

John Clarke

In Chapter 1 of Book Two you were introduced to the idea that *argument* is a key skill in Social Sciences. Indeed by now you probably realise that argument and debate are essential to the Social Sciences. It is not so much that empirical facts are in dispute but rather how facts are interpreted and explained. Indeed, a guiding principle of D218 has been to argue that to understand the construction of facts we have to examine the discourse, the reasoning, the argument in which these facts are embedded.

This tape is going to explore processes of argument. More specifically, it's going to allow you to evaluate the adequacy of argument by putting on trial the welfare system and in particular Social Security payments to the poor.

In the Media notes, we suggested that you read Section 5.31 of Chapter 1 in Book Two. One of the key points made there is that a soundly constructed argument has a clearly stated and easily identified proposition. The proposition is the statement that the speaker or writer wishes to prove. On this tape, the proposition is that: *the failure to discriminate between the deserving and undeserving poor has caused the cost of welfare to inflate uncontrollably. It has distorted the British economy, undermined the work ethic and produced a less fair rather than a fairer society.* We are going to use a radio programme broadcast on Radio 4 in early 1997 to illustrate these points. It's a perfect example of different styles of argument. Chapter 1 also made the point that a well-structured argument is one in which the proposition is backed up by relevant evidence and logical reasoning.

In the programme which follows, you will hear the prosecutor, the person arguing the case for the proposition, presenting his case and calling two witnesses, who will be examined with the aim of supporting the proposition. Your role is to listen and assess whether or not the case for the proposition is logical and can be sustained. Has the proposition been adequately established and logically reasoned, such that we can maintain with confidence that the failure to discriminate between the deserving and undeserving poor has caused the cost of welfare to inflate uncontrollably and that it has undermined the work ethic and produced a less fair, rather than a fairer society.

To help you assess this claim, the Defence will attempt to show that the arguments made to support the proposition are flawed. So you also need to assess the adequacy of the arguments being put by the Defence. Finally, don't forget that assertions are often presented as though they were arguments. Assertions are statements which offer no supporting evidence, explanation, or reasoning, where arguments do furnish supporting evidence and make their reasoning explicit.

The case for the Prosecution is put by Dr Digby Anderson of the Social Affairs Unit, a Think Tank that has specialised in Social Policy. The case for the Defence is put by Bea Campbell, a writer and journalist. You are the jury. You must adjudicate. Is the welfare system, as charged, guilty or not guilty? You should make notes, in your own words, on the arguments, evidence and reasoning in this debate. You may want to do this while listening to it or you may prefer to stop the tape to make notes. Dr Digby Anderson opens the debate.

Dr Digby Anderson

Just before this programme, the Audit Office, which is an independent body, found that the Social Security System last year handed out five hundred million pounds too much. Fraudulent claims in that same period cost the taxpayer, that's you and me, 1.4 billion a year. And that's the ones they know about. For eight years now, the Social Security Accounts have been unable to be finally and completely audited and approved because they

are in such disarray and the rot goes deeper still. Most decent people, regardless of their politics, want to help those in need, especially those fallen on hard times through no fault of their own, the widowed, the orphaned, the disabled. The objection to the Social Security System is that it does not help such people efficiently and at the same time it showers hand-outs on many others: the short term unemployed, who have been working for perhaps twenty years and could have made provision for brief unemployment. Those who expect the State, that is other taxpayers, to pay the costs of their sexual adventures in subsidies for the children of a series of absent fathers. Those who are needy but use their handouts in an improvident way and get themselves immediately back into debt.

John Clarke

That's Dr Anderson's opening statement. The case for the Prosecution is now developed.

Digby Anderson

The system is not working and ordinary people know it. More than fifteen years ago my Institute, the Social Affairs Unit, said something similar in a report called "Breaking the Spell of the Welfare State". It said the system was out of control, out of financial control and moral control, and it was misleading and mesmerising people especially intellectuals. We were then regarded as eccentrics. All would be well, the policy experts said, if only the taxpayers were taxed harder and more money was spent on welfare. Well, now even most of the experts have come round to our view. The system is doing damage, moral damage, and must be reined in.

Mr McEwan

Could you please get these estimates typed for me? We need to get them off today. We need to get these out...

Digby Anderson

The McEwan family run a small building firm in Liverpool. The father, Charles expresses the concerns of many who like him are angry at those who just take from the system.

Mr McEwan

The people who've no intentions of working, I've no time for them at all. I don't think they should receive benefits and they should be forced to work. It's difficult enough to cope today. The staff are under stress, all of us, trying to cope with things. But these people are out there with no other stresses, no other problems, don't pay tax. I mean we are a hard working family firm. I have been in business for thirty-nine years. I still only live in a semi-detached house. So are my sons. You know, we work very hard for it.

Digby Anderson

Ordinary people knew long before the experts, that scroungers were a problem. The experts always belittled it. *"The number of people abusing the system is minimal, grossly exaggerated. The real problem, in fact, is those **not** claiming their rightful benefits"* they said. Well the experts were wrong. No one of any repute across the main political spectrum now denies that social security fraud is a major problem. Frank Field is a leading Labour Social Security expert and Chairman of the Social Security Select Committee. He has said and I quote: *"The age of large scale re-distribution of income by Welfare Benefits has gone. Politicians who argue otherwise are a public menace."* Much welfare need is not caused by lack of money but by the behaviour of those who are in need. Failure to put aside for a rainy day, irresponsible sexual behaviour, bad budgeting, failure to look for, or to stick at, work. The Social Security System does not distinguish between these people and people genuinely in need. Miles Harris is a London GP who sees welfare recipients in his surgery. He knows the difference between those who deserve and those who don't deserve help.

Miles Harris

You get people for instance who do things like thieving, mugging, not working, lying around in bed, not trying to get jobs, taking drugs and so forth. But they don't meet with any form of disapproval from the services that help them. They go to counsellors and people and they are met by very non-judgemental, empathic, non-directive counselling.

Digby Anderson

In his experience the welfare system as it stands today rewards bad behaviour and poor character just as much as it throws a lifeline to decent people who have fallen on hard times. It is blind to character and it's blind to moral worth. It is therefore an immoral system and worse it entices people to behave badly so as to get benefits, to be feckless, to have children without the means of family support to look after them. It encourages irresponsibility.

Miles Harris

I think many doctors would agree that they see patients who certainly are going to get a two-bedroom council house because they've got a couple of children and they are single parents. And the system encourages it in the sense that it says nothing about it.

Digby Anderson

The time has come to stop debating whether to change the social security system and to start thinking about how to change it. The challenge is how to cut it and how to moralise the little that is left. That means benefits conditional on decent behaviour and much more voluntary effort replacing government handouts at a local level. Dame Barbara Shenfield was Chairman of the Women's Royal Voluntary Service.

Dame Barbara Shenfield

People tend to think that these voluntary things are just a little extra, ladies' coffee mornings kind of things. I mean the WRVS for instance, what they deliver thirteen and a half million meals a year and about another million and a half in clubs. They work in about seven or eight hundred hospitals. They give the National Health Service four and a half million pounds in cash. They send thousands of people away on holiday. They do an immense amount of work. And I mean that's just one organisation. If you look at what two hundred and forty thousand of these organisations turning over what fifteen billion a year, somebody's estimate of the value of the work they do if you had to pay for it would cost you about forty-one billion pounds. It's a huge resource.

Digby Anderson

There can be welfare without the massive wasteful, immoral, government bureaucracy. True welfare comes from those on low incomes being prudent, faithful to the other parent of their children, and working hard. It also comes from the better off being understanding and generous to those less fortunate than themselves. The Social Security System encourages neither. It's time to cut most of it and to re-moralise the little that is left.

John Clarke

Digby Anderson's proposition is that the welfare system treats the deserving and undeserving poor in the same way. The consequence of this, Anderson argues, is that those who do pay taxes are subsidising the undeserving and irresponsible poor. Those who abuse the system and those who by failure to take responsibility for their own lives are the authors of their own misfortune. Indeed, by providing welfare assistance, the system itself is culpable in that such payments encourage irresponsibility, immorality, and welfare dependency. Bea Campbell will now present the case against the proposition