasible argumentation scheme for argument from commitment, as shown in Argumentation Scheme 5.1. It will scan through the whole database of an arguer's commitment set and continually apply *modus ponens* and argument from commitment to pairs of propositions until it generates some conclusions from them. At this point, the commitment set will have grown, so the inference engine will have to work recursively by continually applying rules to old and new facts until it cannot do this any longer, or until some specified limit on the extent of this activity has been reached.

However, there is a danger of automatically applying this kind of procedure to straw man arguments without taking special precautions warned of by Robinson in his discussion of examples of philosophers interpreting, and in many instances misinterpreting, the writings of other philosophers (Robinson 1962, p. 2). Robinson pointed out that just because an author has explicitly asserted P_1 , and also accepts the inference rule if P_1 then P_2 , it might wrongly assume that the author meant to accept P_2 as a commitment. The author may not have even been aware of the suggestion that P_1 implies P_2 , and when confronted with P_2 , he may deny that he is committed to it. Of course, if he does so, his position as a whole is not logically inconsistent. Further dialogue may be required to try to figure out where the author stands. However, in cases where the author is a philosopher who has been dead for a few centuries, there is no possibility of having a dialogue with him. One can easily see how difficulties arising from conflicting interpretation of philosophical texts may require extensive discussion to sort out. Dealing with this kind of problem is normal work for philosophers.

The solution to such problems is to draw a careful distinction between explicit and implicit commitments, and to recognize that there can be different kinds of implicit commitments, and that different kinds of inference engines may be needed to search through an arguer's positions to try to find different kinds of implicit commitments. Despite these difficulties, the notion of an implicit commitment is very important for the further study of the straw man fallacy. Other difficulties that arise in connection with the straw man fallacy even take us beyond the use of search engines to examine an arguer's position. In some cases, it is also necessary to go beyond the commitment set and to search for new knowledge in other databases.

Waller (1988, p. 167) uses the example of an oil corporation advertisement that presents the position of environmentalism in an unsympathetic way by showing that it raises the problem of how to recognize straw man fallacies. In order to know that

the position presented by the Corporation is a distortion and exaggeration of the genuine views of environmentalists, you must know something about the environmentalist position. Otherwise, you cannot prove or disprove the claim that the position attacked is not the real position that advocates of environmentalism take. In this kind of case, the problem is that it is extremely difficult to conclude fairly whether the argument commits a straw man fallacy or not. You need to know something not just about the critics of environmentalism but also the positions of the advocates who support this position. The very important point made by Waller (1988, p. 167) is that you have to look at the pros and cons of environmentalism, and not rely exclusively on the critics of this position. However, how should one do this? Waller offers the advice: “Look up the actual claims and arguments of those who advocate the increased use of soft energy resources.”

The question remains how one could carry out this advice in a practical way. There is an answer. There are now manuals available that keep track of the most commonly used pro and con arguments that are currently the subject of many political debates and policymaking discussions. One useful source of this kind can be cited is *Debatepedia*,³ an online encyclopedia of pro and con arguments and quotes in editorials, political statements and pro-con articles on issues of current concern in public policy debates. One of the categories containing many debates is that of Environment, including such issues as Climate Change, Animal Rights and Wildlife. *Database*⁴ is a comparable site that allows you to browse debates by theme, under categories such as Politics, Free Speech, Environment, Health, and so forth. These resources can easily be used get an idea of the standard positions on both sides by examining the actual claims made on both sides.

5.4 Introducing Formal Dialogue Systems

Any attempt to model an argumentation structure that could be useful for approaching the problem of analyzing examples of the straw man fallacy, or at any rate examples where there are some grounds for believing that such a fallacy may have been committed, has to recognize, first, that there are two parties communicating with each other in all such cases. Second, the framework is one in which one of the participants in a dialogue exchange has attacked an argument put forward by the other side. Third, the argument being attacked is supposed to be based on the position of the participant who put it forward. Fourth, in a fallacious use of the straw man argument, the arguer making the attack has somehow distorted this position, or presented it in a way that does not represent the other arguer’s real position on the issue. Hence, the central problem for evaluating the argumentation in a given case

³*Debatepedia*. (14 November 2011). Retrieved from http://www.debatepedia.org/en/index.php/Welcome_to_Debatepedia%21 (Accessed on 19 December 2016).

⁴Deatabase: a world of great debates. *Idebate.org*. Retrieved from <http://idebate.org/deatabase> (Accessed on 19 December 2016).

to see whether the straw man fallacy has been committed or not is to build a systematic method for determining whether the position that was attacked really represents the position of the arguer whose argument was attacked based on whatever evidence is available on the case. Typically, the evidence is some kind of textual data. For example, the argument attacked is typically found in a natural language text of discourse and that text is available in a document of some sort. A secondary problem is the interpretation of the text that was found in the document. What needs to be sorted out is whether the interpretation of what the arguer actually said or wrote is a reasonable one.

A general framework for approaching this sort of problem has already been set out in Walton and Krabbe (1995), following the approach of Hamblin (1970, p. 264). Hamblin (1970, 2008) built formal dialogue games precisely meant to be helpful for dealing with problems associated with informal fallacies of the kind typically found in the logic textbooks, such as the straw man fallacy. Hamblin offered some very simple examples of formal dialogue games in which there are only two participants (parties), called White and Black, who take turns making moves composed of what he called a locution, such as asserting a proposition, putting forward an argument or asking a question. Hamblin defined a formal dialogue of this kind (Hamblin 2008) as a triple, $\{n, p, l\}$ composed of three elements: n is a number representing the length of the dialogue (the number of moves so far), p is a participant, and l is a locution. Subsequent literature has expanded on the very simple, early formulations of dialogue games of Hamblin in order to build more complex kinds of dialogues that are useful for artificial intelligence.

There is one special characteristic of Hamblin's formal dialogue system that is fundamentally important for any attempt to approach the problem of how to evaluate straw man arguments. He called it the commitment set, or commitment store. It is defined simply as a set of statements (propositions), for example, a set of statements listed on a blackboard or in a computer database. For our purposes here, the term "statement" may be taken as equivalent to the term "proposition." Statements are taken to be expressed in sentences, and each statement has the property of being true or false. Therefore, a commitment set is simply a set of statements so that at each move in a formal dialogue, statements can be added to this set, or withdrawn from the set of statements that is already there. In a case where a statement is withdrawn, the operation is called one of retraction. The commitment set represents the statements that an arguer is already committed to because of previous moves in the dialogue. We can also use the term "position" here. The commitment set can function as a kind of representation of the arguer's commitments. Therefore, it should be possible to use a formal dialogue model along with its commitment set as a basis for judging what the arguer's position is supposed to be (or can fairly be taken to be), given what a participant has previously said in the dialogue or from evidence that might be available, telling us what he said or wrote in the past.

The idea behind Hamblin's formal dialectical model is that there can be procedural rules governing what moves can be made as the dialogue proceeds. Such rules specify what kinds of moves are permitted or required at any particular point in the sequence of dialogue. For example, there might be a rule allowing a participant to

make an assertion, and there might be another rule allowing the other participant at its next move to question that assertion. Because of the existence of such procedural rules, the dialogue structure can be seen to have normative force as applied to any real example of argumentation. To say that it has normative force means that it will only allow certain kinds of moves as permitted or forbidden in defined situations. After Hamblin's time, the literature (Walton and Krabbe 1995) went on to classify different types of dialogue. For example, the distinction was drawn between persuasion dialogue and deliberation dialogue. In a persuasion dialogue the so-called issue is set at the opening stage, meaning that the one party advocates a particular proposition designated in advance of any actual moves in the dialogue, and the other party either advocates the opposite proposition, or in some instances merely plays the role of skeptic by expressing some doubts about whether the designated proposition is true. A deliberation dialogue is about looking at the arguments on both sides to see whether a particular action, or policy for action, would be a good idea to go ahead with, or whether other alternatives proposals should also be considered. To get some idea of what the structure of a formal dialogue of one of these kinds is like by showing that it has rules, let us consider a very simple system.

In the persuasion dialogue system CB (Walton 1984) there are two participants, called the proponent and the respondent. Each participant has a proposition that it advocates, generally called its thesis to be proved as its ultimate conclusion of the dialogue. Like every formal dialogue, CB has three stages. In the opening stage, the issue is set in place, so that it is transparent what each party has to do to win the game. To win, a party needs to prove its thesis by arguments that are valid, according to agreements made on a criterion of validity, and that have as premises only propositions that are commitments of the other party. When this one party constructs an argument of this sort, the other party loses the dialogue.

As the system CB is set out in Walton (1984), validity of an argument is determined by the rules of classical propositional calculus. For our purposes here, it is possible to simplify the game even further by having only one rule, *modus ponens*. The formal dialogue systems for use in studying fallacies began with very simple elementary dialogue games starting with the letters A and B, leading to the slightly more complex family of systems beginning with the letter C. The subsystems of the system were called CA, CB and so forth.

The dialogue system CB has four kinds of rules, locution rules, commitment rules, dialogue rules and win-loss rules (Walton 1984, pp. 132–135). The locution rules specify which kinds of moves are possible to make. The commitment rules determine what the effects are on any kind of move on the commitment set of the player who made the move. The dialogue rules are the turn-taking moves that specify what kinds of responses are permitted after the other party has made a particular kind of move. The win-loss rules determine when the sequence of moves has resulted in a win or loss for the one party or the other.

In this way of setting up the new dialogue system STRAW₁ in the next section, several changes will be made from the original formulation of Walton (1984) both to simplify the new system and extend it in order to make it more easily applicable to studying the straw man fallacy. In CB, there is a win-loss rule stating that for

every statement S accepted by him as a commitment, a player is awarded one point. This rule has been deleted in the new system, which is now called STRAW₁. In CB, what were called the strategic rules are now called the win-loss rules in STRAW₁.

5.5 The Formal Dialogue System STRAW₁

As shown in the previous section, the older formal dialogue systems represented by Walton and Krabbe (1995) were set up using a set of rules (including a set of rules defining the types of moves that can be made in locutions by each party), a set of commitment rules determining the operation of commitment stores, a set of dialogue rules governing turn-taking (how each party must respond to a previous move at its next move), and win-loss rules. However, more recent studies in artificial intelligence have set up such systems in a different way. They define a set of speech acts representing the kinds of moves that each party is allowed to make. The rules of a dialogue, comprising all the types of rules, are called its protocol, or set of protocols. Moreover, the protocol states the preconditions and post-conditions for each type of move that can be made by either party. The dialectical system STRAW₁ outlined below, for purposes of easier exposition, will mainly follow the artificial intelligence format, but will preserve some elements of the older argumentation format.

5.5.1 Moves and Rules in STRAW₁

An *argument* is defined as a set of statements P_0, P_1, \dots, P_n called the premises of the argument that lead by an inference to another statement C called the conclusion, where the inference fits the form of some rule of inference, such as *modus ponens*, that is accepted as a valid rule of inference by the participants in the dialogue. STRAW₁ is not restricted to deductively valid forms of argument. The inference repository can include defeasible argumentation schemes based on rules that are subject to exceptions, such as argument from commitment. However, for purposes of building the base system, it will be sufficient to use the deductive inference rule for *modus ponens* and the defeasible rule represented by the scheme for argument from commitment.

We begin with informal description explaining what kinds of moves can be made in the system. There are two parties, called the proponent (questioner) and the respondent (answerer). The way the system is formalized has been inspired by the partial formalization of Aristotelian dialectic of Erik Krabbe (2013).

Dialogue Moves

Issue Formulation: Both parties agree to set the issue of the dialogue as a pair $\{T, \sim T\}$.

Choosing Sides: Each party agrees to pick a side. These two speech acts can only be used during the opening stage, and commitment to them cannot be later retracted.

Assertion: Putting forward of a statement letter P_0, P_1, \dots, P_n constitutes an assertion of the proposition represented by that statement letter.

Retraction: ‘No commitment P_i ’ is the speech act for making a retraction of a statement.

Yes-no Question: A yes-no question ‘ P_0 ?’ is used to ask whether the answerer is committed to P_0 or not.

Support Request Question: A support request question of the form ‘Why P_0 ?’ is a request for an argument $P_0, P_1, \dots, P_i, \dots, C$ where the premises P_0, P_1, \dots, P_i are supposed to support the conclusion C .

Putting Forward an Argument: This speech act is used to advocate an argument $P_0, P_1, \dots, P_i, \dots, C$ where the premises P_0, P_1, \dots, P_i are supposed to support the conclusion C .

Successful Support Request Reply: A support request is said to be *successfully provided* if the respondent’s argument $P_0, P_1, \dots, P_i, \dots, C$ is valid and all of its premises P_0, P_1, \dots, P_i are commitments of the proponent.

Argument Attack: An *argument attack* is the putting forward of an argument by one party against an argument previously put forward by the other party. An argument attack can take three forms.

Premise Attack: This form of argument attacks a premise of the previous argument.

Inferential Link Attack: This form of argument attacks the inferential link between the premise and the conclusion of the previous argument.

Conclusion Attack: This form of argument attacks the conclusion of the previous argument.

Position Attack: This form of argument attacks the other party’s position.

Next we set out three sets of rules that give the reader insight into how the formal dialogue will work. Commitment rules determine which kinds of moves are permissible or obligatory.

Four Commitment Rules

(C1) After a participant makes an assertion P_0 , this proposition is inserted into in his or her commitment store.

(C2) After a participant retracts P_i , this proposition is deleted from his or her commitment store.

(C3) ‘Why P_i ?’ places P_i in the hearer’s commitment store unless he gives an argument against P_i .

(C4) As soon as a support request for a proposition P_i is successfully provided by the answerer, P_i automatically goes into the questioner’s commitment store.

The dialogue rules determine the turn-taking of making moves and what type of move must follow a previous one by the other party.

Three Dialogue Rules

(D1) Each participant takes his or her turn to move by advancing one locution at each turn.

(D2) A question ‘ P_i ?’ must be followed by an assertion ‘ P_i ’, or a retraction ‘No commitment P_0 ’.

(D3) The asking of a support request question ‘Why P_i ?’ must be followed by (i) ‘No commitment P_i ’ or by the putting forward of an argument with P_i as its conclusion.

Three Win-Loss Rules

- (W1) Both participants agree in advance that the dialogue will terminate after some finite number of moves designated at the opening stage.
- (W2) The dialogue is won by the participant who supports its thesis by a sequence of arguments with premises all accepted by the other participant and containing only valid arguments.
- (W3) If nobody wins after the predetermined number of moves, the dialogue is a stalemate.

The four kinds of rules listed above give the reader who is not familiar with formal dialogue systems a basic idea of what the various components in such a system do, and how they work together to provide a coherent framework that can be used to model dialectical argumentation.

5.5.2 Preconditions and Postconditions in STRAW₁

Following the style of system currently used in artificial intelligence, the preconditions and post-conditions of each of the type of speech act are presented in a tabular format. Table 5.1 presents the preconditions for each move.

Table 5.1 Preconditions for STRAW₁

Dialogue moves	Precondition
<i>Issue T/~T (Stating the Issue)</i>	Both parties are engaging in persuasion dialogue.
<i>Select T (Selecting a Thesis)</i>	Each side must agree to select a thesis.
<i>Assert P_i (Making an Assertion)</i>	The party making this move must not already be committed to P _i .
<i>Retract P (Withdrawing a Commitment)</i>	The party making this move must already be committed to P _i .
<i>Question P_i? (Asking a yes-no Commitment Question)</i>	Can be put forward at any free turn during the argumentation stage.
<i>Why P? (Putting Forward a Support Request Question)</i>	The party to whom this move was directed must already be committed to P _i .
<i>Argument P₁,...,P_n/C (Putting Forward an Argument)</i>	Can be put forward at any free turn during the argumentation stage.
<i>Argument Attack on P₁,...,P_n/C (Attacking an Argument)</i>	There must be a prior argument (target argument) P ₁ ,...,P _n /C put forward by the other side.
<i>Premise Attack directed against one or more of P₁,...,P_n</i>	There must be a prior argument (target argument) P ₁ ,...,P _n /C put forward by the other side.
<i>Conclusion Attack directed against C</i>	There must be a prior argument (target argument) P ₁ ,...,P _n /C put forward by the other side.
<i>Position Attack directed against the other party's position</i>	The party against whom the attack was directed must have an identifiable position.
<i>Proof Claim for a sequence of argumentation for T or ~ T</i>	The party making this move must have put forward an argument P ₁ ,...,P _n /C where C = T(~T).
<i>Proof Claim Test Request for T or ~ T</i>	The party making this move must have previously put forward a proof claim for T or ~ T.

There are a number of features that make this list of moves especially applicable to studying real examples of arguments from natural language discourse where there is some problem about whether a straw man fallacy has been committed. One of these features is that various kinds of attack against an argument are permitted. The first one is a general attack on the argument itself by counter arguing that the inferential link between the premises and conclusion does not hold. To analyze particular cases where this type of attack is an issue, questions are raised regarding the argumentation scheme, or inferential rule joining the premises to the conclusion. For example, if the argumentation scheme is the one for argument from commitment, the critical questions matching this scheme can be brought into play. Two other kinds of attack permitted are the premise attack and the conclusion attack. However, the reader should especially note that there can be an additional kind of attack called a position attack that is directed against the position of an arguer. The position is the collective set of propositions that this arguer has gone on record as committing himself to, according to the commitment rules of the dialogue and his previous moves.

Notice also that the speech acts are only to be used in certain stages of the dialogue. The first two speech acts of selecting an issue and stating a thesis are used only in the opening stage. The last two speech acts of making a proof claim and making a proof claim test request are only allowed to be used in the closing stage of the dialogue. All the other types of speech acts are only allowed to be put forward during the argumentation stage.

Table 5.2 codifies the postconditions for each dialogue move by listing the required response of the second party to each move previously made by the first party, and the effects of having made such a move on the commitment stores of either or both parties.

Table 5.2 Postconditions for STRAW₁

Move	Required Response	Commitment Effect
<i>Issue T/~T (Stating the Issue)</i>	Both parties must agree that T/~T is the issue.	Both parties are now engaging in persuasion dialogue about T/~T.
<i>Select T (Selecting a Thesis)</i>	One party's selects T and the other selects ~T.	One party is committed to T as its ultimate claim and the other to ~T.
<i>Assert P_i (Making an Assertion)</i>	The answerer must accept P _i or attack the assertion.	The party making the assertion is henceforth committed to P _i .
<i>Retract P_i (Withdrawing a Commitment)</i>	None.	The party making the speech act is no longer committed to P _i .
<i>Question P_i? (Asking a Yes-no Question)</i>	Answerer must reply whether he is committed to P _i or not.	P _i added to commitment store or removed from it.
<i>Why P_i? (Making a Support Request)</i>	Answerer must offer an argument for P _i or retract P _i .	None, but if answerer retracts P _i it goes out of his commitment set.
<i>Argument P₁,...,P_n/C (Making an Argument)</i>	The answerer must accept P _i or attack the argument.	None, but if answerer accepts P _i it goes into his/her commitment set.

(continued)

Table 5.2 (continued)

Move	Required Response	Commitment Effect
<i>Attack $P_1, \dots, P_n/C$ (Attacking an Argument)</i>	None. The other party is free to reply or not.	None.
<i>Premise Attack on one of the premises P_1, \dots, P_n</i>	Answerer must offer an argument for P_i or retract P_i .	If answerer retracts P_i it goes out of his/her commitment set.
<i>Conclusion Attack against C</i>	Answerer must offer an argument for C or retract C .	If answerer retracts C it goes out of his/her commitment set.
<i>Position Attack</i>	Answerer must respond to modify/support his position.	A change of the arguer's position requires change of commitments.
<i>Proof Claim for T or $\sim T$</i>	Answerer must accept proof claim or make a test request.	If answerer accepts proof claim he must retract his thesis (T or $\sim T$).
<i>Proof Claim Test Request for T or $\sim T$</i>	Answerer must agree to accept the result of the test.	If the test is positive the answerer must retract his thesis (T or $\sim T$).

As the argumentation goes on in any particular case there will be a lengthy sequence of connected moves as each party takes turn putting forward arguments, and other speech acts, and responding to the prior moves of the other party. We can also represent the dialogue in a given case in a simpler graphical format, as shown in Sect. 5.7 on profiles of dialogue.

5.5.3 Dialogue Sequences of STRAW₁

Finally, as an aid to the reader's understanding, we present an example of a short but typical dialogue sequence in which the party in the column on the left, called the proponent, puts forward moves and the other party, represented in the column on the right, responds appropriately to the proponent's prior move. Note that in Table 5.3 the scheme for argument from commitment has been used.

Table 5.3 Example of STRAW₁ dialogue

Z	Proponent (P)	S	Respondent (R)
1	$T/\sim T$	O	Agree $T/\sim T$
2	Select? $T/\sim T$	O	Select? $\sim T$
3	Question $P_1?$	A	Commitment P_1
4	Question $P_2?$	A	Commitment P_2
5	Question $\sim P_3?$	A	Commitment $\sim P_3$
6	Argument $P_1, P_2, \sim P_3 / P_4$	A	Commitment P_4
7	Argument P_4 / P_5	A	Concede P_5
8	Argument P_5 / T	A	Why $P_5?$
9	ArgCom P_5	A	Concede P_5
10	Proof T	A	No Move
11	P wins	C	R loses

The third column of Table 5.3 shows the stage (S) of the dialogue in which each move is placed. *O* is the opening stage, *A* is the argumentation stage and *C* is the closing stage. Each pair of moves in the same row is called an adjacency pair (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973) (*Z*) of the dialogue. In *Z2*, for example, the respondent has selected $\sim T$ as its thesis. In adjacency pairs 3, 4 and 5, the proponent asks a yes-no question, and the respondent answers yes by taking on a commitment to the proposition asked about. In *Z6*, the proponent puts forward an argument with three premises that the respondent has already committed himself to. Therefore assuming the argument put forward at adjacency pair 6 is valid, the respondent has to commit to the conclusion of this argument. In adjacency pair 7, the proponent puts forward a new argument that has a single premise P_4 that the respondent is already committed to, therefore once again the respondent must concede the conclusion, namely P_5 . At *Z8*, the proponent puts forward the argument P_5/T , which has his thesis T as the conclusion, but in his reply, the respondent questions P_5 . Then during *Z9*, the proponent reminds the respondent that he is already committed to P_5 . This move is based on the scheme for argument from commitment. Hence, in adjacency pair 10, the proponent can rightly claim to have proved her thesis. In the closing stage, it is ruled that the proponent wins.

5.6 Attack and Refutation

For purposes of studying the straw man argument, it is very important to draw a distinction between an attack on an argument and a refutation of that argument. In this book, the distinction will be drawn by defining a refutation as a successful attack. More precisely, a *refutation* is defined as an attack on an argument showing that the argument is no longer acceptable, even though previously it seemed acceptable, or even was acceptable. An *attack* on an argument is directed against the prior argument and aims to show that the prior argument is somehow defective. A refutation is a species of attack that shows that the argument it is aimed at is untenable. It is sometimes called a knockdown argument.

A number of more fine grained distinctions between attack and refutation, and between other significant argumentation concepts such as objections and rebuttals, are also important to consider in argumentation generally (Walton 2013, pp. 28–33). However, for our purposes to define, analyze and evaluate straw man arguments, the most fundamental distinction to keep in mind is between an attack on argument and a refutation of an argument. The straw man argument is a form of attack on another argument previously put forward, or, in some instances, on another arguer's position that has been advocated or appealed to. From the point of view of dialogue games, the crucial issue of argument evaluation is to determine in what cases it can properly be considered fallacious or not. In the case of straw man, the problem is to determine when the straw man argument is merely an attack, one which could be either reasonable or fallacious, or when, normatively speaking, it is a successful attack that can properly be taken to have refuted the targeted argument.

The preconditions and post-conditions for the straw man argument put forward in Tables 5.1 and 5.2 do not by themselves answer this question of argument evaluation. They merely represent the proper procedural conditions for putting forward arguments and for attacking them, as well as presenting conditions for further moves such as making an assertion, retracting a commitment, and so forth. The concepts of refuting an argument and refuting a position are also vitally important for studying the straw man fallacy, but need to be treated separately because they are highly normative notions that define the conditions under which an argument of this general kind can be successful. It follows from the definitions given above that if an argument is classified as a straw man fallacy, it can never be successful in its goal of refuting the argument it was directed against. If such an argument is shown to be a refutation of the target argument it was directed against, it cannot be a straw man fallacy.

5.7 Profiles of Dialogue

The profile of dialogue is a dialectical normative tool, consisting in an ideal sequence of moves between two interlocutors. A profile of dialogue is aimed at outlining the “best strategy” of a dialogue, namely the best way to overcome a difference of opinions. The “best” strategy is defined in dialectical terms as an exchange that does not result in fallacious, irrelevant, or mischievous moves. A profile is a shorter sequence of moves embedded in a longer sequence of moves in an argumentative dialogue exchange; it concerns a specific issue or a specific conflict of opinions. The profile of dialogue technique has been refined as a tool for repairing faults in problematic kinds of arguments associated with informal fallacies in Walton (2015). The profile works as an analytical tool by fitting it into the longer sequence at some juncture where there was a fault in the argumentation that needs to be diagnosed and repaired.

The formal dialogue structure itself could be used to diagnose and repair the fault, but the profile is simpler and therefore more useful for educational purposes (Rapanta and Walton 2016).

5.7.1 *Introducing Profiles of Dialogue*

Walton (1989b, pp. 37–38) first used the profiles technique as an argumentation tool (Krabbe 2002, p. 158), applying it to the fallacy of many questions. A similar approach in linguistics was developed by Schlegloff (1988, p. 56), who employed techniques similar to profile reconstruction in order to study sequences of question-reply exchanges. This method was used to investigate how a repair is made by one party to a misunderstanding shown by the other party in a dialogue. In argumentation theory, profiles of dialogue have been used for the analysis of fallacious moves and argumentative strategies. More specifically, Krabbe (1992) applied it to relevance criticisms; Walton (1999) to arguments from ignorance; Krabbe (2002) to equivocation criticisms; and Krabbe (2002), Van Eemeren et al. (2015) and Walton (2014) to the study of shifts in burden of proof and the presumptions arising from them. Van Eemeren (2010, p. 98) used profiles investigate strategic maneuvering in argumentation. Finally, Koszowy and Walton (2017) used profiles of dialogue to repair faults in arguments from expert opinion.

A profile of dialogue is a sequence that can be modeled as a graph. A *graph* G is formally defined as an ordered pair (N, A) , where the set N is a set of points (nodes) and the set A of lines (arcs), is comprised of the two-element subsets of N (Harary 1969). If you look at Fig. 5.5 below, the points are rectangular nodes representing propositions. However, there is also a set of circular nodes representing arguments. Therefore, this type of graph is called a bipartite graph. The rectangular nodes stand for propositions that are premises or conclusions of arguments, while the adjacency pair nodes stand for arguments. An argument is made up of premises joined by way of an argument node to a conclusion. A *path* in a graph from node s to node g is a sequence of nodes $\{n_0, n_1, \dots, n_k\}$ such that $s = n_0$, $g = n_k$, and $\{n_{i-1}, n_i\} \in A$ (Poole and Mackworth 2010, p. 75). In other words, there must be an arc from n_{i-1} to n_i for each i . A path represents a sequence of argumentation that is part of a graph. Generally, there will be several, perhaps even many paths of argumentation running through a graph taking the form of an argument diagram. Typically, there is a conclusion at the root of the graph, a single point on a graph that has a tree structure. A proof claim test can be made by examining a graph representing such a sequence of argumentation to see whether the ultimate conclusion of the sequence is the arguer's thesis. The test of relevance is whether the path of argumentation running through the graph has as its last point the arguer's so-called *stasis*, the ultimate claim he was supposed to prove. This *stasis*, the end-point or thesis to be proved, is set at the opening stage of a straw man dialogue. These remarks explain the last two postconditions in Table 5.2, which refers to the notion of a proof claim test.

A profile can be represented visually as a pair of graphs, each of which represents a sequence of dialogue moves. The descriptive graph, normally shown on the left, represents a sequence of moves displaying how the dialogue actually went, while the normative graph, shown on the right, shows how the sequence of moves should have ideally proceeded. The idea is that the normative graph gives the reader an indication of how the problem or fault displayed in the descriptive graph can be repaired by dealing with problem in a helpful manner. Using some examples, we will now show how the profiles method can be applied to arguments where the straw man fallacy either has been committed or has been suspected to have been committed.

5.7.2 Profiles of Dialogue for Assessing Straw Man

The classic example of the straw man fallacy from Freeman (1988, p. 88), called the beer and wine example in Walton (2013, p. 252), takes the form of a dialogue.

Concerned Citizen: It would be a good idea to ban advertising beer and wine on radio and television. These ads encourage teenagers to drink, often with disastrous consequences.

Alcohol Industry Rep: You cannot get people to give up drinking; they've been doing it for thousands of years.

According to Freeman's account of the example, there is no evidence that the concerned citizen is arguing for the conclusion that it would be a good idea to get people to give up drinking. However, the alcohol industry representative appears to take the side of common sense by arguing that you cannot get people to give up drinking and by supporting it with the argument that they have been drinking for thousands of years. Superficially, the alcohol industry Rep. seems to get the best of the exchange, but the straw man fallacy has been committed because of the confusion between two propositions. One is the proposition that it would be a good idea to ban advertising of beer and wine on radio and television. This is the actual conclusion that the concerned citizen is arguing for. The other is the proposition that it would be a good idea to get people to give up drinking. This is the proposition that the alcohol industry representative refutes by pointing out that people have been drinking for thousands of years. As Freeman pointed out (Freeman 1988, p. 88), the alcohol industry representative has misrepresented the position of the concerned citizen by "making it easy to refute, making it look almost silly." The profile of dialogue can be represented in Fig. 5.4 below:

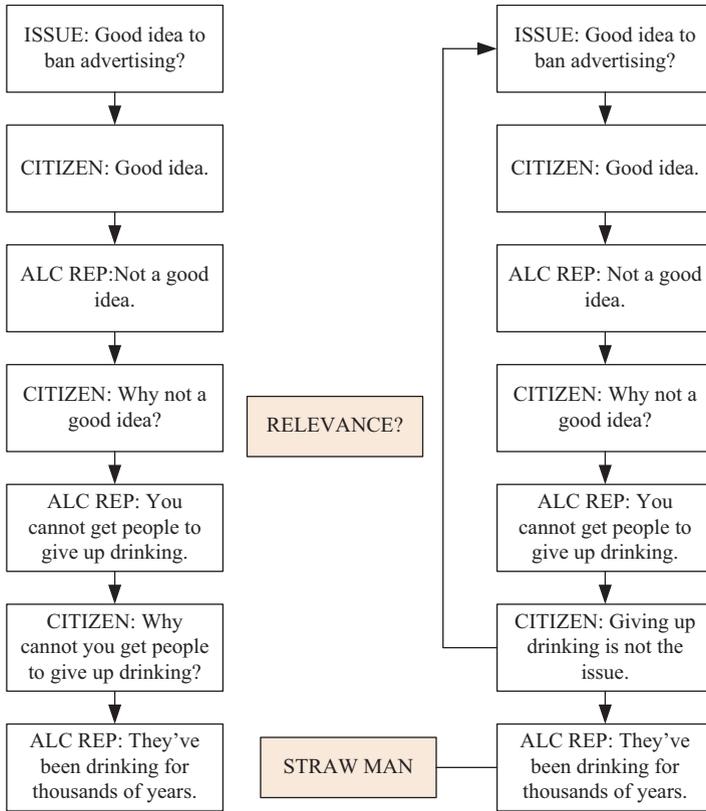


Fig. 5.4 Profile of dialogue for the beer and wine example

As we look down the sequence displayed in the normative graph on the left in Fig. 5.4, we can see that the first three moves represent moves made in the opening stage. Judging from the text it would appear that the issue to be discussed is whether it would be a good idea to ban advertising beer and wine on radio and television. The concerned citizen has adopted the thesis that it would be a good idea to do so, as made clear by putting forward an argument stating that these ads encourage teenagers to drink, often with disastrous consequences. Thus the concerned citizen is the proponent of the proposition that it would be a good idea to ban such advertising, while the alcohol industry representative plays the role of the respondent by taking up an opposed stance on the issue. According to the STRAW₁ rules, it is the turn of the concerned citizen to make a move, asking why the alcohol representative thinks that banning advertising would not be a good

idea. It is at this point that the fault occurs. The alcohol industry representative, in response to this request for an argument to back up his view, now argues that you cannot get people to give up drinking because they have been doing this for thousands of years.

Up to this point, the descriptive graph and the normative graph are identical, but now they begin to diverge. In the normative graph, the concerned citizen, instead of responding to the alcohol representative's argument in the normal way, voices the objection that whether or not to give up drinking is not the original issue to be discussed, as set at the opening stage. Thus the alcohol representative's argument claiming that you cannot get people to give up drinking because they have been doing it for thousands of years, commits the straw man fallacy.

5.7.3 Using Profiles of Dialogue for Assessing Rhetorical Straw Man

The examples of the straw man fallacy presented in Sect. 5.1 of this chapter can also be analyzed as coming under the general heading of fallacies of relevance, but the way they operate exhibits different features of the straw man fallacy. In some cases, the profiles technique can be used in a simpler form where there is just one graph instead of using the comparative device of contrasting the normative graph with the descriptive graph. In the Nixon example (Case 5.1: Nixon's Checkers), Nixon used his Checkers speech to attack the argument directed against him stating that since he illegally appropriated funds for his personal use, these funds should be returned. This straw man can be examined from a dialectical point of view (without taking into account a deeper, meta-dialogical investigation of the presupposed contents investigated in Sect. 5.2 above – Relevance) using the profiles of dialogue.

In Fig. 5.5, the aforementioned Nixon's Checkers example is represented without the implicit premises used for assessing the relevance of the interpretation in Fig. 5.2. The conclusion of the main argument is expressed as a proposition that appears in the rectangular node with a dotted border at the bottom. The counterargument to this argument, shown at the right in Fig. 5.5 is Nixon's story about the little dog. The problem is how this story is connected with the original argument as being some sort of attack on this argument or refutation of it. This is quite hard to figure out, because the strategy was a clever one that actually worked rhetorically for Nixon at the time by deflecting attention away from the accusation made against him.

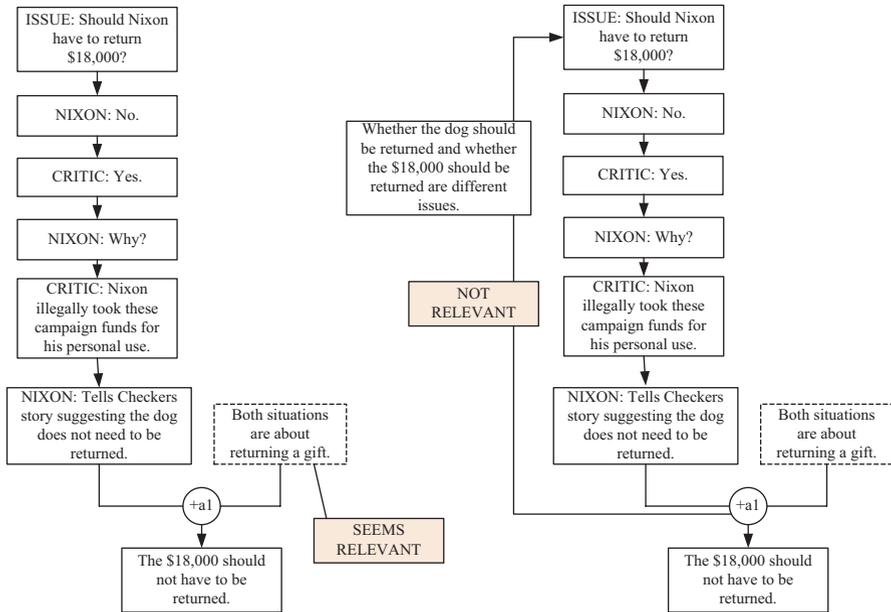


Fig. 5.5 The Nixon straw man fallacy

The basic question, as indicated in Fig. 5.5 is whether Nixon’s story about the little dog is relevant to the original argument that Nixon should have to return the \$18,000 because they were illegally appropriated campaign funds that the employed for his personal use. As shown on the left in Fig. 5.5, since both situations are about returning a gift, the story about the dog seems relevant. However, the example of receiving the little dog as a gift is quite different from illegally appropriating the campaign funds for personal use, which is, at least arguably, against the law. This way to deal with this case is simply to show on the argument diagram where the issue of relevance arises, so the argument analyst is poised to probe further into the issue of just how relevant Nixon’s rejoinder was as an argument, leading to the analysis set out on the right in Fig. 5.2. It appears that it has such a small probative weight but also has a high emotional impact, making it appear silly for anyone to suggest that the dog should be returned, and also to suggest that the whole issue is carping and trivial. What needs to be pointed out is that whether the dog should be returned, and whether the \$18,000 should be returned, are different issues. The dog story is either not relevant or only very slightly relevant, in a certain respect, but it has considerable rhetorical force as a straw man argument because it makes it seem like the critic is arguing that the dog should be returned. However, that should not really be the issue.

5.7.4 *Straw Man Without Straw-Manned Parties*

The Bush example (Case 5.2: Bush rejecting racism) does seem to be a straw man argument because it contains the key phrase a “lot of people in the world,” attributing the rejected view as upheld by these unnamed people. However, unlike our way of reconstructing the argumentation in the Nixon example, in the Bush example the straw man argument does not attack another argument that can easily be extracted from the text of the case. Instead, it attacks a belief or viewpoint, which could be expressed in the statement “people whose skin color may not be the same as ours cannot be free and self-govern.” Most people in the audience would highly reject this statement and indeed any American politician who made such a statement would immediately be attacked as having said something outrageous that deserves strong condemnation. Therefore, this example raises an interesting question. It seems to be presupposed by the treatment of the straw man fallacy in the logic text books that it is an instance of one argument attacking another. However, in this particular case there is no, at least explicitly, stated argument that is being attacked. Rather what is attacked is a viewpoint or position that is strongly rejected by Bush. Therefore, it is somewhat of an open question as to how we are to treat this example. It does seem to be a straw man argument judging from its similarity to the other political examples cited in Sect. 5.1 of this chapter. However, it is a different kind of example in which a position is attacked rather than an argument. To accommodate this sort of example the formal dialogue system STRAW₁ has been constructed to allow for straw man arguments that attack and oppose a position as well as those that attack an opposed argument.

The next three examples, the one used by John Edwards (Case 5.3: Obama and Medicare) and the two used by President Obama (Case 5.4: Obama’s too ambitious plans; Case 5.5: Obama focusing on “their problems”) exhibit a particular pattern in the use of the straw man argument. A problem common to all three of these examples is one shared with the Case 5.2 (Bush rejecting racism). They are what we called hand-waving examples, examples in which the attacked argument or position is vaguely attributed to “some folks in Washington and on Wall Street,” namely speakers who are not specified at all. Not only are no names given of persons to whom we can attribute this argument but no quotations at all are given of the original wording. These kinds of examples appear to be highly successful rhetorically because of their vagueness. They are hard to respond to because no target attack is given that can be used as evidence to show that the straw man argument is a fallacy. The problem with these cases is that there is so little evidence to respond to that it is not even necessary to construct a profile of dialogue to diagnose the fault. The solu-

tion is merely to ask the questions concerning where the attacked argument came from, whom it should be attributed to, and what it was said precisely (i.e. demanding some quotations that could be used to determine commitments). Otherwise such arguments can be very easily dismissed, once it is recognized how to spot the fault.

5.7.5 Straw Man and the Manipulation of the Issue at Stake

Finally, we come to the bank robbers example (Case 4.9: Open all the banks). This example is different from the others, and not only because it is a legal example. In a trial it would be rejected as irrelevant, at least most likely, because it is not a very plausible argument on the face of it, and also because it carries little or no probative weight. Why the argument is classified by Bosanac as a straw man fallacy is not hard to appreciate. The prosecution has the burden of proof to only present evidence that has bearing on the issue, set in the opening stage of the trial, of whether the defendant is guilty or not. An argument can be dismissed as irrelevant if it carries very little or no evidential weight bearing on this issue. The corresponding profile of dialogue is represented in Fig. 5.6 below:

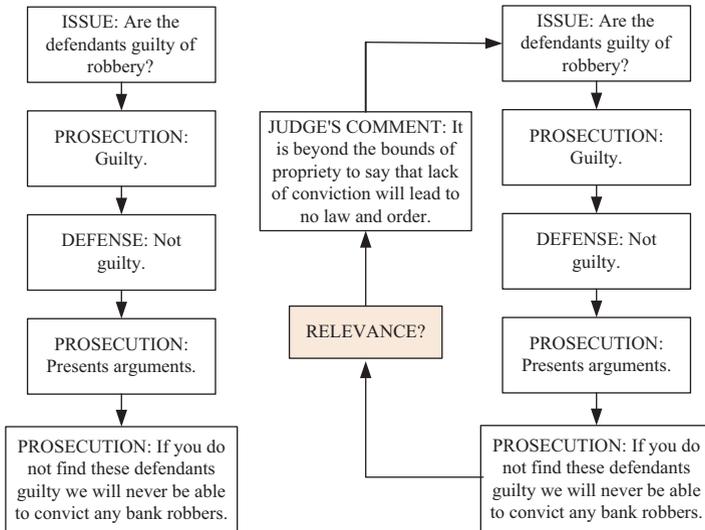


Fig. 5.6 The bank robbers straw man argument

In this case, the judge commented that the prosecution was allowed to point out that there is a need to convict people who are guilty of crimes like bank robbery, but he added that it is beyond the bounds of propriety for a prosecutor to suggest that unless this defendant is convicted it will be impossible to maintain law and order in the jurors community (Bosanac 2009, p. 394). In this respect, the case is similar to the Checkers example (Case 5.1). Although it has to be conceded that the argument in question is slightly relevant, it needs to be carefully emphasized that the argument has a strong emotional appeal which might tend to make it prejudicial to an audience that is not aware of its powerful effect. The problem in both cases is that the argument is only tangentially relevant, and there is a great need to be aware of the power of its rhetorical effect as an emotional distraction.

These last two cases are tricky because in both instances there is some weak basis for conceding that the emotional argument presented has some degree of relevance, while at the same time there needs to be a critical awareness of the tendency to overvalue such arguments. The important thing is to look back to the opening stage to clearly specify what the issue is to be resolved. Along with this, there is a need to determine what kind of evidence needs to be amassed and evaluated in order to prove or disprove this ultimate claim representing the issue. An argument can look like it is relevant, and indeed there maybe even some justifiable grounds for claiming that it does have a modicum of relevance, but still there is a danger of the straw man fallacy being committed.

5.8 Commitment and Position

The key notions for studying the straw man fallacy are that of commitment (analyzed in depth in Chap. 3) and position. The central core of the straw man argument as a fallacy is that the position of the one arguer has somehow been distorted or misinterpreted to make it possible for the other arguer to refute it more easily. In Chaps. 1 and 3, we have pointed out how distortions are carried out through direct quotations, which took us to investigate the problem of how an interpretation can be literal. In this chapter, we have addressed the problem of indirect reports, which took us to analyze argumentative relevance. The goal of this section is to illustrate how the distortion of commitments can be represented in a formal system.

The first step consists in a normative model with rules that can help us to evaluate particular examples to show whether an attribution of the one party's position is fair or reasonable, according to some rules that could govern such exchanges of argumentation. For example, if a participant asserts a particular proposition, that proposition is recorded in his commitment store, and this forms the basis of the kind of evidence we need to rule on whether what is supposedly a straw man argument is fallacious or not. Statements are inserted into an arguer's commitment set based on speech acts that the arguer has performed. However, there can be complications with tracking commitments. In a given example, of course, the commitment will normally be made as a proposition supposedly contained inside a natural language

sentence in which the arguer supposedly made an assertion. Therefore, we have a problem of natural language interpretation. In addition, commitment stores are dynamic. A commitment can be retracted. This can result in complications (Walton and Krabbe 1995, pp. 146–147).

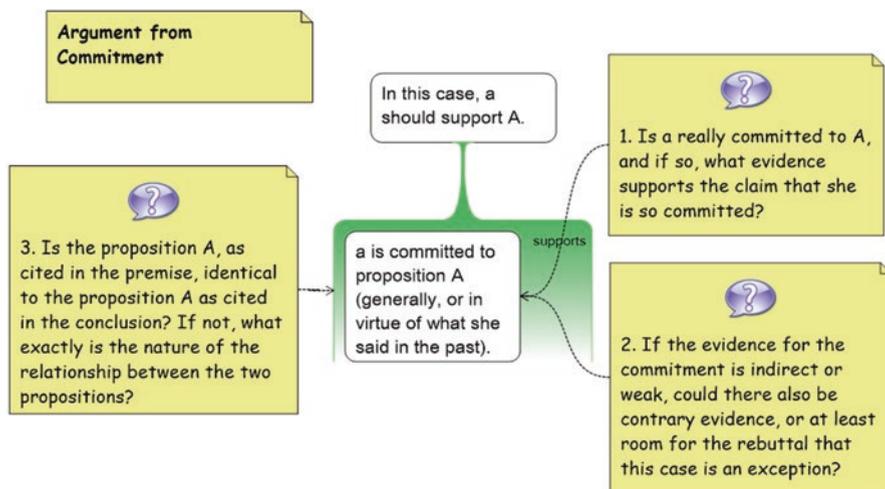
To study the straw man fallacy, it is necessary to introduce the reader to the notion of an immediate consequence, namely the dialectical counterpart of the issue that we have addressed under the label of “relevance” in Chap. 3 (Sect. 3.7). From a pragmatic perspective, it is possible to attribute to the speaker commitments that represent the contribution of the move to the communicative exchange, namely the purpose of the interaction. In this sense, only the commitments that represent the presumable intended effect of a move (i.e. its presumable effect/purpose) can be attributed to the speaker. In formal dialectics, a more abstract criterion, which can be developed using the notion of relevance and the idea of conversational purpose, needs to be used.

Hamblin (1970, p. 257) considered the requirement that commitment stores should always be internally consistent but rejected it, because it does not always meet the ideal of rational man that needs to be used in studying fallacies (Hamblin 1970, p. 263). He also rejected the requirement of deductive closure of commitment-stores for the reason that “certain very immediate consequences” of a commitment should also be considered to be commitments. However, he felt that both requirements are matters of “regulation in a given system” (Hamblin 1970, p. 264). Hamblin (2008) proposes that, for purposes of studying fallacies, a weaker relation than one of deductive closure should be adopted. Generally, participants should not be regarded as committed to all the logical consequences of a proposition that they are committed to. But they could be regarded as being committed to a proposition that follows by a rule of inference such as *modus ponens* from a proposition they are already committed to (in a single inferential step). To make such a distinction we need a notion of immediate consequence. Following Walton (1984, p. 133), a statement T is said to be an immediate consequence of a set of statements S_0, S_1, \dots, S_n if and only if ‘ S_0, S_1, \dots, S_n , therefore T ’ is a substitution instance of some inference rule of the game. A statement T is a consequence of a set of statements S_0, S_1, \dots, S_n if and only if T is derived by a finite number of immediate consequence steps from immediate consequences of S_0, S_1, \dots, S_n . For example, if a participant is committed to S and T follows from T by a *single* application of *modus ponens* using the rule (conditional) ‘If S then T ’, which S also has to be committed to, then we can say that the participant is indirectly committed to T , because T is an immediate consequence of S . The fourth commitment rule of CB_1 is formulated in these terms. As the reader can see, $STRAW_1$ is the minimal kind of dialogue framework that can be used to provide a basic structure for approaching different kinds of problems that arise in examples of the straw man fallacy, and that can be extended to accommodate new examples.

The question may be asked whether the straw man argument is always fallacious or whether there is a possibility that in some instances it could be a reasonable type of argument. The answer is that it is never a reasonable type of argument, even though it does partner with another type of argument that is inherently reasonable

even though it is subject to misuse. This form of argument is represented by the argumentation scheme for argument from commitment (see the variant Argumentation Scheme 1.3: Argument from inconsistent commitment), shown using a Rationale argument diagram in Argumentation Scheme 5.1.⁵

Argumentation Scheme 5.1: Argument from Commitment



According to our analysis of the straw man fallacy, the straw man argument is a fallacious counterpart argument from commitment in which the target arguer's position, or set of commitments, has been distorted or otherwise misrepresented in order to make it easier to refute. It follows as a corollary of this analysis that a straw man argument cannot be other than fallacious.

On the other hand, it is possible to have a straw man argument that looks like it is not fallacious, especially when presented to an uncritical audience. One reason that it looks like it is not fallacious is that the straw man argument is an instance of the argumentation scheme for argument from commitment. It is so because it is based on the commitments, or what are taken to be commitments, of the target arguer. However, it is also possible to scrutinize the commitment set of target arguer to build pro or con arguments on whether he or she really is committed to the premises claim by the argument from commitment. If not, although the given argument may meet the requirements of the scheme for argument from commitment, it can be

⁵A list of the twenty argumentation schemes in (Walton 1995) is shown in the Rationale site that can be found here: <http://www.reasoninglab.com/patterns-of-argument/argumentation-schemes/waltons-argumentation-schemes/>. The list includes such schemes as those for Argument from Bias, Argument from Cause to Effect, Argument from Established Rule, Argument from Evidence to a Hypothesis, Argument from Commitment, Argument from Expert Opinion, Argument from Precedent, Argument from Consequences, Argument from Waste, Argument from Verbal Classification. The user can click onto the names of any of these schemes on the site and find an argument diagram like the one shown in Argumentation Scheme 5.1, displaying the scheme and its critical questions.

attacked using the premise attack that raise doubts about whether the arguer really is committed to these premises. So the straw man argument can go wrong in either one of two ways. It can fail to meet the requirements of the scheme for argument from commitment, or it can meet these requirements but later be refuted by the introduction of new evidence concerning the arguer's commitments.

However, there are different techniques of putting the straw man argument forward, and so there can be a classification of different kinds of straw man arguments that fail in different ways by exhibiting different shortcomings. Knowledge of these subtypes is very helpful for instructing users on how to recognize a straw man argument, an important skill.

5.9 A Procedure for Assessing Complex Cases of Straw Man

The following example shows that in many cases it is not very easy to pin down a straw man argument, and that to really verify by the textual evidence whether such an argument commits a straw man fallacy, there is quite a bit of careful work to be done. Attacks against insinuations can be extremely difficult to analyze from a dialectical point of view, as the more abstract criteria used are of little use. Instead, it is necessary to carefully analyze the relevance of the attack on the possible and presumable conclusions the Original Speaker intends to support with his move. Thus, the interpretive account set out in Chap. 3 needs to be combined with the relevance analysis of the straw man attack developed above.

A complex case can be taken from a reply given by Hillary Clinton to Bernie Sanders during their televised CNN-hosted Democratic debate, the final showdown before the New York primary.

Case 5.6: Clinton's Reply

Senator Sanders says he wants to run a positive campaign. I've tried to keep my disagreements over issues, as it should be. Time and time again, by insinuation, there is this attack that he is putting forth, which really comes down to, you know, anybody who ever took donations or speaking fees from any interest group has to be bought. I just absolutely reject that, Senator. I really don't think these kinds of attacks by insinuation are worthy of you. Enough is enough. If you've got something to say, say it directly. You will not find that I ever changed a view or a vote because of any donation that I ever received. The audience applauded after this, responding very positively, and this evidence suggests that the straw man argument was rhetorically successful. Ms. Clinton's argument quoted above followed repeated statements made by Mr. Sanders that nobody who is on the payroll of multiple Wall Street banks can ever get a handle on effectively regulating them. Ms. Clinton's rejoinder attacked what she took to be the most reasonable conclusion Sanders intended to support, namely that, "anybody who ever took donations or speaking fees has to be bought." The problems with this interpretation can be summarized as follows:

1. It is an indirect report (rhetorical straw man);
2. It is an interpretation of an implicit conclusion drawn from the Original Speaker's words;
3. The conclusion is drawn from various speeches, not only the present one.

Considering these three issues, determining whether the report can be considered as correct, the interpretation reasonable, and the evidence from Sanders' statements sufficient to support it can become complex. The starting point is to analyze the evidence that can be drawn from the present and previous speeches, which can be summarized as follows:

- I. "That is a very significant difference. Our campaign is funded by the people. To a significant degree, her campaign is funded by Wall Street and big money interests."⁶
- II. "Most progressives that I know really do not raise millions of dollars from Wall Street."
- III. "What being part of the establishment is, is in the last quarter, having a super PAC that raised \$15 million from Wall Street, that throughout one's life raised a whole lot of money from the drug companies and other special interests."⁷

Clearly, these moves do not state explicitly that Clinton has been bought by Wall Street and special interests, leading her to changing views or votes. In order to assess whether the attributed implicitly conveyed meaning is reasonably reconstructed, we need to analyze six different factors:

1. The purpose of the overall dialogue in which Sanders is uttering his moves.
2. The nature of Sanders' moves (conversational purpose).
3. The presumed specific purpose of Sanders' moves.
4. The presumable inferences that can be drawn in the specific context.
5. The inferential distance between the presumable inferences that can be drawn from Sanders' moves and Clinton's report.
6. The reasonableness of the implicit premises leading to Clinton's interpretation (the conclusion she draws from Sanders' moves).

We can assess such factors as follows:

1. Sanders is acting within a political campaign aimed at determining the democratic candidate. Therefore, it presupposes a challenge between the candidates (Sanders and Clinton in this case), in which each one tries to show:
 - (a) the differences between the two candidates;
 - (b) the difference in their political views;

⁶Bradner, E. (2016, February 6). *Sanders: Clinton is 'funded by Wall Street'*. *CNN Politics*. Retrieved from <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/02/05/politics/hillary-clinton-bill-clinton-paid-speeches/> (Accessed on 21 December 2016).

⁷Yoon, R. (2016, February 6). \$153 million in Bill and Hillary Clinton speaking fees, documented. *CNN Politics*. Retrieved from <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/02/05/politics/hillary-clinton-bill-clinton-paid-speeches/> (Accessed on 21 December 2016).

- (c) the weaknesses of the other; and
 - (d) his own merits.
2. Sanders with his moves is presumed to:
 - (a) show the (personal, ethical, strategic, economic...) differences between himself and Clinton;
 - (b) show the differences in their political views;
 - (c) show the weaknesses of Clinton; and
 - (d) point out his own merits.
 3. Sanders by uttering moves I-III, is presumed to:
 - (a) point out that he is supported by people, Clinton by rich companies;
 - (b) point out that he is a real progressive (and scares the established power), not one who is funded by Wall Street (the big companies are funding Clinton);
 - (c) point out that Clinton does not represent people but the establishment;
 - (d) point out that Sanders is progressive and represents people.
 4. In this context, the only presumable inferences are the following:
 - (i) the special interests and Wall Street support Clinton (as they fund her);
 - (ii) the special interests and Wall Street support Clinton's views (as they fund her); therefore,
 - (iii) the special interests and Wall Street are not threatened by her political views.

Another possible, even though distant and potentially controversial inference (considering that Sanders is Clinton's opponent) is that the special interests and Wall Street are instead threatened by Sanders (they do not fund him).

5. Clinton's interpretation of the implicitly conveyed content is that, "Clinton changed views or votes to support the interests of big companies because of the donations from Wall Street," attributing to Sanders the premise that, "anybody who ever took donations or speaking fees from any interest group has to be bought." Considering Sanders' words, and the presumable inferences that can be drawn therefrom (4), Clinton's interpretation requires further steps:
 - (iv) since the special interests and Wall Street fund Clinton, Clinton is paying them back with favors, as funding is based on an exchange of favors;
 - (v) Clinton's favors consist in changing her political views; therefore,
 - (vi) since making favors in exchange for money amounts to being bought, Clinton has been bought.
6. Clinton is attributing to Sanders the following premises: "Clinton is changing her political views;" "Clinton's political views favor Wall Street;" "Clinton changed her views to favor Wall Street;" "Clinton's favors are paybacks for funds." Sanders cannot be held responsible for such premises, as he is not accusing her of corruption.

This reconstruction can be represented in the following Fig. 5.7:

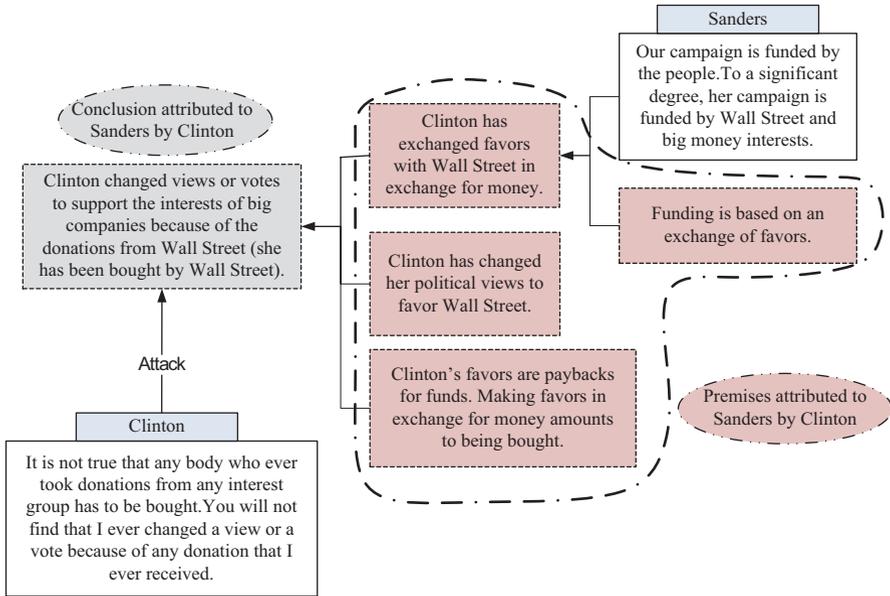


Fig. 5.7 Analysis of the straw man in Clinton’s case

Sanders could have brought to light the implicit premises that Clinton took for granted and easily counterattack Clinton. Sanders could have very easily played the indignant role (Chap. 4, Sect. 4.3.4), claiming that Clinton’s reply was a straw man argument, on the grounds that he never said what she claimed that he did, and that he does not accept the assertion that anybody who ever took donations or speaking fees has to be bought. However, in a rhetorical context, this type of careful analysis is difficult, and Sanders did not take advantage of Clinton’s dangerous move. Moreover, Clinton uses a strategy of self-victimization, implicitly charging Sanders of an attack and depicting herself as the innocent and indignant victim (Macagno 2013; Macagno and Walton 2012).

The argumentation structure of Ms. Clinton’s reply is quite complex. She is acting as the victim, when she is the one that is attacking the opponent by means of a straw man. She says, “If you’ve got something to say it directly,” suggesting that he has made an insinuation. It now looks like she is assuming that he is attacking her directly, using a kind of *ad hominem* argument to insinuate that she is biased or dishonest because she has changed her political views because of donations that she received. The argumentation has now turned from a straw man argument, or what looks like one, in a defense against what she takes to be an *ad hominem* argument. It was common knowledge at this time that there were concerns about her having taken donations and speaking fees from interest groups, and she now seems to have turned the argument in a different direction by responding on this issue. So the argumentation is quite complex, and no doubt it was difficult for the audience to follow the twists and turns and how it went.

5.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, the notion of rhetorical straw man was introduced and described. In the previous chapters we focused (mostly) on straw man strategies grounded on a misquotation, namely a direct quotation that distorts either the words originally uttered (misquote) or that reproduces the original move out of its context (wrenching from context). In this chapter, we have developed the analysis of straw man as a strategy of attack based on indirect reports (Capone 2016). The problems of interpretation we pointed out in Chaps. 2 and 3 become of crucial importance for the assessment of a position that is only indirectly reported. The speaker does not quote the Original Speaker's words, providing direct evidence for his interpretation and attack. Instead, he advances an interpretation and attributes to the Original Speaker distorted commitments that he claims to result from the contents he allegedly conveyed explicitly or, even more critically, implicitly.

In order to assess rhetorical straw man (or indirect report straw man), we used the notion of argumentative (or probative) relevance. The treatment of relevance introduced in Chap. 3 was mostly intended to capture the reconstruction of the communicative purpose of a move, but was not applied to the analysis of implicit conclusions in real cases. In this chapter, we developed it further and made it a calculable notion. We maintain that relevance can be determined in terms of inferential distance between a conclusion and the premise, and of defeasibility (acceptability) of the implicit premises used to support the former. On this perspective, the attribution of the implicitly conveyed meaning to the Original Speaker (commitment to implicit meaning) can be assessed considering the defeasibility of the implicit conclusion considering the acceptability of the premises it is based on. As the Clinton case (Case 5.6) shows, the determination of the communicative intention of the original move becomes of crucial importance for establishing the premises on which the implicit conclusion is grounded.

A method for assessing straw man fallacy was designed and formalized using three instruments: (a) a formal dialogue system, (b) profiles of dialogue, and a procedure for reconstructing the straw man and bringing to light its implicit components. The purpose of the formal dialogue system is to provide a normative framework setting out conversational rules of the kind called protocols in current research in artificial intelligence. Such rules can be applied to real arguments in order to pinpoint defects, such as fallacies, so they can be identified and repaired. The formal dialogue model can be used to determine if the dialogue in the given case has proceeded in the correct order, asking necessary preliminary questions and establishing the arguer's commitments in a fair and reasonable way.

However, when we tackle the problem of building hands-on methods that can be applied by students or other users to arguments of the kind they may confront daily in the real world, we need other tools. First, real arguments need to be reconstructed and their structure abstracted to fit the abstract model. Second, real straw man attacks involve interpretations of the original utterance that very often can be problematic. For this reason, we introduced the profiles of dialogue as well as linguistic

methods to apply such abstract dialogue models to real examples where the natural language text has to be interpreted and analyzed. By the use of examples, we have offered guidance on how an argument taken from natural language discourse can be abstracted from the text, interpreted, and represented. We have applied the profiles of dialogue to match real texts to the requirements of the abstract, formal model. In order to guide the reconstruction and evaluation of the implicit dimension of the straw man fallacy, we have designed a procedure indicating analytical steps for determining the reasonableness of an interpretation.

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