

ISSA Proceedings 2010 - Improving The Teaching Of Argumentation Through Pragma Dialectical Rules And A Community of Inquiry



In this paper we reflect on how improving the teaching of argumentation following the pragma dialectical guidelines and the Philosophy for Children ideal of a “community of inquiry”, also enhances ethical education and contributes to the development of a better society.

According to Pragma Dialectics, in the “practical realm” of argumentation the aim of the teaching of argumentation should be to promote reflection on argumentation and to spur critical discussion. In *A Systematic Theory of Argumentation*, van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004, p. 37) distinguish between “first”, “second” and “third order” conditions for critical discussion: the first order conditions are the willingness to respect the critical discussion rules, the second order conditions are the “internal” mental states that are pre conditions to a reasonable discussion attitude and the third order conditions are the “external” circumstances in which argumentation takes place (political requirements such as freedom of speech, non violence and pluralism).

We propose to focus on the creation of the second and third order conditions for such an education through the development of a “community of inquiry”, as it is understood and practiced in Philosophy for Children, that is, by the creation of an educational environment where both students and teachers feel free to express their opinions, yet, at the same time, are compelled to abide by the procedural and critical rules that encourage mutual challenge and cooperation.

A reflection on the ethical foundations of pragma dialectical rules, in connection with the underlying ethical principles required for the building of a “community of inquiry”, shows that the principles of equal respect and the common search for a

provisory truth, modeled on Socratic dialogue, replace in both instances the traditional competitive scheme. The critical rationalistic ideal of reasonableness and the code of conduct based on equal respect reinforce each other to create the ideal model of a society of mutual respect and cooperation that provides the most appropriate frame for teaching both argumentation and ethics.

We argue that the connection between the concept of a “community of inquiry”, the pedagogical practice of building it, and the pragma dialectical rules for a critical discussion will produce a double benefit: (a) an improvement of the teaching of argumentation in different situations, where the building of an open, tolerant and challenging environment would allow the discussion of difficult and controversial issues in a “benevolent” way and without the pressure of reaching a consensus, and (b) the improvement of the teaching of argumentation in the Philosophy for Children courses by the updating of its argumentation contents and teaching methodology through the pragma dialectical contributions to contemporary Argumentation Theory.

1. Philosophy for Children and the “community of inquiry”

The Philosophy for Children program was created as a response to the shortcomings of the North American educational system some forty years ago. Matthew Lipman (Lipman et al. 1980) observed that school had become dysfunctional to its purpose, had lost meaning for the children and failed to provide adequate tools to develop their thinking skills. Lipman’s then revolutionary proposition of teaching philosophy to the children is now widely accepted and is being implemented in many places throughout the world (Cf. Montclair State University 2008)

According to Lipman’s diagnosis (Lipman et al. 1980), philosophy was the “lost dimension” in education, because its characteristic search for meaning was absent from the way in which teaching was approached. The subjects were presented fractioned, in discreet and isolated quantities, leaving it to the child the titanic task of making the synthesis by himself. In addition, the contents responded to an “adult agenda”, unrelated to the children’s immediate interests and strongly oriented to provide scientific and historic data. This rendered the school increasingly meaningless to the children and gradually destroyed their intellectual curiosity.

In order to give back to the educational experience its lost meaning and to the

children their desire to know, Lipman proposed to introduce philosophy in the school curriculum. He saw that philosophy has been traditionally the discipline that has undertaken the task of asking questions about meaning and, also, has in itself the appropriate methodology by which to conduct the inquiry: dialogue and questioning. Since its very beginning, philosophy has resorted to dialogue as a means to foster and develop thinking. Through rigorous dialogue about things that matter to us, we exercise and develop our thinking skills, thinks Lipman, but, most importantly, through philosophical dialogue we develop the ability to think cooperatively: "When children are encouraged to think philosophically, the classroom is converted into a community of inquiry" (Lipman et al.1980, p. 45).

This concept of a *community of inquiry* is one of the most powerful and influential concepts in the Philosophy for Children movement. The expression, according to Lipman (1991), was originally used in relation to scientific inquiry, to stress that scientists use similar procedures in the pursuit of identical goals. In Philosophy for Children it means that, in a similar way as scientists do, the children and the teacher form a community whose members understand each other and cooperate with each other in a common search for truth and meaning, respecting the same rules and procedures for examining their theories and evaluating the relevant evidence. This community is characterized by mutual respect, critical and cooperative thinking, openness, the avoidance of indoctrination and a willingness to subject all views to Socratic examination through dialogue.

The members of the community challenge one another to examine carefully, to consider alternatives, to give reasons and evaluate reasons given by others, to maintain relevance and to contribute to each other's ideas. In this way, the community becomes "self correcting", avoiding fallacious argumentation and careless thinking, searching for foundations with philosophical rigor, and, in sum, acquiring the habit of thinking critically.

In addition, a special bond of empathy and mutual understanding grows between the community members, referred to as *caring thinking*: "As the children discover one another's perspectives and share in one another's experiences, they come to care about one another's values and to appreciate each other's uniqueness." (Lipman et al.1980, p.199). As this capacity for empathy is extended to include the rest of the human species, the community of inquiry becomes a privileged setting for ethical education, for the children experience in this small community the sense of belonging to the group and feeling responsible for it.

As we were able to show in our research in Chilean schools, through the building of a community of inquiry in the classroom both democratic attitudes and behaviors are developed (Vicuña & López 1995), and significant progress is achieved towards autonomous moral development (Vicuña, López, & Tugendhat 1997).

Crucial in the building of such a community of inquiry is the role of logic and argumentation. According to Lipman (Lipman et al.1980, p.131), there are three meanings of logic in Philosophy for Children: *formal logic*, *giving reasons* and *acting rationally*. In the philosophical novels used to spur philosophical dialogue, the rules of *formal logic* are presented as discovered and tested by the children characters. For instance, Harry and Lisa discover the rules of conversion in chapter one of the novel *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* (Lipman 1974). However, Lipman considers that it would be wrong to suppose that philosophical thinking could be promoted by formal logic alone: "While formal logic can serve as an effective means for helping children realize that they can think in an organized way, it gives no clues as to when thinking by the rules of formal logic is useful and appropriate and when it is simply absurd" (Lipman et al.1980, p. 133)

On the other hand, *giving reasons*, or the *good reasons approach*, entails taking into account the multiple situations that call for deliberate thinking. Therefore, the emphasis of this approach is placed on *seeking reasons* in reference to a given situation and *assessing the reasons given* (Lipman et al. 1980, pp. 138-9). Thus, *giving reasons* is the core of the methodology of philosophical dialogue. Learning to think philosophically through dialogue requires becoming aware of the kinds of reasons that are suitable for a particular context and the characteristics that distinguish good reasons from bad ones. Since both the reasons to be sought and the assessments of the reasons offered are highly dependent on the context of a given inquiry, this learning "basically relies on an intuitive sense of what can count as a good reason" (Lipman et al.1980, p. 139). Therefore, in order for the children to develop this sense we must provide ample opportunity for them to be exposed to a wide variety of settings that require them to search for reasons and to assess reasons. These opportunities are provided by the philosophical novels and the teacher's manuals used by the program. It is also the task of the Philosophy for Children teacher to guide the discussion in such a way that these opportunities are created and taken full advantage of. Some of the conditions required, in Lipman's words, "include a teacher who is provocative, inquisitive,

and impatient of mental slovenliness and a classroom of students eager to engage in dialogue that challenges them to think and produce ideas” (Lipman et al.1980, p. 102).

In the training of such a teacher a fair amount of this everyday language logic should be included. This is where we think that Pragma Dialectics (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992, 2004) can be of great help, both through its *rules for critical discussion* and the analytic tools it provides.

The third meaning of logic in Philosophy for Children mentioned above, *acting rationally*, means “to encourage children to use reflective thinking actively in their lives” (Lipman et al. 1980, p. 146). He explains this by means of several examples of different styles of thinking exhibited by the children characters in the novel *Harry Stottlemeier’s Discovery* (Lipman 1974) and an analysis of how these characters apply their thinking to their behavior (Lipman et al.1980, pp. 147-151). He adds that the main purpose of these examples in the program’s novels is to provide the children “with a means for paying attention to their own thoughts and to ways that their thoughts and reflections can function in their lives” (Lipman et al.1980, p. 151).

In summary, the “community of inquiry” is built through philosophical dialogue, for which not only logical rules are important but also an atmosphere of mutual respect, cooperation and search for meaning. The logical rules and the giving reasons practice develop critical thinking, but the philosophical orientation of the inquiry is designed to develop a connection between thinking and acting, that is, introducing reasonableness in everyday actions and developing “caring thinking”. Therefore, the methodology of philosophical dialogue resorts to two kinds of rules: the logical rules and the procedural rules. The first include formal and informal (giving reasons) logic, the latter, the community of inquiry’s rules that demand respect for one another and for the procedures of inquiry.

In the next section we examine the ethical foundations of the pragma dialectical rules to show the connections between the ideal of reasonableness present in both Philosophy for Children and Pragma Dialectics.

2. The ethical foundations of the pragma dialectical rules for critical discussion

In our view, the pragma dialectical rules for critical discussion (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992), beside being practical rules directed to the goal of resolving

a difference of opinion, are also the expression of an ideal way of conducting interactions between reasonable beings and, therefore, imply some moral principles. These coincide with some of the community of inquiry's features just discussed.

A close examination of the rules shows (Vicuña 2005) that there are four principles underlying the pragma dialectical rules: respect, honesty, consistency and rationality. Thus, for instance, the first rule has to do with freedom of expression, therefore it appeals to mutual respect between the discussants. Other rules (2 and 9) appeal to honesty, urging discussants to take responsibility for their assertions and to acknowledge when they have been defeated, to withdraw their standpoints when they have not been able to successfully defend them, or to retract their doubts when the other party has been able to dissipate them. Other rules (3, 4, 7 and 8) appeal to reasonableness, demanding relevance or urging discussants to respect logical validity and to use the appropriate argumentation schemes correctly. Rule 10 appeals, again, to honesty, commanding to avoid confuse or ambiguous language, to abstain from manipulating the meaning of the other party's formulations, and to represent them with maximum fidelity.

Thus, the pragma dialectical rules can be seen as protecting and promoting certain values, such as freedom of speech, responsibility, honesty (truthfulness), consistency (coherence) and "good will", which are crucial for the civilized life of a human community. All these values and principles mentioned can be expressed by the single concept of "respect"; respect for persons and respect for reason. For, if we respect our fellow human beings, we will also respect reason, because we will treat them as reasonable beings and will appeal to their rationality.

Respect for reason, understood as critical thinking, is also stressed by the "critical rationalistic" ideal of reasonableness (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004), which is modeled on the paradigm of science. Just as scientific conclusions are always provisory, in that they are open to be revised in the light of new evidence, so the pragma dialectical ideal of reasonableness finds in critical discussion the appropriate way to progress in understanding by considering all standpoints open to challenge and to be put to test by the other party's questioning (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004, p. 125).

As we have seen, these features are also manifest in the "community of inquiry" (Lipman et al. 1980, p. 45), stressing mutual challenge and questioning, a

common search for meaning through dialogue and argumentation, and the absence of indoctrination, i.e., acknowledging that no one is in possession of the truth or can impose his/her perspective on others. Underlying this ideal are the same values of respect already encountered at the base of the critical discussion rules.

We contend that these values are implicit in the “critical rationalistic” ideal of reasonableness (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992, 2004) that inspires both Pragma Dialectics and the community of inquiry. Its main features are a healthy skepticism regarding pretensions of acceptability and the willingness to discuss and to submit to test all standpoints that are put to doubt through an argumentation that respects the critical discussion rules. These rules, as stated, include values of respect that are made explicit in the pragma dialectical approach to argumentation, but remain implicit in the three meanings of logic in Philosophy for Children discussed in the previous section. But, as stated before, there are many instances in the novels and teacher manuals where logical rules are illustrated and ample opportunity is given to practice and develop a sense of what are good reasons and reasonableness, and models of good quality dialogue and communication between children and adults are provided. In these instances it is not difficult to discover the underlying values. Therefore, making explicit the pragma dialectical rules would be extremely useful for the building of a community of inquiry with the children and in teacher training.

Moreover, the building of such a community permits to provide a most suitable setting for moral education and for the development of a better society, as we have argued elsewhere (Vicuña 1998), contributing to foster the development of the “second” and “third order” conditions for critical discussion mentioned by van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004, p. 37).

In the next section we discuss the importance of teaching ethics in connection with argumentation.

3. Teaching ethics and argumentation

Ethical education is most difficult in our times, where so many different perspectives of what is good and what would be a good life coexist and compete in our increasingly globalized world. The main problem arises from the questioning of the religious and traditional foundations of morality. As Tugendhat (1988, 1997) shows, this may lead to embrace ethical relativism, which would be

equivalent to accept unwittingly that “might is right”.

As a way out of the trap, Tugendhat (1988) proposes a foundation of ethics on the personal decision of willingly submitting oneself to the obligation of respecting all human beings equally. In his view, this is the only possible foundation of ethics in our times. However, this foundation is weak in that it cannot appeal to “superior truths”, but it appeals instead to everyone’s personal interest: the desire to belong to a “moral community” governed by universal equal respect. Therefore, the foundation rests on a personal decision, and no one can be forced to make this decision.

As a consequence, ethical education ought to be approached in a dialogical way, appealing to the students’ autonomy and reasonableness, so that they can freely make the decision in favor of morality. We also believe that the willingness to live in a moral community, and to work for the building of a moral community, is fostered by the experience of partaking of a “community of inquiry” such as the one described above. As we saw, in the building of it, the pragma dialectical rules for critical discussion play a crucial role and philosophical dialogue guided by a critical rationalistic ideal of reasonableness prepare the ground for ethical education.

In what follows, we illustrate a possible interaction between the teaching of morality and the use of the pragma dialectical rules by means of an ideal fictional dialogue in the classroom. Later we point to some consequences of this interaction.

First of all, it is worth noting that in Philosophy for Children the participants in a community of inquiry are invited to freely analyze the issues according to their personal views. So, a dialogue may follow a very flexible direction. There is plenty of freedom to raise any question that the community wants to discuss, nevertheless, a dialogue is not just a simple conversation, it has a purpose and some rules must be followed. Sometimes the dialogue is exploratory, not always are we faced with a controversy, where we have to respect the pragma dialectical rules. If the participant wishes just to explore a point of view and its possible consequences, because he is only searching for a broader comprehension of the problems, the critical rules have to apply flexibly.

On the other hand, children and young people might have problems to handle

controversies related to ethical issues. This is due to the fact that they normally lack the experience required to deal with the contents of such controversies as euthanasia, abortion and capital punishment (Marinkovich & Vicuña 2008). Their moral beliefs are usually dependent on the opinions of the adult models, without further questioning. This obviously makes them vulnerable to indoctrination, that is, to a dogmatic way of teaching that hinders critical questioning. Paradoxically, in Chile even after recovering political democracy, an authoritarian structure of interpersonal relationships continues to prevail, especially at school and in ethical matters.

In order to be coherent with the principles of Philosophy for Children and also to integrate pragma dialectical rules, ethical education must start from facts or situations that are meaningful for the students. The imposition of general principles, especially moral principles, would hinder the development of an autonomous moral consciousness. So, instead of starting from them, we have to search for such principles in accordance with the students' experience.

Following the analytical approach to ethics developed by Tugendhat (1997, pp. 76-93), we start from basic facts and try to reach some general principles. Instead of asking for moral principles, we can start a dialogue asking for simple facts or situations which the students judge as moral, as we do in our philosophical novel on ethics (Cf. Tugendhat, López, & Vicuña 1998). Students usually find these questions difficult and prefer to respond by pointing to instances of immoral behavior. They seem to know clearly when something is wrong and should never be done, although they are not sure about the reasons to avoid acting in this way.

So, if we ask: "could you give some examples of immoral actions?", they will find no problem in responding by pointing to situations of everyday life: (a) to harm a classmate or (b) to steal some money from my mother or father, or (c) to lie to the teacher, and so on.

Next, we should ask for reasons: "why is it wrong to do that?" This question is crucial to promote ethical reflection, because asking for reasons is an important way of clarifying the student's motives for behaving in one way or another and thus to relate to their immediate moral experience.

Some students may respond, (a) it is bad because you cause suffering to other people, or (b) it is wrong because you cause harm to other people, or, even, some students could say: (c) I wouldn't like to be treated in that way by any other person.

In order to make a distinction between harm and suffering, we could ask: “is it possible to cause harm, without causing suffering?” In this way, the students have to decide which elements are relevant or irrelevant to identify an immoral behavior.

As examples of causing harm without causing suffering, the students may point to: (a) to speak badly about someone in his back, especially of a friend. (b) To lie to someone, knowing that she cannot verify our behavior and so, she cannot realize that she is being deceived. The teacher may reinforce this point through an argumentation by analogy, by asking whether these cases would be similar to being affected by an illness without knowing that we are sick, since then we wouldn't have any symptoms that help us realize that our health is bad.

A following step could be to consider competitive contexts, in which the winner, by winning, causes suffering to the loser, but, as long as the competitors have followed the rules of the game, the winner is not guilty of that suffering. From this discussion, students may infer that “suffering” is not a crucial criterion for judging moral behavior, but “harm” is.

We could call attention, now, to the fact that when we use the expression “this behavior is wrong, because it causes harm”, we are arguing in a more general way, we have put forward an argumentation. So, we could take time to talk about argumentation and to show how this particular assertion implies a more general one: “all behaviors that cause harm are wrong”.

We may present the students with some other cases that we judge as incorrect or wrong, yet we may be in doubt as to whether they are immoral, because they don't cause a great harm. For instance, to wear a friend's favorite tie without asking for his permission. We often refer to this kind of behavior as “abuse of trust”. It is difficult to say that this is immoral behavior, even though we consider it incorrect. We could say that it is a case of “lack of respect” and relate it to other similar situations, such as ignoring other people: not greeting them, for example. We could then generalize, by asking whether any behavior that can be defined as a lack of respect is immoral. Respect would, then, be the global concept that involves relevant suffering, harm and abuse of trust.

Of course, students may question this conclusion, because it implies that we must respect everybody. They might ask: “why do we have to respect every person? Is it not enough to respect only our friends?” Children and teenagers are still bound by their natural sympathies and antipathies, so that it is difficult for them to

understand the moral obligation to respect equally everyone. Therefore, it is necessary to help them question and discover for themselves the foundations of morality. If we failed to do this, they may accept this principle under the authoritarian pressure of society, but this acceptance is no warranty that they will always act accordingly.

3.1 The golden rule and the foundation of moral obligation

In order to get a better perspective of morality, we need to go beyond the mere accumulation of cases and establish a foundation for moral obligations. As mentioned before, we follow Tugendhat's (1988) foundation on the individual's autonomous decision to belong to a moral community governed by universal equal respect.

In order to help students understand this foundation, we may propose to consider examples of the application of the *golden rule*. One of the simplest formulations of this rule is: "Don't do to others what you don't want to be done to you". This is an exhortation to put oneself in the situation of any other person. Therefore, the examples must be of a kind as to awaken feelings of empathy. For instance: "Manuel was given a cat for Christmas last year. He was very fond of it and every day talked to the cat about his joys and sorrows. Last night a truck run over Manuel's cat and killed it. How do you think that Manuel is feeling about this? How would you feel if your beloved pet was killed?"

It is important to emphasize, however, that the *golden rule* defines behavior in terms of universal rules that affect every human being, not in terms of personal preferences. For instance, the reasoning: "I don't like to eat chocolate ice cream, therefore nobody should eat it", is a case of faulty application of the *golden rule*. Therefore, we must give enough opportunities to the children for assessing instances of application of the golden rule.

Since the scope and application of this rule could be very difficult to understand, we may appeal to the notion of "moral feelings" (Strawson 1968), which we experiment in correlation with their conformity to the golden rule. Thus, we feel *guilty* if we behave in a way that implies breaking the golden rule, for nobody should do this to any other person. For this reason, the person affected by this behavior feels resentment, because he/she also judges that this behavior is wrong, and, since the golden rule is to be applied universally, a person who is not directly affected by that behavior feels *indignation*, because he/she also judges that

nobody can behave in such a way.

The moral feelings can also help us clarify the application of the golden rule to unclear cases, as those mentioned above in relation to a competitive context. For instance, the loser can feel sad and impotent, but we would not say that he should feel moral *resentment*, because any impartial observer can judge that he/she has lost in fair play. The winner has not broken the golden rule. Therefore, a feeling of resentment would not be legitimate in this situation: to win in a competition is not immoral. Only when there is a conjunction of these three feelings, we can consider that a specific behavior is immoral.

In this way, all the basic rules of morality can be derived from the *golden rule*: don't kill, don't steal, don't break your promises, etc. Therefore, one basic goal in teaching morality is to get the students to connect with these feelings and to reflect about them.

Some important consequences of this are that (1) everyone who freely submits to the *golden rule* contributes to constitute a moral community, and (2) all members of this community must be treated with equal respect.

As we have seen, to accept this rule requires an effort of empathy, an effort to put oneself in the situation of another person. But, as we know, some people are unable or unwilling to do that. There are people who don't feel guilty when they do something wrong. But, this doesn't mean that we don't have the right to protect us from them. So, we establish with them an instrumental relationship and not a moral one, which would imply mutual and equal respect. This puts a limit to the moral community: they cannot belong to it.

The students could raise the question: "why do we have to obey the *golden rule*?" This question must be explored. If we only had some feelings which we could ignore when the interests involved in behaving in an immoral way are too strong, we wouldn't have a firm foundation. We should not overlook that there are people who do wrong, even though they know it is immoral. This is why the real foundations of morality rest on the individual's personal decision of belonging to this moral community and this is also why this has to be an autonomous and rational decision.

3.2 The extension of the concept of morality through argumentation

Teaching argumentation and ethics in the framework of a "community of inquiry" can extend our sense of morality from the interpersonal relationships to the field

of social problems. As we have seen, the basic principle of morality can be derived from the experience of students that interact with each other. In the context of the classroom, this is not so difficult. However, the question is: “how could we extend this principle to social problems, where we have to deal with the power of the state?”

We think that this can be accomplished through the analysis of complex argumentation and argumentative schemes. This could be clarified through the following examples:

Example (1)

Judith Jarvis Thomson (1983) made the following analogy: suppose you wake up one morning and find yourself connected to other person, a famous violinist. He has been plugged into you because he is very sick and only your blood can save him. To unplug you would be to kill him. Fortunately, after only nine months he will have recovered and could be safely unplugged from you. It is easy to see how this fictional situation is comparable to unwanted pregnancy. The main point of the analogy is to show that the violinist doesn't have any right to demand that you remain connected to him. If you do that, you behave like a “great Samaritan”, but this action exceeds your moral obligations.

Thomson doesn't make a complete analysis of the analogy. Neither does she explain the limits of moral obligations. For her purposes, it is enough to establish that if you decided to remain connected to the violinist you behave beyond your moral duties. It is insufficient as an argumentation; nevertheless, we can consider it as an attempt to formulate an appropriate point of view.

She then shifts to the problem of abortion. So, she asks: would it be fair, for any society, to require from some people to fulfill moral duties beyond their moral obligations? Any society that prohibits abortion, yet, at the same time, does not require men to fulfill minimal moral obligations, like providing basic help to others, clearly discriminates against women. Since, while it would be immoral for the men not to provide the minimal help, but it wouldn't be illegal; in the case of women it would be illegal to interrupt an unwanted pregnancy through abortion. So, the conclusion would be that abortion should not be prohibited if we want to preserve equality before the law. Even though Thomson doesn't follow strictly an argumentative discussion, and we can disagree with some aspects of her arguments, nevertheless, we can realize that she is successful in converting an interpersonal relationship problem into a moral social one. This is a typical result

of a philosophical dialogue: to provoke a stimulus to continue thinking in a broader context, and not to settle down the discussion no matter what.

Example (2)

From 1960 to 1963, Yale University psychologist Stanley Milgram (Milgram 1974, quoted by Beauchamp 1982) conducted a series of experiments to measure the willingness of experimental subjects to obey an authority figure who instructed them to perform acts that conflicted with their personal moral conscience. The subjects were told that they would participate in an experiment on learning. They were placed in front of a complex machine and instructed to give an electric shock to the “learner” each time he gave a wrong answer. The machine had different levers and labels indicating the voltage intensity of each shock. The intensity should increase in 15 volts for each wrong answer. The “learner” was really an actor and the machine did not really give any electric shocks, but the “teacher” (subject of the experiment) was deceived and led to believe that they were real. When the “learner” protested and made believe that he was suffering, the “teacher” might ask to halt the experiment, but he was unwaveringly told by the authority figure, the “experimenter” (the researcher), that the experiment must go on.

An analysis of the argumentative scheme of this experiment could consider that the experiment is an attempt to develop a symptomatic argumentation. The standpoint would be formulated as follows: *The personal moral principles of the “teacher” should be strong enough as to prevent him to cause harm to the “learner”.*

The reasons (symptoms) that would support this assertion would be the causal factors that permitted the “teachers” to apply the electric shocks to the “learners” up to some level and forced them to suspend them at another level.

Although in previous polls conducted before the experiment most people had anticipated that the “teachers” would stop before the 130 volts level and no one would continue to the 450 volts level, the results showed that as much as 65% of the “teachers” applied the electric shock of 450 volts.

These final results would demonstrate that the original standpoint was wrong. The Milgram experiment raised a lot of controversies about the obedience to authority and also about the ethical requirements in experiments with human subjects. They are complex to interpret and deserve much reflection; however, they seem to show that just personal values are unable to resist the influence of

authoritarian power. This seems to be true even of persons with high level of education living in a democratic system. It makes us wonder whether we need to develop stronger convictions about our moral obligations and stronger democratic institutions to protect human rights. The Milgram experiment is an excellent example to analyze with students and to promote an inquiry about our moral obligations and responsibilities, and into the foundations of morality. These would not be possible without the critical discussion rules and the community of inquiry.

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