ISSA Proceedings 2006 – The Justification Of The Normative Nature Of Argumentation Theory

In this paper**[i]**, I would like to propose an account of the normative nature of Argumentation Theory which aims to solve the problem of a dichotomy between descriptivism and prescriptivism as attempts at justifying the suitability of our normative models for the appraisal of real argumentation. This account presupposes a conception of argumentative value which is non-reducibly normative. Therefore, my second task will be to argue for it, something to be done by comparing this conception of argumentative value with an instrumentalist one. In order to give a measure of the standard of normativity that this conception of argumentative value involves, I argue that there is a sense of Biro & Siegel's epistemological approach to argumentation which is also instrumentalist, and therefore, unacceptable.

1. Descriptive vs. normative? Whether we aim to develop descriptive or normative models for argumentation, a preliminary task is to shape a conception of argumentation able to steer our work. The reason is that, as a matter of fact, within the field of Argumentation Studies there is a lack of agreement on which are the identity conditions for argumentation. And the truth is that argumentation theorists cannot appeal to an ordinary univocal practice of naming 'argumentation' certain type of communication, certain forms of discourses, the structure of some linguistic activities, a particular kind of semantic reconstructions, or whichever other possible reference of the term.

By accomplishing the task of providing a set of identity conditions for argumentation, argumentation theorists define the object of their models. The representativeness of this object respecting the sort of phenomena they aim to deal with happens to be a main criterion in order to decide on the practical and theoretical value of these models.

But argumentation theorists are particularly interested in developing normative models for argumentation, that is, models able to rule out certain practices as (good) argumentation[2]. Yet, the development of normative theories has

characteristically raised a critical concern in relation to their epistemological status. With regard to the grounds of Argumentation Theory and the justification of the normativity of its models respecting the sort of phenomena it is to deal with, there would seem to be two alternative accounts: either these models are grounded on the theorists' investigations about actual practices of argumentation, or they are portrayals of each theorist's intuitions about the way we should argue.

But the thing is that both accounts are quite problematic as justifications of the normative status of particular models respecting real argumentative practices. On the one hand, assuming the descriptivist line of justification would pose the problem of explaining how a report of the way people actually argue can become normative for the very same practice. The reason is that, at this point, appealing to "the normal" way of arguing would not do any better because to say that a given argumentative practice is 'abnormal' is not, by itself, a means to rule it out. In order to rule out the 'abnormal' just because it is not normal, we would need additional assumptions regarding the acceptability or goodneess of "the normal" –and also the unacceptability or badness of the "abnormal". That is, we would have to appeal to further intuitions concerning what is "good" or "bad", "acceptable" or "unnacceptable" as argumentation.

Contrastingly, a theorist assuming a purely prescriptivist account of the normative status of her model would have to make her case by arguing for the adequacy of her intuitions respecting the appraisal of real, everyday argumentation. But as far as the determination of the soundness of such argumentation would depend on these very intuitions about what counts as good argumentation, this strategy is likely to be guilty of a different kind of circularity. This is so whether or not her intuitions actually seem adequate to us: after all, we are considering a metatheoretical question. Let me explain this a bit further.

I think that, nowadays, most theorists would acknowledge the problems of a descriptivist account of their work. The models that they have proposed have not been proposed because they are supposed to represent what people usually do when arguing, and they do not propose such and such conditions for argumentation because these conditions warrant that we produce "normal" argumentation. Rather, these models would express theorists' intuitions about what people should and should not do in arguing. Consequently, current approaches would seem to present themselves as proposals whose acceptability as normative models depends on our own intuitions regarding how should we

argue. But justifying that our intuitions are relevant and adequate for determining what is good argumentation would be a matter of these very intuitions about what is good argumentation. That is to say, in refusing descriptivism and lacking of an alternative to it, argumentation theorists would seem to disregard any "fact of the matter" to settle the question about the suitability of particular normative models. For this reason, a decision in this sense would seem to depend just on our willingness to accept or refuse certain rules or principles for arguing, and therefore, on our willingness to accept or refuse the corresponding models.

Certainly, this is not a theoretical, but a methateoretical problem: a particular model may be perfectly suitable for the appraisal of argumentation whether or not we are in a condition to justify that it is. Yet, for argumentation theorists, currently facing a multiplicity of proposals, it would be highly convenient to be in a position to argue for or against any of them. But this is not something we can do if our only reason to preffer a particular model is that we are willing to accept its rules.

In this respect, the dichotomy between a descriptivist and a prescriptivist justification for our normative models for argumentation does not seem to take us very far. Fortunately, we can try a third option: to consider that the very phenomenon that Argumentation Theory aims to deal with is in itself a normative one. According to this perspective, to explain the normative status of a normative model would actually mean to be able to answer the following question: how does this model manages to represent argumentative normativity?

As I would like to show, the point of this option is to stress that an adequate description of the way the activity of arguing actually gets to produce normative outputs would happen to be a normative model respecting these outputs, which in turn would shape the very concept of argumentative value. Therefore, in assuming the viability of this option, I contend that there exists a concept of argumentative value whose characterization is the proper goal of Argumentation Theory as a normative theory, an object by reference to which we acquire criteria to decide whether our models are right or wrong –just as if we were following a descriptivist account of the epistemological status of Argumentation Theory, but with the gain of being able to make sense of its normativity respecting argumentative practices.

Conceiving the normativity of our models as the result of their being attempts at

describing certain object which is in turn normative would be tantamount to assume that there exists a concept of argumentative value which is not the output of any normative model, but the very source of sense of the activity of giving and asking for reasons. Such a concept of argumentative value would be, in turn, the output of the very practice as a normative one. In this paper, I would like to explore this alternative by considering a conception of argumentation as an activity aimed at establishing certain sort of correctness, i.e. the correctness of the claims for which we argue. Thus, I would like to propose a definition of argumentation as an attempt to show that a target claim is correct.

2. Constitutive and regulative normativity in argumentation theory
Yet, it can be argued, defining a concept is, in point of fact, a particular form of normative activity: by doing so, we rule out certain uses of the corresponding terms. So, at this point, I think I could recall Rawl's distinction between constitutive and regulative normativity in order to analyse the sort of normativity that I take to be involved in Argumentation Theory.

Certainly, Argumentation Theory aims at providing regulatively normative conditions for argumentation, that is, models able to rule out certain argumentative practices, or to distinguish good from bad argumentation. As we have already pointed out, the epistemological problem that such models seem to pose appears when we try to ground their (regulatively) normative status, that is to say, when we try to justify their suitability and capacity to decide whether certain practices are good or bad argumentation, in a relevant sense of the distinction between "good" and "bad" [3]. This is so because, as mentioned above, to consider that these models are grounded on reports of the way people argue does not explain how they can be normative respecting this practice; and to consider that they just implement sets of intuitions regarding the way we should argue would pose the ulterior problem of justifying the adequacy of these intuitions: in other words, appealing to our intuitions as the epistemological basis for our models amounts to make manifest that we just lack of criteria of correction for them –our models may be correct but we cannot justify that they are. Contrastingly, according to the alternative that I would like to defend in this paper, the criteria of correction that we are looking for would be provided by a notion of argumentative value which is previous and independent from any particular model. As I will argue in section 3, this conception of argumentative value will be, on the other hand, a non-reducibly normative one: after all, we are

assuming that the very argumentative practice, precisely because of its normative nature, recomends and rules out certain particular practices.

For its part, respecting the constitutive normativity of Argumentation Theory, my task is to make palatable the idea that normative models for argumentation are devoted to the tasks of defining what argumentation is, and also what good argumentation is. The identity conditions of argumentation and good argumentation are supposed to be constitutive of both concepts, so that the type of necessity that our models would involve is far from metaphysical; rather, it would be a matter being able to make sense of certain practices as argumentation and as good argumentation, respectively.

Actually, I think that not only the second but also the former task is crucial for Argumentation Theory being able to provide (regulatively) normative models of argumentation. As any other term, 'argumentation' is a term with applicability conditions. They constitute its meaning, the concept of argumentation, so that an adequate report of these conditions would enable us to rule out cases of false argumentation. This is an important task for Argumentation Theory: consider that the traditional charge against Rhetoric was that its techniques are available when good reasons are not available, or when reasons would be less successful than other means of persuasion. In principle, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with that. But the suspicion may be sound: rhetorical techniques can be deceptive in presenting as argumentation what in fact cannot be considered as such –namely, I would claim, because it is impossible to attribute to the performer the intention of showing a target claim to be correct. In those cases, we do not have bad argumentation, but false argumentation, and rhetorical techniques are used to produce the same effect of "fair play" that real argumentation, in general, produces. This effect is due to the pragmatic implications of appealing to reasons, and when this appeal is not real but apparent, Rhetoric becomes the art of deceiving convincingly.

3. The instrumentalist vs. The non-reducibly normative concept of argumentative value
As explained above, the alternative that I would like to propose regarding the justification of the normative status of Argumentation Theory presupposes that the activity of arguing has normative outputs, that is to say, outputs that, by themselves, shape the very concept of argumentative value. In other words, I am assuming that the concept of argumentative value is not the result of this or that

normative model for argumentation, but rather that normative models have as their goal to represent such pre-existing concept. This concept of argumentative value would be the condition that makes sense of the activity of arguing as it is –arguers behave thus and so because they pursue such a value- and also as it should be –the only way to achieve that value is to argue thus and so. Consequently, this conception of argumentative value is non-reducibly normative: our activities of giving and asking for reasons make sense because we commit ourselves with the valuability of the normative outputs of this type of practices. Good argumentation recomends itself as argumentation just because the claims for which we argue, when we argue well, have argumentative value. On the other hand, there is nothing extrinsic to the very practice of arguing that serves to recommend this value. Rather, it is this practice, as a normative one, what shapes the concept of argumentative value. In the account of argumentative value that I would favor, the argumentative value of a claim consists in its having been shown to be correct[4].

Because of that, our current proposal would have as its counterpart an instrumentalist conception of argumentative value, that is to say, a conception of argumentative value which is not non-reducibly normative. Arguably, such conception would be in a position to give an account, in a descriptive way, of the property "being good argumentation".

Unfortunately, I think that certain form of instrumentalism regarding a conception of argumentative value is virtually universal within the field. And I suspect that the reason is that instrumentalism might provide certain type of "external" criteria to decide on the adequacy of our models. After all, by adopting an instrumentalist conception of argumentative value, we would be in a condition to justify the regulatively normative status of our models: the instrumentalist would justify her rules or conditions for argumentation by assuming that "arguing thus and so warrants getting this and that". If she manages to establish both that this claim is true, and also that getting this and that is something valuable, then she would be justifying the corresponding normative model for argumentation.

In order to make my case that instrumentalism is virtually universal, I would like to show that authors like J. Biro & H. Siegel or R. H. Johnson, acknowledgable because of their fight of descriptivism, are still instrumentalist at some point, regarding the conception of argumentative value. This discussion should shed

light on the ulterior question of the non-reducibly normative nature of the concept of argumentative value, which is, on the other hand, the possibility condition of our proposal.

What is for a piece of argumentation to be good? According to the instrumentalist, argumentation goodness is a matter of the functions that we consider argumentation should accomplish. Thus, if we consider that argumentation is, above all, a means to solve a difference of opinion (Pragma-dialectics), to achieve universal persuasion (Perelman or Tindale), to rationally persuade (Johnson) or to warrant our beliefs (Biro & Siegel), good argumentation would be argumentation that achieves one or another of these goals. As it has been frequently pointed out, the rhetorical approach and Pragma-dialectics seem to be less committed with a normative account of argumentation than Informal Logic or the Epistemological Approach. But according to authors like Biro & Siegel (1992, 1997) or Tindale (1999), this happens to be, to a great extent, a matter of emphasis: regarding Pragma-dialectics, the possibility of reaching an adequate normative level would depend on whether pragma-dialecticians insist on the 'rationality' of the way parties solve their difference of opinion or on the fact of solving it; whereas regarding the Rhetorical Approach, reaching the normative level would be a matter of insisting on the 'ideality' of the audience to be persuaded. An account of good argumentation as argumentation achieving rational persuasion or promoting rational beliefs would be more clearly committed with a normative account of argumentation goodness, according to which the distinction between good and bad practices is normative in the sense that good practices, so characterized, would recommend themselves. Because of that, neither Biro & Siegel, nor Johnson consider that their own proposals are instrumetalist.

In principle, the formulation of any instrumental account of argumentation goodness might sound like a platitude. Certainly, there is a sense in which argumentation, as knives, meals, fathers or ideas can be good or bad –in a purely prescriptivist sense of the distinction between goodness and badness. In this sense, goodness and badness are properties to be determined by reference to the features that we value in each type of "things", let me say. An instrumentalist account would try to show that these features happen to be valuable as means to an end. Up to a point, argumentative discourses can be considered good or bad depending, for example, on their style, their effectiveness to an audience or listener, their historical significance, their originality, their fertility, or whatever.

Yet, a properly instrumental characterization of argumentation goodness would contend that the relevant sense of 'good argumentation' that our normative models should be able to discriminate is that of argumentation achieving certain functions which, allegedly, are characteristic of this practice. The reason is that, as Harvey Siegel (1992) has pointed out, we can always question whether it is good to be instrumentally good. If we manage to establish that argumentation has certain function that defines it as an activity, then questions like this would lay disarmed.

However, it is a matter of controversy which is the characteristic function of argumentation. Moreover, according to authors like J. Goodwin (2005) argumentation has no function at all, despite individuals may use argumentation for a variety of purposes. I would like to adopt this idea, which I take to be also suggested by S. Toulmin in The Uses of Argument:

(…) this was in fact the primary function of arguments, and that the other uses, the other functions which arguments have for us, are in a sense secondary, and parasitic of this primary justificatory use (Toulmin 1958, p. 12)

According to Toulmin, justifying is the primary use of argumentation. In my view, the sense of "primary use" that Toulmin is pointing at is not that of "the most common use" (such as the most common use of a knife is cutting) but rather that of the "constitutive use" by means of which certain activity counts as argumentation (just in the same way in which taking a piece of stone as a tool for cutting makes of it a knife). The constitutive use of those communicative activities that we name 'argumentation' is justifying. Aiming at justifying is what makes of certain activity argumentation. Correspondingly, good argumentation is argumentation that actually achieves justification. But justification would be the constitutive use of argumentation just because argumentation is a normative activity and 'justifying', in principle, just means 'arguing well'.

Because of that, contrary to the instrumentalist definitions of "good knife", "good meal", "good father" or "good idea", a definition of good argumentation as argumentation by means of which we justify our claims is not an instrumental one, in the following sense: justification is not something that we might achieve or fail to achieve after arguing well, and more importantly, it is not something that we may achieve by other means. This is so because justification is the normative output of the activity of arguing as a normative one. Knives, meals, fathers or

ideas are not normative objects, that is to say, good cuts, good digestions, good sons, or good effects in general, are not constitutively tied to the quality of the "objects" by means of which we bring them about.

Consequently, presenting 'justification' as the normative output of argumentation would be quite a contentless move. After all, what is 'justifying'? Do we have independent accounts of this? Let me offer an example to explain a bit further what I mean.

Biro and Siegel (1992, and 1997) have criticised Pragma-dialectics as an instrumentalist account of argumentative value precisely by pointing out that the resolution of a difference of opinion is something that parties might achieve or fail to achieve after arguing "well". But the truth of this claim depends on how we interpret "well". If we assume that there is a sense of good argumentation which is independent of whether we solve a difference of opinion, then it is true that parties may argue well in this sense and yet failling in solving their difference of opinion. I think that Biro and Siegel are right in assuming that there is such a sense of good argumentation, that is, of justification, which is not dependent on how parties solve their differences of opinion. But I also think that they should give independent reasons for that assumption, that is, reasons which do not presuppose that there is a value that this definition does not capture. Actually, if we refuse such a sense of good argumentation, then justifying a claim, according to a pragma-dialectician, would be to get at this claim as the result of a process of critical discussion. Why should we disregard this conception of 'justification'? Pointing out that parties may solve their differences of opinion in an irrational way is question begging, unless we have an independent account of what is to be rational, that is, an account able to distinguish between rationality and justification[5]. But this is, precisely, what Biro & Siegel's account, and up to a point, also Johnson's account, lack. They identify argumentation goodness with rationality, either of the corresponding beliefs or of the persuasion achieved by it. Actually, that is why they may consider that their account is not instrumental: arguably, achieving rational persuasion or rational beliefs is not something that we might achieve or fail to achieve after arguing well. Also, allegedly, it is not something that we might achieve by other means. I do not agree with this view. In order to motivate my reluctance, I would like to show that the two senses of "rational belief" that they may appeal to for making their cases, result in the collapse of their accounts of argumentative normativity.

Biro & Siegel (1992, 1997) say that good argumentation is argumentation whose premises warrant belief in its conclusion. But which sort of warranty are they talking about? On the one hand, we may think at first sight that it is related with truth: a warranted belief would be a belief that it is true –"you can believe it because it is true", that's the sort of warranty we would be looking for!

But Biro & Siegel aim to preserve fallibilism, that is, the idea that a belief may be justified and yet being false. Actually, that is the reason why they do not directly say that good argumentation is argumentation whose premises show that the conclusion is true. Rather, they go on with their normative account of argumentation goodness by propossing the following definition: "an argument succeeds to the extent that it renders belief rational" (Biro & Siegel 1997, p. 278)

Let us assume that good argumentation is argumentation epistemologically acceptable[6]. What, then, does it mean "rational belief"? Does it mean a belief which is epistemologically acceptable? That is to say: is 'rational' equivalent to 'justified' (whichever the conditions according to which we judge that a belief is justified, that is to say, that the argumentation whose target claim's content coincides with the content of that belief is a good one)? Or, does "rational belief" just mean that the belief is held by reasons (whether good or bad)? For my part, I preffer this second sense of the expression "rational belief" because it enables us to make sense of the rationality of those who believe the target claim of a piece of argumentation whose reasons are false when they do not know that they are false. According to this sense, justification and rationality would not be the same thing, unless we are willing to accept that argumentation having false premises, that is, bad reasons, may still be good argumentation.

The problem in Biro & Siegel's, and also in Johnson's accounts, is that, if we adopt the first sense of the expression "rational belief", then their account of argumentation as a means to produce rational beliefs or to warrant the rationality of the corresponding beliefs is empty, non-informative: good argumentation would be argumentation making rational our beliefs, that is, conferring our beliefs the target argumentative value we aim to define. On the other hand, if we adopt the second sense of the expression, it is not clear at all why should we assume that good argumentation is argumentation producing rational beliefs or warranting the rationality of our beliefs: after all, when we engange in the activity of giving and asking for reasons, we are supposed to subject our beliefs to reasons,

whether they are good or bad. Moreover, when we argue because we disagree, we do not necessarily presuppose that our opponent is irrational: very often, we just think that she is wrong, either in her reasons or in her inferences. Actually, the rationality of our opponent's belief (in the sense of beliefs that cohere with, or are supported by, other beliefs of her, whether true or false) does not stop further argumentation: rather, we aim at achieving "correct" beliefs, in that sense of correctness which is the ground of the activity of arguing as a normative one.

We may assume that rationality and correctness regarding beliefs is the same sort of thing. Certainly, argumentation and justification are closely related to rationality. But I think that we can preserve both this connection and also the distinction between rationality and justification if we assume that to say that someone has acquired a belief which is rational is to say that, according to her standards, the content of that belief is the target claim of a piece of good argumentation. Yet, her standards may determine the rationality of her belief, but not its objective justification. This second sense of "rational belief" avoids emptiness by distinguishing between justification and rationality. But it fails in providing a suitable conception of argumentative value, precisely because it turns out to be instrumentalist: good argumentation may fail to produce rational beliefs in this sense; and in any case, it is not our only means to acquire rational beliefs.

4. Conclusion

The normativity of argumentation is not exactly an expression of "that which should be believed", but rather of that "that which is argumentatively valuable". Of course, there is a close relationship between argumentation and rationality: we pursue good argumentation because, in engenged in the activity of giving and asking for reasons, the sense of this activity is searching for that argumentative value which is the ground that makes sense of this activity, that is, which makes it rational to argue. Additionally, there is a conception of "rational belief" which is related to the subject's determination of justification, that is, to the subject's determination of good argumentation.

According to our proposal of conceiving of Argumentation Theory as an attempt at defining what is good argumentation, each normative model would have as its goal to provide an adequate account of 'justification', understood as the constitutive use of the activity of arguing as a normative one. Yet, each model would conceive of justification in very different ways. For my part, I consider that justifying a claim, belief or judgement is equivalent to showing it to be correct.

This way, I would be proposing a conception of justification related to a certain sense of the distinction between correct and incorrect claims, beliefs and judgements. At this point, I think we can find a correspondence between the realms of Theoretical and Practical Reasons regarding the idea of "correction". As it happens in the case of moral normativity, which constitutes the determination of 'correctness' and 'incorrectness' from the point of view of Practical Reason, and thus, it shapes the concept of moral value, argumentative normativity would shape the very concept of theoretical value. Consequently, we should regard a sense of 'argumentation goodness' that cannot be unloaded in terms of the features that we may value in argumentative discourses or in terms of the functions that, arguably, such discourses should accomplish: to properly characterise this sense of the distinction, we should make sense of the idea of theoretical value and, therefore, we would be indirectly appealing to the very distinction we aim to describe.

In this respect, we may say that the normativity involved in the activity of arguing happens to be unconditional in a sense in which the constitutive normativity involved in the use of concepts –including the concept 'argumentation'- is not: the conditions that determine the use of any concept are indeed constitutive of that concept; if we refuse these conditions, we abandon the concept altogether. But still, communication can go on, our communicative behaviour may be perfectly rational, and accessible to others: by refusing some of these conditions we may try to broaden the use of the corresponding term, or to question part of the meaning of the concept. On the contrary, there is no alternative to a refusal of the conditions that determine this sense of "good argumentation", whichever they happen to be, because such refusal amounts to senselessness as indiscerniblility between correct and incorrect claims, beliefs and judgements –in the theoretical sense of the distinction just mentioned. In that respect, we may say that the unconditionality of argumentation's normativity exceeds conventionality. And it makes sense to speak of an intrinsic value of argumentation, because such sort of value cannot be sensibly negotiated.

This characterization of argumentation goodness would then be non-reducibly normative. Also, it would depend on semantic and pragmatic conditions able to determine whether certain speech act is an act of showing that a target claim is correct. That is to say, these conditions will be constitutive respecting the properties "being the target claim of an act of arguing", "being an act of showing", and "being a correct claim". But in turn, they will be regulative

respecting argumentation as an attempt at showing a target claim to be correct. Additionally, as far as this proposal assumes that the very activity of arguing gives rise to normative outputs, the grounds of a normative model for this activity would consists in its being a characterization of this activity as a normative one. That is to say, we will have to be able to show that the normative nature of argumentation is part of our everyday concept of "argumentation". We should give an account of this normative character in dealing with the applicability conditions of the term –in point of fact, as suggested at the end of section 2, these conditions of applicability would enable us to distinguish between the activity of arguing and related activities such as "informing", "suggesting", "hinting", etc. Consequently, a suitable normative model of argumentation–ex hypothesi, an adequate description of our concept of argumentative value-, would comprise an account of two types of normativity: on the one hand, it will have to provide a systematic articulation of the concept of argumentation, that is, a definition that would sanction the uses of the corresponding terms –'arguing', 'arguments', 'argumentative', etc. And on the other hand, it will have to provide a systematic articulation of the concept of argumentative value, and therefore, it will have to provide criteria to sanction our intuitions respecting what counts as good argumentation. According to our proposal, that would be argumentation actually showing that the claims and beliefs for which we argue are correct. As far as these criteria happen to be systematically successful in raising verdicts on the correction of our claims, they would constitute both a description of our conception of good argumentation and also a means to decide on it.

NOTES

[ii] Sometimes, the word 'argumentation' is used in a normative sense according to which 'argumentation' is always 'good argumentation', just as 'reasons' would always be 'good reasons'. I am not simpathetic to this usage because it precludes the possibility of distinguishing between 'bad argumentation' and 'false argumentation' on the one hand, and 'bad reasons' and 'false reasons' on the other hand. As I will argue below, I think that by means of the distinction between

bad and false argumentation we are able to express two different kinds of discursive 'symptoms'. Analogously, I think that the difference between bad and false reasons may play a role in explaining certain psychological phenomena such as rationalization.

[iii] At this point, I am just adopting a purely prescriptivist sense of the distinction between goodneess and badness, or correctness and incorrectness; that is, I am not presupposing any particular feature in the corresponding objects.

[iv] Following a toulmian conception of qualifiers, I am interested in a conception of 'correct claim' according to which a claim is correct if it has been put forward with the degree of pragmatic force that the truth values of the reason and the warrant that we have for it sanction. Consequently, I contend that good argumentation, that is, argumentation showing a target claim to be correct, is dependent on semantic conditions determining the correction of a target claim, and also on pragmatic conditions determining that an act of arguing is an act of showing. That is the way in which I would try to represent the concept of argumentative value that, according to the thesis defended in the present paper, is the goal of any normative model for argumentation. Yet, this is only a proposal, that is, it should be possible to find other ways of representing the concept of argumentative value that I take to be at stake in Argumentation Theory.

[v] After all, a pragma-dialectician might challenge: "you say that solving a difference of opinion according to the pragma-dialectical rules does not warrant the rationality of the process because parties may start from agreed but false or unjustified premises, and they can also follow wrong or problematic rules of inference (Biro & Siegel, 1992: 90). But the thing is that we have to make sense of a concept of rationality that does not depend on the objective value of the output, otherwhise, we could hardly make sense of the rationality of ancient scientists holding wrong astronomic or physical theories".

[vi] I think that the refusal of the idea that good argumentation is argumentation epistemologically acceptable is grounded on a prejudice regarding the possibility of gaining knowledge about values. If we accept that our judgements, beliefs and claims about values can be not only justified –in the sense of being the content of the target claims of good argumentation (whichever the way we are to determine the goodness of argumentation)- but also true or false, then I can think of no reason to refuse that argumentation, which is the kind of activity by means of which we decide on the acceptability of our judgements, beliefs and claims, is concerned with epistemological acceptability.

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