

# ISSA Proceedings 2006 - The Challenging Force Of Dissuasion

✘ « *Si, au contraire, on prend comme concept général de départ, non celui de monde, mais celui de culture, la question revêt aussitôt tout autre aspect.* »  
*Ernest Cassirer, La philosophie des formes symboliques, I: 21*

*The issue:* Our study takes as its starting point the general concept of culture, just as stated in the above quotation in French: “[il] prend comme concept général de départ celui de culture”, trying to analyze the dissuasive force of those ideas that are dominant within the social life and exercise a negative pressure upon a creative mind. The particular aspect of dissuasion we are interested in is neither discursive, nor explicit, but active in the form of an implied argument, the power of which has normative authority.

*The premise:* The argumentative force of dissuasion belongs to the doxastic field (the *belief field*) and has axiological foundations[i].

*A remark:* This paper continues our research within the field of argumentative dialectics, and the topics of several studies of ours count as premises of the present approach: (a) the mechanism of decidability in doxastic thinking follows the constitutive process of the *moral object* (Amel, 1999)[ii]. If our inquiry has in view only the argumentative behavior with reference to cultural notions, we are compelled to emphasize that the respective system of notions is characterized by argumentative authority and presents the danger of promoting a prejudicial judgment; these considerations introduce two further premises: (b) we may judge *authority* as being sometimes a valid argument and sometimes a fallacious one (Amel, 2004); (c) from the point of view of the conversational logic, *the preconceived idea* has all the features characterizing the category of presupposition (it is a pre-judgment).

Actually, our contribution represents ‘une prise de conscience culturelle’, grasped in its dialectical unrest.

## 1. Between psychology and (argumentative) logic

1.1. There is a temptation to oppose dissuasion to persuasion and to define them as complementary acts. By following a strict pragmatic definition, we cannot reduce dissuasion to a perlocutionary act that guides interlocutor’s thinking in a direction, which contradicts his own intentions.

Dissuasion is an exercitive act - a *demand*, [ca. institutionalized; ca. categorical]:

(1) Don't do it, because...

Generally speaking, dissuasion is based on 'reasons' the agent supplies to an inter-agent, in order to make him change his mind and not to implement the plans he priorily projected. Dissuasion is a particular demand, through which an agent tries by *persuasion*, or even by psychological pressure, to determine somebody to forbear from doing a certain act. If the force of dissuasion is less powerful and the 'reasons' which are given are not sufficiently authoritative, the *demand* can be considered a behabitive act - *a piece of advice* (following Austin's classification of speech acts), an act through which a certain agent disconcerts others' plans or ideas.

(2) You, with your foreign accent, don't try to enter this college, because you'll have no chance!

The example (2) represents a piece of advice (the well-meaning force of which cannot be appreciated) given by a teacher to a pupil who speaks Romanian with a Moldavian accent.

Even in the case in which the dissuasion is not a linguistic act explicitly expressed, the illocutionary force it implies can be linguistically translated and it is interpreted as such by the inter-agent.

1.2. The pragmatic definition of dissuasion can be easily reformulated in conformity with the logic of dialectics, if the 'felicity conditions', through which dissuasion reaches an efficient effect, are considered parameters of the argumentative function of dissuasion. In order for it to be convincing, dissuasion should satisfy two conditions: it should be performed from an authoritative position and should supply reasons, which are disadvantageous for the person to whom the act is addressed. The argumentative force of dissuasion cannot be considered an indirect speech act, but an implied one, as presuppositions are.

As dissuasion is fundamentally an act that manages somebody's beliefs, the argumentative logic should be coupled with elements belonging to doxastic dialectics<sup>3</sup>. Consequently, the rhetoric involvement of doxa is extremely important. The argumentative logic, on which dissuasion is based, follows both the logic of rationality and the strategic logic. Through either of these operations, the agent is looking for persuasive means and calculates the interactive advantage he could obtain over his partner.

In order for it to be able to dishearten someone from implementing one's plans, dissuasion, as an act, should satisfy an authoritative condition. This is the first thing the justificative enterprise<sup>4</sup> of dissuasion brings into inquiry. It is impossible to persuade someone to forbear from doing a certain thing, or implementing one's plans, etc., without having a certain authority over that person. The authority can get the force of an argument in two cases: a) a power relationship, within which the advantage one part has over the other is institutionalized and recognized by both partners; and b) a certain moral superiority, and in this case the argument of authority is converted into an argument of credibility.

From the rhetorical point of view of the argumentative dialectics, we shall stress the following things, regarding the two important aspects that are mentioned:

(a) the authority is a matter of degree, and

(b) the authoritative argument, implied in dissuasion, can be either rationally supported or fallaciously imposed.

## *2. The crisis of the justification device*

2.1 Among the rhetorical arguments that manipulate the 'reasons' through which somebody could be persuaded by dissuasion, we include the dominant ideas that a community shares at a specific time.

Within a community, there is a tendency to circulate forms of thinking, which are uncritically assumed and conventionally instituted, such as cultural axioms. In these particular cases, the state of mind has no value in itself, but it becomes pertinent as 'language' (a system of doxastic, respectively, axiological concepts), summarized in sets of several codes<sup>5</sup> governing the speech, thinking or social behavior. We are confronted with a reality that rehabilitates the Saussurean definition of language as a social institution. Social psychology is responsible for this condition - an aspect we do not comment upon, but the fact that such beliefs being a kind of *forma mentis*, socially active, influence the common behavior, as authoritative arguments do. The condition of an institution-like mentality is a consequence of the formative principle, which within the belief field is excessively productive. Belief represents the cognitive 'territory' in search for forms and expression, therefore the ready-made beliefs are the best and the easiest support of the constitutive effort of axiological thinking. Axiological languages, scientific paradigms being included here, get more credibility when others share them, than when they are simply filtered by one's own mind. A value that circulates represents a reason of pertinence and to conform to it seems natural for the

common mind. This explanation tries to resume the process due to which the mechanism of prejudices is augmented within social life (Amel, 2005). A kind of cognitive laziness neutralizes the creative effects of doxastic dialectics and raises the power of intellectual behavior that has already acquired 'legitimacy' to the level of an institution.

When a ruler etc. is interested in imposing an axiological paradigm and in preserving it, the society is compelled to conform to this paradigm for a certain time:

(3) See the ironical but real example: General și particular in gândirea generalilor și particularilor ("General and particular in the thinking of generals and private persons") - paper presented by a student at the Marxist-Leninist seminar (see Al.Stefanescu, 2006).

Within a scientific society, it is already impossible to imagine another scientific paradigm than that which is in fashion:

(4) "Let us analyze, in structuralist terms, the poem Cățeluș cu părul creț!" ("Little dog with curly hair!"), a seminar work (see Al.Stefanescu, 2006).

Sometimes, the lack of cognitive proofs or the insufficient pertinence of the meaning of value concepts prepares the axiological field for distortion.

(5) Physicians say: "It is dangerous to eat eyes because they contain cholesterol!" (although, others, on the contrary, recommend eating an eye every day, because eyes contain lecithin)

(6) "We should admit social anarchy because it is impossible to fight against it!" (which means: 'Real democracy' is either an empty word or a utopia).

(7) "Don't try to be a polite and modest person, because you risk being included in the category of alte Sachen!"

There are paradoxical examples, when 'deconstructive' attitudes get social legitimacy and everybody chooses this way. It is extremely typical for people with a gregarious mentality to follow uncritically a non-conformist attitude, each individual cultivating for oneself the illusion of being original. We may see how great the influence still is in the following cases:

(8) The vulgarization of Nietzsche's attempt of Umwertung aller Werte (to transvaluate values) (Antichrist, last statement; see also the commentary in Yovel, 2000: 188);

(9) The vogue of the nihilist philosophers and the power of their dissuasive attempt of destroying the fundamentals of belief, or the ascendancy of the

representatives of postmodernism who advocate the neutralization of axiological oppositions;

(10) The tendency to be provocative, or to adopt a rebel behavior;

(11) Or even to speak at a brisk pace (see the radio or T.V. reports);

And so on.

In contradistinction to the common language, the institution of prejudices uncovers a kind of semantic vacuum, because the principle of intelligibility neglects the functions of doxastic dialectics. On the other hand, the fact that axiological systems are more flexible than common language is, time- and space-dependent, proves that argumentative dialectics is still active, even in moments when its importance is minimized.

## *2.2 Prejudices of any kind become prohibitive means for a creative mind.*

The original thinking of a person trying to express ideas in one's own language and to behave consequently does not assume predominance without proving the ideas' justificative power. For him, the rules of intellectual behavior, which is socially accepted, are usually under cognitive inquiry in order to examine whether they represent authentic beliefs or cultural prejudices (Amel, 2005). In what follows, we shall discuss two aspects that prove the way original thinking assumes 'the pressure of (axiological) language' in a critical way:

(a) The active role of a subject within the system of language, and

(b) The nature of the authoritative argument implied in dissuasion.

It is important to remind that dominant ideas are veiled in a kind of ambiguity; they are either rationally supported or fallaciously imposed.

## *3. Critical strategy*

*3.1* Due to the 'presupposition status' of prejudices and their surreptitious presence in illocutionary acts, the critical inquiry is easily corrupted. The implicit validation of prejudices allows a short cutting of criticism, during which only the subjective dimension of prejudices is removed and the categorical one is preserved, a procedure through which prejudices get the normative force of axiomatic options. (Cf. Amel, 2005) Consequently, once the normative power of prejudices becomes general, they constitute a sociolect, namely, a socially accepted code, 'an institution'.

From the history of deconstructive enterprises, we quote a fragment from Derrida's *Force and Signification* in order to emphasize the unstable equilibrium of forces and the role the individual has within language:

“On perçoit la structure dans l’instance de la menace, au moment où l’imminence du péril concentre nos regards sur la clef de voûte [= point of tension - Our emphases] d’une institution sur la pierre où se résumait sa possibilité et sa fragilité. On peut alors menacer méthodiquement la structure pour mieux la percevoir non seulement en ses nervures mais en ce lieu secret où elle n’est ni érection, ni ruine, mais labilité. Cette opération s’appelle (en latin) soucier ou solliciter” [= convergent forces - Our emphases] (1967: 13).

Nothing is more unstable than the position of the subject under the pressure of an institution (in our case, the axiological commitment) and against which the interactive subject opposes his own force.

As far as nobody rejects dominant ideas, they maintain their supra-personal status, having normative power. However, the human mind has a critical inclination, especially when values are at stake. Therefore, the institutional status of axiological concepts triggers contrary effects. In spite of the force the institution of language imposes, by limiting free choices, the argumentative attitudes of creative individuals are challenged.

Naturally, we should not forget that ‘the pressure of the system’ is a question of degree: it is exercised either by normative force or by the force of the social choice. The concepts are loaded with specific connotations that make transparent both the authoritative argument and the axiological force they imply. In our study about “Justification transfer” (2004), we stated the following: “The (justification) process engenders the tension between two completely different parameters: the authority of the source versus the authorized source, regarding a certain point of view.” The respective distinction has important consequences upon the interactive subject: In each case, an original thinking does not assume dominant ideas without a dialectical trial: ‘the pressure of the system’ should critically prove its power. If the source gets credibility, the individual resorts to the dissuasive argument:

(12) Smoking is dangerous for man’s health!

It seems rational to conform to the dissuasive force of the above quoted example, because the authoritative argument cannot be doubted.

Sometimes, in spite of the inner resistance, the interactive subject is compelled to adopt either a conformist attitude or the strategy of silence.

(13) The totalitarian propaganda-discourse imposes a dominant speech that functions as an instrument of power. Language becomes a kind of

FORTIFICATION wall impossible to be demolished. The authority of the source dissuades the interactive subject to manifest any critical attitude.

(14) Nobody dared to contradict the structuralist approach in the high tide of its development, while today nobody speaks any longer in terms of structuralist paradigm.

The last example proves that the force of a scientifically chosen paradigm cannot be easily demolished, although, there are scientists who can demonstrate the paradigmatic limits through theoretical shortcomings of the concepts supporting the respective paradigm. The scientific inertia is a known fact, because few people are able to reshape their minds.

3.2. Generally speaking, dissuasion undermines the position of the interactive subject and increases the uncertainty of his own decision. He is caught in a state of axiological doubt. Though it seems paradoxical, this situation triggers the critical attitude. It is less important to inquire the 'reasons', which one gives in order to dissuade somebody else, than to ascertain what is the authority that allows the performance of such an act.

In the particular case approached by us, the interactive subject who endures the pressure of the system, puts under inquiry the normative status of the system he belongs to. In fact, he examines the Argument of Authority that supports the pressure of the dominant ideas: are these ideas imposed by force (e.g., by totalitarian language), by fashion (the common patterns of the intellectual behavior), or can they give transcendental legitimacy to the axiological choice of a particular person?

If the interactive subject is under the 'pressure' of a totalitarian institution, he adopts an ambiguous strategy:

(15) He is ready to admit the counter-argument: If you cannot beat us, join us... or keep silent!

If the subject discloses that a socially corrupted mentality imposes upon him its rules, his critical attitude is more active.

Due to the dissociative function of argumentative dialectics, the justification process has great importance in the belief formation. On this level, the principle of rationality is based on meaning, the 'truth' of which cannot be proved but assumed by consciousness as far as it is pertinent for the thinking subject. Consequently, the principle of rationality should be increased by reasons of

intelligibility.

A person becomes less passive in one's choice when confronted with the dissuasive force of the axiological language which is 'in fashion' - i.e., the values shared by the members of the society he lives in. - The critical postulate, on which doxastic dialectics is constituted, and the interactive subject follows, affirms: "Since doxastic dialectics involves reflecting judgments (see Kant, 1981: 73-74), its entire justification procedure is supported by a higher degree of logic, where the Principle of Uncertainty calls upon a Principle of Transcendence." (Amel, 1999:6)

The Principle of Transcendence is a self-defining principle of generalization. **[vi]** In a reflective judgment, the Principle of Transcendence is a point of reference, a horizon that can give transcendental legitimacy to axiological choice. If the first two cases - the totalitarian language and the ideas in fashion - disclose a fallacious authority, which has no rational force, there are, in exchange, dominant ideas, which define a society at a certain time and space. This case cannot be included in the category of an oppressive system. There are ideas representative for what is called *Zeitgeist*. An exigent mind cannot apply censorship in all these cases - Nietzsche's critical radicalism is not the best example to follow. By opening space for an unprejudicated dialogue, even an exacting mind is caught within the hermeneutical circle, as Gadamer demonstrated: "Il n'y a pas de compréhension qui soit libre de tout préjugé." (1976:347; see also, M.Dascal: "It is impossible to think *iesh mi-ein*", that means: "to conceive something out of nothing.", 2004:161).

## CONCLUSION

Our debate regards the inner mechanism of culture - both its dynamics and its authenticity. We tried to demonstrate that the institutionalized ideas have dissuasive power, being prohibitive for a creative mind.

Within the pressure of cultural institutions, a creative mind is never a passive consumer of ideas in fashion, but a critical participant in a collective debate, for whom the most important step is to supply reasons for oneself, to reach the inner conviction that his sense-giving acts are pertinent for the ontological cognition and the configuration of a larger than priory given *Weltanschauung*.

## NOTES

**[i]** To be convincing, dissuasion should supply reasons that evaluate a situation, which are disadvantageous for somebody in particular.



**[ii]** The conclusions we reached in the respective study concern the general philosophy of cognition: Doxastic dialectics has three main functions (actually each argumentative dialectics does):

a. dissociative - it engenders cognitive intervals between opinion (the linguistic level, pragmatic being included), belief (the content put in consciousness) and doxa (the fundamentals of axiological concepts);

b. justificative or critical - since doxastic dialectics involves reflecting judgments, its entire justificative procedure is supported by a higher degree of logic, where the Principle of Uncertainty calls upon a Principle of Transcendence, and

c. constitutive - doxastic dialectics opens conditions for an alternative truth, semantically constituted, not analytically proved.

**[iii]** See the premises on which this study is based, enumerated above.

**[iv]** See note **[ii]**.

**[v]** Everybody knows what a 'code' means, but we shall consider a recently given definition that satisfies our culture-based argumentation: A speech code is defined as a system of socially constructed symbols and meanings, premises and rules, pertaining to communicative conduct. (See Keith Bairy, 2002).

**[vi]** When the reflecting subject alleges a Principle of Transcendence for his axiological choice, he defines himself through this principle, using his transcendental experience: see Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, 1957, and Bachelard's book, 1957.

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