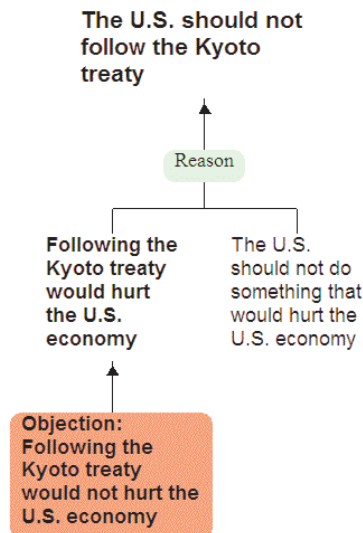


Argument Mapping 5: Objections

Up to this point, we've always been referring to claims as positive statements: that "X is Y", that "John is a good quarterback," etc. It is of course possible to have negative claims ("John is a bad quarterback," or "John is not a good quarterback"...), and the process of argument mapping is the same. However, we have not yet dealt with another important aspect of argument mapping, and that is that an argument map can also illustrate where there is *disagreement* – it can truly map out an entire debate, rather than just one side. In so doing, argument maps can depict more than one case, a case being the view of a particular participant or side in the debate. Broadly, in debates over any particular claim there is usually a 'pro' or 'for' side (a side for the main claim, that is to say, a proponent of it), and a 'con' or 'anti' side (against the main claim, or opponent of it).¹ In the Reason!able and Rationale software, the proponent's case is usually indicated by green boxes and the objections that the con case makes are indicated by red boxes, showing objections that the opponent may have to the argument. Map 5.1 is an example:

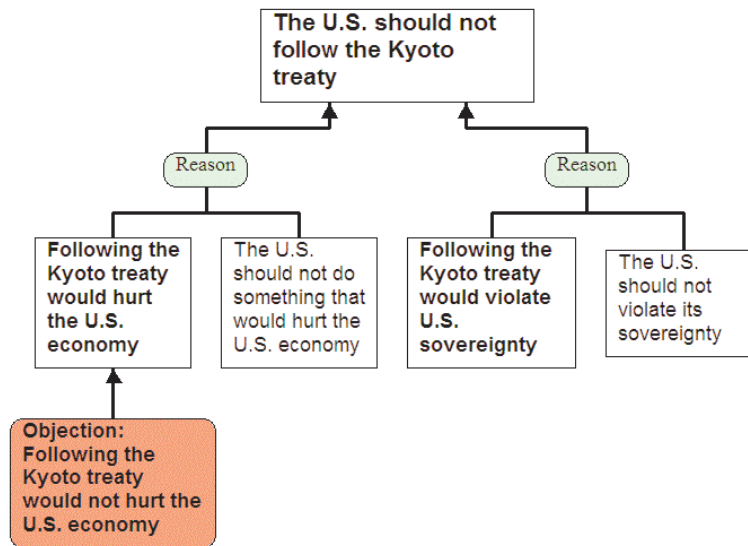


Notice that objections follow exactly the same rules as claims do – they are in fact a type of claim, just one going against the main claim and its reasons rather than supporting it. These objections are placed underneath the claim they refer to (just like a reason would be), they have an arrow pointing to the claim they are objecting to, and they must have the same terms as the claim they object to (answer AQ and follow RR and HH). With the example above we now see as well why identifying all of a claim's copremises is important, because some objections may only apply to one copremise and not the other. In the example above, the con side is *not* objecting to the idea that the U.S. should try to prevent harming itself economically, but only that following the Kyoto treaty would actually do this. Separating out the copremises allows an argument map to illustrate what happens all the time in debates – grant one part of an argument while objecting to another part of it. Many disagreements are based on disputes over a small number of points,

¹ Note that the con side does not necessarily agree amongst themselves on anything more than that the claim is false. They may not even agree on the reasons for how we know that the claim is false.

rather than a wholesale rejection of all of the reasons for a claim. It is as important for us to identify this ‘common ground,’ what claims are accepted by two sides, as it is to identify where exactly they disagree.

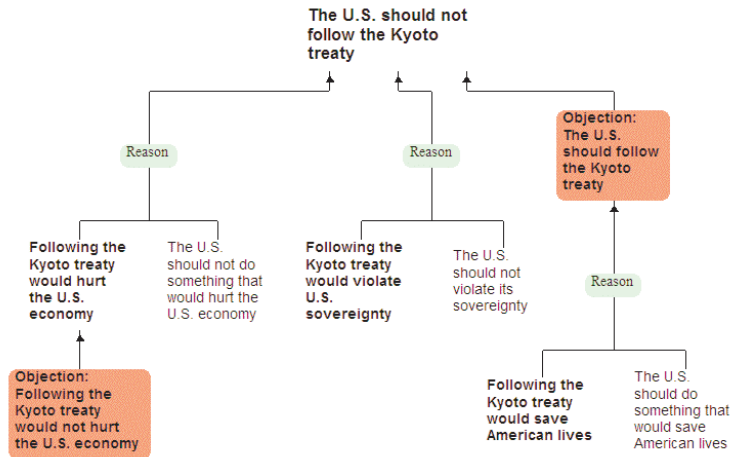
This is also why knowing the exact structure of an argument, identifying all of the copremises and reasons, is so important. Hence the utility of argument maps. Map 5.1 above illustrates there is only one reason for the claim and only one of those copremises has an objection against it. And yet, if that one objection to the one copremise is true (thereby negating that copremise), the *entire* main claim itself must be false. This is because, as we recall from our last tutorial, *every* copremise within a single reason must be true for that reason to be true overall, and the reason obviously needs to be true if the claim is to be accepted as true. But compare Map 5.1 with the following Map 5.2:



The difference, as you can see, is that in 5.2 the main claim has *two* independent reasons to believe its main claim true. So let’s assume again that the objection to the first copremise of the first reason is true, and therefore the first copremise is false, and therefore the first reason is false overall. This does not, however, automatically prove the main conclusion false, as there is another reason to believe the main claim is true (reason 2 regarding U.S. sovereignty), and the existing objection has no relevance to this reason. To decide whether the U.S. should follow the Kyoto treaty or not, given this argument, we would then need to decide whether following Kyoto would indeed violate U.S. sovereignty, and if it would, are the results harmful enough to justify ignoring the treaty. We ignore the first reason as it has been eliminated due to the objection.

Objecting to Different Parts of the Argument

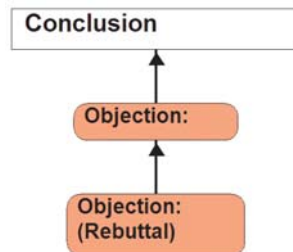
We could of course take the Kyoto debate one step further by adding more objections (or reasons) to it. In an argument you can do this and many other things as well. Not only can you object to a copremise of a stated reason, as we did above, but you could also object to the inferred (i.e. unstated) copremise of a reason. This happens all the time (and is technically called a rejoinder). Or you could add an entirely new objection to the main claim itself, adding a new issue that is not covered by one of the reasons given to support the claim. What type of objection it is depends on where you place the objection box, and what box its arrow points to. For example, Map 5.3:



Here we have a new objection targeting the main claim. It raises an issue unmentioned by the existing reasons, and therefore must object directly to the conclusion rather than to one of the reasons.

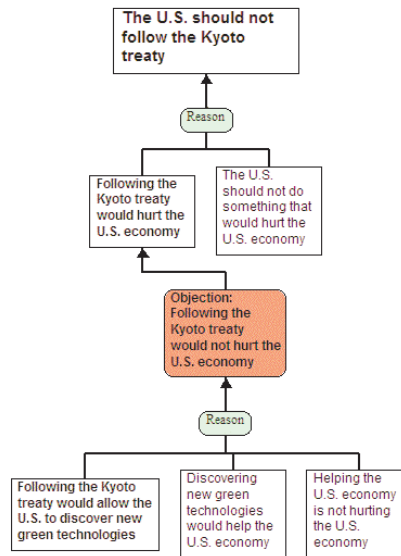
In this case (assuming the economic reason is invalidated by its objection being true), we would then have to decide which is stronger – the pro argument that we should not violate our sovereignty, or the con case that we should save American lives. The answer to this would obviously depend on continuing the argument map further down by asking the Assertibility Question of each of these reasons – how do we know that U.S. sovereignty would be violated? And what is the effect of this? Similarly, how do we know that American lives would be saved? And so on...

You can also object to an objection (called a rebuttal). You place your rebuttal like any other objection; this time your objection is pointed at their objection, like this:



Objections Need Reasons Too

As argument map 5.3 above shows, objections need reasons to be believed just like claims do – they are in fact a type of claim. To continue our example before it got so complicated, we’d ask the Assertibility Question of our objection: “How do we know that following the Kyoto treaty will not hurt the U.S. economy?” (of course we’d do the same of the reason as well). The answer could be mapped like this (Map 5.4):



Notice that an objection’s reasons are also colored green in the software, even though they support the con case, because they are reasons to believe the claim above them, which is an objection. And as a critical thinker, one of your first questions upon seeing this should be the Assertibility Question – how do we know that following the Kyoto treaty would allow the U.S. to discover new green technologies? And how do we know that discovering new green technologies would help the U.S. economy? The responses to these questions would be reasons for these reasons.

Here’s an example where we move from prose to an argument map:

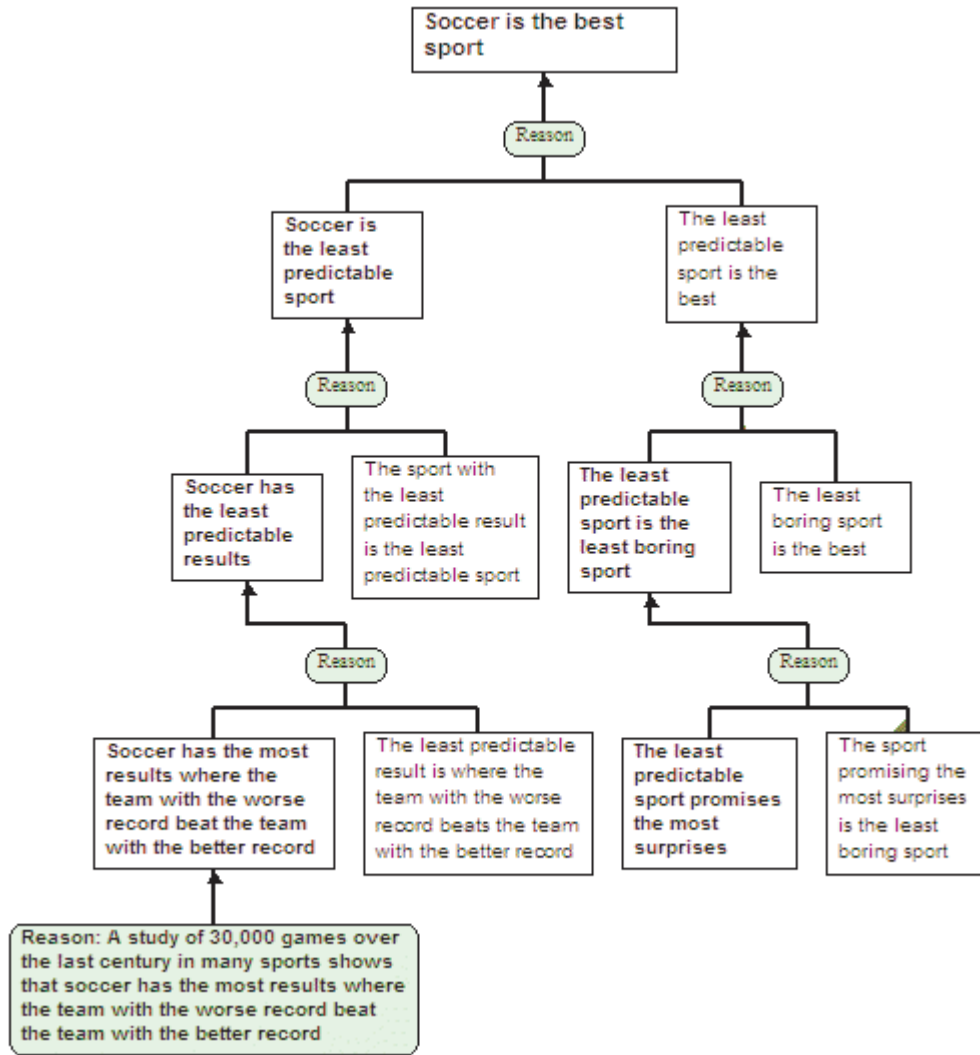
Surprises make soccer the best sport

12:31 04 January 2006
 From New Scientist Print Edition.
 Paul Marks

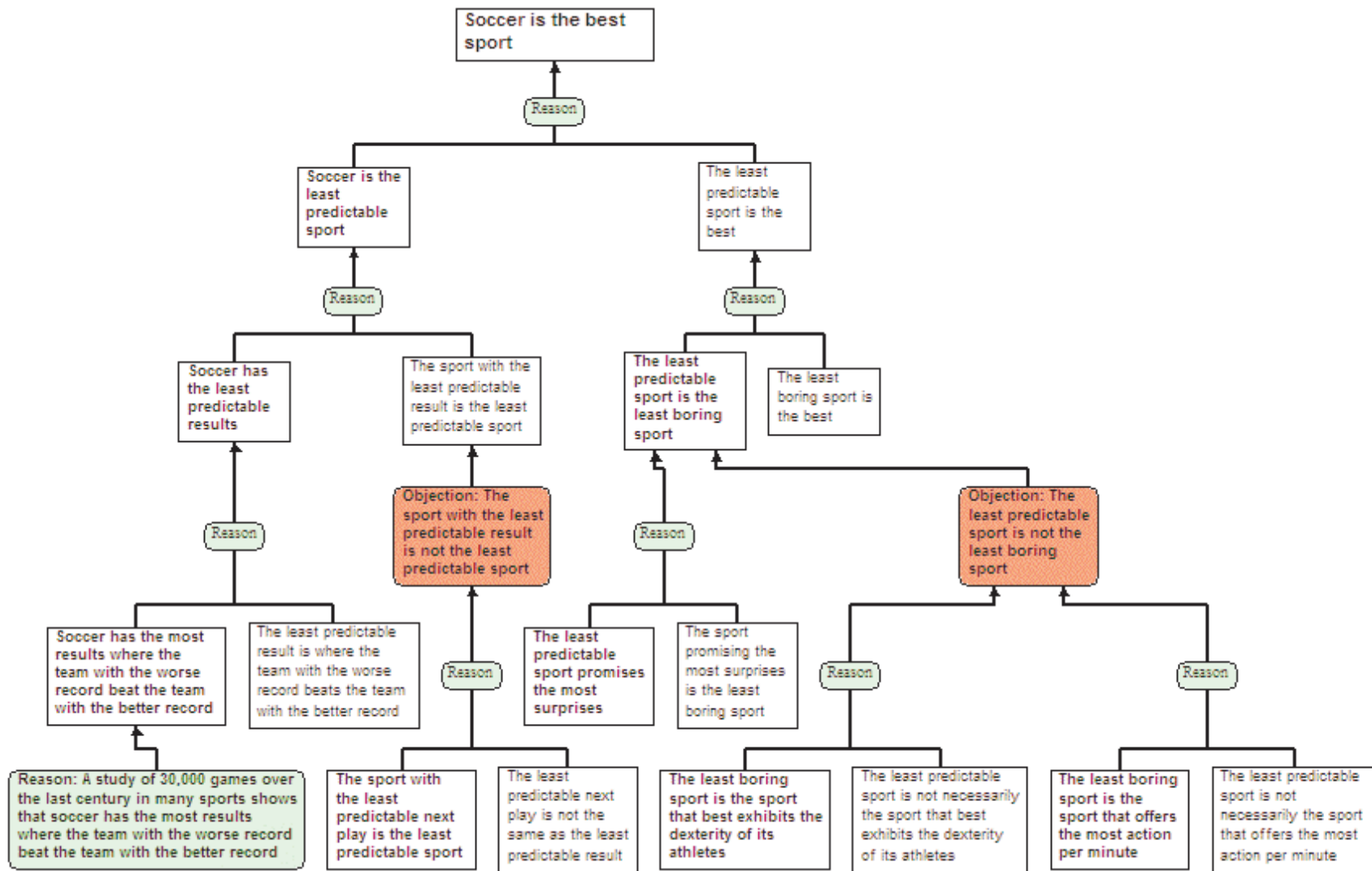
BASEBALL has home runs, American football has touchdowns and basketball has slam dunks. But when it comes to which is the most exciting sport to follow, soccer takes the gold medal.

Eli Ben-Naim, Sidney Redner and Federico Vazquez at the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico decided to look at unpredictability of results - how often a team with a worse record overcomes an apparently superior one - as the best measure of how exciting a league is. "If there are no upsets, then every game is predictable and hence boring," says Ben-Naim.

While seeming straightforward, there are actually a number of layers that need to be added to make this into an argument map and identify all of the reasons involved. In this particular example it helps immensely to read the prose, understand the argument and then apply AQ, RR and HH as you go down. The map should look something like 5.5:

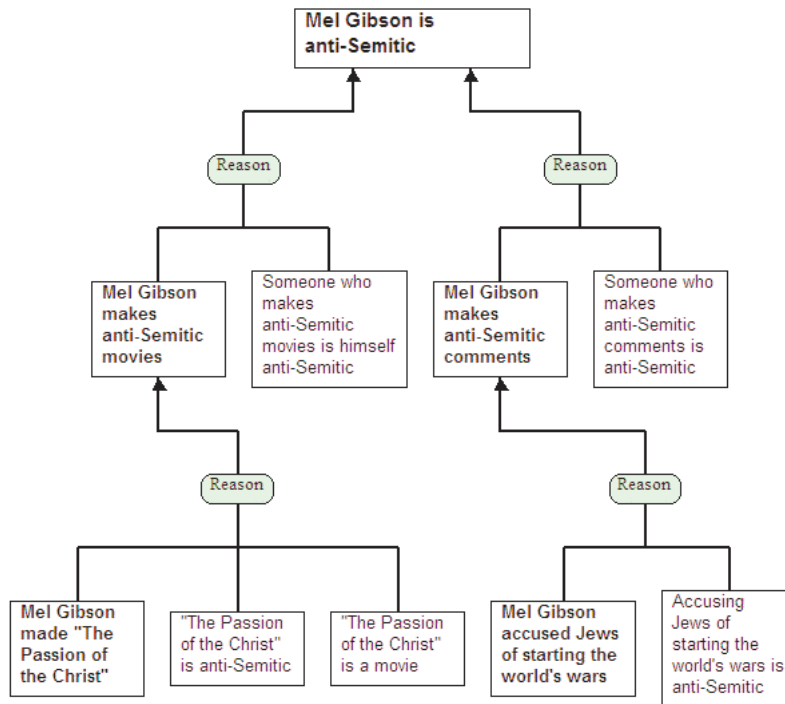


Undoubtedly many of you are already chomping at the bit, so let's get down to it. How do we tell those Los Alamos types that soccer is *not* the most exciting sport? Which reasons are most likely to be challenged? What objections can you come up with? Here are two possibilities displayed in Map 5.6:

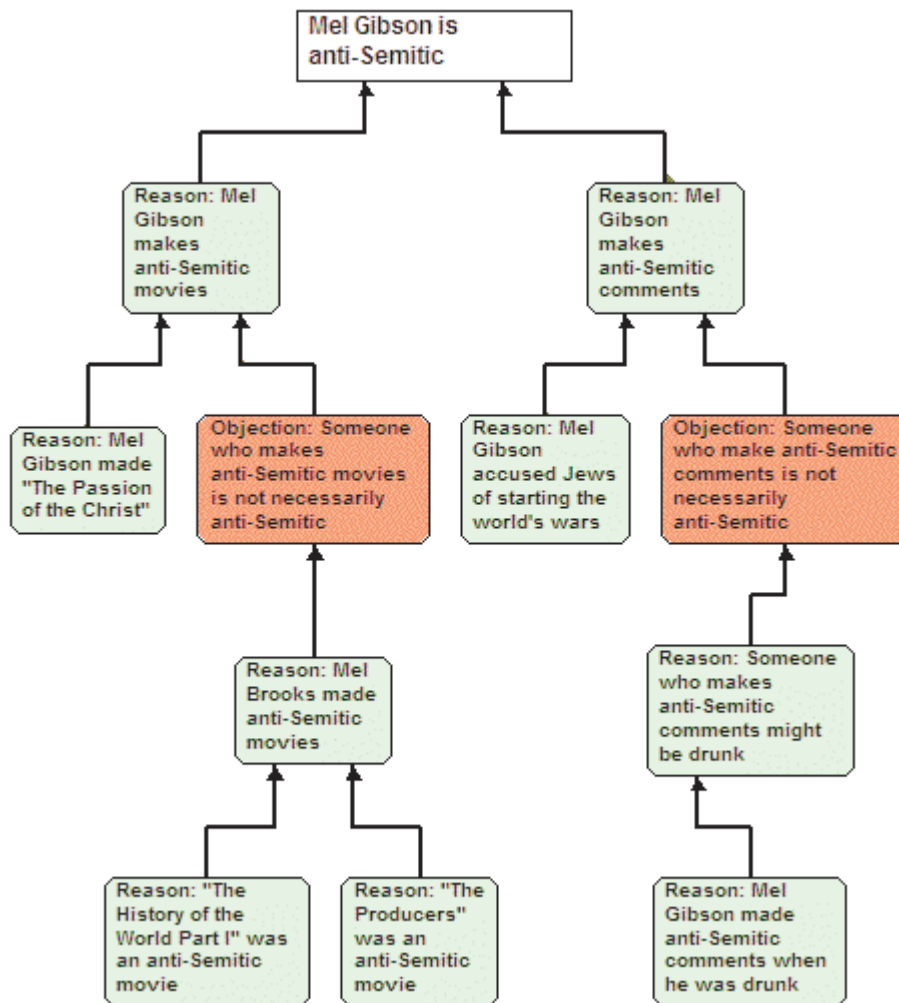


Here's another example, Map 5.7.

After you read the argument map, try to come up with possible objections to its claims and reasons.



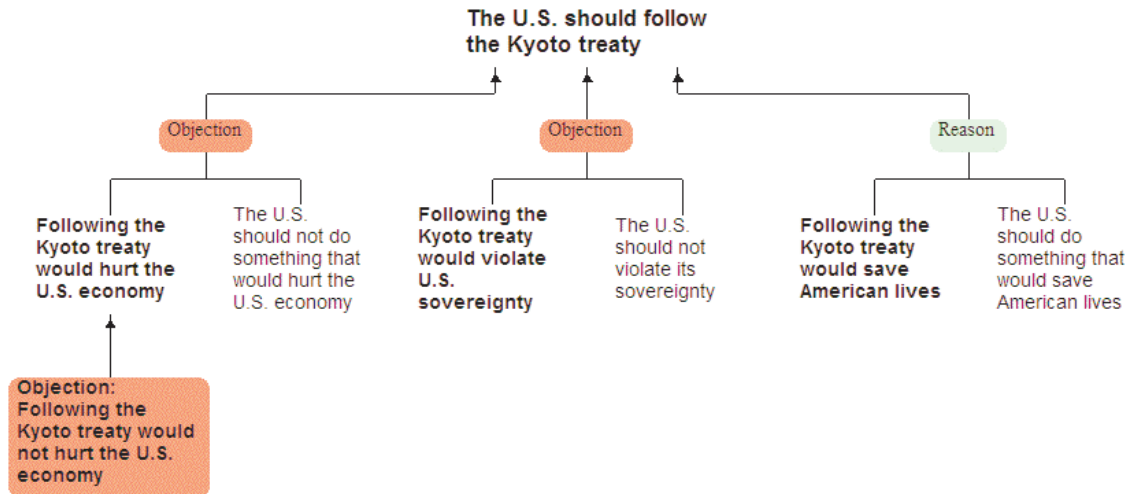
Map 5.8 shows a few possible objections one might make (and in fact have made). See if you can figure out the copremises (not shown).



Many other claims, objections and their respective reasons could be added as well, which is exactly what happens in real debates. Different people with different points of view, different assumptions and different reasons contribute to the debate. If the argument is mapped out (i.e. fully understood) and its reasons evaluated fairly, we come a little bit closer to the Truth, whatever that may be.

Reversible Debates

As we've said before, in one sense it doesn't matter whether the main claim at the top of the argument map is the pro or con side of an issue, as we could relatively easily convert an argument map that concluded "John is a good quarterback" into one that concluded that "John is a bad (or not a good) quarterback." We would simply flip the types of claims being made. The reasons would become objections and the objections would become reasons (unless it is an objection to another objection, in which case it remains an objection, or rebuttal). Compare Map 5.3 above with its opposite below, Map 5.9:



You can see that all of the main points made in Map 5.3 are also in Map 5.9, only their relationships relative to the (now reversed) main conclusion have changed. Instead of two reasons and one objection in the old map, we now have two objections and one reason.

There are three caveats, however, to this interchangeability between pro and con argument maps.

- 1) We should always try to reproduce the argument someone else is making by using their conclusion as the main claim (or our own belief if we are creating our own argument map).
- 2) It is important to remember that just because an argument map may allow us to conclude that a conclusion is false, that does *not* mean that the opposite of that conclusion is necessarily true. In fact, you cannot prove an argument by simply attacking an alternative to it – you *must* provide your own evidence to support your claim, unless you can somehow show that there are *only* two alternatives, yours and theirs, and this is a very hard thing to do.
- 3) As a matter of rhetorical strategy (rather than mere logic or Truth), it is often to one side's advantage to frame the terms of the debate and make your opponent use *your* terminology and to make them stay on the defensive by responding to *your* arguments rather than advancing their own. That's why, for example, those opposed to abortion speak of their opponents as 'pro-abortion,' whereas proponents of a woman's right to have an abortion speak of themselves as 'pro-choice,' rather than 'pro-abortion.'

You Are Objectionable

People who think critically are also more likely than others to consider objections to their own opinions. As cognitive psychologists have shown, we all try to insulate our own beliefs from critical appraisal, engaging in what we call *belief preservation*. This means that we go easy on arguments that we agree with and work extra hard trying to poke holes in arguments that we disagree with. This also means that even when we do question a belief we find acceptable, we tend to privilege it by looking only for evidence that would support the case, rather than looking for evidence that would *disprove* the case. Similarly,

when evaluating a belief or argument we don't like, we tend to only look for disconfirmatory evidence, evidence that would disprove it.

Given this, when you find yourself examining an argument that you find convincing, you need to work extra hard to try to see the other side. As John Stuart Mill argued, your deepest-held beliefs need to be truly tested so that you'll remember why they're worth having in the first place.

KEY POINTS

Case – a side in an argument that takes a particular position. Debates are usually divided into a pro and con side, each presenting its own case and disputing the other's case.

Objection – a claim made by an opponent of a conclusion, in an attempt to undermine and disprove the conclusion. Objections can be made to reasons (rejoinders), to the conclusion, or to other objections (rebuttal). Objections must have reasons to believe them true, just like claims.