

# ISSA Proceedings 2010 - The Ways Of Criticism: Four Parameters



## 1. Introduction [i]

The notions of criticism and of argument are very much related, both at a practical and at a theoretical level. In practice, a critical attitude is often manifested by ‘being argumentative’ in one’s comments and appreciations, whereas arguments are associated with a critical stance sooner than with a constructive one. In daily parlance, both “criticism” and “argument” even share some negative connotations, such as meddlesomeness and quarrelsomeness. In the theory of argumentation, there are no such connotations, but the theoretical concepts of criticism and of argument are all the same closely related. Argumentation can be either critical (opposing someone else’s point of view) or constructive (defending one’s own point of view) or both. Moreover, some sort of critical stance is often seen as essential for all argumentation, including the constructive kind, since argumentation is conceived as an instrument to overcome doubt, and doubt seems to imply a critical stance. In pragma-dialectics, the normative model for argumentation proposed is that of a critical discussion in which standpoints are critically tested (Van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984, 1992, 2004). Also, at the intersection of argumentation studies and artificial intelligence, dialogue protocols and models for persuasion dialogue have been developed that start from the assumption that argumentation and criticism are closely interwoven (Prakken 2005; Parsons, Wooldridge & Amgoud, 2003). Thus criticism seems not only to lie at the origin of argument, but also to pervade the whole argumentative procedure.

But then, there is not just one kind of criticism. Merely expressing critical doubt is certainly different from expressing an opposite point of view, and expressing such a point of view is again different from arguing for that point of view. All three are different from raising specific objections against a point of view, or against an argument, or against parts of an argument, or against the arguer, or against the circumstances in which the argument has been presented. This paper purports to contribute to a systematic characterization of these and other kinds of critical reaction and thus to contribute to the dialectical approach to

argumentation. In this, others have preceded us (Aristotle 1976; Finocchiaro 1980; Freeman 1991; Snoeck Henkemans 1992; Pollock, 1995; Govier, 1999; Johnson, 2000; Walton, 2010), and we have ourselves each attempted to contribute to this enterprise as well (Krabbe 2007; Van Laar 2010).

In this paper, we deal with the term “criticism” in the sense in which the term pertains to negative evaluations, rather than in a sense that also pertains to positive evaluations. (Nevertheless, such criticism can itself be called *constructive* when making valuable contributions to a discussion.) We aspire to discuss negative critical reactions in a wide sense, encompassing such criticisms as pertain to (expressions of) propositions, arguments, parts of arguments, and (the applications of) argument schemes, as well as those pertaining to arguers and institutional circumstances - criticisms which relate to such issues as understandability, admissibility, validity, appropriateness, reasonableness, consistency, timeliness, and civility. But we shall not discuss such aspects of critical reactions as fail to contribute to the contents of an argumentative exchange. Thus one could ‘critically react’ to an opponent by grabbing his shoulders and shaking him gently. Would this add content to the exchange? Of course, it might. If in some culture or in some special circumstances, this would be the way to express that one disagrees with the opponent’s point of view, it would as such add some content and be among the critical reactions we intend to cover; however, the circumstance that the expression of disagreement is performed by grabbing and shaking, rather than by a speech act, will not be part of our concerns. And then, the grabbing and shaking may also fail to express anything that must be taken into account as a part of the argumentative exchange, and thus fail to be part of our concerns altogether. From now on, we shall use the term “critical reaction” exclusively for those (aspects of) reactions that do contribute to an argumentative exchange (dialogue).

It should be mentioned that not all reactions in dialogue are critical. Reactions of agreement or acceptance, or requests to grant a concession would not count as such. The same holds for elucidations and explanations of earlier contributions, and indeed for arguments offered in response to criticism. What is missing in these reactions is a negative evaluation of the move they react upon or at least a suggestion that such a negative evaluation may be forthcoming. One might stretch the concept of critical reaction to the extent that an elucidation of one’s earlier contribution would count as criticism of a request for elucidation, and that

arguments would count as criticisms of doubts or requests for arguments. One might also claim that acceptance of a statement is a criticism of that statement as being superfluous, since one agrees. Taking this line, all reactions in dialogue could be said to be critical in some sense. In this paper, we shall not go that far, but exempt from the realm of critical reactions those reactions that merely comply with the requests (to accept, to elucidate or to argue) contained in the move one reacts upon. We do so because of the lack of obviousness of the negative evaluation content of such reactions, if any.

Rather than straightforwardly heading towards a general classification of types of critical reaction - based upon a division of genera into species - we shall attempt to characterize critical reactions in terms of four parameters or factors (based upon Van Laar 2010): the *focus* of a critical reaction (Section 2), the *norm* appealed to in a critical reaction (Section 3), the illocutionary *force* of a critical reaction (Section 4), and the *level* at which a critical reaction is put forward (Section 5). Each parameter can take several values, which are characteristic features of critical reactions of certain types.

By examining these parameters, we attempt to contribute to a systematic conceptual analysis of the various ways of criticism. A characterization of the distinct kinds of critical reactions will be helpful, for example, when trying to understand various reactions in an argumentative discourse. But also the development of models or protocols for reasonable persuasion dialogue will be facilitated by theoretically motivated characterizations of critical reactions. Finally, given the wide terminological and conceptual divergences in the area of critical reactions, we hope these parameters facilitate the making of reasoned choices.

## 2. *Focus*

Each critical reaction has a *focus*, which functions as a precondition for a critical reaction of a particular type (cf. Wells & Reed 2005). This may be a focus on a move of a particular type, or on a special part of a move, or on a sequence or combination of moves, put forward by the interlocutor, and possibly reconstructed by the critic. Because one can take a critical stance towards any kind of contribution, each type of speech act in an argumentative exchange can be at the focus of a critical reaction. What is more, an argumentative move can be seen as having four aspects: it expresses a particular *proposition*, by employing a particular *locution* put forward with a particular illocutionary force, by a

particular *person*, within a particular *situation*. So, the focus of a critical reaction, besides being aimed at a particular kind of speech act, can be *propositional*, *locutional*, *personal* or (in other respects) *situational* in character. We shall first list the most prominent kinds of focus and then discuss these aspects.

*First*, a critical reaction can focus on (parts of) an elementary argument as reconstructed by the critic. An elementary argument is an illative core of a (possibly more complex) argument, having just one justificatory step. It contains a standpoint (or conclusion) and a set of premises (reasons) containing exactly one connection premise (cf. Walton & Krabbe 1995, p. 128). The connection premise is a conditional statement, having the conjunction of the other premises as its antecedent and the standpoint as its consequent, which – within an argumentative context – expresses the commitment to accept the standpoint as soon as one has accepted the reasons in the antecedent. Often, the connection premise remains implicit, and in such cases the procedure for making it explicit is straightforward.

One of the parts of an elementary argument a critical reaction can focus on is the standpoint advanced by the proponent. This may happen before the elementary argument has been advanced – and in fact elicit the argument. Such a critical reaction may be focused on an expression of an opinion by the interlocutor, whether this expression has been marked as a standpoint or not (if not, the criticism will turn the expression of opinion into a standpoint, see Houtlosser 2001, p. 33). Of course, critical reactions can also focus on other parts of an elementary argument, or on a combination of parts. Where critical reactions on individual parts of an elementary argument are concerned, a threefold distinction can be upheld: such a critical reaction focuses on a standpoint or on a reason advanced in support of a standpoint (turning that reason itself into a substandpoint), or on a connection premise (on the three ways hypothesis, cf. Walton 2010). Comparing this three-fold distinction with the criteria for good arguments in Informal Logic, it is clear that critical reactions to the standpoint are not connected with any of these criteria, but the criticism of a reason corresponds to the criterion of acceptability whereas the criticism of a connection premise may either involve the criterion of sufficiency or that of relevance (Johnson & Blair 1983, p. 34). The distinction between the latter two cases is not one of focus but rather one of strategic advice (discussed below in Section 4).

It can be useful to characterize a critical reaction on an elementary argument in more detail as being focused on a special type of reason belonging to a specific

argument scheme (Garssen 2001) or kind of argumentation. For instance, a reaction could focus on the 'normality premise,' belonging to defeasible arguments, which expresses that circumstances are not exceptional, or it could focus on the 'desirability premise,' belonging to the pragmatic argument scheme (a kind of practical reasoning), which expresses the desirability of a particular goal.

*Second*, a critical reaction can focus on a more complex argument, such as a basic argument that is built up from several elementary arguments (cf. Walton & Krabbe 1995, p. 129). This happens when it is pointed out that there occurs a shift in the meaning of a particular term in the course of a chain of arguments, or when it is alleged that a chain of arguments is circular and begs the question, or when it is shown that various parts of the complex argument are mutually inconsistent. The critic can also charge the arguer of having made mistakes in suppositional arguments: for instance, when the arguer has derived an absurdity after having introduced a supposition to be refuted, but then subsequently misidentifies the responsible premise (see Aristotle (1965) in *Sophistical Refutations* 5 on the fallacy of *non causa*, 167b21-36).

*Third*, the focus of a critical reaction can be on a kind of argumentative move that does not itself present (a part of) an argument. A challenge, to take an example, can be the focus of a critical reaction when it is alleged that the critic's challenge is inappropriate due to the critic's having conceded the proposition at issue at an earlier stage. In a similar vein, one can critically react towards requests for clarification, for example because any further clarification would be superfluous. In such cases, a request can be pictured as a delaying tactic. More in general, a critical reaction can be focused on any kind of critical reaction. But there are also other moves that one can critically react to, for instance proposals. When one party, defending a standpoint, proposes a premise that is to function as a shared point of departure, a possible critical reaction by the other party could be that accepting that premise as a starting point would come down to accepting the standpoint. The critical reaction, in such a case, is aimed at preventing an arguer from begging the question.

*Fourth*, a critical reaction can focus at a combination of argumentative moves (which could all be different from moves needed for constructing an elementary or complex argument). For example, it could be pointed out that one's opponent refuses to concede a proposition that is immediately implied by a proposition

granted earlier. In that case the criticism focuses on the combination of the present move of refusal and the earlier move of concession.

When focusing on such (parts or combinations of) moves of the interlocutor, the emphasis can be on one or other of the four aspects of a move. Consider first *propositional critical reactions*. If such a reaction focuses directly on the content of a standpoint or of a reason, it can be called a *tenability criticism*, “Why *P*?” (Krabbe 2002, p. 161); if it focuses on the content of a connection premise, it can be called a *connection criticism*, “Why would I be committed to *Q* if I were to concede *P* in the current circumstances?” (cf. Krabbe 2002, p. 160).

A *locutional critical reaction* focuses on the formulation of a standpoint, reason or connection premise, or of some other contribution. It may either be concerned with unclarity of the propositional content or with unclarity of the illocutionary force of the contribution. In the *first* case, it aims at getting the speaker to indicate into more detail what proposition he tries to express, “What do you mean by *P*?”; or it aims at pressing him to adapt his formulation on some other ground, for example because the terminology is biased, or distasteful. A locutional criticism concerned with unclarity of propositional content can also focus on a complex argument when pointing out a fallacy of equivocation, or when pointing out the lack of terminological coherence in the opponent’s set of commitments. In the *second* case, when the illocutionary force is unclear, a locutional criticism aims at getting clearer about the kind of speech act performed by the other side: is he offering an argument or an explanation? Is this multiple argumentation or coordinative argumentation? Is this a mere concession or a stronger kind of commitment?

A *personal critical reaction* ‘attacks’ the person who brought forward an argumentative contribution, for example by saying something like “you’re not in a position to argue in favor of (or: against) *P* in a credible way due to a general flaw in your character (or a specific bias, etc.)” or “You shouldn’t argue about Burma; you have never been there.”

A *situational critical reaction* can point out that the circumstances of the dialogue are such that the other side’s contribution is inappropriate. For instance, it can be told to the interlocutor that he has performed an inappropriate kind of speech act: he should not himself have made a *concession* for he is in the present dialogue the proponent in an unmixed interchange and therefore is not to *make*

concessions to defend his standpoint, but to *employ* concessions made by the opponent in order to do so. Or, external circumstances may make a move inappropriate: “Defending this very standpoint in the current societal circumstances enhances violence”, or “Challenging proposition *P* is impolite and therefore not allowed in this family.” Though directed at a particular person and sometimes implying a personal attack, the focus is on the situation rather than just on the person.

### 3. Norm

Each critical reaction appeals to a particular kind of argumentative norm. One can relate to a norm in various ways. One merely *follows* a norm, without appealing to it, when one fulfills the obligations prescribed by the norm. For example, if, when one is supposed to provide an argument if asked to do so, and is indeed asked to do so, one provides an argument. One merely *utilizes* a norm, again without appealing to it, when one makes use of a right provided by the norm. For example, one utilizes the norm according to which the parties can take turns, simply by performing one’s move when the interlocutor has finished speaking. However, one *appeals* to a norm by putting forward a critical reaction (of a kind that is sanctioned by the norms) in order to put some pressure on the interlocutor to respond in a certain way. So, by challenging a standpoint, the critic is utilizing the freedom rule (also called Commandment 1, Van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004, p. 190) which allows her to challenge, but she is also, although implicitly, appealing to the obligation-to-defend rule (Commandment 2, *ibid.*, p. 191) in order to press the arguer to present an argument. One appeals to a norm, in the special sense of *emphasizing* it, in case the critic not only appeals to the norm, but is also rubbing it in, meaning that she is more or less clearly conveying the message that her critical reaction is pertinent because of the fact that this norm is operative. So, when the critic puts forward a challenge, and in addition stresses that the arguer is under the obligation to provide an argument, she is quite explicitly emphasizing a burden of proof rule. Below we shall repeatedly give examples of these two ways of appealing to norms (implicitly, and explicitly by emphasizing the norms). In the remainder of this subsection, however, we shall concentrate on the distinction between three *kinds* of norms, rather than on ways to refer or appeal to them.

First, there are the so-called *rules for critical discussion* (a normative model for persuasion dialogue). These rules mark the distinction between argumentatively

reasonable and unreasonable dialogue moves (*fallacies*). A critic may charge an arguer with having violated one of these rules. Such a charge would amount to an appeal to the rule in the sense of emphasizing. Of course the charge may be ill-founded. When a critic appeals to a norm that she considers to be part of the constitution of genuine critical discussion but we do not, her critical reaction must be seen by us as an incorrect appeal to a rule for critical discussion.

Second, there are *norms of optimality*, which mark the distinction between argumentative moves that are really good and those that, though not fallacies, are unsatisfactory in some argumentative respect (*lapses* or *blunders*). For instance, if a proponent can choose between a stronger and a weaker argument, the stronger argument is to be preferred (cf. Krabbe 2001, on the discussion rule “Try to win”). Since one’s lapses or blunders are usually ‘advantageous’ for one’s interlocutor, the latter may leave them unnoticed. But she may also point out that the argument, though not fallacious, is flawed and therefore unconvincing. External observers of an argumentative discussion often appeal to optimality norms to criticize the participants.

Third, there are the so-called *institutional norms*. Argumentative norms that are institutional can be seen as marking the distinction between dialogue moves that are appropriate within the institutional setting, and those which are inappropriate within the setting. In the latter case we may speak of *faults*. In contradistinction to the rules for critical discussion, these norms are not part of the general explication of argumentative reasonableness. However, they do apply in particular types of context, where the participants use argumentation for special purposes that supplement the goal of resolution of a difference of opinion, for instance the purpose of resolving the difference of opinion in one’s own favor (Van Eemeren & Houtlosser 2002). Van Eemeren and Houtlosser discuss these institutional settings as ‘argumentative activities’ (2005, pp. 76-7; cf. Van Eemeren 2010, Ch. 5). For example, when engaged in legal proceedings, additional rules apply to the argumentative moves put forward by the participants, for in order for the difference of opinion to have been resolved in a manner that is not merely dialectically reasonable but also legally admissible, various additional constraints must have been taken into account. These additional constraints can be emphasized as norms in critical reactions.

We take the idea of an institution in a broad sense, including rather mundane activities such as having a colloquial conversation, or discussing current affairs,



in addition to more formalized activities such as being engaged in a lawsuit, a parliamentary discussion, a public debate or a debating contest. Norms to the effect that particular topics are, within certain circumstances, not up for debate, or to the effect that certain character traits or personal circumstances can disqualify a person as a serious participant can be regarded as special norms that characterize some (and not all) argumentative activities.

#### *4. Force*

A third parameter to be used for characterizing the ways of criticism is that of the illocutionary force of a critical reaction. Conspicuous here are reactions in the form of requests, assertives, and strategic advice.

##### *Requests*

First, a critical reaction, whatever the norm appealed to and whatever the focus, can be put forward as a directive in the form of a *request*; either for argument or for clarification. Requests for argument (or: challenges) have a propositional focus, “Why *P*?”, whereas requests for clarification have a locutional focus, “What do you mean by formulation *P*?” In both cases, the request aims at an extension of the argument as constructed at some stage of the dialogue. Requests utilize the rules for critical discussion, and appeal to them in an implicit manner. By filing a request for an argument or a clarification, the critic is capable of pressing the arguer to provide the requested argument or clarification on the basis of certain rules for critical discussion. The implicit, normative appeal of a request for an argument would, if made explicit, yield something like: “in order for you to fulfill your burden of proof, as laid down in Rule 3 for critical discussion, or Commandment 2 of the code of conduct (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004, pp. 139 and 191), you must provide an argument as requested.” The urgency of a request for clarification becomes clear from a similar message, which could be made explicit to yield: “in order for you to adequately express yourself, as required in Rule 15 for critical discussion or Commandment 10 of the code of conduct (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004, pp. 157 and 195), you must provide a clarification as requested.” Normally, the reference to the applied rules remains fully implicit in such requests, but sometimes the norms are emphasized, rather than merely appealed to implicitly.

##### *Assertives*

Second, instead of merely requesting an argument or a further explication, a critic can reconstruct and negatively evaluate (a part of) a contribution by the

other side, by making an *assertion* to the effect that there is a flaw of some kind in the interlocutor's contribution. Critical reactions such as these have been dealt with by Finocchiaro as 'active evaluations' (1980, p. 339). When pointing out a flaw, the critic is actively taking part in the discussion about the matters at issue in the criticized contribution by putting forward a negative evaluation in which she appeals to one or more norms: the flaw needs repair. The critic can do so but nonetheless refrain from alleging that her interlocutor has been unreasonable on the ground of having violated some rule for critical discussion (a norm of the first kind) or inept on the ground of having violated some institutional norm (a norm of the third kind).

One prominent way of pointing out a flaw is to deny a proposition that has been expressed or employed by the interlocutor or to assert a proposition that implies a denial. Such denials come in two kinds, depending upon the messages conveyed to the other participant. If party A denies a proposition *P* that has been used by party B, saying "not *P*", this denial can convey the relatively weak message that B will not be able to defend his standpoint that *P* vis-à-vis party A. This so-called *weak denial* is not itself a kind of standpoint that requires a defense when challenged. Instead, it expresses an expectation to the effect that, according to A's assessment, party B will not be capable of constructing a case for his main standpoint that will turn out to be convincing for A. If requested to *defend* 'not *P*', party A can justifiably answer "It is not my opinion that *P* is not the case, and therefore I am not willing to present an argument in favour of 'not *P*'; instead I am evaluating negatively your strategic chances of finding an argument that will convince me." A weak denial does, however, come with an obligation for the critic to be open about her considerations that brought her to this assessment: what makes her think that B lacks the means for persuading her? So, there is, instead of a burden of proof, a kind of burden of giving some explanation, be it that this burden will have to be rather limited considering that the critic herself may not have full access to the grounds of her assessment. In short, a weak denial will always be a purely critical move, rather than a constructive one.

A second kind of denial is the *strong denial*. With a strong denial, "not *P*," party A conveys the message that A will be able to defend this denial against B's critical testing. Such a counterstandpoint does carry a burden of proof, when challenged. So, besides being critical, such a move is constructive, generating a mixed dispute in which argumentation (for *P*) is parried by counterargumentation

(argumentation for not-*P*).

If the focus of a weak or strong denial is on the propositional content of the connection premise, the critic is pointing out a justificatory flaw. Such flaws can also be pointed out in ways other than by denials, for example by presenting a counterexample. Methods using assertives, other than denials, for pointing out flaws can also be found in critical reactions in which it is alleged that a formulation used by the other side contains biased terms or harmful ambiguities. Or when the evidence is pictured as legally inadmissible; or when it is held that the interlocutor has exceeded the time limit. In each case, the assertive that points out the flaw may itself be supported by arguments (see Krabbe 2007, pp. 60-61, on *strong objections*).

### *Strategic advice*

Third, when raising a challenge or when pointing out a flaw, party A can choose to accompany this critical reaction by some of the counterconsiderations that party B must take into account when making further decisions as to whether and, if so, how to proceed in his attempts to persuade A of B's standpoint *P*. Within an argumentative context, these counterconsiderations function as directives conveying *strategic advice* to B. Such strategic advice is critical in so far as it conveys the message that a negative evaluation is forthcoming if the proponent will turn out to be incapable of defusing the counterconsideration. We will provide a few examples. First, a challenge can be accompanied by a consideration that explains to B why A is critically disposed to *P*. The message to B then is that B must adapt his persuasive strategy in such a way that this motive for a critical stance will be defused. For instance, a challenge directed at the connection premise, "Why if *P* then *Q*?" can be accompanied by the counterconsideration that *P* does not suffice to establish *Q* (conveying the message that additional reasons should be supplied or that a specific objection should be met), or by the counterconsideration that *P* is not clearly relevant for *Q* (conveying the message that argumentation must be supplied to show the relevance; see Snoeck Henkemans 1992, p. 89-93 and 2003, pp. 408-410). Second, it has been stated above that weak denials should generally be accompanied by considerations that explain why party B will turn out to be unable to persuade A. But such considerations would of course be overruled if B were to defuse them in some way or other. Hence they provide strategic advice for B. Third, strong denials can be accompanied by counterargumentation. Such argumentation can fulfill two

functions: a constructive persuasive function (persuading B of not-*P*), but we refrain from discussing this function since we are concerned with critical, rather than with constructive moves. In the present context it is more to the point to stress the function of providing party B with considerations that must be refuted before party A will retract her critical doubt towards *P*.

### *5. Level*

The fourth and last parameter is that of level. The distinction we have in mind has to do with the directness with which a dialogue move contributes to the argumentation in favour of one of the standpoints adopted in the discussion. Quite direct contributions will be located at the ground level dialogue, while more indirect contributions – moves that are about the dialogue rather than about the issue at hand – are to be located at the next meta-level of dialogue or at levels even higher up in the hierarchy (Krabbe 2003). Although it is difficult to draw a borderline, we think such a distinction can be upheld.

Clearly, a move in which a proponent puts forward an argument in favour of a challenged proposition, or in which a critic puts forward a counterargument against some part of the argument of the other (and so in favor of some kind of strong denial), contributes directly to the issue discussed, and so this move will be a ground level move. The same applies to the clarification of a part of the argument, for example by explaining what was meant by this or that expression. Requests for further arguments or for clarification of an argument will be seen as quite directly contributing to the argumentation in that the response aimed for is an argument or a clarification. So, these moves are considered to be ground level moves as well.

However, if a party's move deals, for instance, with the strategy adopted by himself or by the other side, the contribution may still be seen as dealing with the standpoints at issue, but only indirectly so. The primary topic is a strategy that has been, can be or should be adopted (or not adopted). So, what we have called weak denials are to be seen as initiating a meta-level dialogue. Similarly, moves offering explicit strategic advice are meta-level moves.

An example of an explicit strategic advice can be found in Plato's *Euthydemus*, where Ctesippus challenges Dionysodorus' claim that Dionysodorus and Euthydemus really know everything:

Here Ctesippus interrupted: For goodness' sake, Dionysodorus, give me some

evidence of these things which will convince me that you are both telling the truth.

What shall I show you? he asked.

Do you know how many teeth Euthydemus has, and does he know how many you have?

Aren't you satisfied, he said, with being told that we know everything?

Not at all, he answered, but tell us just this one thing in addition, and prove that you speak the truth. Because if you say how many each of you has, and you turn out to be right when we have made a count, then we shall trust you in everything else. (*Euthydemus* 294c, Plato 1997, p. 732)

When a party claims that the other side has transgressed a rule for critical discussion or an applicable institutional norm of some kind, the moves must be seen as being primarily about the legitimacy or appropriateness of part of the preceding dialogue, and thus as initiating and contributing to a meta-level dialogue. When the critic puts forward a negative evaluation by charging her interlocutor with having breached a norm, strongly emphasizing the norm, her evaluation will count as a request for some kind of repair, as is generally the case with pointing out flaws. But in addition, the interlocutor is accused of having put forward a move that hinders or even blocks either the resolution-goal of their discussion (a fallacy) or one of the goals inherent in the institutional activity (a fault). All such charges take place at a meta-level of dialogue.

Charges of faults (in the present sense) occur for instance when party A points out to party B that defending a certain proposition will have unacceptable social consequences (the charge may of course be unjustified). One may think of the self-fulfilling prophecy that ensues when a prime minister too much stresses its country's economical troubles, or of cases where it is said that our adversaries will profit if anyone would take a critical stance towards a standpoint. Also personal attacks can be seen as charges at a meta-level that the interlocutor has violated an institutional norm, in that case a norm to the effect that for instance the arguer's financial involvement, lack of expertise or insincerity is inappropriate for the kind of discussion at hand. Those personal attacks that are dialectically illegitimate constitute *ad hominem* fallacies.

## 6. Conclusion

As has become evident from our discussion of the four parameters, there exists an enormous variety of critical reactions. These must be taken into account within

argumentation studies aimed at the development of norms for argumentation and of practical guidelines for those who wish to engage in argumentative activities, displaying rationality as well as persuasiveness. In Table 1 below we provide a survey of the critical reactions on the basis of the four parameters.

<i>Parameters</i>	<i>Main types</i>	<i>Some subtypes / Examples</i>
Focus <i>Aspects:</i> Propositional Locutional Personal Situational	On elementary arguments	On the standpoint
		On a reason
		On the connection premise
	On complex arguments	Charges of equivocation, begging the question, inconsistency, and <i>non causa</i> .
	On a move that does not present (a part of) an argument	Criticizing challenges, requests, and criticisms
	On further combinations of moves	Charges of inconsistency or of unreasonable behavior
Norm <i>Ways of appealing to norms:</i> Merely appealing Emphasizing	Rules for critical discussion	Freedom rule Burden of proof rule
	Norms of optimality	Use the stronger argument. Choose the clearest formulation. Avoid digressions.
	Institutional norms	Adapt to audience. Provide only legally obtained evidence.

Force	Directives	Requests:Requests for arguments (challenges) Requests for clarifications
		Strategic advice:To supply additional reasons, meet objections, or show relevance
	Assertives	Pointing out flaws:Weak denials Strong denials (counterstandpoints) Counterexamples Pointing out ambiguities, inadmissibility of evidence, or that there is no time left
Level	Ground level	Requests for further argumentation or clarification Strong denials Counterarguments
	Meta-levels	Calling into doubt the legitimacy or the appropriateness of moves Weak denials Strategic advice Personal attacks

*Table 1.*

In order to proceed in these areas we think it to be important to apply and illustrate the notions in the present approach, comparing them with notions of critical reactions as they exist within such areas as formal dialectic, pragma-dialectic and computation, so as to facilitate the development of a clear and useful inventory of critical reactions. In fact, we took some steps in that direction, which were here omitted by lack of space, but will hopefully be published in a sequel. These applications, illustrations and comparisons concern texts by (1) Aristotle on objections and criticisms in the Topics and the Sophistical Refutations, (2) Finocchiaro on active involvement (Finocchiaro 1980, 1987, 1997), (3) Freeman

on central questions in a basic dialectical situation (Freeman 1991), (4) Pollock on rebutting defeaters and undercutting defeaters (Pollock 1995), and (5) Snoeck Henkemans on complex argumentation in critical discussion (Snoeck Henkemans 1992, 2003).

One thing that has become clear to us, at the present stage of research, is that criticisms often constitute subtle argumentative instruments that do not only carry negative messages for the interlocutor, but are often helpful in that they provide various kinds of strategic advice.

## NOTES

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# ISSA Proceedings 2010 - Cultural Diversity, Cognitive Breaks, And Deep Disagreement: Polemic Argument



## 1. Introduction

Almost every argumentation scholar will be familiar with the famous skit by Monty Python's Flying Circus called *The Argument Clinic* (Monty Python 1987; video 2006). A man (played by Michael Palin) comes to the 'Argument Clinic', wishing to "have an argument". After various failed attempts he finally enters the room where an "arguer" (played by John Cleese) offers such service. Yet the argument does not develop the way the client has expected, since when he double-checks that he is in the correct room, Cleese confronts him with a bluntly dishonest statement ("I told you once."), thereby provoking contradiction from the client, but in the following dialogue confines himself to merely contradicting any statement the client will make. Even when the client tries to define that an argument is not "the automatic gainsaying of any statement the other person makes", but "a connected series of statements intended to establish a proposition", and tries to use logic and reason to defeat Cleese, the latter continues to proceed in exactly the same way, until in the end the enervated client rushes out of the room with an exasperated "Oh shut up!"

This sketch makes us laugh, and this is what it is meant to. But what it draws its funny esprit from is the fact that we will all remember having experienced such or similar scenes in reality. Seemingly futile polemic argument appears to be characteristic of our present-day argument culture. TV talk shows confront us daily with disputers yelling at each other and flinging arguments into each other's faces without ever listening to the other side. And are not today's political debates more often than not characterized by mere cantankerousness and gain-saying rather than by veritable argumentation? To be honest, even academic discussions

oftentimes hardly do any better.

Dissatisfaction with what she feels is a deplorable trait of our Western argument culture provoked Deborah Tannen's notorious book *The Argument Culture* (Tannen 1998; 1999). Tannen's claim is that in our Western societies we argue too much, even when we do not really essentially disagree. In contrast, she advocates a concept of society that would look for common ground rather than dissent and for 'truth' rather than debate.

It is easy to see that the little dispute in the *Argument Clinic* violates each and every one of the pragma-dialectical procedural rules for critical discussion (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1984, pp. 151-175; 2003; 2004, pp. 135-157) and never gets beyond the confrontation stage. Such an argument that shows no noticeable attempt at resolving the basic dissent by rational means, but consists in nothing but repeated contradiction and gainsaying, we will call a polemic argument.

This paper will try to analyse the preconditions under which and the situations in which such cases of polemic argument are likely, if not bound to occur. In this endeavour, we will make use of the concept of "deep disagreement" developed by Robert Fogelin (Fogelin 1985) and the notion of "cognitive breaks" ("coupures cognitives") recently identified by Marc Angenot in his book *Dialogues de sourds* (Angenot 2008, p. 19). It will emerge that deep disagreements typically arise from a lack of common ground between arguers, and that one of the major sources for such a lack and hence for cognitive breaks and deep disagreement is the diversity of the cultural backgrounds of the individual arguers, a problem that rapidly gains in importance in our increasingly multicultural societies. We will determine the sectors and areas in which cultural diversity may manifest itself and the ways in which these diversities may affect the forms, functions, contents, and evaluations of arguments. Based on the theory of antilogical reasoning as a cognitive method developed by the Greek sophists, we will finally seek to establish an underlying logic and rhetoric of purely polemic arguments and to delineate the conditions under which they may still be integrated into a standard of a rational and critical discussion and may play a useful role by helping clarify the issue at stake and the conflicting positions for a broader third-party audience.

## *2. Common Ground, Deep Disagreement, and Cognitive Breaks*

All argumentation necessarily starts from dissent; without any dissent there would be no reason for arguing. But it needs common ground to build on, if it is

meant to make any substantial progress. Such common ground is usually provided by a common cognitive, normative, or cultural environment shared by the arguers. The more common ground there exists between the arguers, the better the prospects for a statement to be successful as a speech act and argument. This 'common ground' has been described as "shared knowledge" by Ralph Johnson and J. Anthony Blair (Johnson & Blair 2006, p. 77), as "mutual knowledge" or "mutually manifest cognitive environment" by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (Sperber 1982; Sperber & Wilson 1986), a term also adopted later by Christopher Tindale (Tindale 1999, pp. 101-115), and as "the normative environment the arguers inhabit together" by Jean Goodwin (Goodwin 2005, p. 111). In the same sense, Michael Billig speaks of "common sense" (Billig 1991, p. 144) and of "communal links, foremost among which are shared values or beliefs" (Billig 1996, p. 226), and Douglas Walton of "common knowledge" (Walton 2001, pp. 108-109) or "general knowledge shared by the speaker, hearer, and audience" (Walton 1996, p. 251).

In a similar way, Aristotle bases the plausibility of dialectical arguments on what he calls *endoxa*, i.e. generally accepted opinions, which according to a definition he gives in the *Topics* (1.1, 100b 21-23) is "what is acceptable to everybody or to the majority or to the wise", as opposed to that which is true by necessity. Aristotle's notion of *endoxa* introduces a clearly audience-related element. According to him, arguing is a cooperative cognitive process that happens between arguer and recipient. Accordingly, it is essential that the arguer make sure not only that his or her argument's premises are adequate, but also in particular that their adequacy is made conspicuous to the recipient (Goodwin 2005, pp. 99 and 111). This cognitive process is clearly enhanced by the extent of common understandings, concepts or ideas shared by both sides.

Yet more often than not such common ground or environment that would ensure successful argumentation is not universal. Values or beliefs arrange themselves into sets of beliefs or belief systems, the importance of which for a correct understanding of the communicative process of argumentation has been emphasized by various theorists (see Gough 1985; Groarke & Tindale 2001; Rescher 2001). Particularly Jim Gough has argued for a view in which such systems of belief "are relative to different individuals in different groups in different contexts" and may thus come into conflict with each other (Gough 2007, p. 499).

Yet in cases in which there is little or no such common ground, argumentation as a communicative process may entirely fail, so that no resolution of the conflict by means of rational argument seems possible. It was for such cases that Robert J. Fogelin first introduced his notion of “deep disagreement” that would be characterized by “a clash of framework propositions” in a Wittgensteinian sense (Fogelin 1985, p. 5). Fogelin distinguishes between two kinds of argumentative exchange: He assumes that “an *argumentative exchange* is normal when it takes place within a context of *broadly* shared beliefs and preferences” (p. 3), with which he includes that “there must exist shared procedures for resolving disagreements.” (p. 3). In cases, however, “when the context is neither normal nor nearly normal”, for Fogelin “argument [...] becomes impossible,” since “the conditions for argument do not exist.” (pp. 4-5). “The language of argument may persist, but it becomes pointless since it makes an appeal to something that does not exist: a shared background of beliefs and preferences.” (p. 5). In such cases, Fogelin speaks of deep disagreements (p. 5).

A normal reaction to this would be to simply stop arguing. Yet Fogelin seems to be aware of the fact that this is not what normally happens. In most cases, people will nonetheless continue their argument, even though it has become “pointless” since it is bound to fail on a rational level. This gives rise to the question Angenot asks: Why is it that people continue arguing so frantically even though there are obvious “coupures” in their argumentative logic (Angenot 2008, p. 15) and cognition (pp. 17 and 19) that are more or less “insurmontables” (p. 17) and separate arguers from each other to such an extent that they even cannot understand each other’s arguments, since they don’t apply the same “code rhétorique” (p. 15)? Angenot’s ultimate answer is that people do not argue in order to convince anyone, but in order to justify and assert their own position (pp. 439-444) with a certain “imperméabilité” (p. 21). As a consequence, each side will bluntly deny the rationality of the other side’s arguments and declare them plainly absurd, a situation Fogelin describes in terms of “radical perspectivism” (Fogelin 2003, pp. 73-74), which means that “conceptual frameworks” may not only not be shared by opposing parties in an argument (p. 72), but even “wall us off from others enveloped in competing conceptual schemes” (p. 74). If, under such conditions, the argument continues - and it frequently does -, then the result can only be “dialogues of the deaf”, as Angenot calls them, or polemic argument, as we define it (yet not argumentation in the true sense of the word).

Polemic argument, of course, may as well be just wilfully polemic, and the deep disagreement may be faked for provocative purposes without there being any real deep disagreement (as is the case in many TV shows, and oftentimes also in politics). But it may as well be the result of a genuine deep disagreement, as is the case for instance in the debates on abortion, reverse discrimination, the Terri Schiavo case on the removal of life-supporting measures, the debate on separation of francophone Québec from Canada, or dissent on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Fogelin's radical and shocking claim that nothing can be done to resolve deep disagreements on a rational level has provoked various reactions from Informal Logicians and argumentation scholars in general. It has been attacked by several scholars: Andrew Lugg (1986) meant to save Informal Logic from this challenge by pointing out that Fogelin's main examples of the abortion and positive discrimination debates were inappropriate, since in both those cases, in spite of the continuing debate, a perfectly "normal" argumentative exchange was going on. Don S. Levi, too, failed to see how deep disagreements would constitute any limitation on what can be achieved by critical thinking, since in his view the main focus should not be placed on the final verdict about the argument, but on the acquisition of a better understanding of the issues involved (Levi 2000, pp. 96-110). Richard Feldman, while in principle sympathizing with Fogelin's pessimistic view, argued that "suspending judgment" could be a rational solution, and that consequently there could be no "reasonable disagreement" (Feldman 2005a; 2005b; 2006; 2007). Richard Friemann (2005) suggested that emotional backing could help resolve deep disagreements, and David M. Adams (2005) objected that Fogelin had not specified any a priori conditions that would make a disagreement deep. Yet on the other hand, Fogelin's thesis has also been defended, among others by Peter Davson-Galle (1992), by Dale Turner and Larry Wright (2005), by Christian Campolo (2005), or by van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson & Jacobs, who do admit that such types of disagreements may mean a serious challenge to the pragma-dialectical model of a critical discussion, since in those cases participants do not enter into the discussion with a resolution-minded attitude, but with very personal interests which each of them regards as privileged and beyond discussion (van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson & Jacobs 1993, pp. 171-72). In a similar way, John Woods has described what he calls "closed-minded disagreements" under the name of "standoffs of force five" (Woods 1992; 1996; 2004, p. 194-199), which he declares intractable; in that

respect, he even speaks of “paralysis” and “argumentational blockages” (Woods 1996, p. 650). Moreover, as early as in the fifties, Henry W. Johnstone Jr. had already identified the possibility of “radical conflicts” and “radical disagreement” (Johnstone 1954; 1959, pp. 2-3; 132-133).

### *3. Cultural Diversity and Deep Disagreement*

One of the major factors that may account for diversity of belief systems between arguers, and hence also for deep disagreement, is most certainly the cultural environment each individual has been brought up in or acculturated to. It is only in our globalized and multicultural postmodern world that this obvious fact has become fully manifest, explicably so since culture-specific presuppositions in argumentation frequently remain implicit in terms of unstated premises. In the same sense, Aristotle’s *endoxa* have also been interpreted as “culturally shared values” vs. *topoi* as culturally shared rules of inference (Rigotti & Rocci 2005, p. 128).

Whereas culture-specific belief systems may enhance mutual understanding of the argumentative exchange when employed *within* a cultural community (i.e. when shared by both sides), they are highly likely to create problems in the case of cross-cultural argument. In a cross-cultural argumentative dialogue substantial parts of one arguer’s set of beliefs may not be shared by the other arguer, a fact that may cause incomprehension or misapprehensions. Arguments can thus be culture-specific, culture-determined, and therefore culture sensitive (see Kraus 2010).

Some such notion of cultural sensitivity appears to be addressed by Johnson and Blair, when, in *Logical Self-Defense*, they define ‘ethnocentrism’ as “a tendency to see matters exclusively through the eyes of the group or class with which one identifies and/or is identified” and declare “most prominent among such groupings [...] those by religion, culture, nation, gender, race, and ethnic background” (Johnson & Blair 2006, p. 192). While for Johnson and Blair ‘ethnocentric attachments’ are legitimate, in fact even inevitable, a problem arises whenever they turn into an ‘ethnocentric attitude’, i.e. “one that assumes (probably never explicitly) that our culture is somehow better than others’ culture or else that what is true of our culture is also true of others’ culture.” (p. 192). For Johnson and Blair, an ‘ethnocentric attitude’ is one of the principal causes of fallacious reasoning (p. 192), by reason that it violates the standard of acceptability (p. 58); yet one might as well also say that it may result in a “clash of



framework propositions”, which, according to Fogelin, will produce deep disagreement.

“Argumentation is a cultural phenomenon,” says U.S. argumentation educationalist Danielle Endres (2003, p. 293; 2007, p. 381), and she is most certainly right. The study of diversity in argument cultures and of cross-cultural or intercultural argumentation has become a thriving field of global research. But while in earlier times cultural studies searched rather for commonalities between cultures, in recent years, based on empirical field research, the focus has progressively shifted to differences between cultures.

Endres identifies three basic respects, in which arguments may differ across cultural boundaries: forms, functions, and evaluations of argumentation (Endres 2003, p. 294), to which one might wish to add contents. Fogelin, in his analysis, seems to focus on functions and evaluations when he insists that, in a “normal” exchange of arguments, “there must exist shared procedures for resolving disagreements” (Fogelin 1985, p. 3), whereas Angenot appears to concentrate mainly on forms and contents.

The most relevant current approach to cultural diversity is the so-called ‘cultural dimensions approach’, which is “based on the assumption that a culture is best represented by the values and beliefs that a group of people hold in common” (Hazen 2007, p. 7). Its most influential version has been developed by the Dutch scholar Geert Hofstede (1991, 2001). According to Hofstede, cultures can be differentiated on the basis of four value dimensions: 1) individualism vs. collectivism (the degree to which individuals are autonomous from or integrated into groups), 2) power distance (the degree to which people accept or do not accept unequal distribution of power, i.e. hierarchies), 3) uncertainty avoidance (the amount of tolerance for or avoidance of uncertainty and ambiguity), and 4) masculinity vs. femininity (the degree to which gender roles are fixed and respected).

Hofstede’s fairly abstract and generalizing categories are certainly useful, but need to be fleshed out by some material contents. In this respect a taxonomy developed by Barry Tomalin and Susan Stempleski is useful. According to Tomalin and Stempleski, cultures can be defined (and contrasted) by three interrelated elements: 1) ideas (values, beliefs, institutions); 2) products (e.g. customs, habits, food, dress, lifestyle); 3) behaviours (e.g. folklore, music, art, literature) (Tomalin

& Stempleski 1993, p. 7).

As far as contents of arguments are concerned, cultural diversity may be said to manifest itself in any one or a combination of the following elements: First and foremost, there are values, norms, codes, and institutions. These may be of religious provenance (including e.g. religious values, beliefs, dogmas, commandments, taboos, views of gender roles etc.), associated with political ideas (e.g. freedom, democracy, legal systems, civil rights vs. hierarchic thinking), or of a more general philosophical and ethical character (e.g. human rights, ethical codes, rules of conduct).

A second group is represented by the elements that form the collective memory of a cultural group, such as the narratives of a society's myths and history, but also outstanding cultural achievements such as products of literature and art, etc.

A third tier is formed by the standards that regulate everyday social life and interaction, such as language, customs, habits, routines, codes of honour, sense of shame, sense of humour, eating and drinking habits, etiquette, fashion and general lifestyle. With this group would also belong what is called popular culture.

It is easy to see how for instance religious or political values and norms, but also more everyday customs and habits that may enter into an argument as premises may clash in a cross-cultural dispute, so as to create deep disagreement that will not be resolvable as long as the differences in fundamental values are not resolved, which appears not to be feasible by way of rational argument.

As far as functions are concerned, there are cultural communities, such as many Asian or Native American ones, in which the aim of argumentation is not, as in our Western tradition, to win a case against an opponent, but to talk controversial matters over patiently until consensus and harmony can be reached (Endres 2003, p. 294). The focus is on community rather than rivalry and competition.

Forms of arguments and styles and patterns of reasoning, too, may be valued differently in different cultural communities. An argument from authority or expert evidence, for instance, will have a much different effect in communities with high power distance such as most Asian societies, as opposed to communities with low power distance such as Western societies. But even so, a particular authority that is acknowledged by one cultural group need not

necessarily be so by another one. This notably applies to religious authorities, as is obvious from the debate on abortion, in which one side claims that abortion is murder since their religion tells them so, which is however declared absurd or non-relevant by their opponents.

Similar discrepancies obtain for arguments from popular opinion (Goodwin 2005, p. 108-109). A statement such as “Everybody thinks that English should be spoken everywhere in the world” may perhaps hold good for the U.S., but other nations may see things differently. Even ad hominem arguments, particularly in their abusive variant, are clearly open to cultural sensitivity, since there is substantial disagreement among different cultures as to what qualifies as a personal affront.

But even a simple argument from example will only work well if the example is known to and acknowledged as such by the interlocutor. Otherwise there will be no common ground to build on, and the argument will go unheard. This applies to all examples taken from a specific cultural group’s collective memory, i.e. from its myths, history or literature. For instance, an argument such as “Non-violence may ultimately prevail, as Gandhi’s example proves” will presuppose some knowledge of modern Indian history.

Evaluation of arguments, finally, is the most delicate point of all. A first issue is relevance. An argument that holds good for one cultural community will appear completely irrelevant to another. For instance, a Native American tribe’s argument that no nuclear waste site should be built on a particular mountain, since that mountain was a serpent lying asleep that would get angry when awakened (Endres 2007, p. 383), was bound to fall on deaf ears with local politicians and engineers. Similarly, the local First Nations’ argument that Mount Uluru (Ayers Rock) in the central Australian outback must not be climbed, because the path crosses an important dreaming track, was bluntly ignored by the Australian Prime Minister, who made access to Uluru for tourists a condition for handing the title to the area back to its original owners.

In a similar way, an argument that would be regarded as sufficient support for a claim in one cultural community, may appear insufficient to a different community. That we must not pollute this planet, since it is God’s creation, might be considered a sufficient argument by devout Christians, but clearly less so in a more secular environment, even if the argument is not considered irrelevant.

Cultural diversity will also strongly affect the strength of arguments. For instance: “You should work more than is requested in your contract, since this is for the best of your company” will be a strong argument in collectivism-oriented cultures such as most Asian societies, but a fairly weak one in highly individualist societies such as most Western ones.

Arguments may even backfire when the addressee, by supplying a contrary premise, interprets them to the contrary of what they were meant to say; or they may unwillingly embarrass or insult the addressee, such as when the former French president Charles de Gaulle defended French colonial policy in Guinea by arguing that France had done many good things to that country, as was amply demonstrated by the perfect French spoken by its president Sekou Touré (Kienpointner 1996, pp. 49-50). De Gaulle’s argument presupposed that francophonization of the colonial population was a positive value. But African anti-colonialists, to whom the argument was addressed, will surely have interpreted this as an expression of cultural imperialism.

Of course, not every argument that is culture sensitive will necessarily produce deep disagreement. According to Danny Marrero, cultural difference in argumentative dialogues comes in three grades: slight, moderate and radical (Marrero 2007, p. 4-6). In dialogues with slight cultural difference, the arguers belong to different groups with minor cultural variations, but still share a clearly defined common ground (p. 4). In a dialogue with moderate cultural difference there is an intersection of the sets of cultural beliefs, but only certain items are shared between the arguers, so that there is only limited common ground (p. 5). In an argumentative dialogue with radical cultural difference, however, there is no common ground at all. “Each arguer has a cultural-specific system of beliefs, values and presuppositions” (p. 5). This is the basis for deep disagreement.

On the other hand, by far not all arguments are culture sensitive at all. Arguments of the type “John should be at home, since there is light in his apartment” or “You should take your coat, since it is raining outside” may qualify as culture-independent. But it can nonetheless be reasonably stated that cultural diversity may be one of the principal causes for deep disagreements.

#### *4. Antilogical Reasoning*

At this point, let us for an instant return to the Argument Clinic. When, after minutes of mere gainsaying from the part of his opponent, the client complains

that “an argument isn’t just contradiction,” John Cleese retorts: “It can be.” (Monty Python 1987). But can it really? Can mere contradiction in any way be a basis for argumentative resolution of problems?

In that respect, it is helpful to look back some two-and-a-half millennia to the age of the Greek sophists. Those early thinkers had developed a serious method of establishing knowledge by opposition of two contrary statements. This method was to be employed in cases in which certain knowledge was unavailable. Practical examples of this strategy can be found in a judicial context in Antiphon’s *Tetralogies* (four antilogical speeches in a judicial case; Mendelson 2002, p. 110-112; Tindale 2010, p. 107), in a political context in Thucydides’ pairs of opposed speeches (Mendelson 2002, pp. 103-106; Tindale 2010, pp. 107-108), or in a more philosophical context in the anonymous treatise called *Dissoi Logoi* (“Opposed speeches”; Mendelson 2002, pp. 109-110; Tindale 2010, pp. 102-104) as well as in Gorgias’s treatise *On Not-Being*. It was the sophist Protagoras who formulated the axiom that, with respect to any topic, two contradictory statements may be formulated and confronted with each other (frg. B 6a), which became the basic principle of the sophistic technique of *antilogia* or ‘anti-logic’ (Mendelson 2002, pp. 45-49; Schiappa 2003, pp. 89-102; Kraus 2006, p. 11;).

This theory, however, had a well-defined epistemological foundation (Kraus 2006, pp. 8-9). In his treatise *On Not-Being or On Nature*, Gorgias advocated the following three statements: There is nothing; even if there were something, it would be unknowable; and even if it both existed and could be known, it could not be communicated to others. Based on such sceptical epistemological views, Gorgias eliminated any reliable criterion of truth. There will be no way of distinguishing a false statement from a true one. All statements will be gnoseologically equal. Hence, since there is no criterion of truth, but only *doxa* (appearance), any *doxa* may easily be replaced by another more powerful one by means of *logos* (speech or reasoning). There is thus, according to Gorgias, always, and necessarily so, a clear cognitive break between individual arguers.

Regarded from this point of view, it is certainly not by accident that all the preferred examples for cases of deep disagreement that are constantly evoked by modern theorists (abortion, positive discrimination, artificial life-supporting measures, political separatism etc.) involve discussions of basic ethical, religious or political values, i.e. topics that typically belong to the realm of *doxa* (cf. Angenot 2008, p. 46), in which there can be no question of ultimate truth, but

both sides may equally claim to have good arguments.

Moreover, it appears that the sophists regarded the 'art of *logoi*' (as they used to tag what was later called rhetoric) basically as an art of combat, as a competition (Kraus 2006, pp. 3-5). Plato, in his dialogue *Protagoras* (335a 4-8), has Protagoras boast that he would be able to win at any competition of *logoi*, provided that he was master of the rules; similarly, in the *Gorgias* (456c 7-457c 2), the sophist from Leontini compares rhetoric with combative sports such as boxing, fencing or wrestling. The pivotal term in all these passages is *agōn*, 'competition'. Also in the *Sophist* (225a 2-226a 4), as one of the subdivisions of the 'art of competition' (*agōnistikē*) there appears the art of 'arguing contradictorily', or 'contradiction' (*antilogikē*), which then becomes Plato's standard term for what he thinks is the general sophistic practice of employing *logos*. This description may not be inappropriate, since references to *agōn*, to *antilogía*, and to combative or competitive arts can be found all over the sophists' original texts. For instance, the title of one of the most famous works of Protagoras's, *Antilogiai*, alludes precisely to the technique described by Plato,

The repeated reference to competition and sports is significant. For sports imply rules and umpires, champions and prizes. The *agōn* of *logoi* which the sophists have in mind is thus more than just mere altercation, it is a well-regulated competition, governed by rules and supervised by impartial umpires, in other words, a formal debate.

In the course of the contemporary turn toward a renaissance of sophistic thinking championed by scholars such as John and Takis Poulakos (J. Poulakos 1983; 1987; 1995; T. Poulakos 1988; 1989), Bruce McComiskey (2002) and others - not to speak of Victor Vitanza's idea of a modern 'third' sophistic (Vitanza 1991) - the technique of antilogical reasoning has been revalued. Michael Mendelson, in a recent book (2002, p. 49), finds in it "the conscious effort to set contrasting ideas or positions side by side for the purpose of mutual comparison", and he identifies it as a "radically egalitarian" strategy that protects no position as sacrosanct, but, "[i]n giving voice to 'all pertinent' *logoi*, [...] creates an opportunity not only for conventionally 'weaker' positions to be heard, but, in the juxtaposition of probabilities, for the dominant order to be challenged and even overturned if the alternative case can be made to the satisfaction of those involved." (p. 56). He thus makes it the root of modern debate.

Nola J. Heidlebaugh, too, in an attempt to tackle the question how, in an age of fractured diversity and pluralism, contemporary society can productively address issues of deep disagreement such as, for instance, the abortion problem, which are considered intractable owing to an “incommensurability” (using Thomas S. Kuhn’s term) of the fundamental conceptions underlying the conflicting positions, draws on the “antithetical method” of the ancient sophists in order to overcome such disagreements by means of an application of classical rhetoric that understands itself as situated, contingent, and practical (Heidlebaugh 2001, pp. 29-48). She observes that, for Gorgias, “the saying of one thing is what makes possible the emergence of its opposite,” and “contradictories emerge as a means of generation in Gorgias’ thought.” (p. 39).

Christopher Tindale, in his most recent book on sophistic argument, devotes a whole chapter to the analysis of antilogical argument. He emphasizes the open-mindedness and fairness of this technique which “sets before the audience a full range of possibilities from which they (and the author) might choose.” (Tindale 2010, p. 110). “Selective biases that favor one perspective over the other” are avoided, so that the audience’s own choice is encouraged and is left completely free and autonomous; there is no advocacy or preference for whatever side (p. 111). Hence, “[n]ot insisting on a truth from among opposing views but working to gain common insights from them is a strength of this approach.” (p. 111).

How might this model help in cases of deep disagreement? Can it help establish an underlying logic of purely polemic argument and delineate conditions under which a standard of a rational and critical discussion may still be maintained?

Maybe the common interest two polemic arguers share in a certain issue already establishes a minimum of common ground that can be built on (see Lueken 1992, p. 283). Maybe even agreement on the fact that there is incommensurability of conceptions and hence the disagreement is intractable may be a rational progress (Lueken 1992, p. 280). The possibility of “reasonable disagreement” (in John Rawls’s sense) in cases of epistemic underdetermination has recently been defended against Feldman’s scepticism (2007) by Marc A. Moffett (2007), Christopher McMahon (2009), and Alvin I. Goldman (2010). With a bit of luck, and some further reflection on both sides, however, even if there is disagreement on a basic level, maybe more common ground can be gained on a higher level, by the “subsumption” of the competing positions under a more comprehensive or overarching problem, by the “elaboration of a more global view which could

embody the opposing theses,” as was Chaim Perelman’s rather optimistic view (1979, p. 115). Other authors have called for more pragmatic solutions by way of “games” of reasoning (“Begründungsspiele”) and “stagings” of situations (“Situationsinszenierungen”) such as “free” exchanges of views (with rational discussion rules temporarily suspended), or learning games (Lueken 1992, pp. 215-347), or by tried and tested methods of classical rhetoric such as commonplaces, topics, and stasis theory (Heidlebaugh 2001, pp. 49-137).

But even if the opponent arguers never gain any common ground themselves, the repeated assertion of their contrary positions, and be it by mere gainsaying, may still help clarify the competing positions for a third party, namely the greater audience that witnesses the dispute. Models for such a view are close at hand. There will always, by definition, be something like deep disagreement between opposing parties or advocates in court or in a political debate, even if this disagreement is sometimes unduly exaggerated or even faked. None of the two parties will accept any of the opponent’s arguments (or pretend not to do so). But the real addressee of their arguments, the one who is really capable of being influenced (see Bitzer 1968) and who will really need to be persuaded, is not the opponent, but the deciding body, i.e. the jury, the assembly, or the electorate. Hence, for instance, a polemic and seemingly aporetic TV debate between politicians of opposing parties may, by forcing the parties to make explicit their positions and arguments, still help the witnessing TV viewer find or better define his or her own position in the controversy.

Possible solutions of situations of deep disagreement by introducing a third party have been advocated earlier, e.g. by Richard Friemann (2001), Vesel Memedi (2007) or Simona Mazilu (2009). We suggest here that, based on the model of the cognitive method of two *logoi* as developed by the sophists, a rational and critical discussion of issues about which there is deep disagreement may be substantially furthered even by polemic argument, by way of setting out to a broader audience all possible positions in full clarity and in stark contrast so as to enable them to make their choices. For if there really is deep disagreement that cannot be resolved by rational argument, yet decisions must be taken in limited time (as is generally the case for instance in jurisdiction or legislation), such decisions will only be possible by way of deliberate choices that must be made on the basis of an impartial presentation of competing positions. And even if Michael Gagarin may be right in stating that “opposed speeches cannot have the aim of persuading the



audience” (Gagarin 2002, p. 30), this may just not be their proper aim; they may well fail in persuading their immediate opponent, but they may nonetheless still help enucleate, highlight, and clarify the essential points in a controversial debate for a third party – the party that makes the ultimate decisions –, and thus lead to a “better understanding of the issues,” as Levi (2000, p. 109) has called for.

## 5. Conclusion

The above considerations started out from the observation that situations of deep disagreement may arise when common ground between arguers is minimal or non-existent, and when there are cognitive breaks involved, and that, when the argument is continued in spite of that situation, it will turn into merely polemic argument that consists in nothing but contradiction, gainsaying and endless repetition of the same arguments without any substantial move forward.

It was further demonstrated that one of the major sources of such lack of common ground, of cognitive breaks and hence also of deep disagreements may be cultural diversity between arguers that can bring about a clash of basic religious, political, or ethical values that are not considered open to discussion by the parties involved. Since owing to the process of globalization clashes of cultural values are getting increasingly frequent and relevant in processes of argumentation in our present-day multicultural and pluralistic societies, this problem cannot be neglected.

Yet it turned out that, based on the model of the sophistic technique of *antilogia*, a solution may nonetheless be possible. The model suggests that contrasting arguments can have a cognitive function and may produce insight on a higher level. By making explicit the basic points of disagreement by way of setting them out in contrast, even purely polemic argument may still play a useful role in the rational discussion of controversial issues in a broader public, so that there is after all a way of integrating polemic argument into the rational model of a critical discussion – maybe not for the *Argument Clinic*, though, for that case is really hopeless.

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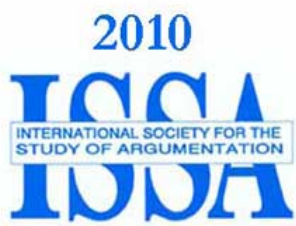
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# ISSA Proceedings 2010 - Expert Authority And Ad Verecundiam Arguments



While fallacies have been a major focus of the study of arguments since antiquity, scholars in argumentation theory are still struggling for suitable frameworks to approach them. A fundamental problem is that there seems to be no unique category or kind such as 'fallacy', and arguments can be seen as fallacious for many various reasons. This heterogeneity does not invalidate the need to study fallacies, but it

poses serious difficulties for general systematic approaches. On the other hand, the numerous repeated attempts to find satisfactory perspectives and tools, together with the critical discussions of these attempts, have increasingly contributed to our understanding of the more local situations where different types of fallacies appear, of how and in what circumstances they are fallacious, and, of which contexts and disciplinary areas are relevant to the study of certain types of fallacies.

This paper [i] aims to illustrate these issues by selecting one fallacy type as its subject, the *argumentum ad verecundiam*. The main thesis is that argumentation studies can gain a reasonable profit from consulting a field, the social studies of science, where the problem of appeals to authority has lately become a central issue. The first section summarizes and modestly evaluates some recent approaches to *ad verecundiam* arguments in argumentation studies. The second section overviews the problem of expert dependence as discussed in social epistemology and science studies. The third section presents a rough empirical survey of expert authority appeals in a context suggested by the previous section. The paper concludes by making some evaluative remarks.

### 1. *The problem of ad verecundiam arguments*

An *argumentum ad verecundiam* can loosely be defined as an inappropriate appeal to authority. As there are different types of authority, ranging from formal situations to informal contexts, the function and success of authority appeals can vary broadly. This paper is concerned with one type of authority, namely cognitive or epistemic authority, i.e. those people who have, or who are attributed by others, an outstanding knowledge and understanding of a certain subject or field – in modern terms, with experts. While not all authorities are experts and, arguably, not all experts are epistemic authorities (as we move from ‘know-that’ to ‘know-how’ types of expert knowledge), the paper is restricted to the problem of epistemic authority appeals, or, in short, appeals to experts.

To problematize the definition of *ad verecundiam*, let us distinguish between two questions: (1) What does it mean for an appeal to authority to be inappropriate? (2) How do we know if an appeal to authority is inappropriate? From the analytical point of view, the first question is primary since one can identify an *ad verecundiam* argument only if one knows what it is, and, conversely, once we know how an authority appeal can be inappropriate we are, albeit not necessarily immediately, in the position to distinguish a correct appeal from an incorrect one.

However, a more epistemological perspective suggests, as will be illustrated below, that one cannot tell what it means for an appeal to be incorrect before one knows how to find it out, and any specific expansion of the above definition is likely to fail when ignoring the more practical dimension opened by the second question.

In order to spell out this problem in a bit more detail, it is worth considering two recent influential approaches: Douglas Walton's inferential approach and the functional approach by the pragma-dialectical school. Walton suggests that appeals to authority can be reconstructed according to the following argument scheme (Walton 1997, p. 258):

*E* is an expert in domain *D*

*E* asserts that *A* is known to be true

*A* is within *D*

Therefore, *A* may plausibly be taken to be true

If appeals to authority are implicit inferences, then the first question (What does it mean for an appeal to authority to be inappropriate?) may be answered by analyzing and evaluating the inference: either the inference form is unsound, or some of the premises fail to be true. The soundness of the argument raises serious problems, for it is obviously not deductively valid, nor can it be classified as an inductive inference in any traditional sense (generalizing or statistical, analogical, causal, etc.), but we can certainly attribute to it a degree of 'plausibility' the conclusion claims and put aside further investigations into argument evaluation. What Walton seems to suggest is that it is the failure of the premises that renders the conclusion unacceptable. And this means that in order to be able to answer the second question (How do we know if an appeal to authority is inappropriate?), one needs simply to know who is expert in which area, what they assert, and to which area these assertions belong.

The situation becomes more complicated at a closer look. Walton lists a number of questions one has to ask to establish the truth of the premises (*ibid.*, p. 25):

1. *Expertise Question*: How credible is *E* as an expert source?
2. *Field Question*: Is *E* an expert in the field that *A* is in?
3. *Opinion Question*: What did *E* assert that implies *A*?
4. *Trustworthiness Question*: Is *E* personally reliable as a source?
5. *Consistency Question*: Is *A* consistent with what other experts assert?
6. *Backup Evidence Question*: Is *E*'s assertion based on evidence?



While these questions are clearly relevant, it is important for us to note that in order to be able to tell whether an authority appeal is correct, one needs to possess a huge amount of knowledge. Elements of this knowledge are of various nature: knowledge of 'fields' (like scientific disciplines and sub-specializations), degrees of credibility (like scientific rankings, credentials, institutions and statuses), logical relations of assertions in a technical field, other experts and their claims, personal details, matters concerning what it means to be evidentiary support, etc. In the pessimistic reading this scenario suggests that laypersons will hardly be able to acquire all this knowledge, appeals to authority will generally be insufficiently supported, and that the interlocutors of a discussion (if they themselves are not experts in the field in question) will rarely be able to tell whether an appeal to authority is appropriate or not. In the optimistic reading it points out themes and areas that are primarily relevant to the first question, through the second question to which the first is intimately connected, and it embeds the problem of *ad verecundiam* in a specific theoretical context in which they can be analyzed.

While Walton's approach focuses on what it means for an expert claim to be unreliable ('incorrect authority'), the pragma-dialecticians place the emphasis on the *use* of authority appeals ('incorrect appeal'). According to their functionalization principle, one needs to look at the function of an assertion within the discourse in order to tell whether it contributes to the final dialectical aim of rationally resolving differences of opinion. Fallacies are treated as violations of those rules of rational discussion that facilitate this resolution. In one of their book (Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992, pp. 212-217), they use the *ad verecundiam* to illustrate that the same type of fallacy (as understood traditionally) can violate different rules at different stages of the dispute, and thus it can serve various purposes. An *ad verecundiam* argument can thus violate the Argument Scheme Rule at the argumentation stage, i.e. the interlocutor can present an appeal to authority instead of a correctly applied and appropriate argument scheme when defending her standpoint. But *ad verecundiam*s can also be used at the opening stage to violate the Obligation-to-defend Rule: a party refuses to provide adequate argumentative support for her claim when asked, and offers an appeal to authority instead. Moreover, they can violate the Relevance Rule in the argumentation stage again, when authority appeals are used as non-argumentative means of persuasion.

Just as the pragma-dialectical approach offers a radically different answer from Walton's to the question of what it means for an appeal to authority to be incorrect, the possible answers to the question of how to recognize these incorrect appeals are also strikingly different in the two cases. For pragma-dialecticians, one needs to identify the function of such appeals in the context of the entire dispute as reconstructed according to a fully-fledged theory with its stages and rules and further assumptions. Pragma-dialectics offers an exciting framework in which one can focus on the pragmatic use of elements in argumentation, but it pays less attention to the study of what is used. Surely, an appeal to authority can often be used as to evade the burden of proof, or to intimidate the other party by non-argumentative means, but in many other cases it is simply unavoidable to defer to expert testimonies, even among rational discussants engaged in a critical dispute. As the next section argues, such appeals are actually so widespread and indispensable that the study of abusive appeals seems only secondary in importance.

This paper studies problems that are more similar to Walton's questions than to the issues raised by the pragma-dialectical approach, although it does not accept the inferentialist framework with its interest in argument schemes (in that the focus will be on elements of knowledge answering Walton's questions, rather than seeing these elements as connected in an argument scheme). The possibility of *ad verecundiam* arguments, just as the possibility of correct authority appeals, depends on non-experts' ability to evaluate the reliability of expert claims. In the followings, recent philosophical and sociological discussions will be summarized in order to investigate such possibilities.

## 2. *Some recent approaches to expertise*

It is a common recognition among many fields that, in present cultures, the epistemic division of labor has reached a degree where trust in expert opinions is not only indispensable in many walks of life, but also ubiquitous and constitutive of social existence. Thus the problem of expertise has gained increasing focus in psychology (Ericsson *et al.* 2006), in philosophy (Selinger and Crease 2006), or in the social studies of science where the initiative paper by Collins and Evans (2002) has become one of the most frequent points of reference in the field. Other forms of an 'expertise-hype' can be seen in the theory of management, in risk assessment, in artificial intelligence research, in didactics, and in a number of other fields having to do with the concept of 'expert'.

For the present purposes, a useful distinction is borrowed from recent literature on the public understanding of science. Two approaches are contrasted to frame the expert-layperson relationship for the case of science: the deficit model and the contextual model (Gross 1994, Gregory and Miller 2001). In the deficit model the layperson is viewed as someone yet ignorant of science but capable of having their head 'filled' with knowledge diffusing from science. Such a 'filling process' increases, first, laypeople's scientific literacy (and their ability to solve related technical problems), second, their degree of rationality (following the rules of scientific method), and third, their trust in and respect for science. Recently, this model has been criticized as outdated and suggested to be replaced by the contextual model, according to which members of the public do not need scientific knowledge for solving their problems, nor do they have 'empty memory slots' to receive scientific knowledge at all. Instead, the public's mind is fully stuffed with intellectual strategies to cope with problems they encounter during their lives, and some of these problems are related to science. So the public turn to science actively (instead of passive reception), more precisely to scientific experts, with questions framed in the context of their everyday lives.

The strongly asymmetrical relationship between experts and the public suggested by the deficit model is at the background of a groundbreaking paper by the philosopher John Hardwig (1985), who coined the term 'epistemic dependence'. His starting point is the recognition that much of what we take to be known is indirect for us in the sense that it is based on our trust in other people's direct knowledge, and the greater the cultural complexity is, the more it is so. Hardwig takes issue with the dominantly empiricist epistemological tradition, where these elements of belief are not considered rational inasmuch as their acceptance is not based on rational evidence (since the testimony of others does not seem to be a rational evidence).

Hardwig takes a pessimistic position regarding the possibility of laypeople's assessment of expert opinions: since laypeople are, by definition, those who fall back on the testimony of experts, they have hardly any means of rationally evaluating expert claims. Of course, laypeople can ponder on the reliability of certain experts, or rank the relative reliability of several experts, but it can only be rationally done by asking further experts and relying on their assessments - in which case we only lengthened our chain of epistemic dependence, instead of getting rid of it (p. 341). So, according to Hardwig, we have to fully accept our

epistemic inferiority to experts, and either rely uncritically on expert claims or, even when criticizing these claims, we have to rely uncritically on experts' replies to our critical remarks (p. 342).

However, at one point even Hardwig admits that laypeople's otherwise necessary inferiority can be suspended in a certain type of situations that he calls *ad hominem* (p. 342):

The layman can assert that the expert is not a disinterested, neutral witness; that his interest in the outcome of the discussion prejudices his testimony. Or that he is not operating in good faith - that he is lying, for example, or refusing to acknowledge a mistake in his views because to do so would tend to undermine his claim to special competence. Or that he is covering for his peers or knuckling under to social pressure from others in his field, etc., etc.

But Hardwig warns us that these *ad hominem*s "seem and perhaps are much more admissible, important, and damning in a layman's discussions with experts than they are in dialogues among peers", since *ad hominem*s are easy to find out in science via testing and evaluating claims (p. 343). And apart from these rare and obvious cases, laypeople have no other choice left than blindly relying on expert testimonies.

Nevertheless, Hardwig's examples imply that in some cases it is rational and justified for a layperson to question expert testimonies. Recent studies on science have pointed out various reasons for exploiting such possibilities. For instance, there are formal contexts at the interfaces between science and the public, such as legal court trials with scientific experts and non-expert juries, where laypeople's evaluations of expert claims are indispensable. Such situations are considered by the philosopher of law Scott Brewer (1998), who lists what he identifies as possible routes to 'warranted epistemic deference', i.e. means of non-expert evaluation of expert claims.

*Substantive second guessing* means that the layperson has, at least to some degree, epistemic access to the content of expert argument and she can understand and assess the evidences supporting the expert claim. Of course, as Brewer admits, such situations are rare since scientific arguments are usually highly technical. But even with technical arguments one has the option of using *general canons of rational evidentiary support*. If an expert argument is incoherent (e.g. self-contradicting) or unable to make or follow basic distinctions

(in his example, between causing and not preventing) then, even for the layperson, it becomes evident that such an argument is unreliable. Laypersons can also judge by *evaluating the demeanor* of the expert: they may try to weigh up how sincere, confident, unbiased, committed etc. the expert is, and this obviously influences to what degree non-experts tend to rely on expert claims. However, all this belongs to the ethos of the speaker and Brewer emphasizes the abusive potential in demeanor often exploited by the American legal system. The most reliable route, according to him, is the *evaluation of the expert's credentials*, including scientific reputation. He adopts the credentialist position even while acknowledging that it is laden with serious theoretical difficulties, such as the regress problem (ranking similar credentials requires asking additional experts), or the underdetermination problem (similar credentials underdetermine our choice between rivaling experts).

Another reason for focusing on the possibility of lay evaluations of expert claims is the recognition that experts do not always agree with one another, and such situations are impossible to cope with in terms of simple epistemic deference. According to the contextual model, the public need answers to questions they find important (regarding health, nutrition, environmental issues, etc.), and these questions typically lack readymade consensual answers in science. Alvin Goldman, a central figure in social epistemology, tries to identify those sources of evidence that laypeople can call upon when choosing from rivaling expert opinions - in situations where epistemic solutions of 'blind reliance' break down (Goldman 2001).

Goldman distinguishes between two types of argumentative justification. '*Direct justification*' means that the non-expert understands the expert's argument and is able to evaluate it, similarly to what Brewer means by substantive second guessing. But when arguments are formulated in an unavoidably esoteric language, non-experts still have the possibility to give 'indirect' justification by evaluating what Goldman calls *argumentative performance*: certain features of the arguer's behavior in controversies (quickness of replies, handling counter-arguments, etc.) indicate the degree of competence, without requiring from the non-expert to share the competences of the expert. Additional experts can be used in two ways in Goldman's classification: either by asking which of the rivaling opinions is agreed upon by a greater *number of experts*, or by asking *meta-experts* (i.e. experts evaluating other experts, including credentials) for

judgment on the expert making the claims. Similarly to Hardwig's ad hominem cases, Goldman also considers the possibility of identifying *interests and biases* in the arguer's position. But what he sees as the most reliable source of evidence is *track-record*. He argues that even highly esoteric domains can produce exoteric results or performances (e.g. predictions) on the basis of which the non-expert becomes able to evaluate the cognitive success of the expert.

Despite their different answers to the question of most reliable decision criteria, Brewer and Goldman agree that sounder evaluation needs special attention, either by studying the institutional structure of science (to weigh up credentials) or by examining specialists' track-records. But why should the public take the effort of improving their knowledge about science? If we turn from philosophical epistemology to the social studies of science and technology, we find an answer at the core of the discipline: because laypeople's lives are embedded in a world in which both science and experts play a crucial role, but where not all experts represent science and even those who do, represent various, often incompatible, claims from which laypeople have to choose what to believe.

The program called 'studies of expertise and experience' (SEE) evolved in a framework shaped by these presuppositions, initiated by science studies guru Harry Collins and Robert Evans (2002, later expanded to 2007). Their initial problem is that "the speed of politics exceeds the speed of scientific consensus formation" (Collins and Evans 2007: 8), meaning that decision making processes outside science (politics, economy, the public sphere, etc.) are usually faster than similar processes in science. This gives rise to what they call 'the problem of legitimacy' (Collins and Evans 2002: 237): how is technological decision making possible given the growing social uncertainty? They claim that solutions are already achieved, or pointed to, in the field of 'public participation in science'. However, a related but yet unsolved problem is 'the problem of extension', i.e. to what degree should the public be engaged in technical decision making? The program of SEE is meant to provide normative answers to this question.

In this framework the term 'expert' has a wide range of applications, since experts are defined as those "who know what they are talking about" (Collins and Evans 2007: 2), which is based on immersion in communicative life forms. Forms of expertise range from ubiquitous skills (such as native language usage) to the highest degree of scientific specialization, as summarized in 'the periodic table of expertises' (p. 14). This table includes, in addition to types of specialist expertise,

those forms of 'meta-expertise' that can be used to judge and evaluate specialist expertise.

According to the SEE, the public live in a society where they are conditioned to acquire skills and 'social intelligence' needed to cope in an expert culture. Non-experts are able to come to decisions regarding technical questions on non-technical grounds, based on their general social intelligence and discrimination. As Collins and Evans claim (p. 45), the "judgment turns on whether the author of a scientific claim appears to have the appropriate scientific demeanor and/or the appropriate location within the social networks of scientists and/or not too much in the way of a political and financial interest in the claim". So people (or at least sufficiently informed people) in Western societies have enough social skills to form correct judgments (in their examples, about astrology, or manned moon landings, or cold fusion) without possessing field-specific technical knowledge. Also in their 'periodic table' one can find 'meta-criteria' for evaluating experts, such as credentials, past experience and track record, but all these criteria need special focus on the layperson's side to assess, apart from their basic general social skills.

To sum up the main points of this section: It seems clear that despite all the possible theoretical difficulties, laypeople can and do make evaluations of expert claims, and since laypeople are not experts in terms of their cognitive domains, these evaluations are based on criteria external to the specialist domain. Also, such external evaluations are not only frequent but generally unavoidable in a world of rivaling experts and consensus-lacking controversial issues. But while these philosophical analyses give rise to different while partly overlapping normative solutions, it remains unclear whether these solutions are really functional in real life situations. The next section attempts to examine this question.

### *3. A rough case study*

The recent worldwide public interest in the H1N1 influenza pandemic threat, and in the corresponding issues concerning vaccination, provides a highly suitable test study for the above theoretical approaches. First, the case clearly represents a technical topic about which various and often contradicting testimonies were, and still are, available. Second, despite the lack of scientific consensus, decisions had to be made under uncertain circumstances, both at the level of medical policy and at the level of individual citizens who wanted to decide eagerly whether

vaccination (and which vaccination) is desirable. Huge numbers of non-experts were thus forced to assess expert claims, and come to decisions concerning technical matters lacking the sufficient testimonial support.

Luckily, the internet documented an overwhelming amount of lay opinions, mostly available in the form of blog comments. In order to see how laypeople do assess expert claims, I looked at four Hungarian blog discussions (as different as possible) on the issue, examined 600 comments (from October-November 2009) trying to identify explicitly stated criteria of evaluative decisions that I found in 110 cases. **[ii]** The work is rather rudimentary and methodologically rough at the moment, but it may suffice to yield some general results to be tested and elaborated by future work. I approached the material with a ready-made typology of warrants abstracted from the theoretical literature, and I counted the number of instances of the abstract types. I disregarded those comments which did not contain any clear opinion, or where arguments (reasons, warrants) were not given in favor of (or against) the standpoint, or which were redundant with respect to earlier comments by the same user. Some comments contained more than one type of argument or warrant, where all different instances were considered. The tested categories distilled from the literature cited in the previous section are the following.

(1) The first group is argument *evaluation by the content*, i.e. Brewer's 'substantive second guessing' or Goldman's 'direct argument justification', when laypersons interiorize technical arguments as their own and act as if they had sufficient cognitive access to the domain of expertise. Example: "I won't take the vaccine, even if it's for free in the first round. The reason is simple: the vaccine needs some weeks before it takes effect, and the virus has a two week latency. And the epidemic has already begun..." (cotcot 2009, at 10.06.13:06).

(2) The second group contains those contextual discursive factors that are indirectly tied up with the *epistemic virtue of arguments*. (2a) Such is the consistency (and also coherence) of arguments, clarity of *argument structure*, supporting relations between premises and conclusions, etc. Example: "Many of those who go for this David Icke type humbug are afraid of the crusade against overpopulation, so they're against inoculation, which is a contradiction again" (cotcot 2009, at 10.05.22.:43). (2b) A similar matter is the degree of reliability of *argument scheme* used by the expert. Arguments can be weakened, albeit at the same time increased in persuasive potential, by different appeals to emotions and



sentiments, or by abusive applications of ad hominem, or by irrelevant or misleading appeals to authority, etc. Also, dialectical attitude (instead of dialectical performance) can be highly informative, i.e. moves and strategies in controversies, including conscious or unnoticed fallacies such as straw man, red herring, question begging, shifting the burden of proof, and more generally, breaking implicit rules of rational discussion. I found that these kind of assessments are very rare, still an arguable example is: “It is a bad argument that something is a good business. Safety belt is also a good business for someone, and I still use it.” (vastagbor 2009, at 11.04.14:52)

(3) Hardwig, Goldman and the SEE all emphasize the role of detecting *interests and biases*. Considering these factors belongs to the field of ‘social intelligence’, and precisely because these are ubiquitous they do not need focused effort and training to improve (as opposed to the argumentative factors mentioned above). Example: “I’d be stupid to take the vaccine. All this mess is but a huge medicine business.” (vastagbor 2009, at 11.04.12:26)

(4) Social intelligence covers the ability to evaluate the reliability of *experts*, instead of judging the arguments. (4a) The simplest case is *unreflected deference* or blind trust. Example: “My aunt is a virologist and microbiologist. She never wants to persuade me to take any vaccination against seasonal flu, but this time it is different...” (reakcio 2009, at 11.14.15:21) (4b) As the credentialist solution suggests, laypeople can estimate the *formal authority* of different experts by judging their ranks or positions. Example: “So, when according to the Minister of Healthcare, and also to Czeizel [often referred to as “the doctor of the nation”], and also to Mikola [ex-Minister of Healthcare], Hungarian vaccine is good, then whom the hell would I believe when he says that it isn’t?” (szanalmas 2009, at 11.04.12:22) (4c) Also, quite similarly, one may discredit testimonies by claiming that the expert is a wrong or *illegitimate authority*. Example: “Why should I want to believe the doctor who tried to convince my wife not to take the vaccine a few days ago, and then tried to rope her in Forever Living Products? Or the doctor who does not even know that this vaccine contains dead virus, not live? [...] So these are the experts? These are the doctors to protect our health? ” (szanalmas 2009, at 11.04.12:22)

(5) Finally, there are various forms of *commonsensical social judgments* not explicitly dealing with interests or authorities, as expected by the SEE programme. Three examples: “Let us not forget that first there wasn’t even a date

of expiry on the vaccine” (vastagbor 2009, at 11.04.12:00). “This huge panic and hype surrounding it makes things very suspicious” (vastagbor 2009, at 11.04.12:02). “The vaccine comes from an unknown producer, and the formula is classified for 20 years...” (szanalmas 2009, at 11.03.16:01).

The results are summarized by the table below:

	“cotcot”	“szanalmas”	“vastagbor”	“reakcio”	in total
number of comments	87	140	224	150	601
Type 1 (judgment by content)	5	4	4	2	15
Type 2a (argument structure)	2	0	1	0	3
Type 2b (argument scheme)	0	0	0	1	1
Type 3 (interests, biases)	10	6	6	4	26
Type 4a (unreflected deference)	6	0	4	7	17
Type 4b (formal authority)	1	2	0	1	4
Type 4c (illegitimate authority)	3	2	0	0	5
Type 5 (“social” judgments)	6	8	11	14	39

*Table 1. Number of argument type instances in blog comments*

Judgment by content (type 1) is quite frequent, contrary to the recommendation of

normative approaches emphasizing that the demarcation between experts and laypeople correlates with the distinction between those who have the ability to understand technical arguments and those who do not. There are several possible reasons for this. One is that laypeople do not like to regard themselves as epistemically inferior, and try to weigh up expert arguments by content even if they lack the relevant competences. Another is that the publicly relevant technical aspects of the H1N1 vaccine issue are far less esoteric than for many other scientific issues, and there is a lot to understand here even for non-virologists and non-epidemiologists. Another is that while people form their opinions on testimonial grounds, they often refrain from referring explicitly to their expert sources (especially in blog comments resembling everyday conversations), and state their opinion as if they themselves were the genuine source.

In contrast, assessment informed by argument structure and form (types 2a and 2b) is pretty rare, even when it seems plausible to assume that, in some respect, judgments on general argumentative merits require different competences from the specialist judgments based on content. But just as most people are not virologists, they are very rarely argumentation theorists, so they are usually not aware of the formal structure or type of arguments they face, or the relevant fallacies.

The identification of interests and biases (type 3) is a really popular attitude in the examined material. While part of the reason for this might be that the studied case is untypical in that very clear interests were at play (the vaccine producer company seemed to have some connections with certain politicians), this popularity is nevertheless in line with the expectation shared by most of the cited authors about the relative importance of such considerations.

Also, simple deference (type 4a) is a relatively widespread attitude, despite the fact that contradicting expert testimonies were obviously available in this specific case. While Brewer and Goldman suggest ranking and comparing expert authorities, it seems that such ranking is pretty rare in actual arguments. Neither considering formal or institutional indicators of authority (type 4b) nor questioning the legitimacy of putative experts (type 4c) seem frequent. Perhaps this is partly because people tend to base their trust on personal acquaintances (the SEE calls this 'local discrimination'). Another likely reason is the public's relative ignorance in the field of scientific culture and social dimension of the workings of science: unlike other important cultural spheres like that of politics,

economy, or sports, about which laypeople are more likely to make reliable social evaluations, science as a social system is hardly known by the public.

What I found to feature most often in laypeople's decisions is 'commonsensical' forms of social judgments, practically those that consider factors other than direct interests or expert authorities. Obviously, social structures and mechanisms are easier to understand (based on our fundamental experience with them) than technical arguments, even if peculiar features of the social world of science are much less widely known than the social reality in general.

In sum, public assessment of expert claims is based on skills and competences acquired through everyday social interaction, and the applicability of these skills in restricted cognitive domains is generally presupposed without further reflection. While the deficit model suggests either blind reliance or the acquisition of the same domain-specific cognitive skills shared by experts, the contextual model points to the possibility of a kind of contextual knowledge that would enable the public to assess expert claims more reliably than merely adopting the most general social discriminations, without having to become experts themselves in all the fields in which they need to consult experts. However, it seems that the evaluative criteria suggested by normative accounts are rarely used in actual decisions.

#### *4. Conclusion*

If we set aside the question of how expert authority appeals are *used* inappropriately and, instead, focus on what it requires to tell whether an expert argument is *reliable* at all - which is essential when critical discussions are aimed at rational decisions - then it turns out that the depth and range of knowledge required from the public seems to escape the confines of the study of argumentation in general. Surely, evaluations of expert claims supported by arguments can be significantly improved by awareness of some basic concepts in argumentation studies, regarding e.g. the consistency (and also coherence) of arguments, clarity of argument structure, relations between premises and conclusions, argument schemes and their contexts, fallacious argument types, etc. However, it is important to realize that an even more efficient support to such evaluations can be gained by some familiarity with the social dimension of science (as opposed to technical knowledge in science, restricted to experts): credentials, hierarchies of statuses and institutions, types and functions of qualifications and ranks, patterns of communication in science, the role of different publications and

citations, mechanisms of consensus formation, disciplinary structures, the nature of interdisciplinary epistemic dependence and resulting forms of cooperation, etc.

While this contextual (rather than substantial) knowledge about science may be essential in societies that depend in manifold ways on the sciences, it is not obvious how and why the public attention could turn to these matters. If spontaneous focus on scientific expertise might be unrealistic to expect from the public, there are organized ways to improve cognitive attitudes toward science. One relevant area is school education where, in most countries at present, science teaching consists almost exclusively of scientific knowledge at the expense of knowledge about science (and awareness of argumentation is also rather rare in school curricula). Another area is science communication, including popular science and science news, where contextual information about matters mentioned above is typically missing but would be vital for enhancing understanding. Also, improving forms of public participation in, or engagement with, science is an obvious way to increase public interest and knowledge.

All in all, as our cultural dependence on cognitive experts has been recognized as a fundamental feature of our world, the problem of appeals to expert authorities seems both more complex and more crucial than when viewed simply as an item on the list of fallacy types in argumentation studies. The paper tried to show that the study of argumentation can shed light on some important aspects of authority appeals. However, this does not mean that the problem of expertise is, or should be, a substantive field of argumentation studies, or that argumentation theorists should substantially evaluate claims made by experts. But argumentation studies (as a field of expertise itself) can obviously offer important contributions to the study of expertise, especially when theoretical approaches are supplemented with an empirical study of argumentative practice. Such a perspective may put the emphasis on aspects that are, as seen in pragma-dialectics, rather different from the traditional question of 'How do we know that the discursive partner appealed to the wrong expert claim?' The latter problem is also vital, and in order to tell how to answer it one needs to find out a good deal about science and its relation to the public. The best way to do so seems to be to consult, or better cooperate with, those disciplines that take related problems as their proper subject.

## NOTES

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published in *Teorie Vědi* ('Contextual knowledge in and around science'), while the empirical work presented in section 3 was done for Kutrovátz (2010).

**[ii]** The four blogs are: cotcot (2009) – an online fashion and health magazine (mostly for and by women); szanalmas (2009) – an elitist community blog site, often highly esteemed for intellectual autonomy; vastagbor (2009) – a political blog with marked right-wing preferences; reakcio (2009) – a cultural/political blog with right-wing tendencies.

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# ISSA Proceedings 2010 - The Metaphysics Of Argument: Two Proposals About Presuppositions



Sometimes it is hard to know where politics ends and metaphysics begins: when, that is, the stakes of a political dispute concern not simply a clash of competing ideas and values but a clash about what is real and what is not, what can be said to exist on its own and what owes its existence to another.

- J.M. Bernstein, *"The Very Angry Tea Party"* (*The New York Times*, June 13, 2010)

All modern philosophy hinges round the difficulty of describing the world in terms of subject and predicate, substance and quality, particular and universal. The result always does violence to that immediate experience which we express in our actions, our hopes, our sympathies, our purposes, and which we enjoy in spite of our lack of phrases for its verbal analysis. We find ourselves in a buzzing world, amid a democracy of fellow creatures; whereas. . .orthodox philosophy can only introduce us to solitary substances, each enjoying an illusory experience. . .

- A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 49[i]

We understand argumentation as a political practice, and propose that argumentation theory has neglected to attend to that “clash about what is real and what is not, what can be said to exist on its own and what owes its existence of another” that informs the diverse points of view – the “clash of competing ideas and values” – that is displayed in argumentative engagements. That neglect is due to a powerful presumption that has its roots in the primacy that Aristotle gave to substance, rather than relation, as well as the preeminence that Plato accorded to stable concepts (eternal Ideas) in contrast to changing things (the materiality of our “immediate experience”).**[ii]**

Questioning and even overturning this powerful presumption of “solitary substances,” which persists in rationalistic, constructive idealist, and empiricist traditions, is not an easy endeavor. The exigency for doing so is strengthened by arguments for the value of argumentation theory and informal logic, rather than formal deductive logic, for analyzing, understanding, and arguing about that “buzzing world” of our “immediate experience.” In this essay we propose that Alfred North Whitehead’s process-relational metaphysics offers an alternative to the “violence” that (as he proposes in our second epigraph) “modern” or “orthodox” philosophy does to “that immediate experience which we express in our actions, our hopes, our sympathies, [and] our purposes.” Thus, we would modify Jay Bernstein’s suggestion: we cannot know “where politics [or, argumentation] ends and metaphysics begins” because – in our “immediate experience” – there is no severance between those activities. However, an implicit traditional metaphysics that gives primacy to particular substances (subjects) and universal predicates (qualities) remains as the ground that nurtures the explicit “clash of competing ideas and values” that are the content of argumentation.

### *1. Two Proposals*

Our first proposal, then, is that our epistemological endeavors would benefit by accepting the need to critically investigate our metaphysical presumptions. That’s because affective, cognitive, cultural, and social assumptions about what is to be known exert an influence – perhaps, even determine – how we go about epistemic endeavors. Metaphysical inquiry, we would emphasize, is not an optional additional level in, aspect of, or tier within argumentation – because all theory and practice, including argumentation, presupposes some metaphysics. Nor is it a concern with how premises are generated from ideas or beliefs. Rather, this first proposal calls for reflection upon the elements and relations that are presumed as



present in arguments (as products), by way of examining the presuppositions that are embedded in the process and procedure of argumentation.

In making this proposal, we focus on the first and second of Joseph Wenzel's "three different ways of thinking about argumentation" (1990, p. 9), rather than the third way: We regard argumentation as rhetorical and dialectical, rather than as logical; which is to say that we focus upon argumentation as a process of communicative interaction and procedure for organizing what's articulated in that interaction, rather than as a product that enables evaluation of what's articulated in order to assess its strength or validity. We recognize that all three perspectives are valuable, yet propose that the first two are more appropriate for analysis of argumentation understood as a political practice concerning the "immediate experience which we express in our actions." Not coincidentally, the rhetorical and dialectical perspectives emphasize the fluidity, relationality, and contingency of that "buzzing world, amid a democracy of fellow creatures" that characterize our reality, rather than focusing upon abstracted conceptual content that, within the third (logical) perspective, is articulated as its form.

We believe that making these assumptions about the nature of reality explicit and proposing alternative presuppositions enables a re-specified understanding of argumentation that focuses upon what actually happens in our "immediate experience." That understanding, in turn, enables us to envision rationales for making decisions that choose among the plethora of affective, cognitive, cultural, and social possibilities for action that compose that "buzzing world." As in Bernstein's analysis of the anger that motivates the Tea Party, we can move beyond obsession with the "clash of competing ideas and values" insofar as we acknowledge that we are divided about "what is real and what is not; what can be said to exist on its own and what owes its existence to another." This focus on "what actually happens" and on the nature of reality motivates our first proposal, and is developed further as the core of our second proposal.

Our second proposal is that respecifying argumentation theory on the basis of a process-relational metaphysics allows us to analyze the powerful presence, within argumentation, of that reality that is our "immediate experience" - despite the "illusory" overlay of solitary substances and mental representations, as formulated in verbal argumentation, from which argument analysis traditionally begins. Rather than understanding argumentation as disagreement between Cartesian subjects about diverse representational predicates, we can identify the

diversity of ideas and values as intrinsic to the process by which arguers become who they are and how that coming-to-be continues in and through argumentive engagement. In other words: replacing a substantialist, individualist, and empiricist metaphysics with a process-relational metaphysics offers us a way of accounting for how particular ideas and values come to be a part of arguers' process of coming-to-be, and how alternative ideas and values might be advocated more successfully than setting them out in opposition to those currently held.

In this essay, we introduce Whitehead's process-relational metaphysics and briefly indicate the value of this alternative framework for clarifying, rather than "doing violence to," immediate experience. Two conceptual shifts are needed at the start. First, although argumentation theory typically is considered to be an epistemological endeavor, we need to acknowledge that implicit - which is to say, unnoticed and unexamined - metaphysical presuppositions underlie all theory, including any epistemological theory. The conceptual shift that's needed here is toward explicating these presuppositions and discerning their influence. Doing that takes us to the second conceptual shift: We need to expand our theoretical resources for understanding the "clash about what is real and what is not" that, we believe, is operative within argumentation - usually, implicitly - and especially, when argumentation becomes obstructed by deep disagreement.**[iii]**

## *2. Whitehead's Process-Relational Framework*

We advocate this process-relational theory as alternative to traditional "modern" or "orthodox" philosophy, which (as he notes) relies upon a "subject and predicate, substance and quality, particular and universal" understanding of reality. This alternative enables us to reconsider modern philosophy's characterization of humans as either passive recipients of sense-data or active imposers of form upon a sensory manifold. It also enables us to resist postmodern philosophy's focus on the linguistic formulation of experience, which has reinforced argumentation theory's proclivity for beginning analysis at the level of verbal, rather than experiential (affective and embodied), modes of being. In other words, theorizing argumentation within a process-relational metaphysical framework requires us to suspend acceptance of both empiricist and rationalistic presumptions. Once we understand this very different way of considering the environment, we can test its comparative efficacy by applying it to an example of argumentation about "immediate experience." Thus, we begin by introducing terminology for some of the very basic claims of a process-relational framework.

Whitehead understands mind as an “actual occasion” rather than as a substance that requires only itself to exist – that is, which is independent of the material world, including mind’s physical embodiment. An actual occasion functions as a locus of response, and thus relation, to an environment that is not limited to present space-time. Rather, each occasion grasps, and draws from, past actuality as well as future possibility. Whitehead calls this grasping “prehension,” and cautions that unlike apprehension, which is a comparatively familiar mental activity, it is motivated by affective sensory attraction and repulsion, rather than cognition. Actual occasions continually form themselves as actual entities through retaining past prehensions while appropriating possibilities that are present to them as propositions.

Within this framework, propositions are not statements with a truth value. Rather, they are potential ways that occasions may come to be as actual entities. Selection of some propositions and deflection of others depends upon the interest and intensity of their anticipation, within the immediate experience of a prehending actual entity. Truth is still a useful category within this process-relational metaphysics, but it is not a matter of language that corresponds to reality (mentality to materiality) or coherence within an already accepted structure in the mind or in language. Rather, it pertains to correspondence between how an actual occasion (or group of occasions, which Whitehead calls a “nexus”) may be, and how it is. Although particular truth claims can be refuted, we cannot be certain that any particular claim is true. Those that resist efforts to refute them can be retained as, at least, closer to truth than refuted claims. Making an argument, then, is not a matter providing statements that correspond to how things are or should be in a pattern that results in having a valid, and even sound, argument. Rather, it is an activity of acknowledging the relative appeal of how things might come to be. Consideration and choice among possibilities is a response to the aesthetic and affective appeal with which they are present to prehension, rather than of calculative rationality. Selection or choice happens by relating to the more appealing alternative possibility, rather than by making a cognitive decision between opposing claims. It depends on an actual entity’s entertaining those possibilities as potentially providing a more fitting continuation with the past and future, rather than requiring a conceptual decision that’s constrained by already available ideas and values as they are asserted within an oppositional agenda.

### *3. A Case Study: The Tea Party*

This conception of what happens in reasoning suggests a response to Jay Bernstein's question in the editorial that provides our first epigraph. The context in which he finds that metaphysics and politics are difficult to separate is contemporary concern, within U.S. political argumentation, about the "Very Angry Tea Party." The "seething anger" of the Tea Party, Bernstein argues, resists explanation through traditional logics of interest group pluralism. The Tea Party forwards no coherent policy proposals, nor does it protest in order to acquire political power. What matters about the Tea Party, and what no one has yet been able to explain, Bernstein argues, is the "exorbitant character" of its anger. Given the fury of its protests and how that fury "is already reshaping our political landscape," he proposes that the important question is not what does the Tea Party want, but where does "such anger and such passionate attachment to wildly fantastic beliefs come from?"

Bernstein's hypothesis is that the source of this anger is not merely political, but metaphysical. That is, the last several years of crisis and reform, disaster and response - particularly within the U.S. political economy - has shown that we are utterly dependent on government action, even as its limitations, corruptions, and incompetence have never been clearer. What has unraveled in these recent crisis-ridden years is the "belief that each individual is metaphysically self-sufficient, that one's standing and being as a rational agent owes nothing to other individuals and institutions." The autonomous individual has been revealed as an "artifact" manufactured by the "practices of modern life: the intimate family, the market economy, the liberal state."

The poverty of the metaphysical commitments underwriting autonomous individualism has been exposed, and that creates an opening for Bernstein to propose an alternate metaphysical claim: Human subjectivity "only emerges through intersubjective relations." Each of us is called into being by the other, wholly dependent on the other's love for our freedom. Our independence is, therefore, "held in place and made possible by complementary structures of dependence." Love, however, can go bad and when it does we realize that we are "absolutely dependent on someone for whom we 'no longer count,' we feel "vulnerable, needy, unanchored and without resource." This vulnerability unleashes fury. We rage against our former love, proclaiming our independence, denying that we ever needed the other (whether personal or institutional) in the

first place. This is the anger of the Tea Party. They are jilted lovers furious that they have been let down by their government, furious that they find themselves dependent and powerless. They feel all that comes with love's betrayal: rage, disillusionment, sorrow, and confusion. Searching for the source of this betrayal becomes an obsession, expressed in terms of who has stolen their country and how they can get it back. Their anger leaves them epistemically vulnerable, ready to believe just about any conspiracy, any rumor, any fear-mongering appeal that can pinpoint the culprit.

Bernstein is careful not to imply that all political anger is metaphysically suspect. We ought to be angry at the "thoughtless greed of Wall Street bankers" and the "brutal carelessness of BP." We have been betrayed. But there is a difference between moral indignation "raised by cruelty and injustice" and the "exorbitant and destructive" anger raised by resentment of the fact that we are inescapably interdependent. The former is an expression of concern that fosters moral community; the latter seeks to destroy the institutions, such as town-hall meetings, which sustain community. Moral indignation leads to "creative, intelligent, non-violent" resistance; fear-induced rage towards the other leads to nihilistic terror. The Tea Party, thus far, has been a party of resentment. But if it traded its rage in regard to what has been taken from individuals (a sense of autonomy that does not correspond to the reality of the human condition) for indignation about how government has been corrupted so that it destroys real human needs, the seemingly intransigent opposition between left and right may be redirected from the diversity of ideas and values that attract and repel them, and toward common acknowledgment of the need for change in current political practices. Radicals of all stripes could be in "angry agreement" that democracy has indeed been hijacked by corporations, special interests, lobbyists, and self-serving, corrupt public servants. Their righteous indignation could be directed towards a common project of increasing public accountability and restoring self-government through increasing the opportunities for authentic public deliberation.

#### *4. The Nature of Argumentation: Two Insights*

We find Bernstein's diagnosis of "passionate attachment" persuasive and his call to "indignation" compelling (although we differ from some of the particulars of his argument). Putting his analysis into the process-relational metaphysical terminology we have introduced provides these insights into the nature of argumentation as a political practice:

*(1) A process-relational account of argument is uniquely suited to understanding the dynamics of affective politics.*

The effectiveness of the Tea Party's fury in reshaping the US political landscape exemplifies a shift from a content-driven politics (ideas and values in opposition) to an affective politics (the lure of possibilities that attract or repel). The Tea Party's significance, Bernstein makes clear, lies in the "exorbitant" character of its anger," not in any concrete policy proposal or party platform it might forward. Affective politics are driven by image, tone, resonance, movement, and rhythm. Its governing terms are confidence, trust, support, and mood. It is a politics of the body, or more precisely of the becoming-body; a chosen coalescence of neurochemical reactions to environmental stimulations. Affective politics comes from a transfer of energy, of commitment among successive waves of actors, of how energy designs processes that serve as technologies of collaboration. Affective politics is a politics of relation in which the quality of life is increasingly defined in terms of modulating attachment, attunement, and attention.

Thus, Bernstein's question - "where does" the Tea Party's "anger and passionate attachment to wildly fantastic beliefs come from" - directs us toward an important contribution that a process-relational understanding of argumentation can make to the study of affective politics. Argumentation theory has had relatively little to say about the nature of affective attachment to particular claims and beliefs because it has operated from an overly cognitive account of the relationship between mind, body, and environment. This account treats them as distinct entities whose impact on the processes of reasoning and arguing is taken for granted and little understood. Moreover, argumentation has been treated as an exclusively cognitive and verbal activity that occurs in and through conscious reflection, despite growing evidence discrediting that view, as well as the increasing attention of many theoreticians to visual argumentation. A process-relational metaphysics, to the contrary, understands argumentation, in Erin Manning's words, "as a complex passage from thought to feeling to concepts-in-prearticulation to events in the making" (2009, p. 5). A process-relational account understands thought not as a property of the mind, but as an activity of the minded body in dynamic response to, and thus in relation with, the diverse loci of allure and appeal that are continually emergent within its environment. In sum, one of the insights available to a process-relational analysis is that argumentation is very much more than is suggested by the final form it takes in language.

*(2) Argumentation is inherently collaborative, not oppositional. Opposition is an artifact of substantialist metaphysics and the governmentality of liberalism that accompanies it.*

A process-relational view provides us with a means to theorize our environment as a world that is made of events in dynamic relationship. Even seemingly solid and permanent objects are events, or better a series of events in the making, whose composition changes moment by moment. The continuity implied by the existence of enduring objects needs to be actively produced at every instant as a new event. The same is true of us and our perception of those objects. The persistent flow of perception and conception constitutes us anew as subjects. Each instant of every encounter is a new event and each of the selves to which it happens is also a fresh event. This does not entail that objects are created by our perception; it does entail that their shape and importance is formed in perceptual events of interaction with them. Objects-as-events are possibilities for choice, as they are present for perceptual or conceptual engaging of them by actual entities. This account reverses the Kantian assumption that “the world emerges from the subject.” A process-relational metaphysics reveals, instead, that “the subject emerges from the world.” We are born in the very course of our encounter with the world and are precipitated out of this encounter, “like salt precipitated out of a solution” (Shaviri 2009, p. 21). For Whitehead there is no ontological difference between thoughts and things, between animate beings and so-called inanimate objects. The same goes for arguments and arguers. Each is grasped from the “buzzing world” of immediate experience, existing in a “democracy of fellow creatures.”

We have suggested that this grasping, which Whitehead calls prehension, is itself a description of argumentation. That is, argumentation is not simply a distinct activity that we can describe in process-relational terms. Rather, argumentation is at the heart of the process of becoming. Events are constituted through the creative interplay of past occasions of experience and the potentiality of anticipated experience. Their expression as propositions does not provide verbal assertion of goodness or truth, but does make choices available for the ongoing integration that constitutes actual entities. In other words, propositions are neither actual or fictive; they are ‘the tales that can be told about particular actualities’ from a given perspective, and that enter into the formation – the process that Whitehead calls concrescence – of that very perspective. As such, propositions are possible routes of actualization, vectors of nondeterministic

change. (Shaviro 2009, p. 2, quoting Whitehead 1929/1978, p. 256).

Argumentation is the process of assembling and coalescing propositions. It is an essentially creative, collaborative activity, rather than a uniquely “human” activity, insofar as it is understood as an interaction with the environment (both past and anticipated) in which “what is real and what is not” depends not on autonomous individuals or their contexts and not on causation or cognition, but on affective, cognitive, cultural, and social response to the allure of what may be.

One conclusion that we draw from this account of argumentation is that the taken-for-granted understanding of argumentation as inherently oppositional is itself a proposition; a proposal – perhaps particularly appealing and attractive within our cultural and political environment – of how choice among possibilities happens. For instance, argumentation may be theorized as a critical discussion aimed at resolving a difference of opinion in which a protagonist defends a certain standpoint against the challenge of an antagonist who raises doubts about and objections to the acceptability of that standpoint (van Eemeren, Grootendorst, & Snoeck Henkemans 2002, p. 25). To characterize this theory as an interesting and perhaps appealing tale told of how reality happens does not mean that it is false. It does mean that it is a verbal abstraction, necessarily static (given the nature of both abstraction and verbiage). As such – as an abstraction from immediate experience – we commit what Whitehead calls “the fallacy of misplaced concreteness” if we take it as real, or as a description or representation of the real. The fallacy to be avoided here is metaphysical, not logical: “misplaced concreteness” is to be avoided because it “does violence to. . . immediate experience” (Whitehead 1929/1978, p. 49).

Any theory portraying argumentation as oppositional in nature is, we contend (following Bernstein) a metaphysical “artifact manufactured by the “practices of modern life: the intimate family, the market economy, the liberal state.” It is no accident that the logic of opposition works so well to explain the machinations of these institutions. Opposition is the lifeblood of liberal governmentality, which requires that individuals be defined by their irreconcilable differences, standing ready to engage in total war if they are without the mediation of the state. Just as essential to the logic of opposition is the presumption that the state presents an ever present threat to the sovereignty of its citizens. In this respect the Tea Party’s rage is not an aberration of liberalism; it is a pathological expression of contemporary liberalism’s nature.



The test of a proposition is not whether it is true, coherent, or plausible. A proposition is “a lure for feeling”; a means to “pave the way along which the world advances into novelty” (Whitehead, 1929/1978, p. 187). Propositions should be assessed in terms of their aesthetic appeal, creativity, and potential for inventing novel platforms for collaboration. Argumentation theory, presently conceived within a substantialist metaphysics, can inform criticism of the Tea Party’s fury and demonstrate the irrationality of their “wildly fantastic beliefs,” but it cannot explain the nature of their “passionate attachments” nor propose a means to transcend the fierce logics of neoliberal governmentality that pervert them. We advocate adoption of Whitehead’s metaphysical theory as the framework for understanding argumentation as a relational process, rather than as a means for generating oppositional arguments, as the way of doing just that.

## NOTES

**[i]** Unless identified otherwise, the quoted phrases from Whitehead in this essay are taken from this epigraph.

**[ii]** Arguably, this presumption continued to guide philosophical thinking about reasoning from classical to modern times, when it was expressed in René Descartes’ conception of humans as mental substances – solitary minds – whose thinking focuses on ideas (mental events) that describe or represent their material environment. It is also expressed in Immanuel Kant’s conception of humans as dictating the form of physical substance, which was taken to be independent of, and subservient to, mind. And it was expressed in David Hume’s and Thomas Hobbes’ conceptions of humans as passive recipients of sense data, and thus, of mentality as dependent upon materiality.

**[iii]** Concern with the challenges of “deep disagreement” to argumentation traces back to the germinal article by Robert Fogelin (1985). The editors of a special issue of *Informal Logic* in 2005 (which reprints that article) note that they hope to “spark renewed reflection on these sorts of fundamental questions” (Turner and Campolo, 2005, p. 2). See David Zarefsky’s (2010) paper for a current contribution to that reflection. See also the discussion by Frans van Eemeren, Rob Grootendorst, Sally Jackson, & Scott Jacobs (1993, pp. 171-172) of the empirical challenges of deep disagreements to pragma-dialectics. We believe that these “fundamental questions” call for reflection on the metaphysical presuppositions that participants bring to argumentative engagement

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## **ISSA Proceedings 2010 - Moral**

# Argumentation From A Rhetorical Point Of View



Practical thinking is a tricky business. Its aim will never be fulfilled unless influence on practical *attitudes* is gained. These attitudes, though, are no neat propositional structures, as is sometimes suggested. Whether or not a living human being is willing to act in a certain way is determined by dispositions that are non-codified, non-transparent, habitual, embodied and emotional. To reflect upon such attitudes is roughly as complex as reflecting upon the agent's moral identity.

This poses some problems for *moral argumentation*. In practical matters, justifying practical beliefs as "true" is not enough. The motivational dimension cannot be ignored. This is the original field of classical *rhetoric*. Rhetorical methods are not designed to examine theoretical truths but for the purpose of practical decision making. This is why rhetoric and ethics have always been closely related. The aristotelian doctrine of *lógos*, *páthos* and *êthos* reminds us of the fact that speech is persuasive not due to its rationality only but also due to the "moral character" of the speaker and the emotional dispositions of the audience. The adoption of a practical attitude cannot be reached by deduction alone. It takes more to persuade and motivate a human being to act in a certain way.

This being the case, one should think that any conception of moral argumentation reduced to rational argumentation in a narrow sense will be incomplete. However, such conceptions of moral argumentation seem to be wide spread. One of the basic assumptions of cognitivist - and roughly, Kantian - ethics is that moral argumentation has to be built on reason alone, on "*rational discourse*", as representatives of discourse ethics like Habermas would prefer to say. Any reference to emotions, then, has to be regarded as "merely rhetorical".

In this contribution, I will ask for possibilities to reconcile the logical and the rhetorical dimension of moral argumentation. In particular, I will discuss how *expressive speech* can have a place in rational moral argumentation. Here, the important question will be how such speech can be part of moral *argumentation* and more than just emotional talk. I will first sketch what function *logical reasoning* is supposed to have in moral argumentation and why philosophy is

often focused on this dimension (1). In a second step I will ask in how far we usually take rhetoric – in this case, expressive speech – to be relevant for morality (2). Third, I will try to outline a conception of moral argumentation that includes logic *and* articulations of perspectives (3).

### 1. Cognitivism

The first question will be: *Why is moral argumentation in philosophy so often regarded as a kind of rational argumentation more or less in the style of truth based reasoning?*

The answer is, of course, not that philosophers assume that every-day moral communication is in actual fact “rational” in this narrow sense. The interpretation of moral argumentation as a kind of rational argumentation has *normative* sense. The idea – that we may call the cognitivist intuition – is this: By bringing out the logic of every-day moral communication one can set free its normative content. Logical reconstruction shows us what general moral principles are applied and what norms must be considered as binding in the context of the normative systems supported. So the rationality of moral argumentation is not so much discovered but rather *elaborated*.

Justifying a normative claim, then, can only mean: showing that this claim satisfies the basic normative principles or showing how it fits into the presupposed system of norms. Ethical reflection turns into an attempt to ascribe some truth-value-like quality to normative claims. This, to be sure, does not mean that the peculiarities of moral debates are not accounted for. Of course claiming certain facts differs from claiming certain norms to be valid (and since Hume this difference is normally taken very strict). So normative logic is not epistemic but deontic. And the logical principles applied differ as well: e.g., principles of universability play a central role since the consistency of a normative system seems to depend on it. But despite these differences normative claims are treated as claims that transport a content that can be compared to the factual content of a descriptive statement. Sometimes this quality is called “rightness” or the “cognitive content” of moral claims: Just like descriptive claims are true if they correspond to certain facts, so normative claims can be true or “right”, if they express certain valid norms, i.e., a normative content that every “rational” person will accept (Habermas 1999).

One might say that this approach ignores the pluralism of the modern globalized world. But quite the contrary cognitivists argue that cognitivism is *especially*

attractive in face of pluralism. Given a multitude of values and “ideas of the good life”, it seems to be the task of philosophical ethics to find a moral fundament independent of particular standpoints. Under the conditions of pluralism, *many* ethical perspectives have to be reconciled; and this cannot be established by falling back on *particular* ethical perspectives. What is needed is an “overlapping consensus” as John Rawls calls it (Rawls 1971). So the cognitivist approach that seems to be reductionist at first sight turns out to be the only option left in face of pluralism.

## 2. *Ethical perspectives*

Of course, all this does *not* mean that particular ethical perspectives just disappear. It is obvious *that* moral argumentation includes articulations of such perspectives, e. g., expressive speech. But the question has to be: *How can such expressive speech be legitimately introduced into the kind of moral argumentation that philosophy tries to establish?* Modern ethics seems to call for a cognitivist approach and this in turn seems to call for some sort of formal reasoning. Consequently, it might appear that moral argumentation has to be interpreted from a general standpoint. The idea might be that rational argumentation has come to an end as soon as, e. g., expressive – and “emotional” – speech comes into play. So the task is to show how such “perspectival” speech can have *argumentative* function.

To pave the way for an answer I will ask on what occasions we have *no* problems to accept the relevance of articulations of perspectives. Where do we usually locate such speech in moral contexts? I think the above-mentioned “ideas of the good” give us a hint. What I have in mind is this: Such speech has its natural place where human beings are *initiated* into a certain ethical practice. In order to communicate an “idea of the good” or a particular ethical perspective we have to use different means than logical arguments. – Let me explain.

It is a wide-spread neoaristotelian move in contemporary moral philosophy to focus on practice and character rather than on norms and rules. From this virtue ethical point of view the morality of a person is not constituted by the normative statements she rationally accepts or by the rules she is willing to obey but by the *practice* she is engaged in. A person’s moral identity is constituted by habits or dispositions instantiated in his or her *action*, and not just by “supporting claims”.

Given this perspective, a moral judgment can no longer be a matter of cognition

alone; it must be a matter of practical wisdom and perception – the kind of competence that Aristotle has called *phrónêsis*. Acquiring a certain ethical practice goes along with acquiring a certain way of *seeing*. Here, moral judgment is highly contextual. On particular occasions you do not have neutral perceptions of “what is the case” in the first step and moral reflections in the second step (which *then* can be based on “pure normative reasoning” of some sort). In fact, the two dimensions are entangled: moral judging, here, means perceiving a situation in a certain way. From this point of view, morality is a capacity to deal with multiple particular contexts in the right way; and a person satisfying this criterion has virtue.

But it is clear that the notion of “rightness” here is restricted to particular practices. The criteria of what counts as right are the criteria of particular communities and their “life forms” (as Wittgenstein calls it). This lack of universal validity is the central difference between the morally right and the ethically good: At first sight, the character-based approach apparently does not answer to the normative question of ethics at all. It rather tells us how the moral life of human beings really looks like.

Now, I do not want to start a discussion on virtue ethics here, but what is crucial to my argument is this: There is obviously no way of arguing in favor of an ethical practice or way of “moral seeing” *by logical reasoning*. Instead, the value of an ethical practice – as a practice having its purpose in itself – would have to be shown. John McDowell has elaborated this thought by referring to Wittgenstein’s reflections on rule-following. His example is, quite naturally, the case of *moral education*: When we are initiated into a way of moral perception we do not learn to act according to rules. McDowell writes: “In moral upbringing what one learns is [...] to see situations in a special light, as constituting reasons for acting (McDowell 1978, p. 21). The decisive aspect of such a process of teaching such a way of moral seeing is expressed in the formula: “See it like this!” It is not a matter of saying what is “right” but of showing what is the *point* of it. There is no question if certain claims are justified. The aim is to make someone see what it means to consider something as valuable or “good” – what it is to take a certain ethical perspective. On such occasions one will apply “helpful juxtapositions of cases, descriptions with carefully chosen terms and carefully placed emphasis, and the like” (McDowell 1978, p. 21). In a process of this kind there is no guarantee that the aim is reached. “That, together with the importance of

rhetorical skills to their successful deployment, sets them apart from the sorts of thing we typically regard as paradigms of argument.” (McDowell 1978, p. 22). Perhaps one might even say: To explain a particular ethical perspective it takes *everything but* argument.

### 3. Argumentation and articulation

Let us come back to the central question: *How can articulations of ethical perspectives be part of “rational” moral argumentation as preferred by philosophers?* What we need is a conception of moral argumentation that accounts for both kinds of speech. On the one hand: logical persuasion, i.e., justifying claims as valid normative claims (which implies arguing from a moral standpoint that has *overcome* individual perspectives). On the other hand: articulations of ethical perspectives which implies expressing ways of “moral seeing” or particular “ideas of the good” (as familiar from moral education). How can these two elements *at once* be part of moral argumentation? I will try to at least outline an answer.

The reason why particular ethical perspectives cannot be ignored for moral argumentation is, of course, very simple: *Moral conflicts are conflicts of ethical perspectives*. The fact that normative ethics, especially the Kantian tradition, recommends a general moral standpoint to solve moral conflicts implies the thought that in case of moral conflict such a standpoint is lost. In other words, usually the moral conflict will rest *on the very fact* that there is no common *ethical* basis but opposing “ideas of the good”. Moral argumentation, then, starts with the collision of particular ethical perspectives and its aim is to reconcile these perspectives.

Still, from a strict cognitivist standpoint the “perspectival” aspect of moral claims has no cognitive content. According to the cognitivist a claim has cognitive content insofar as it overcomes perspectivity and expresses a possible general law. It is “rational” only if it fulfills the criteria of a formal procedure. Now one might say that this account is already given from a general moral point of view; the cognitivist takes, so to speak, the *standpoint of the solution* whereas the standpoints of the persons *involved* in the moral conflict are excluded. From *this* standpoint, however, the particular perspective and the universal claim are never separated. The point is: For the speaker, articulations of his or her very own ethical perspective will simply be utterances of “what is right”. The addressee, in turn, will not interpret the other one’s statements as showing him the way to a

new idea of the good (i.e., he does not take the perspective of a disciple in moral education). In case of moral conflict, he will understand his opponent's utterances as articulations of a particular standpoint that is unacceptable in some respect. In short, *participants* in a moral argument will take each other's utterances either as articulations of universal rules (i.e., as right) or as articulations of a mere perspective (i.e., as wrong). More precisely, they will take *their own* utterances as articulations of universal rules (as right) and their opponents' utterances as articulations of mere perspectives (as wrong).

If this is right, what can we answer to the question how *expressive speech* can have a place in moral argumentation (interpreted as reduced to logical reasoning for the sake of argument)? At least, we have a first clue: The normative claims to be justified in the course of argument and the articulations of ethical perspectives could be one and the same. From the standpoint of the participants, normative claims do not necessarily have to be performed as normative claims in the first place. The speakers might just intend to express what their perspectives are like and then get involved in a normative argument. It is tempting to think that an actor who makes a normative claim must have known about the norm all from the beginning as if he had a stock of "rules" that he "follows" in his life. But the virtue ethics discussion reminds us that a practical attitude is not codified by nature. Expressing such an attitude - expressing an ethical perspective - is a *creative* act. The rules of action (the "maxims", in Kant's terminology) are not given as "ready made norms". To put them to test of universability they have to be formulated.

Charles Taylor's conception of *articulation*, inspired by Herder and Humboldt (Taylor 1980), can help to clarify this point. Taylor reminds us that expressing attitudes, is not something like describing "inner facts". It does not mean to speak about things very hard to describe. Neither does it mean to "make explicit" rules. Just like ethical practice is not codified by nature, attitudes do not appear in sentential form. In this sense, attitudes are non-propositional; they have to be articulated: "articulations are attempts to formulate what is initially inchoate, or confused, or badly formulated" (Taylor 1977, p. 36). In this process, there is no constant object that is *represented*. When persons express their practical attitudes they rather *fix* what they want to *accept as right*. Taylor puts it this way: "To give a certain articulation is to shape our sense of what we desire or what we hold important in a certain way" (Taylor 1977, p. 36). To accept such an articulation, then, does not mean to accept a "rendering" as correct. It means



accepting a certain interpretation as an adequate self interpretation (Taylor 1977, p. 37ff.).

What is the general picture that emerges? What in moral philosophy is sometimes called “cognitive content”, i.e., the content of the utterance *as far as it can be generalized* is only one side of the matter. Indeed, every utterance that appears as a normative claim in moral argumentation may *at the same time* be an expression of a particular perspective. We might call this the “ethical” or “expressive content” of the statement. But indeed, the term “content” might be misleading already since the articulation of ethical perspectives is not representational but productive speech, i.e., part of the *formation* of practical attitudes. Moral argumentation, in general, seems to include both dimensions: the *production* and the critical *evaluation* of norms. Attitudes are made public by expressive speech acts for the purpose of formation and further development. In other words, moral argumentation might be regarded as a process of *intersubjective attitude formation by means of critical evaluation*.

If this is right, then expressive speech and normative reasoning might in many cases be *irreducibly entangled*. In fact, the distinction between making normative claims and expressing one’s very own perspective might not even be a *factual* distinction. It depends on the *perspective* that is taken if an utterance is interpreted as a normative claim or as an expressive act. What is interpreted as a normative claim from the perspective of a *third* person might be the articulation of a *first* person’s perspective who *expresses* his or her ethical standpoint. In this case, excluding expressive speech from moral discourse would mean to exclude this perspective. But this, in turn, would obviously amount to eliminate the ethical subject matter itself.

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# ISSA Proceedings 2010 - Definition And Prescription As Classifiers Of Arguments: A Comparison Of Two Models To Analyze Arguments, Sproule (1980) And Toussaint-Ducasse (1996)



## 1. Introduction

As we can see, authors working in the field of argumentation can develop quite different theories and models, especially in a pedagogical context. Let us assume that it would probably be useful to review and reflect on these theoretical achievements, not only for historical reasons but also to reflect on the limits and resources of previous models. This is what I would like to attempt here, with two models developed in two books that I wish to consider and compare. It has been a few years since I was stricken by the differences between these two Argumentation handbooks, books that of course I have used in classes, one from J. Michael Sproule, and the other by francophone authors from Québec, Nicole Toussaint and Gaston Ducasse, helped by pr. G. A. Legault. The first book is *Argumentation. Language and its influence* (1980), the other one is *Apprendre à argumenter. Initiation à l'argumentation rationnelle écrite, théorie et exercices* (1996).[i]

When I am mentioning « models » here, discussing specifically the S model and

the TD model, I am describing and discussing the analytical tool that is furnished in these books by their respective authors in the aim of helping students to discern the main characteristics of a given argument. Armed with these analytical tools, students are supposed to be then able to analyze arguments. These books are both destined to an undergraduate public, but they can also be used at a professional graduate level. They both can be especially useful as first books in argumentation studies. If the theoretical level and the written explanations of Sproule's book seem more theoretically advanced than those from Toussaint-Ducasse, the latter has more guidelines, schemas and details to help a beginner to grasp the argumentation domain; in that sense it can be said to be more "user friendly" than the other, more complex one.

These models have obviously been developed in a teaching context, but they are different in their orientation. Briefly stated, we can give the following precisions on the models. The S model distinguishes, among arguments, between descriptive, interpretive and evaluative arguments, meaning by interpretives, statements raising issues of definition, whereas of course descriptives are concerned with facts and states of affairs, and evaluatives are considering situations with the prism of some values used as more or less precise criteria. The TD model distinguishes, in terms of kinds or arguments available, between assertives, evaluatives and directives, meaning by this last element prescriptions, whereas the other categories overlap with those of Sproule. In each case we have three important categories that come out in the forefront of their respective model, but as we can see they disagree in one third of their respective categories; the Interpretive category is not to be found in TD and the Directive category is not to be found as such in the S model.

Each model represents a certain interest in its specificity. Probably because they differ, there still is a kind of compatibility of that plurality of tools in their capacity to analyse different arguments. Once we start using these kinds of tools, it is difficult to discard one of them as irrelevant, because they obviously have something complementary, as is showed by using them to analyze arguments.

There are basically two ways to look at this situation. The first strategy would be to try and combine them in a synthetic model. The second one would be to refer them to their interactive context of use, their pragmatic setting and respective teaching context. Developing the first briefly will lead us to the second strategy as being the more interesting one.

1 - We could surmount this divergence by simply combining the different elements present, and forge a four-term model that keeps what they have in common and what is specific to each. We would then have descriptives, interpretives, evaluatives and directives (but no commissives - which would not be surprising since these authors do not interrogate the pragmatic dimension of argumentation (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004, p. 62 f.).

2 - But if we start to enlarge the model, we might as well add other dimensions too. It is probably more interesting to interrogate the specificity of each model and their *raison d'être*. To fuse the two models in one would be to sacrifice a certain level of simplicity that was probably a goal. These models obviously have been constructed to give a simplified and usable tool to students.

Focussing then on the first option, we will explore more systematically these models by looking more closely at some representative examples of their specific content, without pretending to furnish a complete and quantitative analysis of their respective work. Used and sometimes new copies of these books can easily be found at the time of this printing.

## *2. Briefly situating the authors and their respective interest*

The present author has been teaching argumentation for a number of years (since 1997) inside an applied ethics perspective, in a graduate setting destined to professionals. This permits me to introduce an element that is important in both Sproule and Toussaint-Ducasse, and that is probably the reason of my previous interest in them: their strong integration and taking into account of what I generally call the ethico-moral dimension of human life and communication. These aspects manifest themselves differently in each handbook. In Sproule, ethical criteria are very important to judge the arguments, alongside the effects standard, the truth and rhetorical validity standard (Sproule 1980, p. 75-92). In Toussaint-Ducasse, the ethical interest manifests itself both by their choices of topics of discussion and by a stance given on the evaluative-directive pair among a total of three main categories, the third being the descriptive (Toussaint-Ducasse 1996, p. 32-89).

On another level of consideration, the careers of the different authors are not of the same amplitude. For those who would not know, Sproule was a speech communication professor for many years, and was named Emeritus professor of Speech communication in San Jose State University. He also published a number of articles and books (among which Sproule, 1992 and 1996), touching especially

argumentation, rhetoric and propaganda issues in the public sphere; he was a dean of the College of Arts of Saint Louis University (starting in 2004) and is a recent past president (2007) of the very important NCA association in the United States, a country into which he certainly attained national and international status. With an excellent level of complexity and precision, Sproule's book was obviously meant for students at the undergraduate level, maybe freshmen or the equivalent. Nicole Toussaint and Gaston Ducasse have been for many years college teachers preparing for the undergraduate level, but they have the merit to have been among the first to give some handbook of argumentative skills to francophone Québec students, and as such they had a good diffusion into a quite small population over all. Noteworthy is also the fact that their book was prepared with the help of an important ethics professor in French speaking Canada, Georges A.-Legault, well known for his applied ethics perspective oriented towards philosophical pragmatism and decision-making issues. This is probably the first time TD's work is discussed at an international level. This having been said, that does not preclude the interest of looking at both these models, I hope to show why in the following.

S seems to be a tool constructed mostly for analysing documents, whereas TD is a tool servicing preferably a purpose of developing rational thought and writing skills, by providing structures of possible developments. But as things are standing, they both can also be used in the other way, since analysing and producing arguments often come together.

### *3. The Sproule model*

To introduce the model, here we have to start with the general notions used. For Sproule, there is the basic and the extended argument (referring to Brandt, 1970). The basic argument is "the relationship of two terms via a name-relation pattern" (Sproule, 1980, p. 4). It is the simple declarative sentence by which two concepts or names are connected. For instance, the sentence "Smoking is harmful to your health" or "Dr Shintani is a good teacher" are basic arguments. This certainly can be reported back to basic attribution, as in Aristotle's *Peri Hermeneias* (Aristotle 2004). Sproule proceeds then to define assumptions, elements seen as unstated and supporting visible arguments. The extended definition of the argument will then be "two or more basic arguments connected in such a way that one of them is a claim to be proved and the other (s) is (are) data offered in support of the claim" (Sproule 1980, p. 8). Then an argument can

be said to have three composing elements: “the data, the reasoning process, and the conclusion”. Syllogism, enthymeme and the Toulmin model are briefly presented. For him, four different issues emerge in argumentation: issues of fact, of definition, of value...and of policy. For instance, if there is a conflict in faculty-administration relation, supposing that we have evaluated the situation to be bad, “the general policy issue becomes one of what should be done to dampen conflict and encourage cooperativeness...”(Sproule 1980, p. 19). We should already note that he will develop specific categories in his model only for the first three kinds of issues.

For his definition of the nature of meaning, he seems close to Charles S. Peirce: it is a triadic relationship between a referent, an interpreter and a symbol, but there is a second interpreter, the other person (Sproule 1980, p. 33). One useful distinction he gives is the one between positive terms and dialectical terms, taking back R. M. Weaver’s famous distinction. The first raise issues of fact; the others have what he calls nebulous referents, like justice or independence (Ibid. p. 34), and they can receive their meaning only in a dialectical way, by the interplay of questions and answers. Dialectical terms might be a necessary level of knowledge, but they carry important emotional overtones, and arguers tend to not define them satisfactorily (Sproule 1980, p. 36). Also noteworthy is the many functions of language: to report, to persuade, and there is an attitude-revealing function, a Self-revelation function, a relationship function with reference to Palo Alto (Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson 1967).

We mentioned before that the S model distinguishes between descriptions, evaluations and interpretations, but we need to go into further detail. What is called a description draws first-order issues of fact, an evaluation draws first-order questions of value; interpretations draw first-order issues of definition (Sproule 1980, p. 69). In the first type of statements, we have appeal to facts, data and statistics, the problem we have is to ascertain if the facts alleged are or were the case. In the second, facts are regrouped and given meaning, they are united in an appropriate category (Sproule 1980, p. 142). Today, we would probably talk of framing issues here (Schön & Rein 1994). Statements that are evaluative for Sproule, using Rokeach’s well known perspective, are based on values defined as “a person’s notion of what is to be preferred” (Sproule 1980, p. 184).

Some of his material will help to better understand his perspective. In one example, we will see how the distinction between descriptions and definitions

functions according to him. Sproule quotes an article from the *New York Times*, May 5, 1977, about the impeachment of Nixon. Without repeating the newspaper's quote, I reproduce Sproule's commentary to render visible his treatment.

(1) "The initial questions raised by the data offered in this news article are ones of fact: Was Mr. Nixon cited as an unindicted co-conspirator? [...] Did the House Judiciary Committee actually made the charge that Mr. Nixon participated in conspiracy to obstruct justice? Only when these factual issues are resolved can the reader proceed to the definitional question stated in the claim: Did Mr. Nixon commit an illegal act? The key observation to be made here is that while not everyone will accept the interpretive claim that "Mr. Nixon committed an illegal act", they can be brought to agree that the House committee did allege his guilt." (Sproule 1980, p. 71).

In this example, issues of fact as deployed in the legal sphere obtain meaning by being reconstructed as steps towards establishing the possible validity of an interpretive. While treating examples like this one, Sproule does not work most of the times by constructing and sequencing different propositions. As we can see here, starting with a substantial quote of a newspaper, he just reformulates the questions that can be raised. It is also interesting to note that this example, as many others in the book, is thoroughly legal and political in its nature, and gives voice to one very important type of recourse in any court of law, we could identify it as staying close to the facts while letting value elements play their part. Sproule situates his work inside what is called forensic debate (Sproule, 1980, p. 364). Other examples around what were immediately contemporary events in 1980, the Nixon impeachment, the Vietnam War and similar topic, abound in the book that refers copiously to *Newsweek*, *The New York Times*, *Times* etc.

For Sproule, a particular argument might raise first-order issues of fact AND subsidiary issues of value (noted 2). The same argument can also raise subsidiary issues of definition (noted 3). Every argument has potentially these three dimensions, present with differing importance. Sproule asserts that a specific prevalence would be present, meaning we will be able to distinguish what is of first order on this and that case. He admits that a combination of these issues is almost always present in complex argument. In practical use though, in some instances it is not easy to decide which aspect comes first, i.e. if this or that argument raises first-issue order of definition or of evaluation, for instance.

Difficulties of the same kind might arise between arguments raising first-order issues of fact versus of evaluation. The tool can function nonetheless in general if we try and weigh carefully what is the most important use of the argument in the context.

Sproule does not discuss “framing” issues as such in this book, he does not make a technical use of this word that many authors report to E. Goffman (but see also Dewey 1925). Nonetheless, his use of the interpretive category understood as raising first-order issues of definition, is certainly a way to put some element in perspective and take into account something similar to the theme of framing inside his argumentation theory. This can be seen when he notes the fact that interpretations and evaluation sometimes overlap. For example, in a given election, descriptions give us the percentage of votes obtained by this or that candidate, whereas interpretations tell us “which candidate “won” the primary” or “which candidate did better/worse than expected”; the totals of the vote are then put into perspective by relating them to other opinions or facts (Sproule 1980, p. 144). Interpretives as raising definition issues certainly can be seen as framing devices, since they permit the grouping of facts under a category.

This role of the interpretive can be seen in an example about the Vietnam war (1965). Here Sproule refers to an expert on Vietnam history, Bernard Fall, according to which there were two different ways to see the forced moving of a million Vietnamese rural dwellers. In one narration of the event, by leaving the North of the country the refugees fled Viet Cong terrorism, but according to another interpretive, they were driven out by American bombing, which according to the author gives at the same time an argument against the war (Sproule 1980, p 145). Here either the communists are responsible for the fleeing refugees, or it is the Americans that are to blame. Without having to take a side, the author simply shows how each interpretive has different implications. It is by the repetition of the examples that some position of the author (let us identify this as “liberal”, whatever that signifies) can be inferred, not because he would be dishonest in the treatment of the specific arguments.

Another example is not political: an anonymous writer (signing “Shy one buck”) writes to a newspaper column, “Dear Abby”. This person was in a grocery store, saw a woman arriving at the counter, having to pay, and then frantically looking into her purse, to declare out loud she was a dollar short. The writer to Abby’s column felt sorry and offered a dollar to help her. The woman expressed many



thanks and insisted in writing the name and address of the giver, she also promised to send the dollar back to him by mail. Three weeks passed, there was nothing in the mail, so our guy writes to Abby and says: "...and I just didn't peg her as the kind who would beat me out of a dollar" (Sproule 1980, p. 145). To better understand this nowadays, we would have to talk about a ten dollar bill. In any case, the "Dear Abby" person had then no difficulty in offering as an answer to the plaintiff three different interpretations of the same fact, one being the following: "She may have lost the paper with your name and address on it". Using the same facts, Abby supplies different interpretations, placing the woman in alternative categories.

Interpretations also occur with comparisons, and with the use of metaphors; he gives the example of a strike being on one side compared to a hijacking or kidnapping, and on the other side to "a revolution for freedom of the small people against "the captains of industry" (Sproule 1980, p. 147). Comparisons act to construct reality, they are highly argumentative and are seen as an important strategy in defining issues. Sproule will also develop on analogy, argument from precedent, minimization-maximization as comparative tools that are also used under the interpretive mode. We might be interested to find one use of that last argumentative structure in an example about offshore drilling (no later than February 24, 1975, in *Newsweek*, p. 68), maximizing the economic benefits and minimizing the ecological aspects (Sproule 1980, p. 151).**[ii]** He notes three subtypes of this argumentative figure: playing on frequency, size and degree. When he comes to discuss causality (in the same chapter on interpretation), he makes a long detour by Mill's canons of induction to go back again to political issues: different causes can be put forward to explain a given phenomena, and the way we assign cause plays an obvious role in defining the situation. He also treats arguments of sign, like the "tip of the iceberg", arguments that predict future consequences, like the "domino theory" or the fear appeal, with reduction ad absurdum, humor, sarcasm, the argument of conspiracy, even the dilemma (with one horn of a situation being presented as less lethal than the other, for instance having to choose between freedom and starvation) and the antithesis. These argumentative figures (that could certainly be reconstructed as schemes) are all grouped under the interpretive category.

One of Sproule's forces is the evaluation criteria for argumentation he puts forward. There is the effects standard, the truth standard, the Ethics standard,

there is also the validity standards, and he constructs a mechanic for deciding rhetoric validity, putting literally into the balance asserted level of certainty and established level on certainty, we can then have an overstating or an understating of a claim. The argument will be declared valid if it is accurately qualified or understated (Sproule 1980, p. 88-89).

He recognizes that values are multiple and play a part, they can be attributed to persons. But he does not treat differently attribution of value to an end, to a mean, a state of being or a type of action. And if we regroup together all these inside what we could call figures of attribution, he does not take into account evaluation as such of X or Y in terms of specific criteria or in terms of specific values. The many different ways into which values can enter into a proposition are all lumped together.

#### *4. T-D model*

The book from Toussaint and Ducasse is a school handbook for students, most of the times of age 16-19, what is called in the province of Quebec (other provinces in Canada use a different teaching structure) the collegial or CEGEP level (Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel). This comes after the secondary school, for some students it constitutes a terminal degree, and for those who wish to obtain a University degree, the "college" level diploma is a mandatory requirement. A few other books are also available in Québec, they are especially used in one of the three required philosophy courses at the college level, the one that treats rational thinking and argumentation. The TD book comes with exercises, many examples, schematic representations etc. This book is also full of precise recommendations specifying how to proceed in the construction of an argumentative text. They tend to work by starting with propositional sentences, in the context of an argumentative development that is to be made afterwards.

They look especially at written argumentation, starting also with basic elements about attribution in ordinary language. Their general approach is dialectical in a sense that it involves taking explicitly into account the statement of a position (we would say a claim) on the basis of a problem-setting; the first step is the constructing of the position with its main arguments, including links between position and arguments. This leads to the formulation of opposing arguments, and to the answer or refutation of the arguments that go with that counter position or opposing claim. A good argumentation has to take into account the opposing side

in a debate. They propose also to furnish a finale in reasserting the position taken and announced in the beginning. They aim at facilitating the construction of argumentative claims by students, while helping to see how an argument actually functions in different cases. The notion of “une problématique”, meaning the problematic, or the way a question is posed and pre-structures the discussion, is the necessary starting point in their perspective. As is also the idea of a controversial domain, an element that is required since we will not argue about the obvious or the uncontroversial, as we have learned since the beginnings of rational thinking.

Their vision of what is an argument is also quite specific. To three types of problem-settings, three types of statements and positions will correspond. There are assertive, evaluative and directive claims, which they call positions; most of the times the authors will aim at giving a precise and short formulation of the position/claim in a single proposition, including the argument used, for instance “The existence of unions was beneficial to workers because since their existence, the number of hours of work for a week has been reduced...” (Toussaint-Ducass, 1996, p. 119). For them, assertives are statements that answer to questions about determination of reality, they are deployed in a problematic about the existence or not of something or aiming to sustain or deny some attribution of a characteristic to some thing. To quote them: “The statement of an assertive position is a judgment that answers to a problematic question that is about the existence of a reality, its nature or the relationships between realities” **[iii]** (Toussaint-Ducasse 1996, p. 58). These statements can be categorical and certain, or hypothetical. The hypothetical is seen as something that could or could not exist, and its existence is seen as depending on a condition, that the argument will have to show. It is in that restricted sense that they take into account modality, but they do not discuss it as such. A certain assertive position will have to be confirmed by facts, meaning data acceptable by all. A hypothetical assertive will be justified by a realisable condition (like when people say: It would be possible to recycle more if the cities would furnish accessibility tools like recycling bins). As for evaluatives and prescriptives, they respectively come from a problematic of value and evaluation, and a problematic of what to do or not do, but they are not presented in modal terms.

Evaluatives do not come either as categorical or as hypothetical, and by their examples we can see in fact that argumentation in those guises tends to support a

categorical affirmation of the positions taken. One example is the following:

(2) “The new reproductive techniques are more harmful than good for the human species (is declared harmful (*néfaste*) what provokes destruction of human life to satisfy a whimsical desire)” (Toussaint-Ducasse 1996, p. 201).

They take into account and discuss one counter-argument:

(3) “Yes, but they also permit to prevent and cure genetic diseases”,

to which they answer by giving another counter-argument:

(4) “But the danger of genetic selection is greater than the benefices of preventing and curing grave sicknesses” (Ibid.)

We should note that (2) is an affirmative assertion, even though some validation is seen as required and is offered inside the handbook. We should also note that (3) is also backed by some elements in the text, but (4) is more again a general evaluative assertion that would require more clarification, which they develop only a little. One massive statement seem to be refuted by another massive statement, we are passing from Charybdis to Scylla. Hypothetical statements might be required in those kinds of issues.

Arguments of this kind are said to rely on value judgments, and they can be backed by consequential arguments (called pragmatic by explicit reference to Perelman) or “facts corresponding to a non pragmatic evaluation”, i.e. referring to norms, values or principles (Toussaint-Ducasse 1996, p. 77). Directives raise issues of how to act, they prescribe or forbid some way of acting or behaving. According to them, a Directive argument can be justified as a moral obligation by recourse to a general norm, or it can be justified as a necessary means to a justified end (Toussaint-Ducasse 1996, 200-201). This gives us a total of six argumentative structures in to which rational argumentation is supposed to occur or can occur in written developments.

An example will show how they would have difficulty to stay neutral on some specific important issues. Translated in English, it would go like this: “Feminine and Masculine characters are more acquired than innate, as we can see by Margaret Mead’s study on three ethnical groups of New Guinea that shows different ways to be a woman or a man” (Toussaint-Ducasse 1996, p. 109). The authors proceed systematically, while explaining this example, first to the clarification of the statement, then to the clarification of the binding relationship between the argument and the position. This binding leads to clarify the content

of Mead's study, giving details about the ethnic groups to which she refers, which leads to an intermediate conclusion showing that qualities and roles are not universal, which permits the main conclusion as to the acquired aspect of gendered behaviour. This position is seen by them as a certain Assertive position backed by confirmation in the facts of a well known research. Of course, thus formulated the position can seem to be backed by the Mead study.

In their model, the normative or deontological argument surfaces for the two types of statements that have to do with the ethico-moral dimension, i.e. the evaluative and the directive, as a counterpoint to the pragmatic or teleological argument that is also an option in both types of statements. This seems to confirm the closeness, almost redundant character of the evaluative and of the prescriptive to one another as categories in their model. Six elements then sum up every argument according to TD: possible or actual facts, ends and means, norms and values.

Let us note also that this closeness between evaluation and prescription is discussed in ethical theory, in the same movement as their difference is also debated. The question of the relationship between norms and values is also a difficult one, since if the values can inspire norms, many different norms or rules of behaviour can claim to be manifestations or realizations of a single value. Sproule notes that this often goes hand in hand with different definitions, or the different play of interpretives (Sproule 1980, p. 199-201, section "Conflicts based on the same value"). We also have a similar structure for the assertives, since we can put facts and data as backing, but we can also put forward a realizable condition, referring here again to action, as the model does for the evaluative and the directive. Facts can then be seen as analogues to a norm in the domain of reality issues.

Throughout their book, Toussaint and Ducasse emphasize the importance of the validation link between argument and position. Its importance goes with its fragility in many situations, where it is in need of reinforcing. They do not have the interpretive category, and they do not raise the question of the constellation of terms used to discuss an issue including figures of speech, metaphors and names, what is called framing in communication and media studies and in some trends of rhetorical studies or in social sciences more generally (see for instance Tversky and Kahnemann 1981). But they use definition constantly in their work. Their use of the problematic and of problematization understood as problem-

setting takes into account this dimension that is sometimes called framing, but from a philosophical point of view. For instance, they will define “the development of an assertive position” as the “manifestation of the meaning that we give it. It includes the clarification of the meaning of the key words with descriptive definitions and illustrations, and the clarification of the general meaning of the statement of the position” (Toussaint-Ducasse 1996, p. 61). In other words, the reflective use of definition will help clarify and develop an argumentative position.

Distinguishing as they do between evaluation and prescription is interesting, but taken in itself it would not be sufficient. For instance, there are nuances to take into account on each side. After all, it is one thing to attribute value, it is another to judge according to a certain value positively or negatively, which is evaluation properly speaking (Dewey 1939). And it is another thing again to intimate a certain course of action. For that matter, their classification does not take into account the differences between prescribing, giving an order, pleading for a practical solution, suggesting a course of action, etc.

### *5. Concluding remarks*

If the Sproule book can be used to indirectly document its readers about the United States of circa 1975, giving us information about the Vietnam War and the Nixon era, the TD book can be used to document the general questions and ideas discussed and abundant in the young Québec population since the late seventies through the 1990s.

The professors of philosophy that are Toussaint and Ducasse rely on definition to develop argumentative strengths; the speech communication professor that is Sproule shows clearly the political use of interpretation in the understanding of political events.

We should note that the two models agree on the importance and the specificity of statements about issues of fact. In Toussaint-Ducasse, something is missing compared to Sproule, the interpretive, and some element is added, the prescription that they call the directive.

(1) The models have specific features that say something of their usefulness

We can say that TD emphasize the ethico-moral by giving it two thirds of their attention already in terms of the categories they put forward. In TD the examples forcibly have a tendency to be taken inside the vast domain of moral issues. This

happens while discussing possible positions about ethical issues. We have to see a correlation between their emphasis on ethico-moral issues and the fact that two of three of their main categories are relevant to those kinds of issues (the Evaluatives and the Directives). Their model might then be specially useful for working on a corpus of moral or ethical judgments.

In S the examples and problems treated are set in terms of more broadly construed political dilemmas. Here again, a correlation has to be seen between the importance of the Interpretive category in politics generally speaking and the fact that the preferred examples are taken into that domain. This says also something about its possible usefulness.

The categories that are specific to each model (Interpretive for Sproule and Directive for Toussaint-Ducasse) have a structuring importance in their respective theories, they serve as grouping and organizing structures; in that sense, each of the elements of the two triads work as classifiers of arguments, and also as selecting tools for picking up and constructing examples. But since Definition (or Interpretives) and Prescription (or Directives) are what distinguishes them respectively the one from the other, they also give us the specificity of their respective approaches. In that regard, they work as classifiers of their theories of argumentation taken globally.

In Sproule we have four types of issues, one being the policy issue and concerning action generally speaking, He does not develop this domain by looking at a specific type of propositions, like T-D is doing by focussing on prescriptions. This is probably because policy issues are seen by Sproule as too complex to reside only in the explicit directives or prescriptions. He has specific chapters towards the end of the book to discuss policy analysis that are in fact the culmination of the volume. These chapters treat "what should be done" in terms of "the use of argument to establish or refute a policy position", which is really more than just prescribe a specific course of action. He especially shows how on policy issues, the three levels are necessarily present and intertwined in a complex manner.

One of its strength compared to the TD model is its taking into account of the interpretive. We could say that without considering it as such, he touches the framing questions but limits it to the grouping factor of a series of facts and by saying it is the language used that raise issues of definition. What he lets on the side is what is called framing more broadly speaking today: namely the use of this

and that term, name, adjective or category in the way to discuss an issue. Framing also encompasses the problem setting of a specific issue seen as the way that the problem or question is formulated, this is close to TD's intentions.

The TD model gives a general structure that provide us with a very basic outlook of argumentative reasoning that is easy enough to help develop some argumentation skills for beginners. It puts emphasis mostly on the problem of the relationship between the claim being made and the arguments that sustain it. Its way to deal with definition issues is to render conscious and reflexive the meaning of the concepts used, by inserting into a writing strategy the question of the meaning of the terms discussed.

## (2) Limits of these models

We do not find in these books a theorizing of the speech act dimension of argumentation, as we find in the books from Van Eemeren and colleagues. We do not achieve the clarity and precision of Walton on the analytical-logical aspect, and neither the rhetorical clout of Perelman or the explicit wish of keeping together the logical, the dialectical and the rhetorical, as we find in Tindale (Walton, Reed and Macagno 2008; Perelman 1977; Tindale 1999). In terms of handbooks, another book seems more rightly designed for decision makers (Rieke, Sillars and Peterson 2008), even though nothing of the kind is available in French.

Neither of these models really takes into account modality and rebuttals, as Toulmin did in his celebrated 1958 book. We noted that TD distinguished, in matters of fact, the certain and the hypothetical, but there is no reason why the evaluatives and directives should not also be theorized in terms of modality, a thing they avoid. TD is closer to an inferential logic by their insistence on validation links and inference. Sproule takes into account the ethos - pathos - logos triad, whereas TD neglects it. We cannot say that they are very close to informal logic in the sense the expression took in the last decades. The TD model lacks some developed discussion of induction, deduction and abduction, basic reasoning skills that are forcibly required in an informal logic perspective, as we can see for instance in Walton's books or elsewhere.

Of course, Sproule recognizes the distinction between evaluations and prescriptions, but he does not give it a specific treatment. In fact, as we have seen, Sproule underscores the notable difficulties in some contexts to bind



together an evaluation with a specific practical position. Even if it is given a great importance in both works, we can not say that the value issues are clearly situated in them, they are supposed to be already understood.

### (3) Their respective context of use

In the case of Sproule, almost all of his examples are taken from the political domain. This goes with his well known interest for the political sphere, as we can see by his list of books and articles, especially his work on propaganda issues. If we keep in mind that political actors are supposedly experts in defining the terms of a public discussion, and if we remind ourselves of the necessity in which politicians are situated to frame problems and solutions according to their party's way of defining the issues at hand, we will not be surprised by this emphasis that is visible in the sheer structure of the analytical tool that Sproule provides (Reese, Gandy and Grant 2003). Said in other terms, he has a model that fits well with the purpose of looking at the political sphere and to policy issues in particular. As for T-D, their immediate context is clearly that of ethical discussions properly speaking inside philosophy classes, even though the book presents itself mostly as an introduction to argumentation for undergraduates. The examples are simple to understand, and do not require a high level of knowledge, for instance of the recent history, but they require and contribute to an ethical consciousness of debated questions. Some examples touch at the political, but considered from a moral point of view. Their analytical tool then reflects this privileged domain of discussion which concerns ethical discussions and issues, mostly to be held in classes.

The field-dependency and field-relatedness of argumentation is something well established since Toulmin's 1958 groundbreaking work. Does our work here show a field dependency not only of argumentative practices, but also of theoretical work about argumentation? We certainly have showed a correlation between preferred domain of interrogation and the categories put in the forefront, even though we did not select a quantitative approach and have not endeavoured to treat exhaustively their respective material. Until further verification then, it would seem that the preferred field of application and research has "selected" the required dominant categories, in one case the Interpretive, in the other the dual system of Evaluatives and Directives, respectively useful especially to understand in some way political phenomena, or to orient action and evaluate practices. To consider things in the opposite direction (the categories constructed permitting to

select domains and preferred examples) would only be to consider the other face of the same coin.

## NOTES

**[i]** Sproule (1980) and Toussaint-Ducasse (1996), respectively the S model and the TD model for the ends of this disussion. See references for the bibliographical details.

**[ii]** Many different terms could be used to describe identifiable argumentative procedures, like the *ad baculum*, etc. Instead of using the “scheme” word here, that is used with great efficacy by Walton and colleagues theses days, or to talk of *topoi*, that could also be valid but would refer us to Aristotle, Cicero and the other classics, we prefer to use here, for our describing purposes, “argumentative structures” that seems general enough to take into account the work of Sproule and Toussaint-Ducasse.

**[iii]** Personal translation, as for the following.

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