

ISSA Proceedings 1998 - Truth and Argument



Truth is deeply complicit in argument wherever logic is, for independent of the purposes of different argument kinds, in so far as they use standard logic they are compelled by its underlying theory of truth. And the notions of truth underlying the two giant contributions in the history of logic: that of Aristotle, and that of the logicians preoccupied with the foundations of mathematics in the early twentieth century - show deep theoretical and even metaphysical assumptions that make them suspect as the underlying theory of a logic adequate to support the theory of argument as currently construed. That is, argument seen as the rational core of ordinary and specialized discourse of the widest variety of sorts. Such a theory of argument with a clear empirical and practical component cannot assume the usefulness of underlying images of logic drawn from rather different conceptions of how reason manifests itself in discourse.

First: as to the problems with the logical core James Herman Randall, in his classic exposition of Aristotle, offers a complex view of the relationship between truth, logic and inquiry. The *to dioti* - the why of things, connects apparent truths, the *peri ho*, with explanatory frameworks, through the *archai* of demonstration, that serve as *ta prota*, the first things - a true foundation for apparent truths. Although Aristotle was more 'post modern' than many of those that work in his tradition, the *archai* after all were subject matter specific, the envisioning of *archai* readily knowable if not known, reflected a classic and overarching optimism about knowledge. This enabled Aristotle to graft a determinate logic onto the various indeterminacies inherent in much of inquiry.

Logic is central in dialogue as well: *to dialegesthai*, the premise seeking activity that seeks to identify the appropriate *archai* of kinds of things. The theory of the syllogism, along with eristics, offers the basic tools of the *logikos* or *dialectikos*, one who thinks and questions.

When all works well, the result is the demonstrative syllogism, *apodeixis* which shows the necessity of a that, a *hoti*, in light of the *dioti*, the cause, in relation to the *archai*. From whence the *archai*? Quoting Randall, by ""experience" of facts,

by repeated observations, we become aware of the archai, the universal that is implicit in them.” Citing Aristotle: “When the observation of instances is often repeated, the universal that is there becomes plain” pp. 42-3. Such a crude inductivist epistemologically has little appeal to moderns and offers little danger for modern views of inquiry, but Aristotle’s logic, remains within the normative core. That is perhaps even worse for understanding inquiry, for unlike the crude inductivism which is quickly seen as too crude, his logic has both necessity and inherent plausibility. The result: the basic truth structure of his logic has been built into the normative structure of reasoning from his time till now.

The problem is how to distinguish the archai from among *endoxa*, the merely accepted opinions prevalent at the time. Again Randall “It is *nous*, working with and in the midst of facts, working in the subject matter itself, that “sees” the truth of the archai” p. 44. Not in Platonic isolation, to be sure, but in the context of subject matter. But still, this *noetic* ‘recognizing’ shares with Plato’s view a phenomenological (Randall calls it ‘psychological’ (*ibid.*)), rather than a logical account of what it means to come to see the truth of archai.

Even given the primitive necessity of noetic recognition of archai, the archai must still prove their logical worth by being the framework within a subject matter becomes truly known. Archai yield the conceptual structures that is determined by syllogistic reasoning from them to consequences. As Randall puts it. ““Science” *episteme*, is systematized “formalized” reasoning; it is demonstration, apodexis, from archai ... [it] operates through language, *logos*; through using language, *logismos*, in a certain connected fashion, through *sylogismos*’ p. 46. Syllogismos points back to the basic constraint on nous that it see beyond the accidental and the particular, that it deal with the essential the *ti esti*, and so syllogism deals with what all of a kind have in common.

Syllogistic reasoning within episteme deduces the particular from what all particulars of the kind have in common, and in dialectic looks at the proposed archai or endoxa, through the strongest possible lens - counter examples as understood in the traditional sense of strict contradictories, systematized, then canonized as the square of opposition.

All of this is so familiar that it seems hardly worth recounting, but without the deep conceptual understanding of the context, the problem with syllogism, and particularly with the theory of truth that underlies the practice of offering counter-examples, the issue will not be clear.

The focus on episteme, on *theoria* places the bar high for those who would

propose archai. The 'inductive' epistemology of concept formation along with the noetic interpretation of their apperception presupposes that human beings can know reality with an immediacy that seem silly given the course of scientific discovery over the past several centuries. Too much conceptual water has gone under the bridge to think that concepts are to be seen clearly within percepts. Rather, the conceptual frameworks that human beings have elaborated, modified and discarded have been multifarious and extend far beyond the imaginative capabilities of Aristotelian views that take the perceptually presented as representative of underlying realities. Once the enormous difficulty of the task of finding the conceptual apparatus that will undergird a true picture of reality is realized, Aristotle's demand that concepts hold true without exception becomes a serious drag on inquiry. Yet it still prevails, built into the very meaning of logic as used.

Why this is so, is in part because of the power of the next major advance in logical theory. Syllogism, the only completed science as late as Kant, took on a new life when the issues of the foundations of mathematics became the central concern of theorists. The historical connection is not hard to trace; for from Plato on mathematics was seen as the prototype of knowledge, and its truths a model for the outcome of inquiry. Galileo and Newton linked mathematics to science and so it is no surprise that the logical model, based on the needs of mathematics retained its grasp on theorists of science as recently as logical empiricism. But there is more to that story, for the enormous advances of the twentieth century took the rudimentary mathematization of syllogism by Boole and others, to a theory whose major achievement: completeness, became a model for both what logic is and how it should be understood.

The magnificent achievement of Russell and Tarski offered a model for understanding logical inference and offers an elaboratable structure - quantification theory, that congruent with much of syllogism, offered a clarity of understanding that surpassed anything dreamt of by centuries of logicians. The Aristotelian core remained, now rethought in terms of extensional interpretations of function symbols that offered a new grounding for the all or nothing account of argument built into the square of opposition. The Boolean interpretation of Aristotle's quantifiers retained the high demand that universal claims are to be rejected in light of a single counter-instance, as did the modern semantics of models within which a natural theory of truth was to be found. Mathematizing the clear intuition of correspondence, Tarski's theory of truth gives the stability

needed to yield vast areas of mathematics and even offered some precious, but few, axiomatizations of physical theory. The price was that the truth was relativized to models, yet there was no reason to think that any of the models in use in science were true. This remark requires clarification.

Since the optimistic days in Greece when the early meta-analysis was innocent of many real examples, the claim that archai are “noused” from particulars with ease seems a historical curiosity, irrelevant to human inquiry. For the history of human inquiry in the sciences, contrary to Aristotle, showed that the identification of archai is no easy thing. Rather centuries of scientific advance have shown the utility of all sorts of truish or even down-right false models of phenomena. Concepts, and the laws, generalizations, principles and etc. that cashed them out into claims, have shown themselves to be mere approximations to a receding reality. As deeper elaborations of connections among concepts, and underlying explanatory frames, have characterized successful inquiry, truth in any absolute sense becomes less of an issue. The issue is, rather, likelihoods, theoretic fecundity, interesting plausibility and etc. The operational concepts behind these: confirmation and disconfirmation, however, in the once standard philosophical reading (Hempel and the rest) retained the absolutist core that Aristotelian logic exemplifies - amplified by quantification theory. Even Popper saw falsification as instance disconfirmation.

Much work since then has offered a more textured view; I think here of Lakatos and Laudan. Students of science no longer see the choice as between deductivism as standardly construed as an account for scientific explanation and some Feyerabendian a-logical procedure that disregards truth. Students of science see, rather, a more nuanced relation between theory building and modification. Argument theorists and informal logicians should be thrilled at this result for it opens the door for what they do best: the analysis of complex arguments. But not if they are crippled by the very logic that has dominated the discussion so far.

Truth, one of the key meta-theoretical underpinnings of logic - along with entailment and relevance - looks rather different when we move from traditional accounts to scientific practice. Let's take an example.

Second: a constructive theory of truth

If you ask a sane moderately informed person what the world is really made of in just the general sense that Greeks might have asked, the answer is something like “atoms.” Let's start there. At the core of modern science stands the Periodic Table. I take as an assumption that if anything is worth considering true of all of

the panoply of modern understanding of the physical world it is that. But why? And what will learn by changing the paradigm?

The periodic Table stands at the center of an amazingly complex joining of theories at levels of analysis from the most ordinary chemical formula in application to industrial needs, to the most recondite - particle physics. The range of these ordinary things - electrical appliances to bridges, has been interpreted in sequences of models, developed over time, each of these responding to a particular need or area of scientific research. Examples are no more than a listing of scientific understanding of various sorts: the understanding of dyes that prompted organic chemistry in Germany in the late 19th century; the smelting of metals and the improvement of metal kinds, e.g. steel; the work of Faraday in early electric theory; the the development of the transistors and the exploration of semi-conductors. This multitude of specific projects, all linked empirically to clear operational concepts, has been unified around two massive theoretic complexes: particle physics and electromagnetic wave theory. The deep work in science is to unify theories. The mundane work in science is to clarify and extend each of the various applications and clarify and modify existing empirical laws, and this in two fashions: 1) by offering better interpretations of empirical and practical understanding as the underlying theories of their structure becomes clearer. 2) By strengthening connections between underlying theories so as to move towards a more coherent and comprehensive image of physical reality, as underlying theories are modified and changed. On my reading of physical chemistry the Periodic Table is the lynch pin, in that it gives us, back to Aristotle again, the basic physical kinds.

We need a theory of truth that will support this. And, surprisingly perhaps, I think the image is just what current argumentation theorists need as well. Since argument is not frozen logical relations but interactive and ongoing, we need a logic that supports dialectical advance. That is, we need a dynamics of change rather than a statics of proof. We need to see how we reason across different families of considerations, different lines of argument, that add plausibility, and affect likelihoods. Arguments are structured arrays of reasons brought forward; that is, argument pervades across an indefinite range of claims and counter-claims. These claims are complex and weigh differently as considerations, depending on how the argument moves. So we need a notion of truth that connects bundles of concerns - lines of argument, and to different degrees.

Back to quantification theory. Quantification theory was developed in order to solve deep problems in the foundations of mathematics. And the standard interpretation of mathematics in arithmetic models proved to be a snare. What was provable is that any theory that had a model, had one in the integers, and models in arithmetic became the source for the deepest work in quantification theory (Godel, most obviously). But the naturalness, even ubiquity of a particular model kind did not alter that fact that truth in a model could only be identified with truth when a model of ontological significance was preferred. This seems to have escaped Tarski's followers who spent little effort in exploring the difference. Now, truth in a model is an essential concept. Without it we have no logic. But the identification of truth in a model with truth just reflects the metaphysical and epistemological biases of the tradition with the univocal character of mathematics as it was understood then. If I am right, it is not truth in a model that is that central issue for truth, but rather the choice of models that represent realities. And this cannot be identified with truth in a model for it requires that models be compared.

To look at it another way, if we replace mathematics with science as the central paradigm from which a logical theory of truth is to be drawn, the identification of truth with truth in a model is severed. For there is no model in which scientific theories are proved true. Rather science shows interlocking models connected in weird and wonderful ways. The reduction rules between theories are enormously difficult to find and invariably include all sorts of assumptions not tied to the reduced theory itself. The classic example is the reduction of the gas laws to statistical mechanics. The assumption of equiprobability in regions is just silly as an assumption about real gases, but the assumption permits inferences to be drawn that explain the behavior of gases in a deeply mathematical way, and in a way that gets connected to the developing atomic theory at the time, much to the advantage of theoretical understanding and practical application.

What are the lessons for the theory of truth? We need to get rid of the univocal image of truth - that is truth within a model, and replace it with the flexibility that modalities both require and support, that is truth across models. We need the metatheoretic subtlety to give mathematical content to likelihoods and plausibilities, a theory of the logic of argument must address the range of moves that ordinary discourse permits as we qualify and modify in light of countervailing considerations. These can not be squeezed into the Procrustean Bed of all or nothing construals of logical reasoning. Formal logic has been captured by Tarski

semantics. It offers a clear analogue to the notion of correspondence, but at an enormous price. The power of Tarski semantics – the yield being completeness, that is all formally valid proofs yield logical true conditionals – requires that the models be extensional, that is, all function symbols in the formal language are definable in terms of regular sets, that is sets closed under the standard operations of set theory, and definable completely in terms of their extensions.

The problem, of course, is that the overwhelming majority of both ordinary and theoretic terms have no obvious extensional definition, and the most interesting functional concepts are intentional (causation, in all of its varieties). The clue is the formal solution to modalities (necessity, possibility, and variants such as physical possibility): that is relationships among worlds as in Kripke semantics. This moves the focus from truth within models, extensionally defined – to relationships among selected worlds. Such relationships may vary widely, each one specific to a relationship, as in the analysis of physical causality in terms of a function that maps onto physically possible worlds (worlds consistent with relevant aspects of physical theory). Little can be said about the general restrictions on mappings across worlds, for inter-world relationships, if we take the intuition behind the account of physical causality, are broadly empirico-historical. That is, what makes a world physically possible is relative to that laws of physics interpreted as restrictions on functions across worlds.

The lack of a logical decision procedure – a consequence of the inter-model relations being empirical in the world-historical sense, need not make us despair as to a solution to the problem of truth in principle. For although essential details of the model require an empirico-historical investigation of concepts in use – the functional relations that are concretized in warrants that support entailments and the procedures that determine the relevance of claims and counter-claims, that is, the structure of logical possibilities, can be furnished a priori.

A solution in principle becomes possible when we look beyond truth in models to truth across models. Within models something very much like the standard interpretation holds, for it enables us to refute our models as we find disconfirming instances. (I say very much like because I don't want to rule out holding out, even within a model, against disconfirmation. But the clear case of classic contradiction is within models: think of why all men are mortal). But across models we need something very different indeed.

As mentioned, the account I offer has an affinity with Kripke's solution to the problems of modalities. We look to functional relations across models, and the history of relations over time and in relation to their logical surround. What I will

try to do is induce you to imagine a mental model. For those interested I have some copies of a precise mathematical description. Bereft of the mathematics a mental image must suffice.

Think, if you will, of physical science as some beautiful array of tubing of different thickness and different color - the color infusing the tube - arranged vertically before you. And see them with vessels at the joins of tubes, gradually changing color. Each individual vessel, can you imagine them, changes colors as the colors from the various tubes from which it feeds alter the composition of the color in the vessel. The 'vessel' is a complex composite function of the tubes to and from which it draws. What is this strange image I ask you to envision?

Truly, the vessels are models drawn from our scientific concepts, the most general models at the top; at the bottom models of data: observations, if you will. Although the models are connected they are individuatable. The richest space of vessels - many vessels, much changes in color, myriad connections - is in the middle of the array. I think here of systems of chemical formula; the aggregate laws of of medium level physics (rigid body dynamics, perhaps); models of DNA; computer models of weather systems and other complex phenomena - nodes in the array to which and from which connections are made. Color fields are systems of principles, laws, generalizations, and other regularities, connected by inference - functions that map models onto models. But that is to introduce the mathematics. An easier understanding is that the connecting tubes are the conduits of evidence. Confirmation from below, systematic support from above, although that is a misleading simplification since higher level theories generate new empirical support for theories they explain (reduce). The 'colors' change with the results of inquiry as the relationship between the various models becomes clearer, as the evidence from reducing theories and empirical confirmation alter the evidentiary weight flowing to and through the various theoretic nodes.

Truth becomes a property of the field. A few suggestions. First, the crucial empirical dimension, for this is science after all. There is a set of privileged models: empirical models of the data. What makes science empirical is a constraint that all models have connections with empirical models. Second, for models at any level short of the highest there may be found higher level models. So for first level models of the data, these data are joined through a more theoretical model. Theoretic models take their epistemic force first from the empirical models that they join, and then, and more importantly, from the additional empirical models that result from the theoretic joining in excess of the

initial empirical base of the models joined.

Truthlikeness is defined in terms of considerations such as: The increase or decrease in the complexity of particular models over time. The depth with which any model is supported by other models (the height on the vertical of any set of nodes (vessels) connected by tubes) at a time, and as a function of time. The breadth, the horizontal width which a supporting model is represented in the field of lower level - more empirical - models at a time, and as a function of time. The persistence of a set across the array. In terms of the visual image: vessels whose color tends to diffuse across the system.

Gradient of color, literally in a physical or computer model of the array, is a metric across the field. Analogically, gradient of color stands for the changing weights assigned to models as they interact. The metric correlates with evidence of varying degrees of robustness flowing from different sources. Truthlikeness in complex ways becomes a function of the structure itself.

Pretty dense, but turn the image to the example. The Periodic Table, up pretty high and to the center connects with the vast domain of chemistry - physical and organic, which in association with roughly parallel theoretic clusters, mechanics - statics and dynamics, electro-magnetic wave theory - explains just about everything we do and can do in the physical world in the last century, and has increased in its explanatory power as individual theories are expanded and refined, and inter-theoretic connections made. There is logic there, dare we deny it? Students of each field learn translation procedures to and from observable phenomena - to and from related theories. The connections are often the result of higher order theories. Above the Periodic Table: particle physics, quantum theory, quantum electro-dynamics, general relativity. These are the massive contributions of 20th century physics. Do we deny that there is logic there?

By the way, there is no requirement for the the highest order models be univocal (that is the lesson of indeterminacy). Nor that all model chains (paths up the vertical) go particularly high. But since higher order theories deepen the support, we like connections and go as high as we can: the tip of the Einstein cone - TOES (theories of everything).

There is a logic, but it is not the all or nothing logic of Aristotle and mathematicians. An argument is not as weak as its weakest link, nor are really weak links much trouble at all. (Think of all of the relatively unsupported empirical phenomena that are part of science without having any clearly seen connections to theories. Nobody changes organic chemistry when the latest results on cholesterol in the diet are reported).

Each member of the array supports the others, but they hang separately. That is, particular evidentiary moves affect each model differently. In the immediate neighborhood (that is actually a technical expression, but think of the vessel image again and picture tubes that connect directly to a vessel), inquiry affects models in the most intimate way - a near relative of standard logic probably works fine here. But there are relations with other theories, consequences for related theories. How does change percolate through the system? These are questions that the shift from a mathematical to a scientific paradigm of truth affords.

There are at least two uninteresting sorts of truths: statements of the cat on the mat variety and logical truths. Everything else relies heavily on movements across inference sets. Sentences ranging from 'the light is red' to 'John has pneumonia,' in their standard occurrences, are warranted as true (or likely, or plausible, etc) because countless other statements are true (or likely or plausible, etc.). To verify each of these, or any other interesting expression, is to move across a wide range of other statements connected by underlying empirical and analytical theories (systems of meaning, generalizations etc). All of these have deep connections with observable fact, but more importantly are connected by plausible models of underlying and related mechanisms. These include all sort of functional connections that enable us to infer from evidence to conclusion, and to question, in light of apparent inconsistencies connected to indefinitely elaborate and elaboratable networks of claims and generalizations of many sorts. For most estimations of the truth of a claim offer a rough index of our evaluation of the context that stands as evidence for it. Under challenge, that body of evidence can be expanded almost indefinitely, all of this still governed by the available meaning postulates and inference tickets cited, assumed, or added as inquiry and argumentation proceed. And without a logic adequate to the understanding the give and take of counter-example and claim, argument and argumentation fall asunder.

My claim, for now three presentations at Amsterdam, is that real argument will be better understood if the best arguments was seen as the prototype - what I call argumentation in regularized discourse communities. What I have tried to show here is that looking at the these also yields a model theoretic understructure for truth in logic.

REFERENCES

ISSA Proceedings 1998 - Emergent vs. Dogmatic Argumentation; Towards A Theory Of The Argumentative Process



From the mid-70s onwards, in line with the “pragmaticization” of research into argumentation, scholars have felt an increasing need to turn their attention to the argumentative process. Simplifying a bit, it may be said that they worked with Toulmin’s layout, or with the topical tradition into which Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca had put new life; but they began to be interested in how arguers actually sorted out what was claim and data and how they hung together by an inference warrant, or how exactly a topical inference was based on reality or actually reorganized the structure of reality.

In a text as early as Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss’s introduction to logic *En del elementære logiske emner* - English version *Communication and Argument* -, first published in Norwegian in 1941, a point is made in favor of taking into account, not only the argumentative product, i.e., the “completed” layout or topical inference, but also the process of “completing” it. For Næss has it that the bulk of an argumentative encounter is not about argumentative support proper, but about being clear what an utterer meant when he used a certain expression. Næss introduces the four procedures of ‘specification,’ ‘precization,’ ‘generalization,’ and ‘deprecization’ by which arguers can be clearer about what exactly they want an expression to say.

Few approaches to argumentation have taken up this process-orientedness of Næss’s account, among them Frans van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst’s *Pragma-Dialectics*. Their meanwhile well-known and influential approach assumes

that ideally a resolution-oriented discussion goes through four stages in each of which only certain resolution-furthering moves can be allowed. But furthermore, at every stage the discussants may perform speech acts specifying or precisating what they mean to say. However, these usage declaratives continue to be defined in the perspective of an argumentation that is successfully conducted to its fourth and concluding stage. That is to say, the argumentative process continues to be connected very closely to the product, i.e., the “completed” argumentation having successfully supported a standpoint which had been contested.

But, as van Eemeren & Grootendorst (1992 : chap. 1) themselves acknowledge, the connection of the process and the product of arguing in colloquial speech is not as systematic as the earlier version of their theory (1984) might suggest. What *prima facie* would seem to be irrelevant sidesteps or childish bickering may be revealed to have a determining influence on the outcome of the discussion (see Jacobs & Jackson 1992). A discussion about one contested standpoint may become more and more complex because clarification is needed as to some of the elements adduced in support of this standpoint (see Snoeck Henkemans 1992). That is to say, while the product of arguing is perhaps best analyzed as an inference complex that dialectically renders plausible a conclusion with the help of plausible premises, the communicative process of arguing deserves more attention as a particular kind of conversation and, therefore, is best analyzed, as are other kinds of conversation, as a step-by-step process extending in time and not necessarily being organized by a dialectical macrostructure.

This is possible with a joint dialectical and communicational reconstruction, prefigured by Normative Pragmatics as proposed by van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson, & Jacobs (1993). In this framework, I shall give a different and more “communicational” interpretation to Næss’s four procedures. Thus, I will be able to reconstruct the argumentative process as a kind of communication organized, on the one hand, by a global dialectical goal and, on the other, step by step by local discursive moves. With Næss’s procedures of clarification in mind, I shall develop a tool for reconstruction starting from a model offered by Richard Hirsch in a different context. With this tool, it will be possible to show that the process of arguing is not always about the justification or refutation of a definable proposition on the background of presuppositions which are shared in principle, but very often about trying to match these presuppositions, these individual backgrounds, as best the arguers can, in order to overcome a problematic situation. In a sense, then, through the argumentative enterprise something

individual becomes “inter-individual” or “intersubjective.” I shall show in this paper that this “intersubjectification” may work easily, may require considerable communicative co-operation, or may fail utterly – and this reflects whether or not at the outset the presuppositions of the arguers resembled each other closely. For obviously, an argumentation is more likely to succeed if the respective arguers’ unconstested starting points are quite similar and more likely to fail if they do not find enough common ground to start from (see, as to this, Willard’s (1983; 1989) theory of argumentative fields).

1. Discourse operations and their linguistic reflexes

Taking seriously Næss’s and van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson, & Jacobs’s point that arguing has a justification-shaped dimension and a clarification-shaped dimension and implementing this point in a step-by-step analysis of the argumentative process requires that the reconstruction tool I will propose account indifferently for every step as a justifying step or as a clarifying step within an argumentative macro-structure. To do this, I shall elaborate on Richard Hirsch’s concept of ‘discourse operations’ (1989 : chap. 4). Hirsch conceives of arguing as an interactive problem solving activity carried out by collaborating interactors. When interactors feel that the information about a given subject which they have at their disposal is problematic, they start generating new information to handle the problem. Thus, the information state given at the outset is modified, and by evaluating all newly generated information as to whether it helps reach a less problematic information state, the arguers alter the general picture step by step and interactively in such a way as to arrive at an information state which is considered unproblematic. The interactive generation and immediate evaluation of information is called by Hirsch a ‘discourse operation,’ which has, accordingly, two phases and can be accounted for in terms of how an utterance reacts as an evaluation to a newly generated information state (1989 : 38-40). It may create a contrast or a complication, which conforms to doubting that the newly generated information state is promising as to arriving at an unproblematic picture (this would be the traditional opponent casting doubt on a proposition). It may consist of logic-like operations such as conjunction or conclusion; and it may be represented by semantic operations which help find a more adequate interpretation of information, such as precization or specification (this would be Næss’s clarifying procedures as part of the arguing) (1989 : 59-74).

All of these discourse operations, serving the purpose of processing information

states in such a way as to come closer to an unproblematic state, have paradigm reflexes on the surface of a text; e.g., the connectors but for a contrast, therefore for a conclusion, or and for a conjunction, etc. And although I am not very at ease with Hirsch's information theoretical background, which suggests that communication would rely on adequate and rather unproblematic mental representations of reality, I shall elaborate his concept of discourse operations which is worth closer examination. For it is likely to render what Normative Pragmatics assumes the process of arguing to be: the arguers' co-operative step-by-step effort to sort out how they might overcome a communication problem (in the first place, a conflict of opinion). It is therefore necessary to give Hirsch's concept a more "communicational" shape; and I shall, consequently, start from the assumption that discourse operations, whose surface reflexes are connectors like but or and, do not link information states but utterances. That is to say that by choosing a certain connector an interactor links his contribution in a specific - contrasting, complicating, etc. - way, to the communication as it has developed to the point where he chooses this connector.

Fig. 1 shows the last two sentences of the preceding paragraph as they are built up segment by segment with the help of connectors representing discourse operations which I felt were appropriate to develop my point about a "more communicational version" of Hirsch's model being necessary for my purposes.

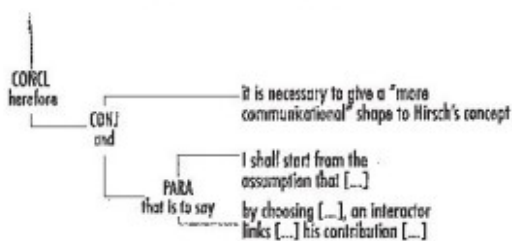


Figure 1 Discourse operations rendering the process of arguing

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The proposed way of putting the concept of discourse operations might be called a "pragmaticization" of Jean-Claude Anscombe and Oswald Ducrot's (1983; see Ducrot 1993, Anscombe, Ducrot, García Negroni, Palma, & Carel 1995 and the thematic issue *Journal of Pragmatics* 24 (1995)) structuralist Theory of argumentation in the langue. According to this theory, because of lexical and

semantic properties of entities of the language system, Saussurean langue, sentences carry with them 'implicit conclusions' and hence have an 'argumentative orientation.' For instance, **[i]** a sentence like, 'The movie is poorly directed,' is more likely to argue for an implicit conclusion, 'It is poorly acted,' than for its opposite, 'It is very well acted.' Hence, the former conclusion has the same argumentative orientation as the sentence, and the latter has an opposite argumentative orientation. This is illustrated by the fact that, 'The movie is poorly directed and poorly acted,' sounds o.k. (same orientation), and that, 'The movie is poorly directed and well acted,' sounds somewhat odd (opposite orientation), whereas, 'The movie is poorly directed but well acted,' sounds o.k. The connector and, then, reflects the identical, the connector but the opposite, argumentative orientation of two connected sentences.

This is in line with my point that the discourse operation reflected on the surface by and creates a conjunction, and that that reflected by but creates a contrast. However, while Anscombre & Ducrot assume that this takes place at the level of the langue, the language system, and that the parole, the enactment of the language system, is sort of accessory, I shall argue that communication is more dynamical. When the addressee of an utterance connects to this utterance his own, following contribution by means of a connector that reflects a conjunctive, complicative, etc., operation, then this would in fact seem to suggest that the proposition conveyed by an utterance authorizes only certain pragmatically meaningful argumentative continuations - namely, the implicit conclusions it carries with it -, but others not. But it would seem, rather, that this is not in the first place a matter of langue but that it is up to the addressee/ respondent to choose one out of several possible meaningful continuations. Whether the continuation the addressee has chosen is in fact an appropriate one may be subject to closer scrutiny. **[ii]** For another interactor may go on with a contrastive or complicative discourse operation; and this complication, in turn, may involve precizing or usage declaring operations on lower hierarchical levels. **[iii]** Let us see how this works with a few examples.

2. Intersubjectification working without serious problems

I have said that by the discourse operations which interactors create by reacting in a specific way upon other interactors' preceding contributions, something individual becomes intersubjective. This intersubjectification may work easily, as I will show now to illustrate how the concept of discourse operations "processing

communication problems towards a solution” can account for the global dialectical and local step-by-step structure of argumentative encounters. The analysis to follow is displayed by Fig. 2.

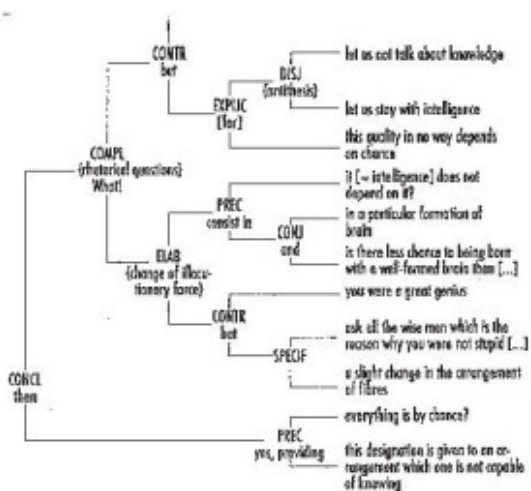


Figure 2 Discourse operations in Fontenelle's Dialogues de Mort

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Situation: In the French Enlightenment philosopher Fontenelle's New Dialogues of the Dead (1686), Erasmus of Rotterdam reproaches Charles V. of Spain with the aristocratic privileges this latter would have, as son of a king, by mere chance without deserving them. Charles opposes to this that Erasmus must not appeal to his knowledge either; for this he has got from the wise men who preceded him, and learning everything that these knew, would not, says Charles, be more difficult than keeping the fortune an aristocrat inherits from his ancestors. To which Erasmus replies.

Erasmus: But let us not talk about knowledge, let us stay with intelligence; this quality in no way depends on chance. **[iv]**

Erasmus connects his utterance to what precedes as a contrast (but) designed to inhibit Charles's equivalence of acquiring knowledge and keeping fortune. The contrast is, to look closer, a disjunction (let us not - let us) with its explication (for, which is unexpressed but can easily be reconstructed).

Charles: It does not depend on it? What! Doesn't intelligence consist in a particular formation of the brain, and is there less chance in having been born

with a well-formed brain than in having been born the son of a king? You were a great genius, but ask all the wise men the reason why you were not stupid and imbecilic: almost nothing at all, a slight change in the arrangement of fibers. [v]

By connecting rhetorical questions (recognizable above all by the negations) to the preceding utterance, Charles creates, on the dialectical level, a complication which, if successful, inhibits Erasmus's contrast and hence strengthens his own equivalence 'acquiring = keeping.' This complication, in turn, conjoins (and) a precization of what intelligence is (consist in) and the claim that a well-formed brain comes about as much by chance as an aristocratic birth. The complication proper relies on a contrast (but) which elaborates on what has just been said.

Erasmus continues with a question: 'Tout est donc hasard? //Everything, then, is by chance?' That is, he fills in the 'yes' Charles's rhetorical questions suggest, and by a conclusive discourse operation (then) he creates a slot in which Charles can fill in the henceforth intersubjective conclusion to be drawn from what precedes: 'Oui, pourvu qu'on donne ce nom à un ordre que l'on ne connoît point. // Yes, providing this designation is given to an arrangement one is not capable of knowing.' (French spelling normalized; my translation.)

The fact that Erasmus does not go on doubting or discussing but creates a slot for Charles's conclusion reflects that the intersubjectification of Charles's point of view has succeeded without major problems. Although Erasmus seems to learn something that fundamentally reorganizes his presuppositions about being proud of privileges, material or intellectual, once he has learned it, the agreement is unproblematic; the problem has been resolved.

3. Elaborate repair needed to process disagreement

It might have been that Erasmus had not created a slot for an intersubjectification of Charles's position. He might have asked for further clarification about how the brain is formed, how intelligence depends on a particular formation of the brain, etc. In that case, intersubjectification might have been possible as well, but it would have required much more collaborative effort.

For reasons of space, I cannot fully discuss here an instance of arguing in which the position held by one arguer at the outset or a position emerging during the arguing becomes intersubjective because of elaborate interactive examination of the acceptability of the position. Let me just point to some characteristics of such instances of arguing by illustrating rather than analyzing a portion of the Nuclear Dialogues in which David Weinberger offers a critique of the Reagan

administration's policy of deterrence in 1980s. One dialogue is between two philosophers one of which, Emma, wears a pin reading 'Ban the bomb.' The other, Jennie, considers the slogan to be childish and simplistic, and disagrees that wearing it does any good opposing nuclear weapons.

Upon closer examination they discover that Emma is not even against all potential instances of use of nuclear weapons, which is why they shift to another, albeit related, topic, namely, what exactly Emma means when she says that she is against nukes. It turns out that Emma is against the policy of deploying nukes in Europe and threatening to use them. But this position, in turn, requires further examination; for now Emma's "refined" position has it that, even though one should avoid using nuclear weapons as far as possible, there might be instances of legitimate use. This, however, is the position the "atomic hawks" have, which is why Emma and Jennie feel the need to turn to question where the differences are between the supporters of the policy of deterrence and their own position, which is that they are against this policy. It is only now, after one more topic shift, that they come to the position emerging from their discussion that 'being against' for them means in the first place that they are against producing and deploying more and more nukes although the number of nukes existing is largely sufficient to deter military action by anybody in their right mind. That is to say that in fact Jennie and Emma intersubjectify a position at the end of their discussion, but that without considerable topic shifts, precizations, specifications, etc. - in a word: without considerable interactive argumentative co-operation the intersubjectification probably would have been impossible.

To a certain extent, this discussion has the same characteristics as the one analyzed in the preceding section. However, here between the emergence and the succeeding intersubjectification of the relevant position, considerable topic shifts occur, and the collaborative effort will finally lead the discussants to intersubjectify a position which neither of them held at the beginning of the discussion. In Erasmus and Charles's discussion the intersubjectification follows immediately the emergence of the position stemming from Charles's precization of what intelligence is. In Emma and Jennie's discussion, on the other hand, precizations and complications "lead the discussion astray." That is, they cause considerable topic shifts, so that at the end the interactors are no longer really having the same discussion they had at the beginning. The preliminary steps, then, are in a sense "dialectically worthless" because they are not immediately connected to the position emerging from the discussion and finally being agreed upon. Nonetheless, they may not be eliminated from the discussion if it is

analyzed in a communicational perspective. For it is obvious that without these preliminaries that gave rise to the precisations and complications leading to topic shifts, the discussants would never have gone on to that part of their discussion in which intersubjectification finally was successful and, accordingly, the problem was resolved.

4. Intersubjectification fails

The most important advantage of the processual reconstruction of arguing with the help of the step-by-step model I am proposing is that it can account not only for arguing that reaches its goal, i.e., arguing in which in the end the intersubjectification of a certain standpoint with respect to a contested position is possible. It can also account for arguing that does not reach this goal, i.e., arguing in which in the end no intersubjectification occurs. This is necessary to be able to model the argumentative process as an element of its own, quite independent of the outcome this process may have.

In Louis Armand baron of Lahontan's *Conversations of a Native and the Baron of Lahontan*, published in 1703, the author offers the Europeans a picture of a North American Native people whose chief, Adario, has been to France and tells Lahontan throughout the conversations about his people's views on morals, politics, and ethics and about what the differences are of these views as compared to the European views.

Adario has just pointed to a gap that can be noticed between the religious imperatives Europeans use to preach and their own behavior which does more often than not deviate considerably from these imperatives. Lahontan concedes to what Adario has said:

I am unable to deny the contradiction you have noticed. But one has to take into account that humans sometimes commit sins despite the guidance of their conscience, and that there are learned people who lead a bad life. This may happen because of lack of attention or the power of their passions, because they have devoted themselves to worldly advantage: man, corrupted as he is, is driven towards evil in so many places and by an inclination so strong that, unless there is an absolute necessity, it is hard for him not to give in.

Lahontan tries to inhibit the destructive power Adario's point would have for his attempts to bring him to a conversion to Christianity (see Fig. 3). After having acknowledged the inconsistency to which Adario has alluded, he goes on with a contrastive discourse operation (but) in which an explication is given (this may

happen because of) for the apparent contradiction. Adario's answer to this is a radical complication, which, in turn, inhibits Lahontan's contrast, thereby giving his previous point all its destructive power:

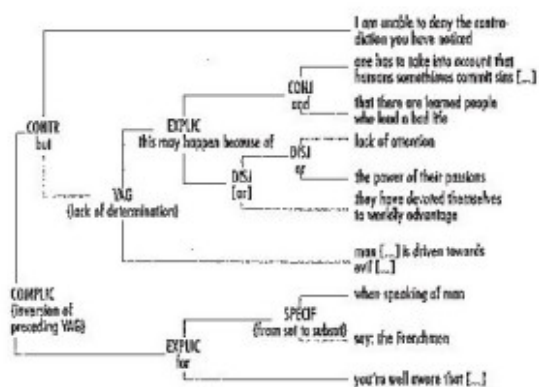


Figure 3 Discourse operations in Lahontan's *Suite au voyage de l'Amérique*

Figure 3 Discourse operations in Lahontan's *Suite au voyage de l'Amérique*

When speaking of man, say: the Frenchmen; for you're well aware of the fact that these passions, this striving for advantage and this corruption you are talking about, are unheard of amongst our people. **[vi]**

By specifying that about which they should be talking and by explicating this specification, Adario claims that Lahontan is right perhaps as far as Europeans are concerned. But since he takes what Lahontan says to be pointless as to the present discussion, he is not prepared to process any of Lahontan's utterances. Therefore the intersubjectification of a standpoint with respect to a position, proposed by Lahontan through the discourse operations he has performed, is not possible. Accordingly, Lahontan's attempt to bring Adario to a conversion will fail, and the discussion will not lead to any dialectical conflict resolution worthy of the name.

5. Conclusions to be drawn

The step-by-step analysis I have proposed for the process of arguing has yielded above all the following result: Categories and concepts of analysis which are applicable to the product of arguing, such as inferential connections or accepting or denying the justifiability of a position, are hardly adequate to an analysis of the process of arguing. For this process operates with more flexible communicative

maneuvers. I have accounted for these maneuvers, on the basis of a reinterpretation of Richard Hirsch's model, as discourse operations, i.e, a specific argumentative processing of a communication problem realized by the interactors through, e.g., connectors or entire phrases used to link their own utterance continuing the communication to the preceding communication in a specific way intended for collaborative problem solving.

The concept of discourse operations has the advantage that it can account for at least two kinds of arguing. Until now I have drawn a distinction roughly between arguing that succeeds and arguing that doesn't. It is more adequate, however, to speak of arguing in which positions that were not shared at first become intersubjective, and of arguing in which nothing becomes intersubjective. For if Charles V. succeeds in countering argumentatively Erasmus's accusation, this is because something completely new emerges from the discussion for Erasmus: people are intelligent or not by (physiological) chance. On the basis of this newly emerged position, having become intersubjective, an argumentative agreement is possible. But it might well have been that this new position would have remained as controversial as its predecessor was, and then argumentative agreement would have been impossible. This kind of emergent arguing is therefore no warranty for an agreement being possible.

In the same way, if Adario and Lahontan do not agree on the merits of Christianity, this is because the position Lahontan proposes does not actually become intersubjective. For Adario's and Lahontan's presuppositions, the backgrounds that underly their communication are too different. Whereas Erasmus and Charles can match their communicative backgrounds to a certain extent to make agreement possible, this does not work for Lahontan and Adario. So it is not the absence of something emerging from the discussion for at least one of the participants that impedes agreement; it is, rather, that nothing emerges and that at the same time the backgrounds would have to be matched to a certain extent - which, in turn, is impossible as long as nothing new emerges. For if the communicative backgrounds of the arguers coincide sufficiently, then agreements are very possible without there emerging anything new from the discussion. This is the case, for instance, in forensic argumentation, proceeding from communicative backgrounds which are largely homologous for all the arguers.

The major conclusion to be drawn from my paper is the following: The analysis of the process of arguing is faced with different kinds of arguing which do not

represent discriminate types of a strict classification but, rather, a continuum extending between two extreme cases. In one extreme case of arguing nothing at all becomes intersubjective and a position is justified or refuted on the basis of communicative backgrounds essentially identical for all the arguers. These backgrounds, then, in a sense acquire the status of an uncontested dogma. Therefore, I term this extreme case of arguing 'dogmatic.' Its characteristics are that rather few topic shifts occur and that the bulk of the discourse operations used are complications/contrasts and explications - which represent the "classical" product analysis categories of casting doubt on a position and justifying the doubted position.

The other extreme case is what I term 'emergent arguing,' for in this type of arguing arguers make a co-operative and collaborative problem-solving effort to match their communicative backgrounds. Because of this, something new emerges from the discussion, which is usually plain because topic shifts occur, because, while arguing, arguers notice that they have to submit a certain point to closer scrutiny, etc. Consequently, in emergent arguing discourse operations like precization, specification, exemplification, and conclusion are more frequent than in dogmatic arguing.

Most of the actual arguing in colloquial speech is somewhere in between the extreme cases, and hence this continuous scale from dogmatic to emergent arguing provides only for a possibility to classify a given piece of discourse as more clearly a form of emergent or of dogmatic arguing. Still, neither of the extremities of the scale guarantees that one or the other of them makes arguing more likely to succeed. Neither of them is "better" than the other. While scientific arguing usually aims at "intersubjectifying" positions and therefore is more emergent, forensic arguing aims at winning a case on the uncontested basis of the body of legislation and therefore is more dogmatic. Neither of them, however, is better than the other; for they obviously have different goals. Hence, as long as non-argumentative and extra-communicative features do not influence on the arguing to such an extent as to make it a pseudo-argumentation, the analysis of the ongoing argumentative process with the tool I have proposed allows for an account of how much the arguers' communicative backgrounds coincided, or of how prepared they were to start from a shared point of view. If dogmatic arguing succeeds, two interpretations are possible: Either there were no noteworthy differences between the arguers' respective communicative backgrounds, or those who accept an argumentative justification of a position accept at the same time all the presuppositions on which this rests. If emergent arguing succeeds,

then the arguers felt that there were noteworthy differences between their respective communicative backgrounds, but they were prepared to examine more closely the point(s) at issue and to give up or modify part of their own communicative background in order to be able to arrive at a shared view of the position discussed.

NOTES

i. Example taken from Anscombre & Ducrot (1989 : 73), which is one of their rare English papers. (It is, in fact, a translation of Anscombre & Ducrot 1986). Rühl (1997b) gives a brief overview over the concept of implicit conclusions. Other sources in English as to their theory are the presentation in *Fundamentals* (1996 : chap. 11) and Snoeck Henkemans's (1995) critique of their analysis of *but* as an argumentative connector.

ii. This is in line with Jackson & Jacobs's (1980; 1982) point that 'conversational argument' comes into being because an addressee has not performed the conventionally expected second pair part of an adjacency pair, thereby creating a communication problem needing repair. The advantage of speaking of an addressee's choosing one out of a variety of possible meaningful continuations is that no 'structural preference for agreement' (1980 : 261-262) of adjacency pairs has to be assumed a priori, which is in a way an idealization making the analysis depart from a strict descriptive account of the interaction.

iii. I have given a detailed account as well as definitions of discourse operations elsewhere (Rühl 1997a : 213-215).

iv. ERAS[ME]. Mais ne parlons point de la science, tenons-nous-en à l'esprit ; ce bien-là ne dépend aucunement du hasard. (p. 109) - French spelling normalized. My translation.

v. CHAR[LES]. Il n'en dépend point ? Quoi! l'esprit ne consiste-t-il pas dans une certaine conformation du cerveau, et le hasard est-il moindre, de naître avec un cerveau bien disposé, que de naître d'un père qui soit roi ? Vous étiez un grand génie : mais demandez à tous les philosophes à quoi il tenait que vous ne fussiez stupide et hébété; presque à rien, à une petite disposition de fibres (p. 109-110) - French spelling normalized. My translation.

vi. I have proposed such an analysis elsewhere (Rühl 1997a : 247-270). The example discussed there is a portion of the dialogue *De grammatico*, composed by Anselm of Canterbury around A.D. 1080 to deal with one of the favorite research topics of scholastic logic and semantics, namely, the logical status of the so-called *paronyma*, that is, simplifying considerably, of expressions which are adjectives

but can be used as substantives, such as, e.g., grammaticus. Anselm's actual problem, however, is not the morphological problem of derivation but the ontological implications this has in the perspective of the philosophy of early Scholasticism. For if there are expressions which can be adjectives and substantives as well, this would mean, in this perspective, that there are things which can be at the same time accidental (Aristotelian 'kategoroúmena') and substantial (Aristotelian 'hypoikeímena'), with which scholastic metaphysics is not very at ease. For more details about the problem, see the commented editions of *De grammatico* provided by Henry (1964) and Galonnier (1986).

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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 Kruijer), 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, humans 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 dramaturgical 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 dramaturgical 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 dramatic 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 dramatistically “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 (α) at .05 and is conducting a test of significance with power = .40, beta (β) will be 1-.40, or .60. Then the ratio of β / α will be $.60 / .05 = 12$ implying a conception of Type I errors (α) as 12 times more serious than Type II errors (β).

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 Stiglitz 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 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 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

ratars 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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