

ISSA Proceedings 1998 - Encompassing And Enacting Dialectic: Kenneth Burke's Theory Of Dramatism



The work of American self-described “wordman”, Kenneth Burke, is having tremendous impact on rhetorical and literary theory and criticism, speech communication, sociology, and many other academic areas, including in some small ways argumentation. Despite this recent attention, particularly in the work of Arnie Madsen (1989, 1991, 1993) and James Klumpp (1993) as well as the recent special issue of *Argumentation and Advocacy* on “Dramatism and Argumentation” (1993) and occasional argument criticisms which invoke Burkean perspectives, Burke’s work still remains relatively unknown to many argumentation scholars, and potential contributions of Burkean theory to argumentation studies remain to be developed fully. Moreover, as Madsen (1993) observed, “the works of Kenneth Burke have gone relatively unnoticed in the field of argumentation theory” (164). And although it is certainly true that “Burke offers no systematic and complete theory of argument” (Parson, 1993, 145), it is also nonetheless equally the case that Burke’s work on human symbol systems and motives, summarized as his theory of “dramatism,” encompasses the traditional domains of rhetoric, poetic, and dialectic, thereby at least by most traditional accounts encompassing as well argumentation (See van Eemeren, Grootendorst, and Kruiger), subsuming, re-defining, and re-positioning “argument” within the orientation of “dramatism.”

The current study attempts to “locate” argumentation within Burke’s theoretical edifice, dramatism, and, more generally, to examine how “dramatism” transforms traditional approaches to “rationality.” As “rationality” is transformed, so too, necessarily, is argumentation. The specific objectives of this paper are per force more restricted. I will sketch, generally and broadly, dramatism’s *encompassing* argument move, with its attendant transformations of “rationality.” Second, and a bit more specifically, I will offer a description of Burke’s theory of dialectics, before concluding with some remarks suggesting how, via the agency of Burke’s

“psychologized” rhetoric of identification, dialectic becomes enacted as what Burke calls the “great *drama* of *human* relations” (1955, 263).

I

Burke’s “Dramatism” is set forth broadly in his informal *Motivorum Trilogy: A Grammar of Motives* (1945), which treats generally of dialectics and transformational processes, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1950), which treats of rhetoric as “consubstantial” with “identification,” and *A Symbolic of Motives* (unpublished), which treats of poetics and ethics variously (depending upon which design for the unfinished project is featured) from within the orientation of “dramatism.” A related manuscript, *Poetics, Dramatistically Considered* (unpublished), is a relatively complete treatment of precisely what the title promises; it may be a re-titled version of what began as *A Symbolic*.^[i] Burke’s proposed “trilogy” of “a grammar,” which centered generally and paradoxically on dialectics, “a rhetoric,” and “a symbolic,” which subsumed both poetics and ethics, parallels in many ways classical formulations including the *trivium*,^[ii] but Burke’s interests, lying at the intersection of language, psychology, and circumstance, focus concern on human motives rather than upon probable truth, “right” action, or divine telos. As such, “‘finding’ a theory of argument, or positions that inform argument theory,” in Burke’s writings, Parson suggests, “will be an inferential process” (146; see also Madsen, 1993, 165). But given the sweeping nature of the *Motivorum* project, the process is not one of merely extending the domain of “dramatism,” a theory derived most explicitly from literary studies, to the domain of “argumentation,” for “dramatism” in subsuming and re-defining “dialectic” and “rhetoric” has already positioned itself atop much of the traditional “argument” domain. And in so-doing, it transformed the nature and function of argumentation itself. As Klumpp (1993) puts it, a “rapprochement” between mainstream argumentation studies and Burkean studies takes one more “toward adapting argumentation rather than dramatism” (149). One important reason for this is that frequently argumentation studies appears as a Phoenix arisen amid the detritus of formal logics, remaining under the sign of “Reason” and genuflecting instinctively toward Reason’s traditional consort, Truth. Burke’s orientation explicitly re-defines “rationality” and de-privileges, indeed de-stabilizes, truth. For a “rapprochement,” to borrow Klumpp’s terminology, to occur, “argumentation” needs to be approached from within the orientations of dramatism; that is, perhaps the most productive point of entry into a “conversation” between dramatism and argumentation is not “Where

does dramatism 'fit' in argumentation?" but rather "Where does argumentation 'fit' in dramatism?"

Burke offers a new contextualization of *rationality* in the nexus of mind, body, language, and circumstance, all infused with the spiritual goads of perfectionism, in the betweenness of action/motion: he calls this nexus "motive" and insists that its structure and functioning can be "read" in the text or verbal encompassments of a situation. These motives are visible in the "ratios" which best encompass the discourse, and the "ratios" - to be discussed more fully below - are products of dramatic analysis. Burke's "dramatism" is an account of human "motives" and, ultimately, human attitudes and actions. It professes to encompass vast chunks of the classical domains of dialectic, rhetoric, ethics, and poetics, as well as much of more contemporary psychology, sociology, and philosophy. While not discounting the biological, psychological, or material, dramatism privileges the linguistic in its account of motives; certainly, for Burke, *motives* per se are linguistic: they are to be located in the accounts people give of why they did what they did (1945, x). In other words, Burke, the word-man, begins always with "logos," the word. In "Curriculum Criticum," an appendix to the second edition (1953) of *Counter-Statement* (1931), Burke writes of his proposed trilogy: "The whole project aims to round out an analysis of language in keeping with the author's favorite notion that, man being the specifically language-using animal, an approach to human motivation should be made through the analysis of language" (218-19). "Dramatism" is an explanatory and critical theory which works through language to better understand human motives; in its sweeping embrace of rhetoric, dialectic, poetics, and ethics dramatism also includes in its embrace the traditional domain of argumentation.

Argumentation's break from logical formalism has moved the field toward Burke's orientation. As Klumpp notes (1993), "Through Wallace, and Toulmin, and Perelman, and Fisher, and Scott, and others, we have treatments of argument that seek to return to the root of 'logic' in 'logos', in the linguistic power of humans. The resources of dramatism with its commitment to a dialectical working of text and context, permanence and change, identity and identification, and dozens of other tensions resolved in linguistic acts may point argumentation more clearly to the constructive appeal of argument" (162). Yet this return to "the root of 'logic' in 'logos'" has not meant a purging of formal logic; indeed, "argumentation" may be seen as an encompassment of formal logics, and as an

encompassment it both *retains* (or preserves) and *reduces* logic. Logic is now a part of the whole, no longer a metonym standing in place of a larger dynamic. Logic is never repudiated: it is retained, yet transformed. Just as the nascent field of argumentation has moved to encompass formal logic, so too does Burke's Dramatism move to encompass argumentation itself.

From within a dramatistic perspective, the association between rationality and probability is, well, problematic: probability begs the questions, probable relative to what? That progressive linkage between the probable, the rational, and, often at least implicitly, the true, viewed from the dramatistic frame, is necessarily only a partial explanation, and hence a reductive one. A more comprehensive perspective would from the Burkean framework be the more "rational" (that with the maximum self-consciousness); that is, rather than emphasizing the *probable*, with its implicit this rather than that, either/or orientation, Burke emphasizes *situational encompassment*, "testing" the adequacy of a explanation relative to both the social and the material recalcitrances it encounters: progressive encompassment, rather than precise differentiation, becomes the desired end, the telos of the rational from within the dramatistic frame (See 1940, 138-167). That is, there is a situational encompassment via a perspective; the "rationality" of the perspective is evaluated relative to the adequacy of the orientation to the structure, including exigencies, of the rhetorical situation (See Burke, 1973).

From the Burkean orientation, a productive approach to "argument" is not simply how it functions in the constructions of formal appeals but rather how it operates from within a given motive structure. That is, questions of "validity" must be framed within the Weltanschauung of the audience; only then can how such appeals operate be seen in the full conspectus of their function. To appropriate Burke's admonition in "The Rhetoric of Hitler's 'Battle'" (1940, 191ff), it is not sufficient to dismiss an argument as being 'unscientific' or lacking formal validity when that argument is holding popular sway. Along these lines, Burke writes somewhat sarcastically in 1940, "We thus need not despair of human rationality, even in eruptive days like ours. I am sure that even the most arbitrary of Nazis can be shown to possess it; for no matter how inadequate his chart of meaning may be, as developed under the privations of the quietus and oversimplifying dialectical pressure, he at least *wants* it to tell him accurately *what is going on* in his world and in the world at large" (114). From the perspective of dramatism, it would appear that argumentation's central concern with reason-giving or justificatory behavior is retained, yet the "rationality" of the reasons/justifications

is not separate from the motivational Weltanschauung from which it emanated. That is, motives are “rational” relative to their own structural/functional design and adequacy to the situations they encounter rather than to any a priori or non-contextualized form. Form, for Burke, is in the psychology of the audience (1931, 30-31); definitionally, “form” as such cannot exist apart from “situation” and “audience.” Through this process, the “tests” of “rationality” are radically transformed. For instance, “that which is ‘rational’ is that which satisfies or would satisfy an aroused appetite, remembering always that in Burke’s interpretation ‘logical’ structures are one of the forms of appetite and desire. It is precisely here that we have the ‘psychologizing’ of rationality, for the operative ‘logics’ in his system of rationality are the logics of desire, of the appetites” (Williams, 1990, 185). The “rationality” of desire is not to be confused with inchoate yearnings or impulsive actions: “That which is rational within a given order of desires may be seen in contrast to that which is incongruous with that order. That is, rationality is, above all else, an ordered structure of relationships; to ‘be rational’ is to operate within the structure or order of relationships apropos to one’s time and situation” (Williams, 1990, 185). It is also, as Madsen emphasizes, to operate within the constraints of a particular terministic orientation (1989, 11; see also Jasinski).

Burke tends to equate “rationality” with but an aspect of human’s symbol-using capabilities, and then he views rationality as the human genius for tracking-down the implications of our creations, linguistic and otherwise, for “perfecting” and “purifying” our categories, our dialectical desire for not just difference but opposition. In “Variations on ‘Providence’” (1981), Burke writes, “The Logological concept of our species as the ‘symbol-using animal’ is not identical with the concept, *homo sapiens*, the ‘rational’ animal – for whereas we are the “symbol-using animal” all the time, we are *nonrational* and even *irrational* *some* of the time. Somewhat along Freudian lines I take it that the very process of learning language long before we have reached the so-called ‘age of reason’ leaves upon us the mark of its necessarily immature beginnings; and only some of these can be called ‘childlike’ in the idyllic sense of the term”.**[iii]** And overly diligent pursuit of the rational proper, as with any such purification, may bring about its obverse, and it certainly brings about something different. From Burke’s dramatistic perspective, “rationality’s” penultimate perfection is ultimately a transformation into something new, different, other. From a more well rounded account of human motives, such genius, as Burke is fond of citing Santyana as saying, is almost always a catastrophe, culminating in scapegoating, wars, and

ecological destruction, for instances. Burke continues, "But implicit in its [language's] very nature there is the principle of completion, or perfection, or carrying ideas to the end of the line, as with thoughts on first and last things - all told, goads toward the tracking down of implications. And 'rationality' is in its way the very 'perfection' of such language-infused possibilities. And what more 'rational' in that respect than our perfecting of *instruments* designed to help assist us in the tracking-down-of-implications, the rational genius of technology thus being in effect a vocational impulsiveness, as though in answer to a call?" (182-83). Burke's alignment of traditional rationality and technological prowess, each containing its own genius for catastrophe, offers fruitful parallels to Habermas's critique of technical rationality, parallels which must wait another day for further examination. Burke's alternative in "maximum self-consciousness," however, may diverge significantly from Habermas's "life world." What is needed instead of more "rationality" is what Burke calls "maximum self-consciousness": an awareness of the very framing and structure of our own motives (and hence of alternative motive structures), a state of mind in which we use language rather than letting language use of, in which we think through the categories of language rather than letting the categories of language do our thinking for us.[iv] In expounding upon the educational and political value of dramatism, Burke maintains that dramatism "contends that by a methodic study of symbolic action men have their best chance of seeing beyond this clutter, into the ironic nature of the human species" (1955, 269-70).

That which is most "rational" within a dramatistic orientation (if not within others) is that which opens-up the linguistic possibilities, that which interferes with perfection and forestalls genius's fulfillment in catastrophe, that which moves us toward "maximum self-consciousness." The objective of such dramatically "rational" argument is not its fulfillment as truth, or victor over dialectical opposition - "the stylistic form of a lawyer's plea" - , but rather as full an understanding as possible of what Burke at times calls a "calculus" of human motives: "An ideal philosophy, from this point of view, would seek to satisfy the requirements of a perfect dictionary. It would be a calculus for charting the nature of events and for clarifying all important relationships." Or, in other Burkean language, it encompasses the situation. Burke continues, "...the only 'proof' of a philosophy, considered as a calculus, resides in showing, by concrete application, the scope, complexity, and accuracy of its coordinates for charting the nature of events." "What, in fact, is 'rationality' but the desire for an *accurate chart for naming what is going on?*" (1940, 113-14). In dramatistic rationality, of

course, accuracy is encompassment, not precise differentiation; it is a “heaping up,” not a purification (1940, 143-49). For Burke, dramatism’s reflexive analytic methodologies – e.g., so-called pentadic analysis – force us toward preservation of the dialectic, toward a disavowal of the absolutism of relativism and an acceptance of the encompassing nature of paradox and irony (1945, 503-517). Burke’s encompassing, or transcending, move culminates in dialectic, which is also where it started.

II

Traditional approaches to dialectics constructed dialectics as a method toward discovery of the True or probably true; it was a method of resolution toward a category of the true. Burke’s approach stands the traditional orientation on its ear: for Burke, categories of the true or apparently true (e.g., the terms or categories of the pentad) become “resolved” into unnamable dialectic constructs, into “ratios” which define motive (e.g., a “scene/act” ratio). The dialectic is not resolved; instead, it is the resolution: human thought – symbolic action – is always dialectical. From this framework, “reason” must be understood not as a product of the dialectic (as a dialectically produced “sign” of the true) but rather as perpetually intrinsic to the dialectic, as itself always dialectical (1945). Again, in a Burkean orientation, a “ratio” (an explicitly dialectical construct) is a “reason” or, once ‘psychologized,’ a “motive.” As Klumpp notes (1993), “the etymological root of ‘ratios’ and ‘reason’ are the same” (162) (sic). They share an “alchemic” core: what can be “thrown up” as a “reason” at one moment may appear distinctly as a “motive” at the next (see Burke, 1945, x). There is, of course, a close and necessarily relationship between the motive structures (ratios) and dialectics: Motives are dialectical. “The elements of the pentad constitute human motives only when they interact, which is to say only when they found dialectical relations with each other: a scene/act ratio, for instance, is neither scene nor act but rather the betweenness of scene and act which allows for transformation, for symbolic action, for motives” (Williams, 1992, 3). Given this, it is instructive to flesh-out Burke’s approach to dialectics before suggesting how “drama” may be seen as the “psychologized” enactment of dialectics via the agency of rhetorical identifications.

Perhaps the most complete treatment of Burke’s dialectic qua dialectic is in the report of a seminar on “Kenneth Burke as Dialectician,” from the 1993 Triennial Conference of the Kenneth Burke Society (Williams, et.al.). The report offers

“nine over-lapping assertions concerning Kenneth Burke as dialectician” (17) which, in summation, offer a brief summary of Burke’s orientation:

1. “Burke’s dialectic is, among other things, *linguistic* in character” (17). The ineradicable negative lurking within any linguistic demarcation of difference renders dialectic and meaning virtually co-terminus: for Burke, essence or substance is always paradoxically dialectic (1945, 21-35). As the Seminar report continues, “From the dialectical structure of language emerge characteristic features of linguistic processes, e.g. merger and division (identification and difference), transformation, polarization, hierarchy, transcendence, etc.” (17). Various “incarnations” of this “dialectical spirit” may be seen in various forms of social enactments.
2. “Burke’s dialectic allows humans to draw distinctions – but not to reify categories” (17). By being ineradicable, the negative always provides the resources to de-construct any hermetically sealed and protected linguistic construct.
3. “Dialectic can be converted to drama via psychological identification with linguistic distinctions” (17). I will elaborate upon this assertion in my conclusion.
4. “Burke’s dialectic is not one of oppositions but rather of *betweenness*. Burke’s dialectic does not operate in the realm of either/ or but rather the both/and; the dialectic is in the ‘margin of overlap’ between the two. The betweenness of the dialectic facilitates transformations of one term into another; it does not promote oppositions or polarization. Dialectic ‘dances’ in the betweenness of two terms or concepts. In this sense, the ‘attitude’ or ‘spirit’ of Burke’s dialectic is ironic, not contradictory or antagonistic: Burke’s dialectic is the ‘essence’ of the comic perspective” (17-18).
5. “Burke’s dialectic neither contains nor aspires toward a determined *telos*; rather, the *telos* of Burke’s dialectic is undetermined and open-ended” (18).
6. “Burke’s dialectic resides ‘in the slash’ between the terms under consideration, and dialectical freedom is enhanced as the slash is ‘widened.’ The metaphor ‘in the slash’ derives from Burke’s discussion of motives as ratios between terms of the pentad (hexad). Thus, in a ‘scene/act’ ratio, the motive is in the ‘betweenness’ of scene and act, which is to say ‘in the slash’” (18).
7. “Burke’s dialectic inaugurates/preserves symbolic action” (18). Burke insists that there is a hard and fast distinction between motion and action, such that action is a unique species of motion characterized in large part by choice, which is to say in large measure this multidimensional structure is the work of logology – or words about [symbolic, dialectical, inhabited] words” (20).

8. "Burke is a dialectician who uses dialectic in a 'strong' sense." That is, he uses "dialectic" not as a general metaphor but rather "as a *generating principle*" for much of his thinking (20). Dialectic is at the "center" of Burke's *Motivorum* project: the very "substance" of motives is dialectical. As Burke puts it in *A Grammar*, "Whereas there is an implicit irony in the other notions of substance, with the dialectic substance the irony is explicit. For it derives its character from the systematic contemplation of the antinomies attendant upon the fact that we necessarily define a thing in terms of something else. 'Dialectic substance' would thus be the over-all category of dramatism, which treats of human motives in terms of verbal action" (1945, 33).

Perhaps one of the most cogent descriptions of Burke as a dialectician is that offered by his life-long friend and confidant, Malcolm Cowley, in Cowley's review (1950) of *A Rhetoric of Motives*: Burke "is a dialectician who is always trying to reconcile opposites by finding that they have a common source. Give him two apparently hostile terms like poetry and propaganda, art and economics, speech and action, and immediately he looks beneath them for the common ground on which they stand. Where the Marxian dialectic moves forward in time from the conflict of Thesis and antithesis to their subsequent resolution or synthesis - and always emphasizes the conflict - the Burkean dialectic moves backwards from conflicting effects to harmonious causes. It is a dialectic of reconciliation or peace-making and not of war. At the same time it gives a backward or spiral movement to his current of thought, so that sometimes the beginning of a book is its logical ending and we have to read the last chapter before fully understanding the first" (250).

III

Burke's theory of "dramatism" psychologizes his theory of dialectics through the agency of "identification," which in turn is Burke's encompassing term for "rhetoric." For Aristotle, rhetoric aims at persuasion, tempered by the ethics of rationality and, ultimately, truth; in its ideal form, rhetoric reasons through contingencies toward the probable. For Burke, rhetoric names the psychological/linguistic process by which "identification" occurs. Identification is the dramatistic counter-part of the dialectical and transformational processes of merger and division: identification with differences carved-out dialectically animates agonistically as "drama." Through drama, both "knowledge" and "identity" are constructed. "Identification" names a psychological process

whereby a person interprets/constructs his/her symbolic world through certain constructs instead of others. By inhabiting certain constructs, a sense of identity is created: identification is constitutive of identity. "Rhetoric." for Burke, is the process of identification (and alienation and re-identification, or re-birth). Identification, or rhetoric, is the internalization or inhabitation and enactment of the dialectical processes of merger and division. "Dramatism" is the theory of these enactments: drama, from the Burkean orientation, is literally the enactment of dialectically constructed agons of difference.

In Burke's interpretation, dialectic demarcates differences, which refine into the *agon* of oppositions. Human agents inhabit the symbolic world through the process of identification with various and diverse dialectical distinctions. Such inhabitation, such psychological linkages, brings the dialectic to life: it quite literally *enacts* the *agon* of difference. The "lived" dialectic is thus literally drama; and since most vocabularies are lived, dialectic and drama are frequently virtually synonymous. But since the possibilities for linguistic transformations, which is to say dialectic, are not all "lived" or enacted, drama becomes a subset of dialectic (Williams, 1992, 9-10). Burke writes, "Though we have often used 'dialectic' and 'dramatistic' as synonymous, dialectic in the general sense is a word of broader scope, since it includes all idioms that are non-dramatistic" (1945, 402). But when the dialectic is "lived," when it is psychologized through the agency of identification, it is transformed into drama. Literally (Williams, 1992, 10). And it is here that the dialectic is encompassed and transformed in its enactment as drama.

Burke's theoretical framework re-situates argumentation within his 'psychologized' dialectic, his dramatism. Burke's theory of dramatism is, in his often invoked phrase, "well-rounded" in its account of human motives. Weaving together strands from dialectic, rhetoric, poetics, and ethics, Burke's "dramatism" is framed within a general commitment to individualism (and its attendant longing for communalism; working in close conjunction with the related pairs: solipsism/communication, division/merger, etc.), pragmatism (with nagging idealizing undercurrents), and "Agro-Bohemianism," Burke's personal mode of adjustment to the material and social exigencies of life. Life occurs through a series of moralized symbolic choices, constrained and impinged upon by social and material conditions, and educated by the recalcitrances of the non-symbolic world as well as by other agents, agencies, scenes, purposes, acts, and attitudes in the symbolic world too. In the classical formulation, these "sites" of these

choices could be understood as giving rise to recognizable discourse forms, e.g., poetics, rhetoric, etc., as well as recurrent symbolic genre, e.g., tragedy or deliberative rhetoric, and ultimately modes of appeal within the generic orientations, e.g., personification or such elements as the modes of artistic proof, ethos, pathos, and logos. Dramatism would analyze classical appeals such as a logos appeal not simply as a form of rational argument but rather as a form of rational argument within a broader realm of symbolic action, which must be understood as transforming the “site” of argument proper. In the dramatistic perspective, “ratios” are “consubstantial” with “motives,” In the traditional view, “reason” leads to “rational action” and perhaps even to “truth.” In the dramatistic view, “reason,” “rationality,” “truth,” etc., are all forms of symbolic action, not privileged above the functionings of language but rather as recurring forms of symbolic action themselves. Argument, for Burke, is not a linguistic process which leads toward an extra- or trans-linguistic truth but rather a dialectical process which yields greater understanding and appreciation of the resources and power of our symbol systems themselves. Burke’s encompassment and psychologized enactment of dialectics in his theory of dramatism offers a potentially productive re-situating of argumentation theory in what some fear may be the twilight of the Age of Reason.

NOTES

- i.** The unfinished drafts of both *A Symbolic of Motives and Poetics, Dramatistically Considered* are products of the 1950s, and for the most part the early 1950s. Portions of *Poetics, Dramatistically Considered* were published as journal articles in the 1950s; additional sections of both manuscripts will soon be published. See the forthcoming book, *Unending Conversations: Essays by and about Kenneth Burke*, Ed. Greig Henderson and David Cratis Williams, which includes several unpublished sections of both *Poetics, Dramatistically Considered* and *A Symbolic of Motives*, as well as essays about these manuscripts.
- ii.** Burke’s points of departure are frequently at least implicitly Aristotelian, as with the *Motivorum* project, and sometimes explicitly so, as with *Poetics, Dramatistically Considered*. But the reading should be Aristotle from a Burkean orientation, not Burke in Aristotle’s terms. Burke ‘came to’ Aristotle, at least as a serious subject of study, relatively late in his theory-building process; references to Aristotle become frequent initially in the early 1950s (See Henderson). From the ‘Dramatistic’ perspective, Aristotelian categories are simply subsumed – retained and reduced – within a broader and more descriptively accurate

viewpoint.

iii. Perhaps because of its comfortable accommodation of the nonrational and irrational as well as the rational, Burke tends to hold poetic and literary models as more representative of human action than logical models. In charting one's way through such a life, Burke's holds forth the aesthetic as the best adapted metaphor for encompassing the situation: literature - not argument - is equipment for living. But this is not an either/or proposition for Burke: argument is subsumed within the broader anecdote.

iv. Burke is often fond of citing Coleridge from *Biographia Literaria* to the effect that our linguistic categories, once 'naturalized', become self-evident 'common-sense': "the language itself does as it were for us" (Stauffer, 158).

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ISSA Proceedings 1998 - Presumptive Reasoning And The Pragmatics Of Assent: The Case Of Argument Ad Ignorantiam



1. Three Theses

This paper focusses on three traditional distinctions commonly made by argumentation theorists. The distinctions generally correlate with one another and work together in picturing argumentation and framing puzzles about it. Not everyone holds all or any of them - maybe

not even most. But the distinctions are invoked and alluded to often enough that we think it useful to challenge them directly.

First, there is a distinction to be drawn between justifying the truth or falsity of a proposition or claim and justifying acceptance or rejection of a proposition or claim. The truth or falsity of a proposition is a matter of independent reality. Acceptance or rejection of a proposition is a voluntary decision. Rational justification of acceptance or rejection is a matter of choice, a weighing of costs and benefits. Rational justification of truth or falsity is a matter of evidence, a balancing of facts. Justifying truth or falsity is a matter of proof; justifying acceptance or rejection is a matter of persuasion.

Second, a distinction should be maintained between arguments over propositions of fact and arguments about propositions of policy. It is a distinction closely related to the first in its rationale. It relies on such matters as the difference between description and evaluation, “is” and “ought”, reasons and motivations, epistemology and politics, epistemic reason and practical reason.

Third, a distinction should be maintained between demonstrative proof and plausible demonstration. The former kinds of arguments are associated with strong conclusions involving direct evidence, certainty, necessity, infallibility and the like. The latter kinds of arguments deal with a balance of considerations, presumptions, probabilities, and tentative conclusions.

One can, of course, maintain all these distinctions as conceptual distinctions, which is to say that these distinctions mean different things, they have different

implications, and they participate in different systems of concepts and puzzles. But presumably these distinctions are more than just conceptual. Presumably they point to real differences in the way in which argumentation is conducted in different domains and help to explain real differences in our sense of the quality of those arguments.

Traditionally, at least, scientific research has been held up as a paragon of demonstrative proof concerning the truth and falsity of propositions of fact. Its procedures of inference are highly formalized through statistical analysis. Its research questions are answered on the basis of quantifiable facts that are scrupulously guarded from questions of value. Its empirical claims seem to be as directly demonstrated and as certain as one can get. If these distinctions hold up anywhere, they should hold up here. In fact, there are important ways in which these distinctions blur when we examine the logic of the statistical analysis upon which modern scientific research depends.

2. Statistical Reasoning as Plausible Reasoning

The core of statistical analysis in empirical research is the logic of hypothesis testing. Factual propositions that are derived from theory and predict empirical differences (research hypotheses) are tested against observed differences. The test occurs by setting the research hypothesis against a competing, default hypothesis – typically the null hypothesis that there are no real differences. Now, it isn't news to anyone that the test of whether the observed differences best match the research or the null hypothesis is a matter of probabilistic inference. But it is worth noting that the logic of hypothesis testing is also a logic of presumptive reasoning. In fact, the statistical inference amounts to *argumentum ad ignorantiam* (cf. Walton, 1996a).

Setting very high the level of proof required to establish the research hypothesis creates a heavy presumption in favor of the null hypothesis. In the absence of compelling evidence to the contrary, normal researchers assume their data shows that no actual effects or differences are present (or, that only trivial effects or differences exist). This is what tests of statistical significance amount to (even when taken together with tests of statistical power). As Cohen (1988: 1-2) puts it: When the behavioral scientist has occasion to don the mantle of the applied statistician, the probability is high that it will be for the purpose of testing one or more null hypotheses, i.e., “the hypothesis that the phenomenon to be demonstrated is in fact absent [Fisher, 1949, p.13].” Not that he hopes to “prove” this hypothesis. On the contrary, he typically hopes to “reject” this hypothesis and

thus “prove” that the phenomenon in question is in fact present. Let us acknowledge at the outset the necessarily probabilistic character of statistical inference, and dispense with the mocking quotation marks about words like *reject* and *prove*. This may be done by requiring that an investigator set certain appropriate probability standards for research results which provide a basis for rejection of the null hypothesis and hence for proof of the existence of the phenomenon under test. Results from a random sample drawn from a population will only approximate the characteristics of the population. Therefore, even if the null hypothesis is, in fact, true, a given sample result is not expected to mirror this fact exactly. Before sample data are gathered, therefore, the investigator selects some prudently small value α (say .01 or .05), so that he *may* eventually be able to say about his sample data, “*If the null hypothesis is true, the probability of the obtained sample result is no more than α , i.e. a statistically significant result. If he can make this statement, since α is small, he said to have rejected the null hypothesis “with an α significance criterion” or “at the α significance level.” If, on the other hand, he finds the probability to be greater than α , he cannot make the above statement and he has failed to reject the null hypothesis, or, equivalently finds it “tenable,” or “accepts” it, all at the α significance level.*

The presumption is that unless the variability between observed groups is sizably greater than the variability within the groups, the observed differences should be assumed to be reflections of random error in sampling and measurement rather than reflections of real differences between populations sampled.

That the logic of statistical inference is a logic of plausible reasoning based on presumption is something that scientists and statisticians implicitly know – though commonly they explicitly disavow such knowledge. The conventional circumlocution used when a significance test fails to support the research hypothesis is that the researcher “fails to reject the null hypothesis.” This way of talking parallels the argumentation theorist’s common explanation for why ad ignorantiam appeals are fallacious: One cannot conclude that a proposition is true simply because one has failed to show that the proposition is false, or vice versa. One can only conclude that no conclusion can be drawn. One doesn’t know the status of the proposition one way or the other. For example, Jaccard (1983: 129) reminds us:

When an experimenter obtains a result that is consistent with the null hypothesis (when it falls between the range of -1.96 and +1.96 instead of outside of it) technically, he or she does not accept the null hypotheses as being true. Rather

he or she fails to reject the null hypothesis. In principle, we can never accept the null hypothesis as being true via our statistical methods; we can only reject it as being untenable.

Similarly, Williams (1992: 79), who talks about “accepting” as well as “rejecting” the null hypothesis, nevertheless warns us:

If a study results in failure to reject a null hypothesis, the researcher has not really “proved” a null hypothesis, but has failed to find support for the research hypothesis. It is not unusual to find studies with negative outcomes where the research has placed a great deal of stock in “acceptance” of null hypotheses. Such interpretations, strictly speaking, are in error because the logic of a research design incorporates the testing of some alternative (research hypothesis) against the status quo (null hypothesis). Although failure to find support for the alternative does leave one with the status quo, it does not rule out other possible alternatives. Put into practical terms, be skeptical of interpretations of unrejected null hypotheses.

Phrases like “technically” and “strictly speaking” are the sorts of euphemisms methodologists use when theory crashes into common sense but don’t want to have to admit they are sunk. (Keppel, 1991, uses the euphemistic halfway phrase, “retain the null hypothesis.”) And, of course, the reason such theoretical qualifications are set out in the first place is because normal researchers openly disregard them in practice.

It seems then, that the advocate of the traditional distinction between demonstrative proof and plausible argument faces a dilemma. Like so many statistical textbook authors, the advocate can conclude that normal scientific research is widely based on fallacious reasoning and needs to be corrected. Or, the advocate can conclude that well done quantitative empirical research in science really is based on a presumptive form of reasoning. Either way, demonstrative proof seems to be missing from the picture.

We think the reason it is missing is because it is not needed to redeem the rationality of scientific inference, if it ever is needed or ever exists at all. As commonsense reasoners, scientific researchers know that arguments from ignorance are legitimate forms of plausible reasoning when one has a good reason for setting a presumption in the first place. Quantitative analysis in scientific research is plausible reasoning. It is *formally rigorous* plausible reasoning, but it is a kind of plausible reasoning nevertheless: A kind in which

presumptions are established as the levels of proof (in the form of probability assessments) required to accept research hypotheses.

3. *Statistical Propositions as Propositions of Policy*

The level of proof required to demonstrate the research hypothesis is commonly a matter of convention. Alpha levels in significance testing are ordinarily set at .05. There can be good reason for setting this level of proof that goes beyond a purely arbitrary decision. The nature of this broader rationale once again proves instructive. For the rationale is one in which *argumentum ad consequentiam* plays the decisive role. And this suggests to us that another distinction carries little weight: the distinction between propositions of fact and propositions of policy. Argumentation theorists have long recognized that while *ad consequentiam* reasoning is an illegitimate proof of a proposition of fact, it can provide compelling support for a proposition of policy (Walton, 1996b). In general, this is because the former would involve an illicit shift from a question of what 'ought' to be, or one of value, to a question of what 'is,' or one of fact. And this is said to be an intrinsic difference between propositions of policy and propositions of fact. Yet this does not appear to be a scrupulously guarded distinction in the logic of hypothesis testing.

Go back to the question of setting the level of statistical significance in hypothesis testing. Textbook authors commonly explain that the level of proof necessary to accept and reject the null and research hypotheses is dependent on both the *risk* of inaccuracy and the *cost* of inaccuracy. In statistical jargon, this process is labeled as committing Type I and Type II errors. Type I error is committed when one rejects the null hypothesis when the null hypothesis is in fact 'true'. Type II error takes place when one accepts (fails to reject) the null hypothesis when the null hypothesis is in fact 'false'. Rosenthal and Rosnow (1991: 41) colorfully describe these two errors an inferential mistake involving "gullibility" (Type I error) while Type II error involves being "blind to a relationship."

These errors are inversely related: when the likelihood of committing Type I error is decreased the likelihood of Type II error is increased. The probability of committing either type of error is determined by setting an alpha level required to accept a hypothesis. A higher than usual alpha level (say, $p = .10$) increases the likelihood of committing Type I error while a lower than usual alpha level (say, $p = .01$) increases the possibility of committing Type II error.

When explaining the rationale for this deciding the alpha level, statistical theorists almost uniformly turn to a utility model of decision-making, calling on

researchers to balance risks and costs of the two types of errors. Summers, Peters and Armstrong explain that the goal of researchers is in deciding which error to make, and “it would make sense to choose limits that balance expected costs of Type I and Type II errors. (1981: 248)” Likewise, Mood and Graybill (1963: 279) explain, “to arrive at a reasonable value for alpha requires an experimenter to weigh the consequences of making a Type I and Type II error.” Rosenthal and Rosnow (1991: 455) suggest that the balancing is in effect a practical judgment of consequences: If an investigator has decided to set alpha (a) at .05 and is conducting a test of significance with power = .40, beta (b) will be 1-.40, or .60. Then the ratio of b /a will be $.60/.05 = 12$ implying a conception of Type I errors (a) as 12 times more serious than Type II errors (b).

The consequentiality of factual decision-making, however, is most apparent when statistics textbooks create a practical context. Heiman (1992: 292-293) explains the reasoning with the following concrete illustration:

We typically set alpha at .05 because .05 is an acceptably low probability of making a Type I error. This may not sound like a big deal. But the next time you fly in an airplane, consider the possibility that the designer’s belief that the wings will stay on may actually be a Type I error. A 5% chance is scary enough – we certainly do not want more than a 5% chance that the wings will fall off. Sometimes we want to reduce the probability of making a Type I error even further, and then we usually set alpha at .01. For example, we might have set alpha at .01 if our smart pill [a hypothetical intelligence-inducing pill] had some dangerous side-effects. We would be concerned about subjecting the public to these side-effects, especially if the pill does not work. Intuitively, it takes even more to convince us that the pill works, and thus there is a lower probability that we will make an error.

Similarly, Hays (1994: 284) explains: Within contexts such as the test of a new medication in which Type I error is abhorrent, setting a extremely small is manifestly appropriate. Here, considerations of Type II error are actually secondary. In some instances in a social science as well, Type I error clearly is to be avoided, and from the outset the experimenter wants to be sure that this kind of error is very improbable.

Jaccard (1983: 131) also illustrates the reasoning in terms of the widely used medical scenario:

The tradition of adopting a conservative alpha level in social science research evolved from experimental settings where a given kind of error was very

important and had to be avoided. An example of such an experimental setting is that of testing a new drug for medical purposes, with the aim of ensuring that the drug is safe for the normal adult population. In this case, deciding that a drug is safe when, in fact, it tends to produce adverse reactions in a large proportion of adults is an error that is certainly to be avoided. Under these circumstances a small alpha level is selected so as to *avoid making the costly error*. With a conservative alpha level, the medical research takes little risk of concluding that the drug is safe when actually it is not. Thus, the practice of setting conservative alpha levels evolved from situations where one kind of error was extremely important and had to be avoided if possible.

Keppel (1991: 56), on the other hand, talks about what is important simply in terms of the more general intellectual and academic costs and benefits of the decision:

Every researcher must strike a balance between the two types of error. If it is important to discover new facts, then we may be willing to accept more Type I errors and thus *increase* the rejection region. On the other hand, if it is important not to clog up the literature with false facts, which is one way to view Type I errors, then we may be willing to accept more Type II errors and *decrease* the rejection region.

All these authors and many others discuss the decision-making process in terms of consequences, costs, importance, seriousness, or severity of error. In other words, research conclusions are inextricably bound up in *ad consequentiam* reasoning. In fact, the seeming objectivity of the “.05” level of significance testing is a reflection of just the opposite – an arbitrary judgment based on lack of sufficient information:

The inverse relationship of the risks of the two types of error makes it necessary to strike a reasonable balance. . . . But conventions are useful only when there is no other reasonable guide. . . . In much research, of course, there is no clear basis for deciding whether a Type I or Type II error would be more costly, and so the investigator makes use of the conventional level of determining statistical significance. (Sellitz, Jahoda, Deutsch & Cook, 1959: 418).

When making a decision regarding making type I or type II errors, the loss function associated with the two errors must be known before a rational choice concerning alpha can be made. However, experimenters in the behavioral sciences are generally unable to specify the losses associated with the two errors

of inference. *The use of the .05 or .01 level of significance in hypothesis testing is a convention.* (Kirk, 1968: 2, sec. 1.5).

Pretty clearly then, the rationale for statistical significance testing relies heavily on argumentum ad consequentiam. It seems then, that the advocate of the traditional distinction between propositions of policy and propositions of fact faces a dilemma. Unless this distinction is a chimera, either the advocate must conclude that statistical argument is grounded in a real howler (illicitly converting 'ought' to 'is'), or the advocate can conclude that scientific reasoning is not really factual reasoning at all. Neither option seems to be attractive to those who would maintain the empirical utility of distinguishing propositions of fact and policy.

4. The Pragmatics of Decision-Making

We think both dilemmas above are a reflection of still a deeper breakdown in distinctions: that between justifying the truth and falsity of propositions and justifying the rationality of their acceptance or rejection. We will not bother to rehearse the argument that statistical decision-making is concerned primarily with the latter and only indirectly with the former. The briefest review of the language quoted above should be convincing enough. Quantitative empirical research in science does not justify the truth or falsity of empirical propositions per se; rather it justifies the rationality of accepting or rejecting such propositions. Scientific theory and empirical knowledge is a matter of *deciding* what to *treat* as true or false. All of the language of statistical inference works at that level. It is a meta-level. It should not be surprising then, that ad consequentiam reasoning - matters of utility and usefulness rather than truth - should rest at the heart of empirical knowledge and reasoning. And it should not be surprising either that statistical inference and scientific reasoning is plausible reasoning based on practical presumptions. But if that is what we find in this domain of knowledge, where exactly would we find anything else?

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ISSA Proceedings 1998 - Slippery Slopes: The Reciprocal Of A Node On A Curve Or Surface



The idea of slippery slopes is a commanding and attractive metaphor. Indeed, speaking in this way has become commonplace in contemporary work in biomedical ethics.[i] It would be interesting to know whether this metaphor has a load-bearing role in philosophical analysis; whether, that is, it is anything more than *une façon de parler*, a figure of speech.[ii] In work underway I pursue this question in three theoretical contexts:

1. analogical arguments,
2. sorites arguments, and

3. the analysis of taboos.

Unless I am mistaken, we shall hit paydirt in the third context, and this is the context I wish to explore in this paper.

Slippery slopes in relation to taboos

In one of its meanings, a taboo is a deep cultural protection of a value, underwritten by broad and largely tacit societal consensus. In my usage here, a taboo is always an ordered pair X in which P is a principle protecting a value – usually a prohibition – and X is an exclusion, an embedded practice which excludes P itself from free enquiry, from the rough-and-tumble of dialectical probing. Sometimes the X -factor also precludes the *mention* in polite society of the practice prohibited by P ; but its more general implication is averting discussion of P 's merits, of whether it is a justified principle and if so by virtue of what. If, for example, P is the principle that prohibits cannibalism then X is the determination not to expose P to critical reflection or scrutiny. Indeed if X is the present-day taboo against Holocaust revisionism, the X -factor operates so tenaciously as to make of the mere raising of the revisionist possibility, no matter how tentatively, an immediate self-disqualification.**[iii]** In the absence of the X -factor, P cannot be a taboo. In societies such as ours there is a principle which strenuously disenjoins urinating in public, but it is no taboo. Except in the most delicate of circles, there is no corresponding bar against explanation and justification, or meeting arguments which might be marshaled against the prohibition (e.g., that there is no such prohibition for males in Japan). Taboos, then, are special cases of principles or points of view attended by dialectically weak – or even non-existent – track records. Of course, there are whole classes of dialectically impotent statements, whose lack of justificatory vigour is a reflection of the fact that they are seen as not *needing* defence or justification. They are “self-evident”, or “common knowledge”, or some such thing. With taboos, however, dialectical impotence is less a matter of judging that a defence is not needed than that it should not even be *attempted*. (I return to this point.)

Many taboos were once religious proscriptions. This helps in understanding both the X -factor and the dialectical impotence that attaches to taboos even after they have lost their religious sanctions. Though shorn of this expressly religious backing, we seem to retain them out of culturally transmitted habit. When they were religious laws, they required no justification by us; indeed to raise the question of whether something commanded by God might require our justification is to risk the sin of hubris. These features are retained as the X -factor and,

relatedly, a pallid dialectical track record. Other taboos such as the one against the eating of pork may be seen as risk averse generalizations from genuinely factual data, a strong induction from an occasional upset tummy.**[iv]** Epistemically, the generalizations are hasty; prudentially they are safe. Risk averse behaviour is tailor-made for taboos. In fact, a good deal of risk averse behaviour involves the holding of generalizations that we don't know how to justify, or which we subconsciously see as having no inductive justification. (Of course, it doesn't follow that risk averse *behaviour* is likewise without strategic justification). Thus our disinclination to raise the question of how these generalizations are justified, and the consequent lightness of the dialectical track record.

Let me here enter a caveat. I do not assume that my conception of taboo concurs fully with contemporary anthropological usage. My first interest is in structures of X sort, and is much less in the lexical niceties. Indeed, perhaps it would be prudent to stipulate my "taboo" as a technical term.**[v]**

Taboos come in degrees, though not exactly on a scale of one to ten. At the high end we could expect to find the cannibalism taboo; slightly lower down, perhaps, the incest taboo; and – almost another thing entirely – the prohibition, in 1948 say, of homosexuality. These differences reflect themselves mainly in our response to violation of a P, rather than that of an X. No one in my neighbourhood is a cannibal, but I daresay that the discovery of a cannibalistic cult next door would be met with utter outrage and outright condemnation.**[vi]** Incest differs on two counts. Comparatively speaking, there is a lot of it around, and when it is discovered it is prosecuted, and may be the object of substantial even though less sweeping public disapproval. The prohibition against homosexuality was much sinned against even in 1948; but except for errant celebrities, a homosexual's defections were the object of local rather than wholly general public condemnation. For all the differences, these prohibitions retained their status as taboos by virtue of the X-factor, the factor which precludes any enquiry into the permissibility of P-hood of a sort which might eventuate in downgrading the prohibited practice from its standing as a *public wrong*. In certain cases, therefore, taboos are a kind of social hypocrisy. They lend, in any event, hefty encouragement to discretion. It is an interesting dynamic, in which getting caught is sometimes the greater wrong than what one was caught at.

In some respects, taboos resemble conventions. Conventions I take in David Lewis' way; they are solutions of co-ordination problems.**[vii]** In a classic

example, the conventions on driving – on the right in countries such as Canada and on the left in countries such as Japan – are regulators of traffic's ebb and flow. In such cases, there is no prior fact of the matter as to which side of the road is the correct side to drive on in Canada, or in Japan. The only facts of the matter are the facts which our respective conventions constitute. If taboos resemble conventions closely enough, there is reason to think that, in some cases at least, they will imbibe this feature of them. If so, the existence of the X-factor can now be seen to be a highly-motivated constituent of such taboos. Taboos carry the cachet of high moral dudgeon and of confident certainty. Under their sway, people are easily disgusted and quick to dismiss the contrary view out of hand. If a taboo is a convention or sufficiently like a convention, there is no prior fact of the matter which the taboo reports or honours. The X-factor prohibits open enquiry. It does so for a reason, as we now see. Open inquiry might well disclose that the taboo records no prior fact, hence no fact which could be seen as sustaining it. This in turn affords an explanation of the dialectical impotence of taboos; for to scrutinize a taboo is to collapse it. **[viii]**

Taboos sometimes have something of the character of the first principles or absolute presuppositions of normal science. They resemble Kuhnian paradigms. If a paradigm cracks, nothing less than a chunk of normal science is in the balance, and a scientific revolution may well be in store. If a taboo cracks, events of like gravamen portend – the collapse of a large chunk of case law, or of public morality, and the prospect of an axiological revolution.

Taboos are the natural enemy of other principles we hold dear. One of these is our affection for free and open inquiry. Taboos embed principles P under the protection of dialectical exclusions X. The Ps of Xs have not had occasion to win their dialectical spurs. This makes them especially vulnerable to attack when it chances that they are attached. So, taboos sometimes crack. They wear out. They lapse. When this happens, violations of the X-factor are made in ways that are tolerated or even sponsored by decision-makers and shapers of public opinion – Walter Lipmann's "dominant élites". Thus a practice heretofore subject to a taboo might become the subject of a Government White Paper, a series of editorials in the *Times*, or even the "full hour" with Larry King. When the X-factor is violated by dominant élites, there is a good chance that this alone constitutes its retirement, and we have it straightaway that the P in question has lost its status as a taboo. It is now fair game for dialectical attack which its *prior* status as a taboo has given it scant fire-power now to resist. This is a point worth

emphasizing. So I ask the reader a blunt question, "What precisely would you say in defence of the proposition that cannibalism is an abomination?" If I might answer my own question, *I haven't a clue*.

The sexual revolution

Some taboos prohibit what people in any event have little interest in or stomach for, as we have seen. Others prohibit what lots and lots of people are keen to do and would do but for the prohibition.

Let us think of the former as *pro forma* and the latter as *substantial* taboos. Let me now suggest that the collapse of a substantial taboo constitutes a slippery slope. In its use here, slippery slopes aren't arguments, not anyhow in any sense that a logician would want for his technical appropriations. Rather they are histories of dialectic, patterns of public and private acceptance and rejection, having, to be sure, arguments as constituent elements, as well the structural features that I shall now try to describe. It will facilitate the exposition if I take as an example a slope that has been slipped down pretty nearly as far as can be, a complex social event of the last fifty years. Before turning to the example, it is useful to stress an asymmetry between what people would have thought of it in 1948 and what people think of it now, a point to which I shall also recur. Let us now re-visit or, as the case may be, imagine the year 1948. The more or less settled consensus about sexual relations was that they were forbidden except under the following conditions: Marriage, and *therefore*, heterosexuality, adulthood and monogamy; as well as consent, privacy, and the "penile-vaginal modality" (if the linguistic barbarism can be forgiven).

I do not say that the consensus in question had the status of a taboo in 1948. Indeed it was a convention under attack. The attack was modest. It proposed a small relaxation of the conditions cited in (1). Marriage would be displaced by engagement, or going-steady or some such thing, hence by a simulacrum of it. Yet in the space of a dozen years, only the conditions of heterosexuality, adulthood, consent and privacy would remain, and the adulthood condition was in process of re-interpretation as biological maturity.

This, of course, was the beginning of the sexual revolution. Once the only-in-marriage condition lapsed, it became increasingly difficult to retain the conditions implied by it. **[ix]** Even as the sexual revolution was in full flower, two taboos remained, though they endured with differential tenacity. One was the prohibition against homosexuality, the other against paedophilia. Even so, the taboo against homosexuality was fraying. How could it not have done? If the marriage-condition

had lapsed, and the penile-vaginal condition[x] too, there remained little to say for the heterosexuality which those constraints imply. The heterosexuality constraint was now on its own. Indeed, the conditions that were left in force bore all the weight of our disapproval of sexual licence: adulthood, consent, and privacy, supplemented perhaps by the desiderata of tenderness and respect.

The original prohibition was against all sexual relations save in marriage. When marriage ceased being a sacrament and was well on its way to what a “pre-nup” would provide – “a mere piece of paper” as the saying has it – what was there to say for its *utter dominance* as a constraint? Indeed, upon reflection, what was to be said for it *at all* as a constraint? With the marriage-condition gone, I say again that the other specifically anti-homosexuality conditions lost their most secure mooring.

Of course, the permissibility that came to attach to heterosexual relations outside of marriage was not transmitted to homosexuality by the relation of logical consequence. When the only-in-marriage condition was in effect, it did make homosexual relations impermissible on the received, and still widely held, view of marriage. But to infer permissibility of homosexual relations from the collapse of the only-in-marriage condition would be the ancient fallacy of denying the antecedent, a logical howler and a logical embarrassment. The linkage that we are trying to describe is not a logical but rather a dialectical one. To see how this is so, let us remark that the inference we have denounced could be redeemed with a replacement premiss, however implausible on its face, to the effect that the marriage-condition is the only prohibitor of homosexual practice.

The question now is whether there is any reason to suppose that the sexual revolution were actually disposed to accept this premiss, and if so, why? Actual dialectical experience suggests that they were in a classic situation *ad ignorantiam*, as we ourselves are today. Short of the only-in-marriage condition, we found ourselves without convincing or plausible cases to press against homosexuality. It is a situation in which continued resistance takes on a texture of arbitrariness and prejudice. It is a situation in which our failure to find a convincing case against homosexuality eventuates in a disposition to suppose that no such case exists. It is disposition, that is to say, to favour an *argument ad ignorantiam*[xi]:

1. We don't know of a convincing case against homosexuality.
2. Therefore, there is no such case.

Ad ignorantiam arguments are sometimes fallacious, needless to say. But they

commit no fallacy where interpretable *either* as an autoepistemic argument such as

A. If there were a convincing case against homosexuality we would know what it is (by now)

B. But we don't

A. So there isn't *or* as an abductive argument such as:

A. The best explanation of our not having a convincing case against homosexuality is that there is no case

A. We haven't, in fact, a convincing case against homosexuality

A. So it is plausible to conjuncture that no such case exists.

The autoepistemic argument is valid by modus tollens; and while the abductive argument is invalid if construed deductively, this is not the intended construal, as the tentativeness of its conclusion makes clear. In each case the main weight of the argument is borne by the first premiss. It is one thing to know whether these premisses are actually true; it is another and easier thing to suppose that in our failure to find convincing case against homosexuality, we might come to *believe* that they are true. The key factor in this dynamic is *dialectical fatigue*. With the lapse of the marriage-only condition we find that we have nothing effective to say against homosexuality. This produces dialectical fatigue which, in turn, delivers the key premiss in the autoepistemic and abductive arguments here sketched. Thus while there is no direct logical link between the rescindment of the marriage condition and the non-existence of a persuasive case against homosexuality, the dialectical fatigue which ensued upon the retirement of that condition does indeed set up some logic, and some rather powerful logic at that.

The attack on the marriage-only condition was intended to promote the modest-seeming reform we have noted. Those pressing for this reform hadn't – for the most part anyhow – the slightest idea or intent that homosexuality would be in the ambit of its escape. They pressed their arguments innocently. They were innocent of two things, one already noted, and another which I shall mention now. The first is that when a taboo loses the protection of its X-factor, the principle it previously protected lacks the dialectical means to defend itself. The second point is that once its X-protection is lost, a newly qualified P stands little chance of reacquiring the status of a taboo, hence the protection of the X-factor. This is certainly empirically borne out by what is known of axiological collapse on the hoof, i.e., in real-life. The likely explanation is that taboos are the result of cultural evolution, and that once the taboo against unmarried sex collapsed, the culture lacked the

time to re-set the taboo a notch below, so to speak.

We see in this, well enough, the elements of slippery slope. Slope is the reduction in the number, and sometimes the weight, of the original clauses of a prohibition. Slipperiness is the lack of dialectical resources to minimize the elimination of them, indeed to cut off at any point. (And here we see the general pattern of sorites arguments). If what I have been suggesting in this section has any merit, we should ready ourselves for more slippage still in the arena of sexual mores. For reasons of time, however, I shall have to defer this issue to another occasion.

NOTES

i. See, for example, Wesley J. Smith, *Forced Exit: the Slippery Slope From Assisted Suicide to Legalized Murder*, New York: Times Books 1997, and Peter Singer, *Rethinking Life and Death: The Collapse of Our Traditional Ethics*, New York: St. Martin's Press 1994.

ii. Not to overlook Douglas Walton's book, *Slippery Slope Arguments*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1992.

iii. I thank Paul Viminiz for the example.

iv. Conversation with Kent Peacock suggested this possibility to me.

v. A suggestion put to me by Barry Allen.

vi. Against this it might be doubted that there is any taboo against cannibalism. In countries like Canada, there is no economic or sacerdotal motive for people even to consider the cannibalistic option. So they don't; and that they don't is reflected in the uniformity of their behaviour. If a taboo always involves a prohibition, we may wonder whether it is possible to prohibit what no one seems to have the slightest interest in doing. This suggests that Canadian avoidance of cannibalism is not the result of a taboo. On the other hand, no one in Canada wears Elizabethan garb. One could say that non-Elizabethan dress is the settled Canadian practice. There is nothing to say for there being a prohibition against Elizabethan costuming, and nothing for there being a taboo against it. Even so, the two cases harbour a significant difference. If people started dressing in this fashion, others might approve or disapprove; but there would be no prohibition. If people started setting up Hell's Angels' Cannibal clubs, there would, as I say, be outrage and universal condemnation. The taboo which was only counterfactually in play would now be realized. (I am indebted to Bryson Brown on this point.) In contrast with the situation in Canada, as Inga Dolinina informs me, during the siege of Leningrad in the Great Patriotic War, cannibalism was rife, and it continued after the siege was lifted, more as a matter of choice than of dire

necessity, and had to be stopped by vigorous intervention of state authorities.

vii. David K. Lewis, *Convention: A Philosophical Study*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1969.

viii. In a nice turn of phrase suggested by Michael Stingl in conversation.

ix. Until the pill, timely marriage was also a fail-safe strategy against bastardy, itself then the subject of a taboo. It is difficult to overestimate the influence of contraceptive technologies in the heterosexual sector of the sexual revolution. The story of this influence is well-understood and need not be developed here.

x. Itself a casualty of the displacement of the only-in-marriage condition, as it relates to procreative intent.

xi. John Locke is the originator of the name “ad ignorantiam”. In its use here it means “to ignorance”. In the concluding paragraphs of chapter 17 of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) Locke describes the argumentum ad ignorantiam as follows: “Another way that men ordinarily use to drive others and force them to submit their judgements and receive the opinion in a debate is to require the adversary to admit what they allege as a proof, or to assign a better”. Thus, if you are ignorant of such a proof, you must yield; and my argument against you is directed to that ignorance. Locke did not think that ad ignorantiam arguments were fallacious as such, but this has not stopped writers of the present day taking the opposite view. On a common contemporary conception of it, an ad ignorantiam is an argument whose elementary form is It is not known that not-P Therefore, P. Here, too, “ad ignorantiam” speaks for itself. I indicate in the body of this chapter, just below, why certain instances of this form are not fallacious.

ISSA Proceedings 1998 - The Effects Of Dialectical Fallacies In Interpersonal And Small Group

Discussions: Empirical Evidence For The Pragma-Dialectical Approach



1. Introduction

Since Brockriede (1975) and O'Keefe (1977) publicly recognized the importance of studying arguments as they are made in the context of everyday discourse (O'Keefe's argument²), argumentation scholars have been increasingly interested in studying the phenomenon in

terms of its value as a communication activity rather than a logical exercise. Rhetoricians have long been interested in the function of argumentation in persuading an audience but it has only been recently that argumentation scholars have taken up the task of examining how patterns of reason giving are created and used by those involved in everyday conversation. Scholars such as Jackson & Jacobs (1980), Trapp (1983), Walton (1992), and van Eemeren and his colleagues (e.g., van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1992; van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson, & Jacobs, 1993) have extended the study of argumentation from the study of formal and informal logic structures to the study of the ways in which arguments function in resolving disputational communication.

One of the first and most productive lines of inquiry regarding the study of argumentation as it occurs in discourse has been the pragma-dialectical approach originating with van Eemeren & Grootendorst (1992). The pragma-dialectical (PD) perspective extends the traditional normative logical approach of evaluating arguments by creating standards for reasonableness that have a functional rather than a structural focus. An argument is evaluated in terms of its usefulness in moving a critical discussion toward a well reasoned resolution rather than concentrating exclusively on the relationship of premises to conclusions. The PD approach recognizes the importance of normative standards for judging the strength or cogency of single argumentative acts but in addition recognizes that arguments are constructed in order to achieve a communicative goal.

As evaluative criteria for the quality of arguments, the PD posits several normative guidelines for how communication in resolving or managing a dispute should proceed. While several argumentation scholars have elaborated, extended,

or some way adopted portions of PD (e.g., Walton, 1992; Weger & Jacobs, 1995), there has been little direct empirical research seeking to verify that the violation of the kinds of discussion rules identified by van Eemeren & Grootendorst (1992) indeed causes problems in the management of disagreements. The purpose of this essay is to examine empirical research in interpersonal and small group argument in order to discover what harms, if any, result from the violation of rules for critical discussion. The essay will begin by examining the effects of following and violating discussions rules on the ability to resolve disputes and the quality of the decisions that result. The next section of the essay will examine the interpersonal and relational outcomes that are associated with following or violating discussion rules as articulated by van Eemeren and his associates.

In *Argumentation, Communication and Fallacies*, van Eemeren & Grootendorst (1992) lay the foundation for the pragmadialectical approach to argumentation study. They begin by arguing that the standard treatment of argumentation and fallacies either ignores the communicative functions in favor of examining reason/claim relationships or abandon entirely normative standards of evaluation in favor of examining whether the argument achieves the goal of gaining the acceptance of an audience. The traditional logical approach evaluates arguments based on decontextualized, abstract structural features of arguments that are applied across situations. The rhetorical perspective, on the other hand, tends to evaluate the quality of an argument in terms of its persuasiveness. PD provides an advance on these perspectives by suggesting that normative guidelines for evaluating the quality of an argument requires attention to the communicative functions served by arguing as well as the logical structure of the lines of reasoning used in the dialogue.

The functional perspective on argument is based first on the belief that argumentation is a communicative activity. And second, it is based on a functional view of communication in which messages are studied in terms of the purposes they serve and the goals they achieve. At its most fundamental level, the purpose of argumentative dialogue is the resolution and management of real or potential disputes. Therefore, it is a mistake to evaluate arguments out of the context in which they are used or in a way that looks only at the logical structure without a description of the way certain argumentative moves effect the ability to manage or resolve a dispute based on good reasons. A functional perspective requires that arguments be studied, in part, by how they contribute to the communicative goals of resolving or managing a dispute.

The PD perspective also commits itself to a dialectical framework in which arguments are assumed to be the basis of critical discussions aimed at arriving at the truth or falsity of some standpoint or set of standpoints. It is therefore, not enough to simply describe arguments and their effects. A complete picture of argument can only be arrived at by examining the quality of an argument both in terms of its usefulness in resolving or managing a dispute and in terms of its validity or cogency according to normative standards of reasonableness.

The dual requirements of usefulness and reasonableness have given rise to ten normative criteria for conducting rational critical discussions (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1992). These rules are organized around the functions that argumentative speech acts perform at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of a critical discussion. In the opening stage of a dispute a speaker presents a standpoint as true while their counterpart casts doubt upon it through presenting objections or counterproposals. In order for the dialogue to continue toward a resolution of the disagreement, arguers must maintain a climate of open exchange of ideas. The first rule presented in the pragma-dialectical approach is that, "parties must not prevent each other from presenting standpoints or casting doubt on standpoints" (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1992; p. 108). Tactics such as attacking an opponent personally violate this rule because it is an attempt to forestall discussion by disqualifying an opponent to speak on the issue, or to distract the opponent from the issue under discussion. For a critical discussion to advanced past confrontation, arguers must also be willing to defend standpoints. The second rule for critical discussions requires that interlocutors defend standpoints once entered into discussion. Violation of the either of the first two rules essential precludes rational testing of the truth of a proposition.

At the argumentation stage PD discussion rules chiefly concern the ways in which lines of reasoning are developed and how logical structures are applied to defending standpoints. Rules three and four require that protagonists and antagonists extend their reasoning in a way that is relevant to their own and their opponent's positions regarding the standpoint under consideration. Rule five deals with the responsibility of arguers to accurately represent the expressed and unexpressed premises that each party is actually accountable for. This rule declares as unacceptable the attack on an unexpressed premise that is either not relevant to the opponent's standpoint or that the opponent has not committed herself to defending. Rules six and seven prohibit the representation of a premise as accepted or defended as true if the starting point has not been accepted or conclusively defended. The sixth and seventh rules also prohibit the denial of a

previously accepted or conclusively defended premise. The final normative guideline at the argumentation stage stipulates that reasons ought to be logically related to the standpoint(s) they are meant to defend. Standpoints that can't, at least in principle, be shown to follow logically from the arguments offered to support them, must be withdrawn from the discussion.

The ninth rule for the rational management of critical discussions involves the closing stage. The ninth rule necessitates that standpoints that are conclusively defeated or upon which doubt has been cast must be withdrawn. The goal of offering arguments that support or cast doubt upon a standpoint is to come to some conclusion about the point at issue. Rule nine is important because it recognizes that an issue can only be resolved if discussants are willing to recognize and acknowledge that their standpoint has been shown to be untenable.

Rule ten applies at all stages of a critical discussion. Rule ten requires that arguments be made clearly and unambiguously and that an opponent's arguments must be given a faithful and charitable interpretation. Resolving a dispute on the merits of each person or group's case depends on both party's cooperation. The use of ambiguous wording, syntax, or logical schemes prevents cooperative discussion because what exactly is at issue or even whether or not a dispute actually exists is open to question. Cooperative disagreement management also depends on each party's ability and willingness to accurately interpret their opponent's messages so that counter reasoning is directed at the actual point at issue in the dispute.

These normative assumptions about what is required to successfully negotiate a controversy have a great deal of intuitive and theoretical appeal. Recent research has provided evidence of the PD model as a tool for argument criticism (e.g., van Eemeren et al, 1993). Little, if any, direct research has been conducted that examines the outcomes of following or violating these rules, however. Fortunately, a critical examination of empirical research in group and interpersonal argument illustrates that following or violating these rules are related to the kinds of decisions that are reached regarding the point at issue as well as the perceived satisfaction with the interaction, the perceived competence of the speaker, and the perceived quality of the relationship.

2. Fallacies and Quality of Decision Making in Group Argument

Research regarding the outcomes of critical discussions have largely appeared in

the small group decision making literature. In general, two qualities of decision making outcomes have been studied. One is whether or not a group is able to come to a consensus. From a PD position, coming to a consensus about a standpoint is not essential but it is preferable since the goal of a critical discussion is to resolve a dispute to the satisfaction of all parties. Research indicates that violating discussion rules prevents groups from coming to consensus.

The failure to defend a standpoint, a violation of rule two, has been found to predict whether a group comes to a consensus (Canary, Brossmann, & Seibold, 1987; Hirokawa & Pace, 1983; Pace, 1985). For example, in a study examining low and high consensus groups, Canary et. al (1987) found that low consensus groups tended to produce more unsupported assertions than the high consensus groups. Furthermore, Pace (1985) found that standpoints were developed by a variety of group participants whether or not there was overt disagreement in high consensus, but not low consensus, groups. These studies point out the importance of offering evidence for standpoints in producing mutually agreeable decisions. The use of reasoning and support for asserted standpoints facilitates the critical examination of the issue by the group and exposes flaws in the quality of decisions advocated by group members. It is easier to derive a consensus about a decision when the flawed decision alternatives are unmasked. Group members are more persuaded to come to a common assessment about a decision alternative when they have been offered reasons to do so.

Another interesting characteristic of argument in high and low consensus groups involves the willingness of group members to switch their position during a discussion. Pace (1985) found that members of high consensus groups appeared to be more likely to explore both sides of a point at issue by offering reasons that both support and cast doubt upon it. This finding offers indirect support for the importance of following discussion rules that require that parties be willing to give up defeated standpoints and be willing to accept opposing standpoints that have been successfully defended. When arguers are willing to explore and ultimately give up their own perspective in favor of a more reasonable alternative they are also more likely to find common ground in coming to a mutually agreeable conclusion based on the merits of the case for the standpoint under discussion. On the other hand, refusing to admit that a standpoint has been defeated and failing to accept an argument that is reasonable prevents groups from agreeing about which position appears to be the most sensible.

Finally, it appears that groups that reach consensus tend to follow rules regarding

the relevance of their contributions to resolving the dispute (e.g., Gouran & Geonetta, 1977; Saine & Bock, 1973). Gouran and Geonetta (1977) for example, found that non consensus groups tended to be characterized by more random contributions than consensus groups. Non consensus groups also tend to be less responsive to issues raised by group members than consensus groups (Saine & Bock, 1973). Keeping argumentative contributions relevant leads to consensus because the discussion stays on track toward resolution. As van Eemeren & Grootendorst (1987) predict, the use of irrelevant argumentation prevents productive outcomes.

Along with predicting whether a group is able to reach consensus on an issue, violating rules for critical discussion is also associated with the quality of the decision a group makes. For example, Hirokawa and Pace (1983) found that groups that make effective decisions[i] engage in more support and defense of standpoints offered by group members than groups that make less effective decisions. This study indicates that the failure to defend standpoints once they are met with scrutiny, and offering standpoints with little or no reasoning in support of them, lead to conclusions that are judged to be unwarranted. Leathers (1970; 1972) has also found that irrelevant remarks (violation of rules three and four), negative messages (violation of rule one), and highly abstract statements (violation of rule ten) are all associated with decisions deemed by independent raters to be of poor quality. Small group research also indicates that groups who leave inferences implicit (Leathers, 1970), and groups who treat unexamined or unchallenged inferences as though they were facts tend to make poor decisions. Along with Leathers (1970), Hirokawa and Pace (1983) also find that ineffective groups tend to draw inferences that are at best only weakly supported by the facts of the case and that are characterized by unsound reasoning. Furthermore, the ineffective groups tend not to explore the strength of their inferential reasoning and once the inferences are drawn, treat them as uncontested facts upon which they base their decisions. It seems clear then that failing the requirement to produce logically sound arguments (rules six, seven, and eight) in a critical discussion leads to coming to conclusions that are judged to be of lower quality.

3. Fallacies and Interpersonal Outcomes

In general, critical research involving the pragma-dialectical perspective focuses on evaluating the effects fallacies produce on the strength of the reasoning used

to arrive at a conclusion or the effects fallacies have on qualities of the conversation itself. It is intuitively appealing to predict that fallacious reasoning in interpersonal disagreements will have identity management and relational impacts beyond the more instrumentally oriented outcomes that have been the focus of dialectical argumentation research. Structural properties of conversation seem to point a preference for at least the appearance of rationality in managing disagreements (Jackson & Jacobs, 1980). It seems likely that serious deviations from rational dialogue will produce less favorable evaluations of those who argue fallaciously.

However, because everyday arguers don't generally hold each other to strict standards of traditional logic in resolving disagreements, the traditional approach to fallacious argument doesn't provide an especially useful framework for examining fallacies in interpersonal disagreements. The PD perspective's conceptualization of fallacies as consisting of conversational moves that derail the problem solving process maps on well to what is known about how qualities of conflictual interaction are associated with identity and relational outcomes.

To begin, research indicates that tactics designed to prevent another party from advancing a standpoint are associated with negative perceptions of the arguer and the relationship. The use of ad hominem in the form of personal criticism and defensiveness have been shown to be associated with less relationship satisfaction (e.g., Gottman, 1979; 1994) and with perceiving the partner to be a less competent communicator (Canary and Spitzberg, 1989; Canary, Brossmann, Brossmann, & Weger, 1995). Complaints that focus on personal characteristics are perceived less favorably than complaints focusing on behaviors (Alberts, 1988). Finally, personal complaints tend to be associated with creating feelings of shame and rage leading to out of control escalation in personal disagreements (Retzinger, 1991). The use of ad hominem not only is logically irrelevant to the claim being examined it also prevents critical examination of a claim by creating strong emotional reactions in listeners that make critical inquiry almost impossible.

Another way in which conversational partners attempt to discourage the examination of a standpoint is to draw attention away from the substance of a partner's complaint by responding to it with the assertion that the act of complaining is itself so objectionable that the respondent need not be held accountable for answering the complaint. In other words, a person may discourage the examination of the standpoint by complaining about the complaint

(Matoesan, 1993). Similarly, cross complaining can inhibit the examination of a standpoint by offering a competing complaint about the complainer's own actions, attitudes, or intentions. Complaining about a complaint is a type of ad hominem attack that forestalls discussion of the original standpoint by asserting the act of issuing the complaint points to some disagreeable quality in the complainer. Cross complaining is a form of *tu quo que* in which the original complaint is disqualified based on some equally disagreeable and complainable, though unrelated, attribute found in the source of the complaint. Cross complaining can be treated as a fallacy of consistency or as a fallacy of obscuration in which the dispute becomes mired in the attempt to resolve two entirely unrelated standpoints simultaneously. Each party in a cross complaint situation is attempting to defend their own standpoint while attacking their opponent's unrelated assertion. Cross complaining both prevents another from advancing a standpoint and creates an over complicated mixed dispute in which the progression toward resolution of one issue is irrelevantly linked to the resolution of an unrelated issue. Both complaints about complaints (Alberts, 1988; 1989) and cross complaining (Gottman, 1979) have been found to be judged unfavorably or associated with dissatisfaction with a romantic partner.

Along with fallacies that prevent others from advancing standpoints, it appears that the failure to defend a standpoint (rule two) and the failure to offer reasons in support of a standpoint (rules two and seven) are related to problematic interpersonal outcomes. First, a great deal of research indicates that couples who engage in demand/withdraw interaction patterns have a substantially greater chance of being dissatisfied and eventually terminating their relationship (Gottman, 1995; Heavy, Layne, & Christensen, 1993). The demand/withdraw pattern can be interpreted as a violation of the requirement that disputants defend their standpoints when asked to do so. Characteristic of the demand/withdrawal patterns is one party attempting to advance or cast doubt upon a standpoint while the opposing party stonewalls by evading the issue or simply refusing to do anything beyond reassert their original standpoint. Stonewalling and withdrawing prevent resolution of important relationship issues, issues which left unresolved create tension and dissatisfaction with the relationship and the partner.

Second, standards for the logical acceptability of an argument require that a claim be accompanied by a supporting proposition that implies the truth of the asserted claim. Arguments which fail to provide reasoning for assertions

therefore violate both rule two and rule seven (which requires that arguments be logically sound). Research by Canary and his associates (e.g., Canary, Brossmann, Sillars, & LoVette, 1987; Canary, et al, 1995) indicate that conversations that are characterized by the use of unsupported assertions result in less satisfaction with the interaction, with the perception that the conversational partner is an ineffective arguer, and with perceptions of decreased satisfaction with the relationship. Canary et al (1995) conclude by suggesting that everyday arguers have minimum standards for rationality in resolving disputes. In other words, in managing ordinary disputes, conversational partners prefer reasoned discourse over simple assertion and counter assertion. Not only does the use of reasoned discourse produce better decisions it produces more favorable interpretations of the conversational partner and the relationship.

4. Implications and Conclusion

This research review points to several ways in which the fields of argumentation, interpersonal, and small group communication intersect and offer implications for each other. One important implication is the usefulness of evaluating and studying small group and interpersonal conflict in terms of dialectical fallacies. Research in small group and especially in interpersonal conflict resolution tends to focus on strategies and tactics as they relate to interpersonal dimensions of the interaction. Rarely does research on interpersonal interaction examine conflict tactics in terms of their acceptability as rational contributions to the resolution of a dispute (cf. Canary et al, 1987; Canary, Weger, & Stafford, 1991; Canary et al, 1995). Furthermore, as Gottman (1994) admits, the relationship of behaviors such as personal criticism, defensiveness, and withdrawal to relational outcomes is more descriptive than theoretical. One possible theoretical explanation for this relationship is that the use of unproductive tactics prevents disputes from being resolved in ways that are acceptable and/or workable for the parties involved. When problems go unresolved partners build resentment toward each other and feel that the costs of staying in the relationship outweigh the rewards. Resolutions to interpersonal disputes that are arrived through a process of reason giving and rational testing of ideas may not only produce logically sound conclusions but also personally satisfying ones as well.

Another implication of this research review is that argumentation scholarship would benefit by paying more attention to the relational as well as the content dimension of argumentative messages. For the most part, argument research devotes its attention to the propositional content of the messages in exclusion to

any meaning the messages have for the identity of the hearer or the relationship between speaker and hearer. The dialectical approaches to argumentation theory, while better than traditional logical approaches, still tends to overlook the ways in which identity management and relationship goals have implications for the way people produce and respond to arguments. While correctly pointing out that speech acts such as expressives (i.e., messages that express a speaker's feelings) can contribute or detract from the progress of a critical discussion, van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1993) largely ignore the relational dimensions inherent in speech acts such as assertives, directives, declaratives, and so on. For example, the fallacy of ad hominem can be accomplished through an assertive speech act by simply asserting that an opponent has poor character. An ad hominem, however, produces poor argument both because it shifts the focus of the dispute to an irrelevant issue and because personal attacks create a hostile and defensive communication climate in which an arguer's attention to identity management and repair become more important than the original standpoint at issue. Being personally attacked also creates strong emotional reactions such as shame and rage (Retzinger, 1991) that place cognitive demands on the disputant that makes productive thinking about the situation difficult if not impossible (Zillman, 1990). The research on small group, interpersonal, and relational argument and conflict can be taken together to suggest that normative requirements for an ideal model of critical discussion are operative in everyday instances of dispute resolution. We can see that the system developed by van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1987) for evaluating argumentation has more than intuitive appeal. Empirical research suggests that there are a number of instrumental, relational, and identity management advantages to avoiding dialectical fallacies.

NOTES

i. Effective and ineffective groups were determined by having independent judges rate the quality of each groups decision along four evaluative criteria.

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ISSA Proceedings 1998 - On The Role Of Ethical And Axiological Arguments In The Modern Science



Can the modern science remain “neutral” with respect to ethics and values? The last decades have shown this question to become an object of intense discussions. The involvement of a man in understanding such complex objects as atomic energy, unique objects of ecology, gene engineering, microelectronics, informatics, cybernetics

and computer technology which a man himself is involved into as well as wide introduction of robots and computers in manufacturing and various life spheres of a man and society make the thesis of “ethic neutrality” of modern science questionable. The natural scientific knowledge nowadays is much more closer to humanitarian sciences in terms of investigation strategy than in the previous periods of the history development. The fabric of the modern natural scientific knowledge search is enriched with categories of duty, moral, good, values, etc. unusual to traditional approach.

The mechanisms transforming the ideals of the scientific knowledge argumentation enter the science more intensively in the second half of the XXth century by developing the noosphere concept and ideas of non-linear “highly unbalanced” thermodynamics, synergetics, modern cosmology and by expanding the system and cybernetic approaches, ideas of global evolutionism and the so called “antropic cosmological principle”. Some of these concepts are considered hereafter in order to highlight the modern science specific features.

The application of “man-centered” arguments and parameters is distinctly observed first of all in the noosphere concept of a well known Russian scientist Vernadsky that is based on the integrity idea of a man with the outer space as well as on the modern science integrity where the borders among its individual branches are obliterated and the specialisation takes part rather by problems than by certain sciences. Vernadsky wrote in 1926 in its work “Thoughts of the modern meaning of the history knowledge” that “the XXth century brings increasing radical changes in the understanding of a new time”, that it is a time of “an intensive reconstruction of our understanding of the World, ourselves, our

environment, search for the sense of being". These processes connected to the revolutionary changes and developments in physics, chemistry and astronomy change not only our notions of the matter, energy, space and time, but they represent also a specific turn of the scientific creative work in the other area – in the area of "place understanding of a man within the World order created on the scientific basis". What consequences and regulation means which go beyond the scientific notions are formed within the noosphere concept and form new ideals of World understanding and search for the sense of being. First of all, the task to build a world by renouncing a man himself and attempting to find any world understanding independent on the man nature is above the man's power, it is illusion. An observer himself, a subject, is obviously incorporated in the picture of the reality under study, in the Nature itself.

The noosphere is only a new qualitative state of biosphere where the man's intellect is called to play the decisive role. By bringing the intellect, reforming activity, thought and science, a man becomes a geological factor capable to effect the planet geological processes. Since the biosphere like the planet as a whole were formed under the joint action of both the earth and the space forces, a man himself is a creation of the earth and space forces capable for taking the whole-planet decisions in their scientific, cognitive and practical activities. Following this notion, the idea of a man domination over the Nature, the consideration of the latter as a subject independent on a man is naturally replaced with harmony idea between a man and the Nature, a man and the space and with the mankind responsibility increase for the Earth's subsequent evolution – in the favour of survival and faster formation of the noosphere within the whole planet and in every area.

Thus, the "object-based" understanding of the scientific knowledge is insufficient and even impossible from this point of view. It is "build over with" a subject-based, value-based component. The arguments themselves used in forming the modern scientific picture become axiologically filled since a man must think and act in the planet aspect. "Pride and independent" ideal of the scientific rationality of classical science where every object steps out as given by itself and not depending on an observer's (cognition subject) point of view is transformed into the non-classical ideal within which a man (cognition subject) is incorporated "into" the Nature, biosphere with its value-based and world outlook concepts.

All this results into the humanisation of science and its argumentation ideals since

a man himself, way of his living activity, his existence within the biosphere, influence on the latter and its preservation become the most “valid” arguments and acquire the whole-planet, space character. A man’s intellect implemented in the scientific thought is intended for the substantiation of the integrity idea of a man and the biosphere, their harmonisation and mutual independence, purposeful development of biosphere. All this must provide further development of our planet, otherwise the civilisation will disappear from its surface.

Let us notice that Vernadsky’s teaching of the noosphere is largely bound by the “Russian cosmism” heritage which is clearly and convincingly expressed the humanistic values forming the very basement of European civilisation. Many representatives of Russian thought caught the rupture between the rational “cold” seeing of the World and the existence of a man’s “Me” and his presence in this World.

The introduction of “man-centered” approaches and arguments into the modern science and culture occurs due to investigations carried out in the area of unbalanced process thermodynamics and the term of “arrow of time” was introduced into the scientific knowledge structure. H. Hacken suggested the term of “synergetics” for a new science that studies a joint action of many sub-systems with different origins. The result of such an interaction is the formation of a structure and a certain functioning.

The long dominated idea of self-organisation belonging to living systems only lost gradually its position under the pressure of the data accumulated, thus indicating the origin of the order from the chaos, the formation under certain conditions of new structures and self-organisation in non-organic systems too. At present, various scenaria of self-organisation are considered in a wide range of non-balanced physical, chemical, biological and social systems: in physics (hydrodynamics, lasers, non-linear oscillations), electrical engineering and electronics, chemistry, biology (morphogenetics, dynamics of populations, evolution of new kinds, immune systems), general theory of computing systems, economy, ecology, sociology. The modern science shows that exposure of such regularities in different areas leads to a substantial reconstruction of our conceptions of the world, of ideals and means of the scientific knowledge substantiation and signifies the dialogue renewal of a man with the Nature and society.

The main features of self-organised systems are their non-linearity, stochasticity, irreversibility, irrecurrability, availability of numerous sub-systems, openness. The

thoroughness of these features revealed in different areas, biological and cosmic facts as well as the data on irreversible processes in the sphere of elemental particles change revolutionary our concepts of the world. Let us consider the behaviour description of such systems in terms of “unbalanced thermodynamics” and synergetics in order to clear up why in studying the complex self-organised systems it appears the need for real conceptual changes, for revision of accepted schemes of the scientific knowledge argumentation. The open character of an overwhelming majority of systems in the Universe and the presence of a large number of sub-systems within their structures lead to continuous fluctuations, i.e. occasional deviations of parameters from their average values. Sometimes individual fluctuations or their combinations may be so strong that the existing structure doesn't withstand and decomposes. It is impossible to forecast at such turning moments (bifurcations) what direction the further development will move in, what state the system will pass into, what structure version will be “selected” by the system.

Based on the functioning analysis of self-organised systems, the modern science has made the conclusions as follows: The transfer from the past to the future (“arrow of time” manifestation) happens through the sufficient manifestation of chance and by passing from instability to stability, “order”; Determinism manifests itself in such instable systems in some cases only to counterbalance the rational model of dynamics where determinism is considered the inevitable consequence; In the situation when the former order and the structure based on it is “impaired” enough and the system is far from being balanced, even very weak fluctuations (i.e. occasional deviations or perturbations) are able to amplify the wave that can crush the previously formed structure; In accordance to functioning principles of self-organised systems, the modern man faces the need to “play through” properly possible ways of complex systems development, to analyse the reasons of their instability, to realise consequences of a man's intervention into the development mode of many natural (ecological, for example) and social (for instance, arising on national or religious basis) processes; The analysis of arising questions and possible answers is also required in studying the unbalanced systems. What will happen if ..., what price will to be paid for restoring the order from chaos, what will be the influence on the system of such a “weak” effect as ..., what is the importance of what will be lost and what will appear if ..., — questions of such a kind indicate the necessity to reject position of implicit “manipulation” and strict control over the study systems (both natural and social); “The freedom of choice” and chance are the inalienable concomitants of complex objects as if

consolidating the structure of the latter.

The specific properties of complex statistical systems appear in it as a result of the increase of “degrees of freedom” and interaction among the system elements. Since a chance is an obvious and sufficient development factor of natural and social objects, the freedom of choice is determined by understanding the extent of its possible and occasional ways of formation rather than by realisation extent of unrealised yet reality (i.e. future). And even through the areas where all processes are traditionally considered prearranged by the initial conditions, chance and uncertainty act as necessary parameters of physical objects, their significance in social and humanitarian environment is even higher since here we deal with a man whose language “makes him capable to perceive an infinitely large number of versions of the past and the future which he may be afraid of or wait with hope”. The development of thermodynamic and synergetic approaches leads to synthesis or integration of physical, chemical, biological and social components as self-organised systems displaying their own “histories”, trends and transformation irreversibility into the interconnected and interconditioned system.

The interconditionality ideas of a man and Universe, the data synthesis of elemental particle physics, molecular biology and cosmology of a “young” Universe have led to the origin of “antropic argumentation” and “antropic arguments”. Formulated in 1973 by B. Carter, the “antropic cosmological principle” analyses realisation conditions of the Universe real history, i.e. it deals with the system origin and conditionally of the Universe regularities which determine its structure and evolution. Thus, if all the laws controlling the process of the matter self-organisation within the Universe were different we just shouldn't appear in it. Everything happens in the World as it is due to our presence in it only. That “delicate” situation which shows that almost impossible logical possibility of Homo sapiens appearance and that the conditions of the Universe historical evolution were “assured” by the system of physical laws and by the knowledge of natural conditions to a high degree of accuracy has found its reflection in formulating two versions (weak and strong) of the antropic cosmological principle. What is its essence?

The first version asserts: our position in the Universe is undoubtedly favoured in the sense that it must be compatible with our existence as observers. The second version says: the Universe (and therefore, the fundamental constants which it

depends on) must be such as to allow the existence of an observer at a certain stage of its evolution.

The modern science within the limits of “anthropic cosmological principle” faces the following questions: either a “thin interlayer” of physical parameters is a “happy chance” providing the necessary conditions for the formation of highly organised structures, life and intellect? Either the “reason-based argumentation” explaining the connection between the presence of rational creatures in the Universe and the physical parameters of our World is sufficient or not? Is the Universe unique or does a number of worlds exist with different physical arrangements which define the potential “modality” of choice and ways of the Universe physical arrangement? These and other questions within the “anthropic cosmological principle” break not only the usual canons of the scientific knowledge argumentation, enrich the latter with integrating variety, choice, logic of narration (history), but aim the scientists at further theoretical search.

The “anthropic” arguments make their specific historical contribution into the Universe global evolution since any history matches the conditions of irreversibility, probability, possibility for new links to appear. The fundamental transformation of cosmology toward the openness, “playing through” the possibilities and choice is a common trend of the modern science manifesting itself by the deviation from the classical science ideal which didn’t have “either memory or history” and the language itself was cut off its past and thus off the possibility to invent future.

The consideration of different parameters effecting a system, refusal of strict means of the scientific knowledge substantiation and the appeal to the concept of occasional, probabilistic processes are demonstrated at the present stage in many medical sciences. The soviet clinical psychiatry crisis is largely explained, as some researchers point out, by its passion for the linear principle according to which any illness (psychical) must include the uniform reasons, manifestations, progress, outcome and anatomic changes (i.e. the same reason results into the same effect). Such a strictness in the thesis formulation (making a clinical diagnosis) has no ground as evidenced by the modern medical science since a fact must be taken into account that different individuals have their own physical and spiritual characters due to which the illness manifestation and progress will be different among them. The argumentation based on “impeccable”, “objective” and “unprejudiced” clinical method and expound without “personal interpretation” is not only logically groundless since the illness treatment is addressed not a

person, as clinical psychiatry declares, but the illness, i.e. the treatment is applied to "illness but not to person". The refusal of an inflexible and strict approach, the appeal to the theory of occasional processes will lead, as considered by some specialists, to the psychiatry renovation since the illness concept will be probabilistic and its origin will be principally unpredictable in a number of cases. The psychiatry will receive the freedom of will in its thermodynamic aspect. This will result into changes of opinion of the "norm" and illness and into the levelling of "boundaries" between the norm and illness by a wide spectrum of adaptational reactions. The opinion of "normal" will change along with the society depending on a medicine model.

The ethical and axiological arguments "penetrate" necessarily through other medical disciplines too. Such medical and biological science as tanatology that studies the reasons, manifestations and mechanisms of death advances especially sharp the problem of "ethical argumentation" in transplanting organs (how to avoid the ethical discrepancy: prior the donor's "alive" organ can be taken the donor himself must be "dead"); in extending the life of an ill person by means of apparatus (what arguments will be ethically grounded to turn off the apparatus, i.e. "to make this ill person dead"); in deciding the problem of life maintenance of persons doomed to death due to untreatable illnesses (to what extent are ethical the medical ethic ideals when an ill man prefers "easy death") etc.

The science enrichment with "man-centered" guides and axiological parameters, the "exacerbation" of reflection and more and more loud thesis sounding of scientist responsibility for the science results which applications may either bring the benefit to the mankind or lead to the extermination of the latter are observed already in the second half of the 40th of the current century. The real science and ethics has experienced, as M. Born wrote, the changes which make impossible to keep the old style of knowledge service in favour of this knowledge itself. We were assured that it could never bring any harm since the search for the truth is the good by itself. It was a nice sleep which we were awoken from by the World events. A. Einstein warned that there was a danger of the mankind total self-extermination that could not be disregarded. This warning sounds even more loudly on the threshold of the XXth century.

Thus, ethical and axiological arguments are used more and more widely in the modern science.

Such "from man", "reason for man" argumentation differs sharply from the

traditional scheme of the scientific knowledge substantiation in the classical science when a fact is considered true if it can be justified without referring to a man, his activity and cognition manners. The arguments used in understanding the unique evolution systems can't be ethically indifferent and the scientific investigation aimed at obtaining the true knowledge in any way is too narrow and dangerous in some cases. A necessity appears to engage the arguments setting the control over the scientific truth understanding itself. The value hierarchy which the scientific truth undoubtedly belongs to is or must be equally accompanied by such values as the good of a man and mankind in their unity and interaction, good and moral, prosperity and safety. The search for the scientific truth is "highlighted" by the axiological imperative: will a new knowledge increase the risk of existence and survival of a man, will it serve the mankind good and its interests.

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ISSA Proceedings 1998 - The Final Days: The Development Of Argumentative Discourse In The Soviet Union



The value of argument in the public sphere and its relation to social change is a concept that is shared by most communication scholars: the idea that argument in some form is an intrinsic part of democracy or at least that it is a necessary concomitant to democracy. In Johnstone's words, "[d]emocracy rests upon the use of discourse as an instrument of political change" (1974:320). Indeed, the very attempt "to marshal public opinion or public support for some policy" implies acceptance of "forms of political action that prevail in a democratic society" (Johnstone, 1974:318). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969:55) take this position a step further: "[t]he use of argument implies . . . that value is attached to gaining the adherence of one's interlocutor by means of reasoned persuasion." We suggest that the Western tradition of democracy entails the notion of doing the public's business in public. This is an important concept, one that marks a fundamental distinction among societies. While recognizing that even in the most stable democracies little of what is considered the public business actually is conducted in the open, one must nevertheless keep in mind the fact that in many authoritarian or totalitarian states there has existed no concept of the public's business apart from the government's affairs, so there is no thought of addressing concerns in the open. This notion **[i]** that some essential portion of civic business should be played out in public is the concept that provides the philosophical ground upon which policy argument may occur: in a real sense it creates space for policy argument to exist. Argument, then, may be seen as a necessary part of the process of doing the public's business; where the ground for that argument does not exist, it must somehow be created.**[ii]** But where there is no history of such a process, how does the concept develop, how does the tradition take root?

Many of the observations made in reference to Western pluralist societies assume even greater significance when applied to the role argument has played in the

socio-political changes that have in recent years transformed the former Soviet Union. In this paper we intend to explore some of the ways in which social change and argumentation interact: in particular, we will consider the way governmental information policies, accepted argumentative structures, and the whole notion of public discourse develop as society undergoes fundamental transition.

By way of background we shall review the beginnings of pluralist public policy argumentation in a specific society where none had existed previously: the Soviet Union of the pre-disintegration period. Before turning to more contemporary events, we will concentrate on two critical media incidents: the 1983 downing of the Korean airliner and the 1986 Chernobyl explosion. One must keep in mind that, all other differences notwithstanding, most political communication in the former USSR, as in the USA, was and is a mediated phenomenon that relies on mass dissemination. For that reason we will focus on the media as the purveyor of the readily available accounts of the transmission of information and opinion formation. Our methodology is historical/critical, and our corpus is drawn primarily from official print media during the period 1983 through 1991.

Of particular relevance to this discussion is the process whereby public argumentative space comes to be created. In this presentation, we explore at least one of the ways this may happen: in the movement from an authoritarian to a pluralist form of government, the space for public argument arises from the citizens' loss of faith in the existing governmental structure.^[iii] As this loss of faith intensifies, the ground for argument begins to expand and continues expanding until the process becomes self-sustaining. At this point, every incremental change in the amount of public argument intensifies the loss of faith that initiated the process, because groups and individuals begin seriously questioning the ability of their government to secure the welfare of the people. The process is recursive: opposition becomes more influential as it becomes more frequent, providing ever greater opportunities for the continued extension of argumentative ground.

Significantly, an authoritarian government's best course is to ignore the opposition. For if government participates in the discussion it legitimates the whole notion of argument as part of the process of governing. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) state that "[t]o agree to discussion means [a] readiness to see things from the viewpoint of the interlocutor." Thus, merely by participating in the argument, government sanctions the concept of oppositional debate, including the risk of losing. Moreover, "the use of argumentation implies

that one has renounced resorting to force alone, that value is attached to gaining the adherence of one's interlocutor by means of reasoned persuasion." Consequently, authoritative regimes typically do not engage in public argument; they neither justify nor provide a rationale for the actions they take. Rather, "by the use of such measures as censorship, . . . [political leaders] will try to make it difficult, if not impossible, for their opponents to achieve the conditions preliminary to any argumentation." Obviously, denying access to the state controlled media constitutes a significant restriction of the ability to engage in argumentation.

That certainly was the traditional mode in the old Soviet Union. As an example, consider the plight of Soviet dissidents. Virtually everyone in the society knew they existed; many may have even thought they had a point. Nevertheless, they continued their protests - including underground publication, or "*samizdat*" - in obscurity; the only public acknowledgment emanating from the government was the occasional arrest and trial of a writer, followed by imprisonment or exile. With no access to the media - including nearly total news blackout of court proceedings - dissidents had no means at their disposal to engage the state in public debate. Thus, their efforts had little social impact within the borders of the Soviet Union.

It is our claim, however, that the Soviet government was forced into a public debate first over Chernobyl, then over the issue of nuclear power, a situation which was unique in the history of that society. Further, at the point the state felt constrained or compelled to engage in argument, the upheaval that occurred in 1991 became inevitable.**[iv]** Although the rapidity with which events transpired and their specific form was unpredictable, over time some sort of fundamental change had become necessary. Nor should one be misled by the rapid, almost precipitous, nature of the transformation, for no movement of this magnitude occurs without the seeds having been planted many years before.

There has been much commentary both in the media and among scholars about the Soviet Union's economic problems and the role that those problems played in all subsequent events. In fact, Steven Cohen (1980) had predicted that if something was not done about the Soviet economy it was only a matter of time before the structure would collapse.**[v]** But there were other factors one must keep in mind, and economic problems should not become magnified as a causal factor in the break-up of the Soviet Union. In the international arena, the Soviet government experienced continuing problems in negotiations with the United

States. Domestically, the Soviet people were grappling with the impact of the war in Afghanistan; and, in addition to other factors, they were deeply affected by the aftermath of the nuclear accident at Chernobyl.

On the other hand, it is important to keep in mind the way those factors interact with the economy. For example, the war in Afghanistan was a drain on the Soviet economy much as the war in Vietnam was on the US economy. As for Chernobyl, the economic impact of that disaster still has not been measured accurately, but surely the social and financial costs will continue to burden the people of Belarus and Ukraine through many generations to come. With all of this as prelude, one must realize that prior to 1986 there was very little social activity in the public sphere of Soviet life that scholars would recognize as argument. Within the Soviet system, the postulate that underlay all other considerations was the very notion of information itself, which was perceived as the inextricable bonding of fact to interpretation. No fact was presented on its own; rather, it was explicitly linked to some political interpretation. Traditional Soviet rhetoric stemmed from universal principles; its purpose was to move towards greater wisdom, thus contributing to the goal of perfecting the communist state. Since true knowledge of historical processes was provided by Marxist ideology, the function of the information dissemination system created by the Bolsheviks was not to search for knowledge but, instead, “to bring the fruits of Marxist analysis to the people” (Kenez, 1985:6).

It may be difficult to remember in 1998, but even at the beginning of the 1980s, Soviet theories of mass communication were still imbued with this ideological conception. The Leninist ideal for an information system was reiterated most succinctly by Evseev (1980) in a semi-official publication, “The press, television, radio or propaganda and education must assist the Soviet citizen in orienting himself in domestic life and in international events” (18).

Hence, in a way, the whole system was a propaganda network designed to interpret selected events in the world. In the wry comment of one observer, Soviet television newscasts were described not as a “mirror” but as a “magnifying glass” (Matuz, 1963; Hollander, 1972). We would maintain that, in a system like this, the news itself gains an even greater rhetorical function than it would ordinarily have, for example, in the United States **[vi]** and that it becomes the equivalent of public oratory in a society which has no traditional forms of oratory. Even during much of the Gorbachev era, news was not presented for its own sake, but as an interpretation and as proof that the postulates of the socialist state

generally, and the current administration particularly, were correct.

Political and social crises always test the strength of such systems, and there have been a number of particularly significant events in the preceding fifteen years. What is most striking about such crises is the greater – rather than lesser – reliance on traditional communication mechanisms. In the traditional mode, crises, tragedies, disasters were typically not reported until an appropriate interpretation could be provided. Many incidents, particularly natural disasters and man-made tragedies, were never reported; on the other hand, political and social crises were given the interpretation most in tune with current policy goals of the state. Moreover, despite some fundamental changes that had occurred in Soviet media, news delivery remained a bonding of events to policy, with policy rather than events more instrumental in determining the nature, the extent, and even the timing of news coverage. The traditional response pattern exhibited by the Soviet information apparatus was so ingrained that its development can be followed quite clearly through six stages: initial silence; attacks on Western media sources; a burst of rhetorical activity setting forth the government's position (interpretation); a public statement by the head of government; decrease in the volume of rhetorical activity; and elevation of the official interpretation into the long-term memory of the state.[vii]

In our opinion the process of change – or the beginning of the end, in terms of our analysis – really started with the 1983 Korean airliner incident. Sometimes it is difficult to remember that when this tragedy occurred fifteen ago, Russia – the USSR – was still operating under the old system. Indeed, that incident illustrates the way in which the old Soviet system operated whenever a factual event occurred—understanding that until the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident, a disaster of that type was typically not reported in the Soviet press at all. One of the unique things about the airliner incident was that ultimately it was discussed at great length.

Each of the six stages of the traditional pattern of response to crises was illustrated very dramatically in the KAL incident. First there was an initial period of silence, that is no response at all, no indication that anything had occurred, while facts were gathered and interpretations were considered. Then there was a typically reflexive response to Western news sources including the various government supported radio stations that were broadcasting into the Soviet Union telling the populace that these events had occurred; this response was critical of Western sources for raising a “ruckus” and generating anti-Soviet

hysteria. The third stage would be development of the government interpretation of the event; at this point there would be a burst of rhetorical activity characterized by well-defined starting and ending points. Fourth, there would be a culmination of the interpretive process via a public statement by the head of government, after which the rhetorical activity would dramatically drop off; finally that official interpretation moved into the canon of public culture to be brought out again at appropriate times as proof that the interpretation of the new event was, and remained, correct. This last is the process of historical analogy which Hinds & Windt (1991) argue is the essential characteristic of rhetoric.

Typically, the US has engaged in very similar behavior every time an administration submitted a treaty with the Soviets for Congressional approval and opponents would bring out all the past treaties that the USSR had allegedly violated. One can conclude that the phenomenon is probably not culture-specific; nevertheless, it was very noticeable in Soviet rhetoric.

As we have indicated, the KAL incident follows the traditional pattern very clearly. In a month's time, the incident progressed in stages from a non-event which was completely ignored (initially there was a three line statement in *Pravda* followed by virtually the identical statement in *Izvestiya*), to a deliberate provocation designed to entrap the Soviet Union into destroying the Korean intruder (Launer, 1989). The development of those arguments is clearly traceable in the Soviet press through a number of iterations (Young & Launer, 1989). Yuri Andropov's published statement on September 28, 1983, provided the final, authoritative interpretation of that event:

The sophisticated provocation masterminded by the United States special services with the use of a South Korean plane is an example of extreme adventurism in politics. . . . The guilt of its organizers, no matter how hard they may dodge and what false versions they may put forward, has been proved (*Pravda*, September 28, 1983: 5).

The official Soviet government position was never completely believed by the Soviet people. Radio Liberty polls found that over 50 percent of Soviet citizens traveling in the West did not believe the government version of what happened to the Korean airliner (RFE/RL, 1983). That was a high percentage, an indicator of the beginning of erosion. From this tragedy, the Soviet information apparatus learned a bitter lesson regarding its vulnerability to Western propaganda. In this case, the government chose to target domestic propaganda at an incident that might never have been mentioned in the media at all. The incident also

demonstrated that in a crisis situation, because of the need to interpret events ideologically, the Soviet propaganda mechanism was largely reactive rather than proactive (Jameson, 1986): the lag time in the response simply allowed others – specifically the West – to get their interpretation in first. And, this episode underscored the importance of public image – something Gorbachev was able to take advantage of later on.

Finally, and for this analysis, most significant, Soviet rhetoric in the aftermath of the KAL tragedy took on a justificatory tone that was an early sign of the need to engage in public argument. The debate itself must have seemed very strange to much of the Soviet public, because the state-controlled mass media were responding to allegations available only via short-wave radio.

Nearly three years later on April 26, 1986, the Chernobyl nuclear accident again challenged the constraints of the Soviet information system. Once again an event that had occurred within the borders of the Soviet Union was generating extensive coverage worldwide as a catastrophe of international proportions. Like KAL, Chernobyl presented a true crisis of information and information policy for the Soviet Union both domestically and internationally. Once again, the initial response of even the progressive Gorbachev government was to follow the traditional model. Nearly everyone undoubtedly remembers the delay before the accident was announced: the reactor blew up at 1:04 am on Saturday, April 26, 1986 (2204 GMT on April 25) but was first reported by the Swedes on Monday afternoon. Editors at the central newspapers in Moscow were initially forbidden to publish any reports, and no reporters were dispatched to the scene for several days. Local radio and television did not cover the explosion or the fire. Soviet national television did not even show a still photo of the accident site until May 1, and the first news film was presented only on May 4 (Young & Launer, 1991:105-107).

It is now apparent that the Soviet information apparatus had lost control of the situation almost from the beginning. Nevertheless, despite the fundamental changes that would ultimately be wrought in the Soviet news dissemination system, the government persevered in attempting to interpret the event to political advantage. Chernobyl was said to demonstrate the horrors of nuclear war. In this way, the accident could be linked rhetorically to the Soviet testing moratorium, each day of which was numbered in Pravda, and to Mr. Gorbachev's proposal for the elimination of nuclear weapons by the year 2000.

The impact of Chernobyl as a rhetorical event, as an event that forced the government to justify its actions to a disbelieving public, has not been analyzed

fully and certainly has been under- appreciated. The amount of material that was generated by the Soviet media with regard to this one incident is almost overwhelming. And the behaviors that were manifested by the Soviet government were unprecedented in the country's history.

Because there was no institutionalized means for the kind of justificatory rhetoric that was necessary in the aftermath of the disaster, the government found itself engaging in a wide range of efforts to re-focus the people's perceptions of what had happened. In dozens of published interviews ordinary citizens complained that they had not been warned of the danger. These comments reflect a startling realization among the populace that the government wasn't interested in protecting them, but was much more interested in smoothing things over and making it appear as if nothing was wrong.

This crisis was the sort of jolt to public trust that can easily cause an erosion of faith. It occurred in a society much different from societies familiar to Western scholars. Forty five thousand people lived within three miles of the Chernobyl nuclear station, the lives of most of them inextricably bound to the plant itself. Reactor unit No. 4 exploded with a force sufficient to completely destroy the huge building that housed it. A concrete cover for the reactor vessel head, weighing about one hundred thousand pounds, was blown off to one side, landing on edge. Yet no one reacted. All the next day, despite the fact that smoke was billowing up from the disaster site, life seems to have gone on as usual, with mothers hanging out laundry and doing their shopping, with children playing outdoors, and teenagers and adults sunning themselves on apartment house rooftops in the early spring warmth (Marples, 1986: 14-15, 27). One can only speculate about the degree of trust - or fear - required for people to ignore the dramatic events occurring nearby, but it is difficult to imagine such passivity anywhere in Europe or the United States, for example. And some measure of the social compact between the people and the government of the USSR - the faith that they would be taken care of—can be measured by the utter panic that ensued once the people of Ukraine realized the magnitude of the accident. Over and over again in interviews people said “they didn't tell us,” “they didn't tell us we were in danger.”

Still, Chernobyl forever changed the way information is handled in the states of the former Soviet Union. The news reporting of the explosion ultimately became almost immediate. There were television cameras on the scene of the accident after the first week; there have been movies made about it; there have been

documentaries; there are plays, there are poems, there are novels. And while some of that was unofficial, much of it was also official. There was a whole series of documentary films that came out after Chernobyl, at least two of which, *Warning* and the *Chronicle of Difficult Weeks*, constituted a type of ideological advertising for the government's political message.**[viii]** At the same time, the government was constrained because it didn't really have an institutionalized way of making its arguments; the films represented an attempt to change people's perceptions indirectly. It does not appear that they were very successful.

Chernobyl inspired debate, not just about the relationship between citizen and state with respect to the danger resulting from the accident itself. It also spawned an entire debate about the environment and the role of the individual in ecology. In many ways this was a safe debate – or so officials thought – for the government to engage in and the first step towards true public discourse. Gorbachev had opened the door with his policy of Glasnost', announced just one year earlier; while Glasnost' signaled a change in the relationship among the citizen, the state, and the public realm, it was never intended to address a situation such as a nuclear accident. Thus, Chernobyl and its aftermath became an argumentative wedge, a wedge that separated the state from its control over public information and knowledge.

The aftermath of Chernobyl illustrates the point that where ground for debate can be created, it will gradually expand. For, in the period following the accident, there seemed to be almost an explosion of discussion about ecological issues. To a great extent, debates over ecology served as a convenient and legitimate battleground for expressing center-periphery tensions that already existed in Soviet society but which had no discursive outlet.**[ix]** An example is the decision taken by the Khmel'nitsky oblast soviet in the Ukraine to halt construction of the nuclear station being built there. This was an unprecedented action that was replicated across the republic: "Suddenly people demanded the right to make their own decisions on such critical questions as whether they wanted a nuclear power station in their area" (Dawson 1996: 94).

Nevertheless, through the second anniversary of the Chernobyl accident, official descriptions and interpretations of the tragedy predominated in Soviet media. Dawson (1996) notes:

[A] detailed survey of the Soviet and Ukrainian press during the 1986-87 period indicates that information on the accident was still highly restricted and published reports were often intentionally falsified to obscure the true magnitude

of the disaster. While the high-circulation press permitted publication of articles dealing with the progress of the accident cleanup and investigation into its causes, no articles were published which questioned Moscow's competence to safely operate nuclear power stations or the government's plans to dramatically expand nuclear power facilities in Ukraine. . . . (68-69)

However, in mid-1988, expressions of public pressure in Belorussia, Russia, the Ukraine and the Caucasus Republics turned very negative, reaching the point of attributing blame to the Soviet system itself rather than to specific individuals or organizations.[x] Then, starting in mid-1989, mainstream national media began to echo the dissatisfaction that initially had been expressed only in the regional press. Coverage of Chernobyl remained a prominent feature of the Soviet media for five years. Even today, each anniversary of the event spawns features in all the mass media.

Also after the second anniversary, an intense argument was waged on the pages of the national press over scientific authority, bureaucratic privilege and official indifference to public welfare. The public, of course, believed little or none of the tranquilizing rhetoric emanating from the authorities; one of the first signs of how little effect this unprecedented barrage of information was having was the development of a government-sponsored campaign to paint growing fear of nuclear power among the population as mere "radio-phobia." At about the same time a movement was forming among the intellectual elite in the Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus against nuclear power and the nuclear mafia that had become entrenched within the nation's ministry structure. And, to the extent what Gorbachev called *establishmentarianism* was one of the crucial stumbling blocks to economic reform, the rhetorical thrust of nuclear power opponents resonated ideas that the central government wished to promote. In other words, the anti-nuclear forces successfully linked their appeals to the *perestroika* reforms. But the government's national energy policy, which was based on rapid development of all forms of electrical generating capacity, including nuclear power, put the ministries in an ambivalent position *vis-à-vis* conservation, fuel efficiency, and pollution control – all programs advocated by the Soviet "Greens."

One of the singular achievements of the anti-nuclear group was its ability to create symbols that appealed to a broad audience. Indeed, by attaining such success, the anti-nuclear movement succeeded in passing beyond the bounds of dissidence, emerging as the first legitimate locus of unofficial political culture. In an article entitled "Honest, They Won't Blow Up Anymore" Oles Adamovich spoke

of himself as a non-specialist (non-expert), and as such he challenged the bureaucratic insistence that the public and particularly dilettante writers had no right to question the authority of scientists, engineers, and ministry officials.[xi] These terms became code-words for a completely new phenomenon in Soviet political culture – a concerted attack on the institutions of power, on a major political and economic policy, and on the legitimacy of the system itself. Remarkably, all of these features found expression in the mainstream print media beginning in late 1988. They soon led to a fundamental reassessment of Soviet energy policy, at least with regard to questions of design adequacy, siting requirements, and enhanced operational safeguards, leading to a moratorium on new construction and the abandonment of several sites then being built. In the opinion of one prominent scholar, it would no longer be possible to propose any site for a new Soviet nuclear power plant without generating intense opposition from the local population.[xii]

Despite the anti-intellectual tenor of much movement rhetoric, in many places scientists joined the chorus of critics. One such place was Gorky [now Nizhny Novgorod], where the government was constructing a nuclear-powered heating plant. A group of scientists from the physics institute led the opposition, convincing their audience that “the absolute safety of the Gorky AST could never be achieved” (Dawson 1996:104). In July 1988, other scientific institutes joined in a publicity campaign against the heating plant that, after some resistance, ultimately received extensive local television coverage (see Dawson 1996: 104). This 1988-89 period is particularly interesting because it demonstrates the unprecedented extent to which popular pressure from below affected public discussion of a vital issue – the future development of nuclear power production – and the extent to which the “official” establishment was incapable of maintaining rhetorical control of public perception or even of continuing to define the parameters and limits of the discussion. As a consequence, Chernobyl had a substantial effect on the social fabric of Soviet life – even ignoring the radiological and economic consequences of the accident. Leadership of the ecological movement[xiii] broke through the rhetorical shackles of dissidence – its isolation from society’s information dissemination system – becoming the first legitimate expression of unofficial political culture opposed to *policy* goals established by the party and government hierarchies. In this way, the movement challenged the very legitimacy of Soviet institutions – particularly centralized planning and party control of civic society.

Writers such as Adamovich even succeeded in creating rhetorical icons around which the population at large could rally:

1. the citizenry as hostages to nuclear power;
2. the nuclear bureaucracy – ministries, design bureaus, and research institutes – as arrogant defenders of bureaucratic privilege who dismiss the opinion of the masses and ignore their welfare;
3. this same nuclear bureaucracy as the last bastion of incompetence protected by laws enforcing secrecy in the nuclear industry; and
4. anti-nuclear advocates proud of being non-specialists because that meant they were not corrupted like the bureaucrats and technical experts.

As a result, in the aftermath of Chernobyl an argumentative wedge emerged into which the Greens movement moved, developing an argument of ecology that provided the basis for a growing lack of trust in the institutions of government, which provided in turn more ground for argument to occur. And ultimately it foreshadowed the events of August 1991.

The crumbling of the Soviet empire, of course, began two years earlier, with the breaking away of Eastern Europe and the destruction of the Berlin wall. Perhaps, these events, too, are the direct descendants of changing information policy in the USSR; certainly, these incidents did little to bolster the Soviet people's faith in the ability of their government to secure the common welfare; rather, circumstances signaled the continued erosion of the authoritarian Soviet state. But surely no one could have predicted the events of August 1991. Indeed, the coup attempt itself indicated just how far change had already penetrated the Soviet state. The attempted deposing of Gorbachev was thwarted in part because the new freedom of information enabled the domestic and foreign press to carry the story immediately, with no intervening period for interpretation and analysis. The bumbling ineptitude of the coup-plotters was no doubt to some degree the result of a lack of understanding about how to deal with the new situation. Their initial – and traditional – tale of Gorbachev's "illness" was not only disbelieved, it was ridiculed in the world media. The world, which was suddenly on their doorstep looking in, was horrified at the turn of events. The plotters hesitated; and into the breach rushed Boris Yeltsin. The rest, as they say, is history.

Yet, one cannot imagine these events playing out in the same way even five years earlier. The rhetorical situation had changed dramatically in the Gorbachev years following Chernobyl. The press had begun using the national media to discuss

issues of significance. New outlets were springing up daily, despite the chronic shortage of paper. Television was flexing its muscle; even the now defunct *Vremya*, once the most watched television news program in the world, took on a new look, with modern graphics and on-location reporting. Talk shows that criticized the government became popular fare. In short, there was an information revolution, not in the technological sense, but in terms of content and control. In the process, the ground for public discourse continued to expand, until it encompassed and challenged the existence of the state itself.

In the 1960's, communication scholars in the United States talked about "body rhetoric" and activists talked about putting your self on the line in the civil rights and anti-war movements. During those same years, Soviet citizens used nonverbal communication to avoid drawing attention to themselves: visitors from the West were struck by the unwillingness to make eye contact, people looking at the ground, shrinking within themselves to avoid notice. Remembering that period, which continued until only a few short years ago, the vigorous ecological debates following Chernobyl become all the more remarkable. And the rhetorical behavior exhibited in the streets of Moscow and St. Petersburg in August 1991 demonstrates the extent of change.

Debates about ecology are silent now, overshadowed by other (largely economic) concerns. Interestingly, it appears that the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the achievement of independence on the part of the Republics, dissipated the fervor of the anti-nuclear debate; now decisions about nuclear power were in their own hands and this, coupled with the economic crisis, put the issue in an entirely different perspective.

Now the debates are about the economy and the constitution and a balance of power between the president and the parliament: how much socialism, how much capitalism, what sorts of social safety nets should there be. And there are still threats of censorship. But the discussion about policy goes on – in public media and on the street as well as in the privacy of the halls of government. It is still only the beginning of a civil society and it may yet fall apart under the weight of economic collapse. Many of the rhetorical choices sound disturbingly familiar, from reactionaries' open yearnings for the days of communism to reformers' inability to shake off their deterministic roots. It is still difficult to predict whether there ever will be anything truly resembling a Western-style democracy in any of the states of the former Soviet Union. But things will again never be the way they once were.

NOTES

- i.** The authors are grateful to Alexander I. Yuriev, St. Petersburg (Russia) State University, David Cratis Williams, University of Puerto Rico, and Bruce Gronbeck, University of Iowa for their advice and support. Scott Elliott, our research assistant, also provided invaluable help. Russian materials cited in the text were translated into English by M. K. Launer.
- ii.** In American society, this sometimes is manifest as an exposé or, in its milder form, an investigative article that reveals previously hidden information about governmental decisions, plans, expenditures. In totalitarian or authoritarian states, such materials usually emerge as part of a coordinated effort to implement specific governmental policies.
- iii.** It is important to keep in mind that governments in many of the nations deemed by Westerners to be the most pernicious nevertheless enjoy the support of an overwhelming majority of the citizenry.
- iv.** Even by 1990 rhetorical conditions within the country had changed to such an extent that all sessions of the new Soviet parliament were televised live throughout the nation “from gavel to gavel,” with deputies openly challenging the policies of the Gorbachev administration.
- v.** Prof. Alexander Yuriev, a political psychologist at St. Petersburg University, made a similar prediction at a Party Congress in 1982. Private communication, October 1996.
- vi.** One might argue that the current histrionic tone adopted by even the mainstream media in the U.S. has altered the traditional rhetorical function of the press.
- vii.** For an extended discussion, see Young and Launer, 1989.
- viii.** For an extended discussion, see Young and Launer, 1991.
- ix.** For a thorough discussion see Dawson, 1996. Dawson focuses her discussion on principles of resource mobilization and ignores the role of discourse, except in passing.
- x.** There is a striking resemblance here to the developmental steps of radical organizations in the US, for example, Students for a Democratic Society. A turning point in the evolution of that organization occurred in 1965, when its leadership “named” the established social mechanisms for making policy decisions and according status as the inherent cause of society’s ills. Much of that rhetoric, albeit in a milder form, was subsequently reflected in the mainstream press, and echoes of that era remain today in references to “the system.” Perhaps it should not be surprising that the Russian ecological movement would follow a similar

path, for within the constraints of the Soviet system, they were clearly becoming radicalized and losing faith in the system is an essential step in that process.

xi. This argument is reminiscent of similar claims made in American rhetorical studies to the effect that on many issues technical elites have eliminated public opinion from policy formation.

xii. Academician N. N. Ponomarev-Stepnoi, Deputy Director of the Kurchatov Institute. Personal interview, June 1990.

xiii. Significantly, this leadership was drawn from both humanist intellectuals and scientists, a pattern to be seen throughout Eastern Europe in subsequent years.

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