

A GENERAL OUTLINE OF SCHOLASTIC DISPUTATION
Presented by the International Society of Scholastics

Argumentation involves a **Moderator**, a **Defender**, and an **Objector**.

1. The **Defender** begins by stating his thesis and offering a brief explanation of his position.
2. The **Objector** listens attentively and then states the OPPOSITE of the thesis.
 - a. EXAMPLE: The **Defender** states and explains the thesis: ‘Living being is essentially distinct from non-living being.’
 - b. The **Objector**, then, will be trying to prove ‘Living being is not essentially distinct from non-living being.’
3. The **Objector** attempts to *prove* the contradictory (thereby disproving the **Defender**’s thesis) by means of a syllogism.
 - a. EXAMPLE: The **Objector** might argue: “MAJOR PREMISE—Living being is essentially distinct from non-living being if and only if the so-called living beings have properties that cannot be explained by the arrangement of elements and chemicals themselves. MINOR PREMISE—But all properties of so-called living beings can be explained by the arrangement of elements and chemicals themselves. CONSEQUENT/CONCLUSION—Therefore, living being is not essentially distinct from non-living being.”
4. The **Defender** begins to criticize the objection by saying “You argue thus, sir” (“sic argumentaris, domne”). He restates the **Objector**’s syllogism slowly, thinking about the validity and truth of each premise and the consequence. Then, he deals with each premise one at a time.
 - a. MAJOR PREMISE: the **Defender** believes the major premise to be either TRUE, PARTLY TRUE AND PARTLY FALSE, COMPLETELY FALSE, or IRRELEVANT
 - i. IF TRUE: he states “I concede the major” (“concedo majorem”). He goes on to the minor premise.
 - ii. IF PARTLY TRUE/PARTLY FALSE: he states “I distinguish the major” (“distinguo majorem”). He separates the true sense (“If taken to mean A, I concede the point.”) from the false sense (“If taken to mean B, I deny the point.”) and he then moves to the minor premise.
 - iii. IF COMPLETELY FALSE: he asks the object to prove the premise, “Please prove the major” (“Faveas probare majorem”). The **objector** offers a second syllogism to prove the major premise and the **Defender** deals with it in the same way as the first.
 - iv. IF IRRELEVANT or he doesn’t want to deal with it at this point he dismisses it, “Let the major pass” (“transeat major”).
 - b. MINOR PREMISE: after he has dealt with the major, the **Defender** moves on to the minor premise. At this point, the **Defender** has either GRANTED, PASSED, or DISTINGUISHED the major.
 - i. If he has GRANTED or PASSED the major: he either denies or distinguishes the minor. He then denies or distinguishes the conclusion accordingly, “I deny the consequent” (“Nego consequens”).
 - ii. If he has DISTINGUISHED the major: he denies, distinguishes, or contradistinguishes the minor. To contradistinguish is to introduce the same distinction into the minor as was in the major, conceding the member which corresponded to what was denied in the major, and denying the member which corresponded to what was conceded in the major. He then offers an explanation for his distinctions.
 1. EXAMPLE of contradistinguishing: This is an objection against the existence of an abstractive faculty in man (the ‘agent’ intellect)
 - a. **Objector**: arguing against the thesis ‘we have an abstractive faculty or agent intellect’, he declares, “No faculty exists in us of which we are not conscious. But we are not conscious of the existence of the agent intellect. Therefore, we have no agent intellect.”

- b. The **Defender** responds: “I distinguish the major. No faculty exists within us of which we are not either immediately or mediately conscious, *I concede*; no faculty exists within us of which we are not immediately conscious only, *I deny*. I contradistinguish the minor. We are not conscious of the agent intellect immediately, *I concede*. We are not conscious of the agent intellect mediately (i.e., by means of something else), *I deny*.”
 - c. N.B. Sometimes a distinction might itself require another distinction. This is called subdistinguishing.
 - i. Example: The **Objector** is arguing against the thesis ‘the soul can exist independently of the body’ and he argues, “The human soul evolves and grows old with the body, and is subject to the influence of its dispositions of sickness and health. But this cannot happen unless the soul is subjectively dependent on the matter of the body. Therefore, the soul is subjectively dependent on matter, i.e., it cannot exist independently of the body.”
 - ii. The **Defender** responds: “I distinguish the major. As regards the faculties of vegetative and sensitive life, *I concede*. As regards the intellectual faculties, I subdistinguish. As regards the being and existence of these faculties, *I deny*; as regards the use of them in the present state of union with the body, *I concede*.”
- 5. The **Objector** then attempts to prove what has been denied by the **Defender** with another syllogism: “I prove what was denied” (“Probo negatam”). This new syllogism is criticized as before.
- 6. At any point the **Objector** may ask the **Defender** to prove anything he has denied, which the **Defender** then does with a syllogism. The **Objector** may then attack this new argument, “But the difficulty remains” (“stat difficultas”).
 - a. EXAMPLE: The **Objector** is arguing that powers are not specified by their objects, and he states, “If powers were specified by their objects, there would be as many powers as there are objects. But there are not as many powers as there are objects. Therefore, powers are not specified by their objects.”
 - b. The **Defender** responds: “I distinguish the major. That there would be as many powers as there are material objects, *I deny*; that there would be as many powers as there are formal objects, *I concede*. I contradistinguish the minor. That there are not as many powers as there are material objects, *I concede*. That there are not as many powers as there are formal objects, *I deny*.”
 - c. The object then responds: “But powers are not specified by their formal objects. Therefore, the difficulty remains.” And he attempts to prove this: “Formal objects are not the specific differentiae of powers. But powers are specified by their specific differentia. Therefore, powers are not specified by their formal objects.”
 - d. And the **Defender** again responds: “I distinguish the major. Formal objects are not the intrinsic differentiae, *I concede*; they are not the extrinsic differentiae, *I deny*. And I contradistinguish the minor. Powers are specified by their specific differentia as by their intrinsic principle of specification, *I concede*; as by their extrinsic principle of specification, *I deny*.”
- 1. It is for the **Moderator** to ensure that proper syllogistic procedure is followed and that errors in formal logic are not tolerated. He should see to it that sophisms be excluded and that mere verbal disputes are avoided. He should ensure that equivocation is not employed and that all agree on primary nominal definitions.