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Presence of the Non-Existent. Challenges Faced by the Study and Teaching of Rhetoric and Rhetorical Argumentation

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Abstract

Referring either to the anti-modernist (Weaver, Taylor) narrative of rhetoric’s birth, death and resurrection, or to works of the modernist rhetoricians (Burke, Richards, Perelman) we can state that the widening presence of rhetoric is detectable in many disciplines. Its notions, methods are spreading, nevertheless the study of rhetoric – especially in Europe – is treated as a field better not to be mentioned when speaking about science.

Liberal democracy is, as it used to be, based on the autonomous individual, and thus the fundamental distrust in persuasion that subverts this autonomy. That may be among the reasons why rhetoric treated formerly as a study of persuasion could not keep its place inside the scholarly domain. When rhetoric is narrowed down either to the “collection” of persuasive techniques or to a structuring device of text-production and decoration, it loses the capacity to serve as a language by and through which identities, relations, and situations can be defined, managed, or changed. The trope of rhetoric as decoration is rooted most powerfully in the partitioning of the classical five canons of rhetoric by Petrus Ramus. He removed from rhetoric the canons of invention, arrangement, and memory – and rendered the former two into the realm of logic – leaving behind style and delivery, thus starting the tradition of considering rhetoric as a form of style and performance. Rhetoric has become a form rather than the content, while its concepts and methods have been infusing new approaches into many disciplines. This “presence of the non-existent” calls for new approaches to the study of rhetoric, for the resituation of argument, the integration of the visual into the rhetorical tradition and the adaptation of the rhetorical tradition to the digital age.

This paper aims at outlining the challenges rhetoric and the teaching of rhetoric (in higher education) should answer. It will raise questions considering the vision, the status and the content rhetoric provides for teachers and students. Starting from “homo rhetoricus,” following with the concept and community forming “phronesis,” finishing with “netoric” (or next rhetoric), the presentation will propose a theoretical framework within which the teaching of public discourse, argumentation (verbal and visual), and critical thinking can be integrated. Methods will be introduced and dealt with within this theoretical framework.
Keywords: study of rhetoric, phronesis, rhetorical (visual, verbal) argument, homo rhetoricus, netoric

"Using the label ‘rhetorical’ in this way does not necessarily imply a conception of rhetoric that equates rhetoric without any ado with »winning«, let alone with »winning at all costs«. It does mean however, that rhetoric whatever safeguards are added, is in the end always, and undeniably, associated with getting your point across to the audience." (Eeumeren–Houtlosser 2007: 69)

"Any effort to prove rhetoric unnecessary would already involve rhetoric – the rhetoric of factual communication, if not of exhortation. Another way of indicating the necessity of rhetoric is to point out that without it there can be no consciousness of fact or value, and hence no human experience at all. Rhetoric is necessary to man, and is unnecessary only if man is unnecessary." (Johnstone 2007: 25)

"We are always in a rhetoric." (Corder 1998: 93)

Introduction

This paper is aimed at outlining the challenges rhetoric and the teaching of rhetoric (and, briefly, rhetorical argumentation) has to answer in our age. Highlighting the bends and turns in the scholarly history, the article endeavors to compose a complex portrait of the discipline in order to present the variety of interpretations that are equally relevant when theorizing or applying rhetoric. Modern and postmodern views of rhetorical dianoia and paidea reflect not only the richness of the rhetorical tradition (utens-docens) but the growing difficulties in choosing a singular interpretation when teaching rhetoric.

This paper will not shoulder the responsibility to provide scholars and teachers of rhetoric with an exclusive definition or methodology (as it would definitely fail if it strove to) but it does endeavor to lay emphasis on the critical moves and changes in the terminology and reference of the discipline.

The main aim is to point toward, rather than elaborate fully, so the key themes will be loosely connected in order to represent the spaciousness and capaciousness of rhetoric.

Rhetoric and persuasion

In antiquity classical rhetoric used to serve as the universal science of the public sphere in which right acting and right speaking were considered one. Although broadly defined as the art of persuasion, it has always tended to outgrow its original concern with persuasive public speaking. Its genuine communicative and strategic characteristics, the philosophical concerns, the pragmatic capacities, its references to both the public and the personal have
made rhetoric an interdisciplinary field of intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational and public discourse. Rhetoric is “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” as Aristotle (1355b) put it. Debated as a science, it has been defined to be either a faculty or a virtue. Its verbal persuasive function, “dicere ad persuadendum accommodate” (Cicero), however, has widely been accepted and it has long been referred to as agonistic. Meanwhile, its reduction to the techniques of elocution has led to the pejorative use of the term rhetoric. Modern and postmodern rhetorical theory has been searching for new horizons to interpret rhetoric in a more integrative way, legitimizing it to function as a dimension of communication and its meta-representations.

The diversity of definitions of new and postmodern rhetoric is due to its relative resistance to being defined. This resistance is consonant with the shift from the functional-traditional view to the symbolic-construction and the ideological-critical perspectives (Livesey 2002: 119). As the Hungarian scholar emphasizes, rhetoric is the seeking of order. It is a device to submit the world into an orderly state; it is a code of cognition (Kibédi Varga 1998: 58). Lloyd Bitzer (1968) defines rhetoric as the mode of altering reality by the creation of discourse that changes reality through the mediation of thought and action, while Cheney at al. (2004: 79) conclude that rhetoric is “concerned about the way discourse is intertwined with human relations.” As a code to render the cognition of world into an orderly state, a mode of altering reality by discourse and a discourse that is bound with and by human relations rhetoric is a system, a method, and a language that can be applied to situations of human interactions.

**Democratic suspicion**

From the second half of the twentieth century there is a democratic suspicion of rhetoric as it may involve manipulation of the audience’s mood and thus coercion (Dryzek 2010). This suspicion can be traced to Kant who believed that oratory propagated appealing illusions and so violated the autonomy of the rational agent. In rhetoric, premises in argumentation have to be plausible to a particular audience, so its currency is particular.

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1 “[D]iscourses about rhetoric throughout history often have shifted between suspicions about the manipulation of truth and knowledge through language and the development of truth and knowledge by argument and persuasion through language.” (Young–Kendall 2009: 335)

2 “The problem for rhetorical theory after the birth of Enlightenment liberalism lies in the central role of moral autonomy in the emerging view of the liberal self. The very philosophy of liberal democracy itself was based on a fundamental distrust of persuasion. Once the autonomous individual rather than the family or community became the fundamental building block of politics, any effort to subvert that autonomy, whether through rhetoric or violence, came to be viewed as ‘heteronomous imposition’, as Immanuel Kant put it.” Aune 2009: 85.
rather than universal appeals. The Platonic commitment and its democratic-rational (Jürgen Habermas, John Rawls) linking to truth seeking with the virtue of reasonableness in justification goes with the abhorrence of rhetoric. Even though dismissal of rhetorical competence is generally approved of in scholarly discourses on deliberative politics nowadays, there are some theorists who think that rhetoric does have a role in public and civic discourse. Young (2000) emphasizes that rhetoric is a communication style that can be employed by those who are disadvantaged when it comes to rational argument, Hauser (1998) thinks that rhetoric is what enables participation in a civil society.

Antimodernist, modernist and postmodernist coping with rhetoric

There is certainly a “problem of rhetoric” caused by the significance of the autonomous self and the (democratic liberal, rational) disillusion in pathos and ethos, two of the three proofs of classical rhetoric (ethos, pathos, logos). This can be reacted to either by returning to a communitarian view of ethics and politics and constructing a coherent narrative of rhetoric’s birth, death and resurrection, or by offering a new rhetoric that is applicable to modernity and its cultural and political changes, or by promising new forms of persuasion and multiple selves. These reactions, marked antimodernist, modernist and postmodernist by Aune (2009), articulate different answers and reasons to the need for rhetoric.

The antimodernist view (Alasdair MacIntyre, Richard Weaver, Ernesto Grassi) has striven to discredit liberalism in a sense that it sought for a continuity in rhetorical tradition and articulated the necessity for the civic rhetor. Rhetoric is a cure for the cultural crisis engendered by industrial capitalism, the loss of historical memory, mass media and mass education. Rhetoric serves here as the counterpart of modern neutral, objective, scientific communication; for all acts of communication necessarily take a point of view and hold an immanent intention to persuade. Richard Weaver also argues for a healthy balance of dialectic and rhetoric in culture and society: “Dialectic is abstract reasoning on the basis of propositions; rhetoric is the relation of the terms of these to the existential world in which facts are regarded with sympathy and are treated with that kind of historical understanding and appreciation which lie outside the dialectical process.” (1995: 56)

Representative of the revived humanist tradition, Ernesto Grassi (1980) sought to retrieve the ideas of the Italian humanists, showing how the starting point for humans is not rationality or logic but language through which humans grasp and express the sense of reality. Based on the early modern philosopher Giambattista Vico’s thought, his humanist starting point is the concrete situation that characterizes human existence, the given situation that demands a response, a strategy for handling its challenges. The process by which these demands are met is the process of ingenium (archaic non-reducible power). The ingenium is a capacity that allows us to see with the world to make connections in
experience. *Ingenium* frees human to create and order their own lives, to choose how to respond to life’s changing demands. Grassi differentiates between two types of speech: rhetorical versus rational. It is the rhetorical language that is grounded in the ingenious function. Thus rhetorical speech is immediate, not deductive or demonstrative, illuminating, or purely indicative. It is figurative, metaphorical and pathetic. Rational speech, on the other hand, is deductive, demonstrative; it achieves its effect through logical demonstration rather than through images. Rhetorical speech is grounded in metaphor and is directly connected to the sensory images upon which humans come to rely in knowing and creating their world. It achieves an emotional identification with specific images that simply does not occur with rational speech. Therefore, rhetorical speech is of a dialogic nature³.

For representatives of the modernist tradition (Kenneth Duva Burke, Chaïm Perelman, Ivor A. Richards), the study of rhetoric furthers the goal of personal autonomy by freeing citizens from bewitchments of language and ideology and enabling practical reasoning under conditions of uncertainty. They were faced by the question, however, that for practical reasoning (and the public argument) new standards should be provided in a pluralistic and multicultural democracy. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca called for a ”new rhetoric,” a new study of rhetorical argumentation. They stated that “the theory of argumentation cannot be developed if every proof is conceived of as a reduction of the self-evident. Indeed, the object of the theory of argumentation is the study of the discursive techniques allowing us to induce or to increase the mind’s adherence to the theses presented for its assent. What is characteristic of the adherence of minds is its variable intensity: nothing constrains us to limit our study to a particular degree of adherence characterized by self-evidence . . . . “ (1969: 4). Their stance is made clear with stating that an ”effective community of minds” should be realized at a given moment for arguments to exist. This effective community of minds is at least created through the existence of common language, further through the importance attached by the person to

³ Rhetorical practice is the strategic planning of persuasive argumentation in terms of source, audience and message, relation and context. This planning requires a framework reflecting the dialogic nature of rhetoric. Rühl’s (2002: 152) writing about “dialogic rhetoric” states that “Dialogic rhetoric is dialogic and it is rhetoric in that (…) it assumes the argumentative situation to be an interaction in which the interactors are subject to the coercions of everyday life.” Dialogue involves justification of views and rebuttals (Kuhn 1991, Tindale 2004), so it is also dependent upon the consciousness that gives distance to consider interaction and to have the freedom to refuse. Nevertheless, in Bakthin’s (1981) view dialogue is ruined by agonistic speech and persuasion. Anticipation of the answer and the word’s structuring in accordance with the anticipation of the future answer is what characterises dialogue, not the fighting views and rebuttals. Dialogues have the dynamic dialectic structure of not pro-cons but words provoking answers. Aiming at consensus dialogue is a complex form of consolidating and dispersive meaning functions and interactions. Considering the fusion-fission powers of dialogic discourse, rhetorical argumentation, if regarded dialogically, has more of a question-answer pattern that invites opinions than a fight of fixed advocated positions. It is a meeting, rather than a distancing.
gaining the adherence of his/her partner, and through the listening that displays a willingness to eventually accept the other’s point of view.

In Kenneth Burke’s unique opinion, rhetoric provides a name for a situation, represents a strategy for dealing with that situation and acts out a stylized answer to that situation. He stresses that rhetoric “is rooted in an essential function of language itself, a function that is wholly realistic, and is continually born anew; the use of language as symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols.” (1969: 43) Rhetoric is concerned with identification, a term introduced by Burke as a supplement of traditional rhetoric. Identification is synonymous with consubstantiality and represents the alliance between man and his partner (and various properties) through the centrifugal and centripetal (dialogic and dialectic) usage of language. To put it simply, rhetoric is an attempt to bridge the conditions of dissociation and estrangement in order to facilitate identification.4

Richards suggests that traditional rhetoric should be replaced by a view of rhetoric as a philosophic discipline aiming at a mastery of the fundamental laws of the use of language. Richards’s definition sees rhetoric “as the art by which discourse is adapted to its end.” Its task is “to distinguish the different sorts of ends or aims, for which we use language, to teach how to pursue them separately and how to reconcile their diverse claims.” (1938: 12–13). The study of rhetoric should be a systematic study of misunderstandings that language offers and its remedies. Much of his perspective on rhetoric is concerned with how words come to mean what they do, for him meanings are central to rhetoric.5 Rhetoric should also consider how losses in communication can be measured, how good communication differs from bad. It shall not be limited to a discipline that is peripheral or irrelevant to other studies. “Rhetoric can provide the core of a sound educational curriculum at a time when nothing is central and primary in the educational curriculum.” (Foss–Foss–Trapp 2002: 23)

In the postmodernist approach (Nietzsche, Foucault or Derrida) new technologies are taken into account that promise new forms of argument and persuasion and an end of the autonomous humanist self. It is characterized by the rejection of the traditional canon or curriculum a shift from the critic to the performer and finally “a contention that all is rhetorical (…) because we can never escape the prison house of language.” (Aune 2009: 101). From this perspective truths are illusions, worn-out metaphors (Nietzsche), the idea

4 “Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division. Identification is compensatory to division. If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity.” (Burke 1969: 22)

5 Richards’s semantic approach is significantly different from the traditional one focusing on speeches and argumentation. He believes that individuals should understand first how words function.
of public address should be forgotten as we now only have fragments and ethos shall be described in terms of and line with difference multiplicity and mutation instead of identity, unity and continuity.

**Death and rebirth of rhetoric**

If rhetoric is not viewed through the lenses of 20th-century scholarly paradigms but as a tradition cut/quit and later restarted/redelivered by certain social-historical changes, we will list the reasons of its death and rebirth.

According to Bender and Wellbery (1990) the cessation of rhetoric was caused by both Enlightenment and Romanticism. The former treated it as empty, blurred and diffuse. In the enlightened mode of discourse transparency and neutrality became the determining merits. Public discourse had to be cleared off from individual interests, deprived of rhetorical ambiguity, magniloquence and passion. As for romanticism, rhetoric had become a craft rather than the faculty of the genius, a way producing rather than creating. It blamed rhetoric for what enlightenment could only accept from it. With these two sets of attacks combined, the classical tradition of rhetoric has been deposed for the following reasons:

- the requirement for neutrality of discourse
- the significance of authorship
- the omnipotence of the written medium
- the growing importance of national, vernacular language

With the recession of these, rhetoric has regained its significance. This shift, or rebirth, is characterized by:

- Postmodern paradoxes of science
- Losing faith in neutrality
- The decline of the value of founding subjectivity.
- The growing playfulness in public
- The return of (secondary) orality
- The downplay of the national paradigm, globalization
- New (democratic) ways and media of self-expression: desktop publishing, new genres.

Regaining relevance in relieving paradoxes, performing playfulness, fulfilling global communicative exigencies and objectives, rhetoric returns to the scientific cultural and educational horizon of the 20th-21st century.
Rhetorical education

As rhetoric is present in all socialization (Burke, 1969: 39), it provides people who interact with skills to adapt themselves to situations, to identify themselves with emerging goals and to accept argumentation, persuasion, without and within.

Rhetorical paideia and consciousness

Rhetoric can be considered as a teaching tradition, the pedagogy of good, ethical speaking. It has taught a rhetorical consciousness, a consciousness that is required whenever there is genuine communication. According to Johnstone (2007: 21–23) to be conscious of something is always to interrupt the unity of the transaction between subject and object. Consciousness confronts the person with something radically other than himself. Consciousness is the relevant distance and distinction between subject and object, between the person and what is communicated. Rhetoric is the evoking and maintaining this consciousness, an interface that enables the acceptance of refusal to accept statements.6

Rhetorical teaching tradition is ethically based, the speaker should be a doer of deeds and is oriented toward a wisdom in civic affairs and moral responsibility. Phronesis, practical wisdom, the situational knowledge, is at the heart of rhetorical paideia, rhetorical invention, and this is what characterizes the speaker as well.7

Rhetorical paideia and homo rhetoricus

In Richard Lanham’s generic portrait (1976: 2–3) of the almost unchanged rhetorical paideia (program of education) he lists the main principles that are, due to this synthesis, the following:

- Start your student young
- Teach him a minute concentration on the word how to write it, speak it, remember it.
- Stress memory in a massive, almost brutalizing way, develop it far in advance of conceptual understanding
- Stress behavior as performance: reading aloud, speaking with gestures

6 Rhetoric, therefore, cannot be considered to be just the art of persuasion but the inevitable technique to obtain the necessary consciousness to relate ourselves to objects (situations or events) and to experience facts and values

7 According to some scholars rhetoric creates knowledge, not just transmits it and gives it effectiveness. The situatedness of knowledge is limited to a particular context and thus it is probable. “Rhetoric has always functioned in the realm of probability. In the process of establishing a discourse’s probability, the rhetor uses warrants, lines of argument that connect a starting premise to a conclusion, often implicitly.” (Lauer, 2004: 8)
o Require no original thought
o Demand an agile marshalling of proverbial wisdom on any issue
o Categorize this wisdom into pre-digested units, commonplaces, topoi.
o Dwell on their decorous fit into situation
o Teach a corresponding set of accepted personality types, a taxonomy of impersonation.
o Nourish an acute sense of social situation
o Let him translate not only from one language to another, but from one style to another.
o Shape the ability to argue with equal skill on either side of the question
o Stress the need for improvisation, the coaxing of chance
o Train with continual verbal play, rehearsal for the sake of rehearsal
o Urge the student to go into the world and observe its doings from the perspective of the historical situation.

Lanham also raises the questions, “What kind of world would such a training create? What kind of man would homo rhetoricus be?” (1976: 39) His notion of homo rhetoricus refers to some previous and upcoming contrasts and distinctions drawn between the rational (real, dialectical) and rhetorical (ingenious, metaphorical). He quotes Jaeger (Paideia 2., 1944) stating that there are two contrasting types of life. One is built upon the flattering quasi-arts. It is the rhetorical ideal of life, while its opposite, based on knowledge of human nature, is the philosophical life. In Lanham’s opinion the rhetorical man’s common denominator is a social situation. He has more value-structures he dwells in. For him reality is what is accepted as reality; what is useful. The rhetorical view of life begins with the centrality of language and homo rhetoricus is a free player of language without “transcendental loyalties.” He feels and holds the eros of language and plays for advantage, but pleasure as well. “He is not, like the serious man, alienated from his own nature,

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8 Following Thomas Kuhn’s distinction between normal science and revolutionary science, Rorty claimed that there are two basic situations in which two lexicons, two languages emerge. In stable periods literal language serves to solve practical problems with arguments. This normal argument cannot be used if it comes to the question of ends not means. That is why, in the other type of situation, in periods of instability new words, new languages should be created through the device of the metaphor. So argument is fashioned when talk is familiar but if it is the time of change and experiment with new language, metaphor will have a significant role. (Jasinski 2001. xvi)
language” (1976:5). He also gains tolerance from knowing that he and others may think and be differently. Rhetoric represents half of man.  

Rather than underestimating the power of the rhetorical ideal, it would make far more sense to recognize it as a worldview, a way and a view of life, a coherent counterstatement to serious reality. The Western self has been composed of an uneasy combination of homo rhetoricus and homo seriousus: of a social self and a central self. Without the former we would retain no social dimension. However, the human self exists inasmuch as it continues to debate with itself. The struggle between social and central self is a self-generating, self-protecting device.

Rhetorical pedagogy in antiquity oriented the student toward common traditions and forms of speech, the language and mode the learned world had been using for centuries. Rather than underestimating the power of rhetorical paidea, we could make far more use of it in teaching social skills, “effective communities of minds” through language, rather than individual creativity. Based on a sense of situation, the study of the topoi, observation, lifelong rehearsal, the coaxing of chance and on the presumption that others may think and exist differently, alternative modes and attitudes of argumentation can be examined.

**Alternative arguments**

Even though problems in the study of argumentation$^{10}$ give more legitimacy to the rhetorical to work with the dialectical and pragmatic, I will not address here the rhetorical definition of argumentation in general. I mention only two alternatives to the logical, dialectical, pragram-dialectical, informal logical models, that are worthy of consideration.

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$^9$ As Lanham thinks rhetoric “has been deplored because it has been discussed in serious terms, in terms, that is, not germane to its essence.” (1976: 5)

$^{10}$ From the pragma-dialectic perspective, van Eemeren (2009: 110–111) sums up the most significant problems argumentation theorists have to face nowadays:

1. The problem they are jointly concerned with is the identification of a standpoint. As the sine qua non of argumentation is that it pertains to a standpoint, it is of crucial importance to elaborate on how a standpoint is formed and marked in the communicative act.

2. Premises that remain unexpressed in discourse but are often centrally important points of an argument also raise the problem of identification. Logical analysis in the revelation of these unexpressed premises should be accompanied by a pragmatic analysis through which the premise can be more precisely defined.

3. The problem of identifying argument schemes has to be taken into consideration as well to the solution of which pragmatic analysis should also be brought to.

4. In the evaluation of argumentative discourse the determination of the argumentation structure is also to be dwelt upon, which calls for the consideration of pragmatic and contextual factors.

5. Scholars are facing the problem of identifying fallacies as the logical definition of fallacies, as arguments that seem valid, but do not refer to a great number of recognized fallacies.
Both are connected to the dialogic rhetorical paradigm in which scholars argue that rhetoric had its own kind of thinking, a "rhetorical dianoia" (an intellectual activity as discursive process) whose end was in the addressee (Craig La Drière 1949). Rhetoric in this sense comprises ways of arriving at a mutual understanding among people working toward patterns of cooperation (Daniel Fogarty 1959, see Lauer 2004). Both have been, on the other hand, utilized in teaching rhetoric and composition for a decade.

At the center of these two, we find a different attitude from the conflict-winning one traditionally assigned to rhetorical argumentation. In his ethos-centered “Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love” Jim W. Corder writes that “the arguer must, with no assurance, go out inviting the other to enter a world that the arguer tries to make commodious, inviting the other to emerge as well. . . . It can happen if we learn to love before we disagree. Usually it’s the other way round: if we learn to love it is only after silence or conflict or both” (1985: 26). His pedagogical-psychological, expressionist (existential phenomenologist, as James Baumlín put it) interpretation is rooted in the view that argumentation is a kind of conflict and arguments are significant to us if threat occurs and continues. This is when, emphasizes Corder, “we have to see each other, to be present to each other, to embrace each other” (1985: 23). His stand proves him to be an advocate of a dialogic rhetoric of mutual exploration that will replace the agonistic form of rhetoric based on predetermined positions.

The Rogerian argument (introduced to modern rhetorical theory in the 1980’s by Teich, Becker, Pike, on the basis of Carl Rogers’ Communication: Its Blocking and Its Facilitation, 1951) is similarly “pacifist.” It is strongly directed toward reducing the opponent’s feeling of threat. When arguing, participants should avoid evaluative language while acting out an assumption of similarity and demonstrating that the position of the other has been understood (Teich 1992: 109). Winning here means opening a field of consideration or – referring to Corder as well – transcending the conflict.

Epilogue

Conclusions are not to be drawn from a meta-theoretical overview. Final statements can be articulated, however, arguing that (postmodern) rhetoric is a capacious garden, a field of study and a method of teaching that offers various definitions and frames in which social discursive skills can be acquired. It should also be suggested that rhetoric has its own dianoia and paideia from which principles and practices can be derived when it comes to the theorizing or teaching of speech and argumentation. Looking not far back on the discipline’s multi-voiced tradition of thought, language, speech and teaching, the paper sought to contribute to the study of present-day challenges of rhetoric.
References


Organizing Dissent: Educational Debate Activities in Romania

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze organizing issues raised by developing debate activities for youth. A focus on educational debate is aimed at highlighting the benefits of teaching argumentation and rhetoric skills in an interactive manner. In fact, educational debate is one of the most effective tools of learning participatory communication. It also helps in developing critical thinking skills. Debating both sides of a controversy in a formal, simulated setting might seem uncomfortable at first. However, it is justifiable on educational grounds, because it helps participants understand the complexity of most controversial issues. In everyday life debates are informal: beyond psychological contracts, there are no settled rules for dialogue. Formal debates attempt to bring clarity to the blurry debates that take place in the real world: confronting ideas in a controlled manner contributes to developing a more tolerant and participative attitude in communication.

Keywords: educational debate, critical thinking, youth, participation

1. Educational debate in post-totalitarian societies

Totalitarian societies restricted the space of dialogue, clash and dissent. During Communism, citizens learned how to survive censorship; after the fall of the totalitarian regimes, they had to learn to communicate in a tolerant and persuasive manner (Bakó–Horváth 2008). Educational debate is a tool of empowerment: it provides the skills and framework for a participative approach to communication.

In a conference article (Bakó–Horváth–Szabó 2006) we explored the idea that knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired through active debating contribute to strengthening the four pillars of learning, as described by Delors (1998): learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be.

Our main arguments were that post-communist public space is flooded by obscenity, therefore we need a rational discourse; teaching debate is an effective tool to develop the
four pillars of learning, because it develops critical thinking skills; secondly, debate prepares youth for life, by enhancing interpersonal skills; thirdly, debate is a space for creative game, making it an attractive and effective learning tool; and finally, debate helps value clarification and the process of building social identity, because it raises controversial value issues.

What is educational debate about and how does it work? “The object of debate is to convince a neutral third party, called a judge, that your arguments are better than those of your opponent” (OSI 1997: 12). It involves an affirmative and a negative side, a controversial topic called the “resolution,” and a set of rules and norms that ensure a fair ground for argumentation and, at the end, for judging.

The literature suggests that educational debate is beneficial for students in at least three areas: it improves communication skills, it develops critical thinking attitudes and it prepares for real life conflict situations, because “exposure to the thinking of others on the important issues of our time is valuable, but learning to think critically about these issues is even more important. Critical thinking is grounded in a careful examination and interpretation of relevant facts and values” (Colbert–Biggers 1996: 3).

Communication skills developed through active debating are related to key elements of speech, or what is often called “the three M’s”: matter (content), method (structure), and manner (delivery). Debate training improves speaking skills and helps students in many other communication situations, such as group discussions, negotiations or teamwork.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of debating – in any setting – is the ethics of dialogue. In a highly competitive environment, the clash of ideas often generates strong feelings which need to be controlled. In terms of content, honesty is the key issue of debate ethics, Snider suggests: “The only prescriptive standard of ethics in the game of debate should be honesty. Academic debate should not be a forum for lying. . . . One problem in applying the ethic of honesty is that it may be thought of as assuming that there is a clear definition of truth” (Snider 1996: 17). Fairness and honesty are important ethical norms both for debaters and judges. There is an expectation from the judges and the opponent side that speakers are well prepared on the topic; as for judging, “an individual does not need to possess special knowledge or acuity. The judge is supposed to be a reasonable person, not an expert or a sage. Paradoxically, a good judge must try to suppress any special knowledge about the resolution that he or she possesses” (Driscoll 2000: 63).

Debating both sides of a controversy in a formal, simulated setting might seem uncomfortable for some at first. It is justifiable on educational grounds, however: it helps people understand the difficulty and depth of most controversial issues.
2. Critical thinking and debate

Debating helps in developing communication and critical thinking skills, research suggests (Colbert–Thompson 1996). In fact, the most important skills used in debate are critical thinking skills. “Critical thinking means correct thinking in the pursuit of relevant and reliable knowledge about the world. Another way to describe it is reasonable, reflective, responsible, and skillful thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do. A person who thinks critically can ask appropriate questions, gather relevant information, efficiently and creatively sort through this information, reason logically from this information, and come to reliable and trustworthy conclusions about the world that enable one to live and act successfully in it” (Schaferman 1991: 1).

Nickerson defines a critical thinker’s profile through a rich set of knowledge-, skill- and attitude elements (1986). A critical thinker is a person who:

- uses evidence skillfully and impartially;
- organizes thoughts and articulates them concisely and coherently;
- distinguishes between logically valid and invalid inferences;
- suspends judgment in the absence of evidence to support a decision;
- understands the difference between reasoning and rationalizing;
- attempts to anticipate the probable consequences of alternative actions;
- understands the idea of degrees of belief;
- sees similarities and analogies that are not superficially apparent;
- can learn independently and has an abiding interest in doing so;
- applies problem-solving techniques in new domains;
- can formalize informally represented problems;
- can summarize a verbal stream in its essential terms;
- habitually questions one's own views;
- attempts to understand underlying assumptions;
- discerns between validity and persuasive power of a belief;
- is aware of the fact that one's understanding is always limited;
- recognizes the fallibility and bias of one's own opinions.

In the absence of key critical thinking skills, a person can be easily manipulated and becomes a passive consumer, rather than an actively involved citizen (Schaferman 1991). Common sense often codes it simply as “problem solving,” but thinking critically is more than that. Literature on the topic emphasizes analytical skills, referred to as the ability to find, select and organize relevant information for a clearly set purpose.

When students analyze a debate resolution during topic analysis, several skills are involved: separating relevant from irrelevant information; identifying and isolating the
problem; evaluating causes and possible effects; searching for evidence; brainstorming for new ideas; confronting their position with the teammates’ perspective on the issue. Analysis is a complex skill involving many stages and levels of a debate. We define three main stages of debate activities, which include both educational and competitive aspects: preparation, debate and evaluation.

Critical thinking skills are involved in all stages of a debate, from preparation to evaluation, as shown in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Debate stages</th>
<th>Critical thinking skills involved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for debate</td>
<td>Research: finding relevant information on the topic; selecting and focusing ideas at the resolution; finding vulnerabilities of their own position. Reasoning: building logically valid arguments, suspending judgment in absence of proper support. Organization: the ability to group and label arguments and evidence developed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debating</td>
<td>Reasoning: building valid arguments during the debate and communicating them coherently; discovering logical gaps and errors in their own / in the opponents’ system of arguments. Organization: the ability to group pieces of arguments and evidence of the opponents while presented, in order to refute them properly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating a debate</td>
<td>Summary speeches and judging the debates are moments of weighing the areas of clash between affirmative and negative side, establishing strengths and weaknesses of the debate round, and creating a “damage report” of the verbal fight. Incorporating feedback for further debates is also critical.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Debate judges are, in fact, the best evaluators of critical thinking skills, assessed during the round. It is the “teachable moment of the debate,” as policy debate coach Ken Broda-Bahm used to say. Judging criteria refer to key areas of content, structure and delivery, in order to set clear guidelines for decision-making, as presented in the Karl Popper Debate Program handout (OSI 1997: 124).
Argumentation skills

1. Refutation and rebuttal:
   1.1. Is the debater able to confront opposing arguments and rebuild his own case?
   1.2. Does speaker find flaws or inconsistencies in opponent’s reasoning?

2. Analysis:
   2.1. How well does the debater understand the topic?
   2.2. Is the debater able to present clear arguments and explanations?

Support for arguments

3. Reasoning and evidence:
   3.1. Do both reasoning and evidence provide the basis for the arguments?
   3.2. Does the evidence prove the argument?

4. Organization:
   4.1. Is the affirmative case structure used to guide the structure of the debate?
   4.2. Are easy-to-understand transitions used to explain key issues clearly?

Presentation

5. Speaker responsibilities:
   5.1. How well does the speaker carry out special speaker duties?
   5.2. How effectively does the speaker deal with cross examination?

6. Delivery:
   6.1. Is the speaker dynamic, persuasive?
   6.2. Is the speaker fluent and easy to understand?

The most difficult to teach are reasoning and refutation skills. Novice debaters tend to focus on their own speeches rather than following the opponents’ discourse. The link between a claim (or conclusion of an argument) and data (evidence aimed at supporting the claim) is often neglected. Beginners jump to conclusions easily and skip the explanation part that makes an argument comprehensive and persuasive.

In order to prepare students for critical thinking, Bellanca and Robin identified several key elements (1991): active listening, reflecting, observing, understanding, investigating, exploring and evaluating. A systematically designed game-based model was created in order to develop these skills. The next step after practicing preparatory skills is to reach the critical thinking stage, involving a more complex set of abilities: attributing, comparing and contrasting, classifying, sequencing, setting priorities, drawing conclusions, analyzing cause and effect, examining opposite points of view, evaluating bias, ranking in order and
weighing consequences. The authors highlight metacognition as an integrative skill to evaluate one’s own thinking strategies.

Educational debate involves organically the entire requisite of critical thinking skills presented above, while developing debate club communities. The magnet that attracts high school and university students to join this very specific activity is the opportunity for spending quality time, for traveling to other regions and for engaging in intensive social interactions.

Learning from each other is a fast and efficient way to personal development: novices are regularly coached by experienced debaters at club activities and at tournaments. A significant amount of know-how transfer is done, in fact, on a peer-to-peer basis. Students learn, beyond argumentation and rhetoric, how to work in teams, how to manage their time before and during tournaments and last, but not least, how to deal with interpersonal conflicts.

Debating can sometimes lead to heated moments of clash, when students need to practice self-control and empathy. Beyond critical thinking, debate develops interpersonal skills and attitudes such as teamwork, solidarity, self-control – key attributes of emotional intelligence.

3. Educational debate activities in Romania

Educational debate has been implemented by the Soros Foundation’s “Karl Popper Debate Program” from 1994 to 1998 through its four regional branches based in Bucharest, Iași, Timișoara and Cluj-Napoca. In four years, a national debate training team was developed, coaches were trained for conducting debate activities, and several high school and university debate clubs were established. Since 1994, debating has become an extracurricular activity with a significant outreach, in approximately forty high schools and five universities from across Romania, according to the debate association report (ARDOR 2006).

In 1998 Soros offices encouraged their debate programs to develop autonomous institutional frameworks as a strategy for sustainability. Financial and legal support was provided by the Open Society Institute to create non-governmental organizations, in order to sustain educational debate activities. In Romania, the Romanian Association for Debate, Oratory and Rhetoric (ARDOR) was registered in November 1998, replicating the Soros debate program management structure as a geographical divisional organization.11 In 2000

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11 The four branches (București, Cluj-Napoca, Iași, Timișoara) have their central headquarters in Bucharest.
a decentralization process took off: regional divisions of ARDOR became legal entities; the Transylvanian Debate Association, ARDOR Moldova, ARDOR Muntenia, ARDOR Banat and the Association for Social Education (AES) established their own grassroots structures, enabling a more flexible management of fundraising and partnership-building activities. The national debate organization ARDOR became a membership organization, replicating the international NGO created by the Open Society Institute in 1999 to support educational debate initiatives worldwide.

The Transylvanian Debate Association (Erdélyi Disputa Egysület) has been founded in February 2000 by a few enthusiastic debaters and coaches to provide an independent institutional framework for the Hungarian-language debate program in Romania, launched by the Open Society Foundation (OSF) in 1994.

The association has declared its mission to promote the basic values set by the OSF debate program: open-mindedness, critical thinking, clarity of ideas, tolerance and responsibility, as values that sustain democracy. These aims are achievable through practicing the art of argumentation as a method of informal education, implemented in several clubs from Transylvanian cities, dealing with three age-groups: middle school, high school, and university students. Besides debating, club members also play communication- and team-building games.

In addition to the weekly or monthly club activities, promoters of the Transylvanian Debate Association were involved in organizing demo debates in order to expand the network, training courses in different debate formats for new coaches, training courses on judging for coaches and advanced debaters, and local, regional, national and international debate tournaments, such as the annual summer camp and the Handshake intercultural forum.

Managing debate activities takes experience and organizing routines. When educational debate activities started up in Romania in November 1994, under the patronage of the Soros Foundation, very few organizers were prepared to manage these activities on a local level. A group of teachers were initiated into debate rules and skills prior to the launch of the Karl Popper Debate Program (KPDP), during the summer of 1994, and based on their expertise, a series of trainings were organized for other high school teachers.

Logistics and funding related to organizing seminars, trainings and tournaments were provided by the Soros Foundation’s regional branches in Romania, located in Bucharest (headquarters, Muntenia region), Iași (Moldova region), Cluj-Napoca (Transylvania region)

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and Timișoara (Banat region). Teachers involved in the debate program were encouraged to organize debate clubs in their own school communities, to teach students the Karl Popper Debate format (specially designed by American debate experts for the Soros Foundation’s Debate Program) and to participate in regional and national debate tournaments, organized by the Foundation’s KPDP coordinators.

3.1. Debate program standards and procedures

After three years of piloting the debate program in several Central and Eastern European countries, principles and guidelines were set up by the strategic funder – the Open Society Institute – to help implement the Karl Popper Debate Program (OSI 1997):

1. **Debate Center.** The center is meant to be a logistical support for the debate program, by providing information about upcoming events such as seminars, tournaments and camps, and gathering resources for program participants, for research on the debate topics. The person(s) responsible for the Debate Center should be one or more of the national coordinators. Debate Centers should have internet access.

2. **National Debate Coordinators.** Their job is to develop the program through seminars, tournaments, presentations, camps.

3. **Community Assistants** are teachers working with the debate program who have the time and the energy to involve their community in debate, by establishing and maintaining communication and support locally. They may be asked to organize seminars and competitions in their region, with technical support from the Debate Center.

4. **Debate Coaches.** The debate coaches are a crucial part in the program, for without them there is no program. Debate coaches are teachers who have gone through training and have chosen to develop the program at their school. The steps of developing a debate program in a school or university should include:

   Step 1: introduce the concept of debate to the young people (as many students and age groups as possible). This may be done through sample debates by those students who have been trained, or simply introducing a topic, and working through arguments, case development and debate formats with the students. The presentation should include at least four hours of instruction.

   Step 2: set a debate club meeting for once a week after school. The purpose of the meetings is to improve the level of debate, prepare them for the next competition, and offer new students exposure to debate. The team-like atmosphere should motivate students and teachers to participate regularly in club activities.

   Step 3: register students with Debate Center for the next debate tournament. The numbers will change as the students’ schedules fluctuate, but it is important to register
only those students who have committed to participate. This is important for those organizing the tournament as the number of team is crucial to plan the tournament.

Step 4: continue working with the Debate Club and maintain good communications with the Center. When a date has been set for the next tournament, the coaches will be asked to accompany their debate teams to the tournament. Teams must be accompanied by a trained coach. While at the tournament, coaches will act as judges and assist the event wherever possible.

Step 5: the Soros Foundation offers a stipend for the additional responsibilities of coaching. The stipend will range from 25-30% of a teacher’s salary and will vary depending on the number of debate teams registered with the Debate Center by the coach.

Debate teams in schools were supposed to be created by recruiting debaters, getting administrative support and involving parents in most of the club activities.

Recruiting Debaters:
   a) Teachers were advised to talk with each other to come up with potential debaters.
   b) Student debaters were encouraged to convince their peers to join the team.
   c) Everyone involved was supposed to publicize events and successes of the teams.

Getting Administrative support:
   a) Keep the principal of the school informed of all activities.
   b) Invite the principal and influential school officials to observe events.
   c) Mention the principal in any press releases (with permission).

Involving parents:
   a) Train parents to serve as judges.
   b) Ask for parents’ help in organizing and running debate events.

3.2. Applying the funder’s standards to Romanian context

Most of these norms and standards set by the funder were applied successfully while the Karl Popper Debate Program had substantial financial support from the Soros Foundation. From 1994 to 1998, over 50 coaches have been trained to develop debate clubs in high schools across the country. Except for parent involvement, which did not fit the school culture in Romania, the program development standards worked well within a national context.

Community assistants, known as “regional coordinators,” developed regional debate programs based on regular club activities, seminars for judges and tournaments for beginner and advanced debaters, on a regional level. High school and university debate club activities flourished during consistent Soros funding (1994–1998).
From 1998, when the Karl Popper Debate Program was encouraged to spin off, and develop as an autonomous organizational structure in order to become sustainable, the wind of change started to blow.

Firstly, some of the teachers quit the program – partly because they were supposed to work as volunteers further on, and partly because of the poor communication with young debate program managers. Muntenia and Banat regions were the most affected. In Moldovan and Transylvanian regions (the Hungarian program mainly in the latter) teachers stayed committed to the program, due to better communication with the regional debate centers.

From 1998 to 2001 the Soros Foundation kept giving significant financial and legal assistance to the spin-off organization, ARDOR (Romanian Association for Debate, Oratory and Rhetoric) in order to manage the transition from a fully assisted program to a sustainable civic movement. The NGO went through a structural change, when regional members registered as independent legal entities, starting with the Transylvanian Debate Association (the Hungarian language debate program in Romania), in February 2000. Step by step, each regional debate center registered as an independent legal entity: ARDOR Moldova, ARDOR Muntenia, ARDOR Transylvania and, finally, ARDOR Banat. A strong and active local debate community from Muntenia region – Ploiești – registered its own debate organization: AES (Association for Social Education). Following legal advice provided by the core funder – the Open Society Institute – ARDOR changed its former centralized structure to a decentralized membership organization, basically replicating the membership organization model provided by the international debate organization set up by the Soros office – IDEA (International Debate Education Association).

Since 2002, educational debate program in Romania became less systematic and based mainly on committed volunteers: students, coaches and trainers. Although it restrained core debate activities on a grassroots level (we estimate a decrease in number of participants by 50% at least in terms of clubs and students), creative initiatives and partnerships have developed, both on a regional and a national level.

3.3. The Karl Popper Debate Program

The Karl Popper (KP) Debate format – the core educational debate activity in Romania – was developed by American debate experts in order to implement educational debate in Central and Eastern European countries and the former Soviet Union. The 3:3 format is a genuine mix of value- and policy debating styles, with clearly set ethical standards (see Appendix at the end of the article). “The Karl Popper Debate Program is a combination of
the Lincoln-Douglas and Policy format. Designed to promote teamwork, its three-on-three style encourages students to work together both in the preparation and the activity itself” (OSI 1997: 14). Our coaching, judging and training experience showed that a very strict and didactical Karl Popper Debate format is a useful introduction to systematic debate activities: it teaches students both research skills and structured delivery.

The Karl Popper Debate Format:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speeches</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Roles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affirmative Constructive</td>
<td>6 minutes</td>
<td>Affirmative 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Negative Cross-Examination</td>
<td>3 minutes</td>
<td>A1 answers, N3 asks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Constructive</td>
<td>6 minutes</td>
<td>Negative 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Affirmative Cross-Examination</td>
<td>3 minutes</td>
<td>A3 asks, N1 answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Affirmative Rebuttal</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Affirmative 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Negative Cross-Examination</td>
<td>3 minutes</td>
<td>A2 answers, N1 asks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Negative Rebuttal</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Negative 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Affirmative Cross-Examination</td>
<td>3 minutes</td>
<td>A1 asks, N2 answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Affirmative Rebuttal</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Affirmative 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Negative Rebuttal</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Negative 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Driscoll 2000: 65

After a year or two of practicing Karl Popper Debate, students are keener to explore other formats, such as Parliamentary Debate or World Schools Championship format, enabling a potent mix of intellectual discipline and creative approach to a controversial topic.

Educational debate is still a successful extracurricular activity in about forty high schools and five universities from Romania, according to debate association annual reports (ARDOR 2006, 2007). The main difference between the “Soros-funded era” (1994–1998, 1999–2000) and the spin-off age (“debate programs run by independent NGOs”) is that less students are involved, and due to the voluntary basis and impression management of

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13 see descriptions at <http://www.idebate.org/teaching/debate_formats.php>
project-based activities, only the best informed and the most ambitious students take part in debate events. The core volunteer base – teachers – has quit the program in massive numbers.

Since 2002, educational debate activities in Romania are based mainly on volunteering: committed coaches, trainers and judges give their time for developing meaningful debate activities at the local, regional, and national level. Main debate activities, as described in ARDOR annual reports (2004–2009), are debates in various formats (Karl Popper, Worlds School, Parliamentary); regular preparation for competitions (regional, national, international); regular training in different formats, as well as coaching and judging.

Educational debate as implemented in Romania by the Soros Foundation’s Karl Popper Debate Program had a significant impact on developing critical thinking skills and civic involvement of students, coaches and organizers involved in the program. During the consistent funding period (1994–1998), the program reached more local school communities. After the cut of core funding from Soros and developing alternative organizational structures (regional and national debate associations across Romania), debating has become both restrained in scope and diversified in activities. Since 2009, new directions of debate activities have taken off: online debates, by two projects: YouSpeak (ARDOR 2009) and Closer2Oxford (ARDOR 2010). Next steps should include a strategic partnership with the Ministry of Education, in order to re-launch educational debate as a systematic, curricular activity with a broader community outreach.

4. Conclusions

Debates in everyday life are informal: beyond psychological contracts, there are no explicitly settled rules for dialogue. Formal debates attempt to bring clarity to the blurry debates that take place in the real world: confronting ideas in a controlled manner contributes to developing a more tolerant and participative attitude in communication.

Implementation of educational debate programs in high schools and universities across Romania has been beneficial both for the individuals involved, and for their communities. Firstly, debate activities contributed to the beneficiaries’ personal development as critical thinkers. Secondly, students and teachers acquired a valuable set of management skills: time management, human resources management, and event organizing experience. As a result, debate program promoters and beneficiaries were empowered for active civic involvement.
References


Appendix: Ethical rules during Karl Popper Debate tournaments

1. *No research is permitted.*
   Topic research must be completed prior to the beginning of a debate. Once the debate begins, the participants may not conduct research via the Internet, nor through electronic or other means.

2. *No outside assistance is permitted.*
   No outside person(s) may conduct research during the debate and provide information directly or indirectly to the debaters. Debaters, however, are allowed to consult whatever research materials they have brought with them to the debate.

3. *Debaters should be able to provide sources for direct citations.*
   When debaters refer to any public information, they should be prepared to provide, upon request, complete source documentation to the opposing team and to the judge. A team's documentation of cited material must be complete enough for the opposing team and the judge to locate the information on their own. Ordinarily, such documentation would include the name of an author (if any), the name and date of a publication (and a page number, if available), or the URL of a Web site.

4. *Debaters should practice intellectual honesty.*
   Students should cite arguments and statistics truthfully, and never fabricate sources or data.

5. *Debate should be approached as a team activity.*
   Each debate team is composed of three individuals who will speak in the roles they announce at the start of the debate. Debaters may change their role in the debate from round to round.

(2010.03.11) <http://www.idebate.org/standards/ruleskarlpopper.php>
Argumentative Discourse about Works of Art

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Abstract

The discourse connected to the realm of art and, most of all, argumentative speech connected to works of art differs from the discourse of the realm of science. The specificities of the language of aesthetics are due partly to the fact that we can talk about aesthetic properties, which are different from non-aesthetic properties.

In 20th century art we come across works of art in the case of which aesthetic properties are irrelevant. According to the thesis of the paper, if we can differentiate between perceptually indifferent works (e.g. Duchamp's *Fountain* or Ondak's *Loop*) and perceptually relevant works (e.g. a Monet or a Van Gogh), then this difference will be mirrored in the discourse about these works.

*Keywords*: aesthetic judgment, verdictive judgment, aesthetic and non-aesthetic properties, perceptually indifferent works of art

1. The Aesthetic in Kant's aesthetics

Aesthetics as a separate philosophical discipline was born in Immanuel Kant’s *The Critique of Judgment*. On the other hand, the rebirth of the term “aesthetics” is due to Alexander Baumgarten, who calls *cognitio aesthetica* the science of confused ideas, thus dividing the area between simple perception and conceptual thinking. The role of aesthetics in Baumgarten is similar to the role of logic: logic is the tool for the adjustment of rational thinking, while aesthetics helps adjust sensual thinking and formation of ideas (Strube 2004). Although Baumgarten refers to different arts, he still considers aesthetics as belonging to gnoseology, thus missing the opportunity to notice the specifics of the area of aesthetics that make it separate from cognition.

The two meanings of “aesthetics” as the theory of sensual cognition or the theory of the realm of beauty and arts in Kant’s writings still compete with each other. In *The Critique of Pure Reason* in the chapter “Transcendental aesthetics” it would be useless to look for any
reference to beauty or art: here Kant deals specifically with the a priori forms of cognition, i.e., uses aesthetics in its traditional meaning. In a few years however, the idea of aesthetics went through such changes that in the introduction to The Critique of Judgment Kant is compelled to explain: it is true on the one hand that aesthetics refers to the object as phenomenon, to which the form of sensuality necessarily adheres,

but it has been customary for some time also to call a kind of representation aesthetic in a sense in which what is meant is the relation of a representation not to the cognitive faculty but to the feeling of pleasure and displeasure (Kant 2000: 24).

Kant organizes the realm of aesthetics around two concepts: the beautiful and the sublime. At the same time Kant excludes all concepts in which are inherent the interests of either inclination or intellect: thus are excluded from the authority of aesthetic judgment the agreeable, and are becoming suspicious such adjectives as “charming,” “graceful,” “disgusting.” In order to found the realm of aesthetics, and to be able to build in a priori structures which will ensure the universality of aesthetic statements, Kant practically blotted out the sensual side of the beautiful: based on Kant, we can hardly state that a phenomenon (object, being) is beautiful – rather, we can say that we see it as beautiful, we find it beautiful, it affects us, cognitive and feeling subjects, or maybe more exactly: subjects that feel through our cognitive ability that something is beautiful.

In this sense, with Kant the criteria of the beautiful are not discussed, nor the standard of taste: taste in the meaning of sensus communis can be communicated universally, and it does not differentiate but unites people. Actually Kant does not consider that he discovered a new class of phenomena, but a new relation of the subject to objects. Thus there are no aesthetic properties, only aesthetic reactions, which are articulated as aesthetic judgments of taste. You cannot argue about taste—this means that if there was a discussion about the beautiful, it cannot be decided, as the beautiful is “without concept,” it has no definition, no rules. At the same time, there is no discussing the beautiful, as the beautiful has a subjective necessity: we expect everybody to find beautiful what we find beautiful. This may not even be questioned when we move in the sphere of natural beauty (as Kant likes to do), but the consensus on judgments based on sensus communis is not as easy to prove in the case of works of art.

In The Critique of Judgment Kant defined the realm of aesthetics by virtually disregarding art and perceptually grasped aesthetics. Art is not the object of pure judgment of taste, because beautiful works of art do not exemplify pure beauty but adherent beauty. The represented object has a defining concept, and its beauty is to be decided in relation to it. In connection with art Kant deals with only one issue in detail: the issue of the genius. On the other hand, Kant’s grand design to define the beautiful solely based on its subjective effects will make hopeless any referral to perceptual qualities. If we remain within Kant’s
limits, we can hardly speak about works of art in a relevant way. Kant does not even try to do this.

2. Aesthetic terms and judgments in 20th century thought

Twentieth century aesthetic discourse is distanced from Kant in at least two ways: on the one hand, it is primarily art philosophy; on the other hand it is not about beauty, but about the aesthetic. These two momentums are connected to each other: it turns out that in the discourse about works of art it is not the “beautiful” that plays the central role, but such qualities as elegant, fine, clumsy or charming. Nick Zangwill interprets these qualities in his “hierarchic proposal” as ways of being beautiful or ugly (Zangwill 2006). These terms are called aesthetic terms and the arguments are more about the use of these than about the beautiful or the sublime. At the same time the aestheticpronouncements still cannot refer to pictorial or semantic content. The fact that a painting represents flowers can be relevant to judgment of taste, but it is not an aesthetic judgment in its own (Zangwill 2006).

This type of formation of the realm of the aesthetic is greatly due to the suggestions of Ludwig Wittgenstein in his aesthetics lectures, as well as Frank Sibley’s concept-clarifying work about the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic.

In his lectures about aesthetics, Wittgenstein extended his thesis of undefinability, related to everyday concepts, to aesthetic concepts (Wittgenstein 1998). Even though the limits of aesthetic concepts are blurred, vague and flexible, they are not any less useful. Similar to everyday concepts, their use can be adequate and legitimate, even if they do not hold a well-defined essence. At the same time we should rethink our aesthetic vocabulary. We could see that Kant went on with the tradition that found the prototype of aesthetic language to be statements of the “this is beautiful” type. As opposed to this, Wittgenstein notes that we use the concept of “beautiful” very rarely, and even then more as interjection, and not as a descriptive or even evaluative concept. Rather more often do we use the terms cute, lovely, fine, etc., which, similarly to beautiful, work as interjection. And when we talk about works of art, we are more inclined to use terms that are closer to correct or appropriate than to beautiful: “Note that transition!” or “This passage does not fit here.”

Thus Wittgenstein draws attention to the logical pluralism of aesthetic discourse (Shusterman 1983). The significant occurrences of aesthetic discourse are not deductive, although such methods are also legitimate. If we use the word “appropriate” in aesthetic discourse, we can base our comparison on the knowledge of rules (e.g. the tailor learns how long a jacket should be). This is a deductive method, insofar as the rules are exact. On the other hand, we can develop in ourselves a feel for the rules, we can interpret the rules. This is what Wittgenstein calls “aesthetic judgment,” and emphasizes that by learning the
rules we can get to more and more refined judgments. Here is where the old theme of taste returns, although more as competence: taste can override and does override rules.

Being or not being appropriate does not even come into question when we talk about “tremendous things in Art,” like a Beethoven symphony or a Gothic cathedral: these play different roles in our lives. Here we cannot say, as in the case of the jacket that it’s too long, or too wide, because these do not allow for gradation. This is a different language-game. We can sense that here, too, what plays an important part in our lives, remains unsaid.

Wittgenstein firmly rejects that inductive method in aesthetics, which subordinates aesthetics to psychology. From the point of view of deciding aesthetic questions, psychological experiments or any other quantitative methods are completely irrelevant. These questions will be answered in a different way. Wittgenstein’s text focuses mainly on the type of argumentation that we may call the perceptual model (Shusterman 1983). In this case the aesthetic statement is not supported by arguments (e.g. “this picture is balanced because the green dot on the side is balanced by the red dot on the other side”), but by gestures, statements that lead the thinking in that direction (“look at the two red dots on the side of the picture!”). About “giving the reason,” Wittgenstein highlights such a procedure when we give an account of the way that lead us to the result (“I followed such and such a train of thought”). This corresponds to Wittgenstein’s attempt to describe language-games instead of theoretic considerations.

Wittgenstein replaces aesthetic discourse in a certain way of living: he emphasizes that it is not the words that bear foremost importance, but the cultural and aesthetic context in which they are uttered. Wittgenstein introduces his 1938 lectures with the statement that he is not going to concentrate on the fine words, but on the situations in which we utter them (Wittgenstein 1998). The parallel he uses between art and tailoring, as well as between the judgment of the “products” of these suggests that the same kind of language-game is present here.

However, the person making the judgment is also part of the description of the context. In this regard, we can differentiate between those who know what they are talking about and those who do not (Wittgenstein 1998: 15). The person who knows what they are talking about reacts consistently through time, knows some facts, etc. If we work with a traditional vocabulary, this means such a connoisseur who has both knowledge and taste - at the same time Wittgenstein measures competence in actions. Competence is shown by the savvy connoisseur’s choices. Being pleased by something means that the person takes a book into his/her hand often, reads something often, etc. Aesthetic disagreement is also expressed more by gestures than words: the landlady who finds a picture charming will dust it carefully, looks at it often, while someone who finds it horrible would rather throw it into the fire. This is the best description of aesthetic argument, since we cannot go on
from one saying “horrible”, the other “charming.” “with this the case is closed” (Wittgenstein 1998: 23). We can quote paragraph 35 as a summary of Wittgenstein's position:

In order to get clear about aesthetic words you have to describe ways of living. We think we have to talk about aesthetic judgments like “This is beautiful,” but we find that if we have to talk about aesthetic judgments we don't find these words at all, but a word used something like a gesture, accompanying a complicated activity. (Wittgenstein 1967: 11)

Richard Shusterman (1983) understands Wittgenstein's suggestions as not to be giving exclusivity to the perceptual model, but rather as pointing towards a critical pluralism, and allowing several ways of discourse about works of art: the deductive, which is based upon rules, the inductive, which is based upon the reactions of the recipients, and that of perceptual persuasion, which aims at influencing the recipient's attention.

Wittgenstein's account is to be taken as describing one form of aesthetic argument or explanation, highlighting one of many language-games in aesthetic appreciation, one which is widespread and important, but had so far escaped philosophical attention. His highlighting and justifying this one game, should not blind us to the existence and efficacy of other games involved in the justification and explanation of aesthetic judgments; and as Wittgenstein so insistently reminds us, these games are extremely numerous and diverse. Wittgenstein correctly diagnoses “the craving for simplicity” as the reason we find monistic or essentialistic theories so attractive in aesthetics. But we must resist this craving in the name of truth and in the face of a plurality of aesthetic language-games, which serve a variety of aims and employ a diversity of forms of argument (Shusterman 1983: 72).

Frank Sibley put the difference between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic into theoretical focus at the end of the sixties. Sibley’s thesis is that there are properties that do not require a special sense (taste) to be grasped, and there are those that we can only grasp by taste. Those belonging to the first category are named by Sibley non-aesthetic properties, those belonging to the second, aesthetic properties. According to the author, such properties as form, color, theme, are accessible to all, their perception does not require any special sensibility. We do not need any aesthetic sense to determine that something is round, green, slow or monosyllabic. There are properties, though, that require some kind of aesthetic perception or sensitivity. We need to possess aesthetic sensitivity to realize that something is graceful, charming, or garish, or that a work of art is balanced, touching, or powerful (Sibley 1965: 135).

If we accept that we can distinguish between aesthetic and non-aesthetic properties, we have to establish how they relate to each other. Sibley’s position is that the aesthetic properties (e.g. a balanced composition) ontologically depend on non-aesthetic properties (for example a green spot in the corner of the picture), furthermore, aesthetic qualities change when non-aesthetic properties change, but aesthetic qualities cannot be logically
deduced from non-aesthetic qualities. A very important conclusion is drawn here, which affects aesthetic argumentative discourse: we cannot deduce the existence of aesthetic properties from the presence of non-aesthetic properties, i.e. aesthetic deductive argumentation is impossible. As Sibley puts it, aesthetic properties are “non-condition-governed”. We also have to give reasons when making aesthetic statements, but “reasons” here means being able to tell why something is like it is, and not a premise from which a conclusion can be drawn. Obviously, “because” can denote the cause why things are like they are, just as much as the reason, or justification for stating something. A statement about a non-aesthetic property cannot figure in argumentative discourse in the second meaning, just the first. “A may in fact be the reason why something is B, and yet the knowledge that that thing has A may provide no reason or justification for supposing that it has B” (Sibley 1965: 148).

Although aesthetic statements cannot be proven, they can be justified—not with arguments, but rather with explanations: the statement “this picture is balanced because there is a green spot in its left corner” can be accepted, although not as proof, but as explanation. Thus the aesthetic argumentative discourse does not prove with evidence, instead it convinces with explanation. And persuasion works as Wittgenstein described: by pointing out, emphasizing, description, similes or metaphors—i.e. with perceptual argumentation. Sibley talks about perceptual evidence, which he calls substantiation, but not rational substantiation. These are successful if the partner in conversation also notices the aesthetic property, which they overlooked before. The goal of criticism is principally to help people see these aesthetic qualities themselves. The critic is successful if people at first do not see, then later find out aesthetic properties for themselves.

The aesthetic always involves some kind of perception (we can see the grace of the work of art, we can hear the rampage of the music, we can see the elaborateness of a sketch, and we can feel the power, atmosphere, uncertain voice of a novel). These properties either strike us at once, or after many encounters, or we need the opinion of the critics for it. To be able to form an aesthetic statement, we need aesthetic perception; we cannot form such judgment without it (Sibley 1965: 137). He concludes:

Being able to generally substantiate aesthetic statements in a rational way with the help of empirical research, arguing that without it criticism is unacceptable, is futile hope. The program of a general “underpinning” is misconceived (Sibley 1965: 158).

Actually Sibley also talks about *verdictive aesthetic judgments* besides aesthetic judgments and those using non-aesthetic terms, which state that a work of art is good, bad, a masterpiece, excellent, poor, etc. without wanting to discuss these: ‘I called them ‘verdicts.’ I regard them as very different from judgments of the second type – for example, that something is gaudy, or graceful, or balanced – and as raising largely
different, though occasionally overlapping, questions . . . Nowhere in my paper did I discuss judgment of the first type” (Sibley 1963: 79).

Those who assimilated this trichotomy (Stecker 2003, Zangwill 2006, Lyas 1994) are bound at the same time to tackle the question of how aesthetic judgments relate to judgments about the overall merit of the work. One of the possible solutions to this problem is Nick Zangwill’s hierarchical proposal, in which substantive judgments (e.g. something is elegant, fine, charming—judgments that state an aesthetic merit or flaw, but not the object’s general aesthetic quality like beautiful or ugly) are dealt with as modalities of something being beautiful or ugly (which are stated by verdictive judgments). At the same time he believes substantive aesthetic judgments necessarily imply verdictive aesthetic judgments. According to Zangwill, if something is elegant, it is necessarily beautiful as well.

It is a quite widely accepted position within the literature that aesthetic (critical) statements of course have to be justified, but this cannot be either a deductive justification (which would deduce evaluatory statements from rules), or inductive justification (which would ground an evaluation or even an interpretive statement about works of art in experiments or surveys), but the justification has to lead back to the perpetual, immediate experience of work of art. (Stecker 2003, Zangwill 2006, Lyas 1994, Shepard 1987). In this case, then, argumentative speech is not of an evidentiary nature, but rather of explanatory nature: it subsequently explains a judgment the speaker (critic) formed based on perception, looking for those aesthetic and non-aesthetic properties which played a role in the forming of the judgment to be justified (given reasons for).

The rejection of deductive reasoning is based on the assumption that there are no laws to taste, and we cannot anticipate aesthetic properties from non-aesthetic properties, i.e. aesthetic properties according to Zangwill are anomalous (Zangwill 2006). Another thought connects to this, which emphasizes the momentum of persuasion in aesthetic argumentative discourse. No one can be convinced with arguments about liking a work of art (picture, music, text, etc.) that they actually find uninteresting, but with different methods (description, similes, pointing out, metaphors etc.) one can be convinced to notice (see, hear, etc.) something they have not before - and the change of perceptual experience can lead the partner in discussion to accept, due to the argumentation, an aesthetic statement they rejected before. Colin Lyas describes this process the following way: first we grasp the work’s value through attentive reading, listening or watching. Then after grasping the qualitative properties, we can explain how they depend on the visible, audible, readable properties. The task of the critic is to help us grasp this effect. This cannot be done by rational deduction, and this is so because it is about perceptual experience. The starting point in the analysis of a work is its expressive quality: a poem for example can be pathetic, insolent, ironic, witty, or sad. If it is sad, we can decide whether the expression of it is excessive, or too common. Afterwards these judgments can be
connected to the objective properties of the work: rhythm, tone, alliteration etc. (Lyas 1994). We have come across a similar description in John Holloway who therefore states: “criticism is no place for inference of the logical kind” (Hannay, A. H., John Holloway, M. Macdonald 1949: 176).

Discourse about the nature of aesthetic properties highlights direct relationship with works of art, which it holds crucial for a forming of aesthetic judgment. This indirect relationship cannot be replaced by any argumentation or theoretic process. Sometimes it seems this direct relationship is not only the most important, but also the sufficient condition for reaching an aesthetic judgment. From this perspective, literary studies for example do not necessarily make literature more accessible, and do not make better readers of us. The receiver gets everything from the work of art that is needed for the experience: they should only focus on the work.

3. Intermezzo: the Loop

The idea described above is based on the implicit premise that what makes the merit of works of art is describable as an aesthetic property. The painting is beautiful (good, excellent, etc.) because it is charming, elegant, harmonious, warm, serious, etc. Besides this there are other reasons why we esteem a work of art (e.g. for its moral or political message), but these are outside the domain of aesthetics.

Arthur C. Danto's philosophical reflections on art, which admittedly set out from artistic events of the 20th century, emphasize the insufficiency of aesthetic approach to works of art. Aesthetic approach took it for granted that there are works of art, which form a well-defined class, the task is only to ascertain the specificities of discourse about them. Thus the main question was how aesthetic judgments work, how we apply them, how we support substantive (aesthetic in Sibley’s meaning) or verdictive judgments.

In the twentieth century however, we find several examples of things (events, processes), in the case of which the primary task is to ascertain whether we are to talk about works of art at all, or simple objects.

Arthur C. Danto discusses cases where objects that are perceptually identical have different aesthetic properties. The question is whether there is a difference between a regular snow shovel and Duchamp's snow shovel, while perceptually they are identical? If there is, it remains hidden from our senses, states Danto (Danto 2005). According to his view, Duchamp's Fountain possesses such qualities that are not intrinsic to the urinal, which is perceptually identical: bold, cheeky, irreverent, witty and imaginative (Danto 2003: 96). Duchamp's or Andy Warhol's works prove that we cannot talk about works of art solely based on their visible aesthetic properties, and pure perceptual argumentation is not enough. The aesthetic quality of the work is not perceptual but cultural-historic: the
function of its own historic identity. Duchamp's urinal did not hold aesthetic qualities before it turned out it was a work of art. We need to ascertain the work of art first, taking into consideration some thorough art-historical and art-philosophical inquiries, and only then can we talk about the quality of the work of art. Pure aesthetic reaction (which is not socially, historically conditioned) in the case of such works cannot come into question.

Let us take an example, which is closer to us: at the 2009 Venice Biennale, Slovak artist Roman Ondak was present with a work entitled Loop. He planted the vegetation natural to the Giardini, the venue of the exhibition, into the Slovak pavilion, thus the Slovak pavilion is actually a loop leading in and out of the Giardini. We can interpret this work as a reflection of the relationship between art and life, or a conservationist work about the relationship between the human artificial world and nature, or as a paraphrase of Hegel's views on the end of art - but we can only do all these after we stated: we are not in a park, not in nature, but we are up against a work of art (more closely: an environment, or a conceptual work). Identification as a work of art is made questionable by the Loop being perceptually indistinguishable from the Giardini. To be able to approach this work it is not necessary to notice the shape of the trees or the relationship of the size or number of trees and bushes, the character of the light, etc. A critic trying to convince us about the significance of the work with such kind of argument would simply mislead us.

Danto states that philosophy can only differentiate objects and works of art; it cannot ascertain the difference between works of art, because a good theory is valid for all works of art (Danto 1997: 228). Maybe philosophy can do more than that: for instance, it can reflect on discourses, which can be used to approach works of art.

4. Two kinds of things, two kinds of speeches

It seems in the world of art by now a class of works of art has formed where physical encounter with the work is not an absolute necessity. Whether one knows Duchamp's Fountain (not even the original one but a later one - if we can talk about original at all here) from a picture, or saw it exhibited in the MOMA in New York, is almost immaterial. Direct encounter with the object does not enhance much the picture we already have of it. Similarly, for the senses, the Slovak pavilion at the 2009 biennale does not give a different experience from a walk in the Giardini. But we can say the same about Robert Barry's conceptual work whose title is identical with the text making up the work: All the things I know but of which I am not at the moment thinking - 1:36 pm; June 15, 1969. I do not think the experience would be much different when seeing this work in its original form, photographed in a book, or shown on screen.

However, this is only true of a fraction of works of art. Painting in its traditional form, or from contemporary genres for instance Michelangelo Pistoletto's Seventeen Less One
which consists of a huge hall of mirrors broken by the artist on the day of the opening, creating mysterious black holes on the surface of the mirror - are such works where the encounter with the work is essential. A reproduction will never give back the light flooding from Monet's paintings, or the stiffened concrete-like quality of the water in Puvis de Chavannes's *The Poor Fisherman* (1881).

If we can differentiate between perceptually indifferent works (e.g. Duchamp's *Fountain* or Ondak's *Loop*) and perceptually relevant works (e.g. a Monet or a Van Gogh), then this difference will be mirrored in the discourse about these works. In the case of perceptually indifferent works we can imagine a storage where the counterparts of these works are present as common objects, as Danto suggests. As opposed to this, it would be difficult to imagine a situation where a perceptually identical object with Van Gogh's painting could be taken off a storage shelf.

In the case of perceptually relevant works of art it is unnecessary to affirm that these are works of art. Aesthetic discourse will rather strive to make aesthetic and verdictive statements, and to accompany these with such methods proposed by the perceptual model, which are trying to affect the perceptual experience of the recipient, and not directly their aesthetic judgment. Here the model that starts out from aesthetic judgment and justifies it with explanation is acceptable, since it has primarily explanatory and proving effect. Non-aesthetic statements play a role in this phase, as aesthetic properties ontologically depend on them.

In the case of perceptually indifferent works the starting point is identifying the object as work of art, which necessitates a serious theoretic background (historical, art-historical, art-philosophical knowledge, theoretic framework). The perceptual model does not work here because perceptual differences are irrelevant. The pluralism of aesthetic discourse proposed by Shusterman seems inevitable here.

5. Embarrassing speeches about works of art

If perceptually relevant and perceptually irrelevant works can be distinguished, then the discourses about them follow different patterns. In the case of perceptually relevant works perceptual (more broadly: aesthetic) properties are so important that it is not justifiable to talk about a work without making references to these perceptual features-- as if they were irrelevant.

There are hardly any philosophers that would have such a distinguished role for art in their thinking as Heidegger. One of his theses is that scientific thought and the conceptual apparatus of philosophy are both unable to grasp truth, but in art thinking has a better chance. Art opens a world, makes it possible for the existing to step out into the non-hidden of its existence. Thus art is an origin, and not only the origin of the work of art.
This view is reflected in his analysis of Van Gogh’s *A Pair of Shoes* (Heidegger 1988). To quote Heidegger’s moving description:

> From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stands forth. In the stiffly solid heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field, swept by a raw wind. On the leather there lies the dampness and saturation of the soil. Under the soles there slides the loneliness of the field-path as the evening declines. In the shoes there vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening corn and its enigmatic self/refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining anxiety about the certainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, the trembling before the advent of birth and shivering at the surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs to the earth and it is protected in the world of the peasant woman. From out of this protected belonging the equipment itself rises to its resting-in-self (Heidegger 1988: 57–58).

Heidegger uses this painting to question the “tollness” of the tool. Cunningly, at the beginning he represents Van Gogh’s painting as a mere illustration: take a common instrument, a pair of shoes. Everybody knows them well, but it would be nice to make the demonstration easier, so let us take “a well-known painting of Van Gogh..., who painted this kind of shoes many times” (Heidegger 1988: 56). At the end of the painting’s description however it turns out that this was not only “making the demonstration easier,” but the only way to demonstrate the “tollness” of the tool: Van Gogh’s painting has spoken to us. In the work of art the truth of the existent comes into action. Furthermore we did not need any philosophical background knowledge to realize the truth. The question is, can we accept this writing as an authentic analysis of Van Gogh’s painting?

The first difficulty is encountered when we would like to decide which piece of art it is about. Heidegger himself mentions that Van Gogh painted a number of works of this subject. Meyer Schapiro found out: Van Gogh has eight paintings of shoes. Heidegger’s description fits most of these, although it is difficult to decide whether these are men’s or women’s shoes. Moreover, Shapiro had an opportunity to ask Heidegger which painting he meant, and identified an 1886 picture of a pair of boots in this way (Schapiro 1994: 136).

Even if we know which picture Heidegger’s description is about, this still is not specific enough not be theoretically true of Swedish painter Kreuger Nils’s shoes painted also in the 1880s.
The next catch is that there are hardly any perceptual adjectives in Heidegger’s description (the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes, the stiffly solid heaviness—we have to be content with these more specific descriptions). On the contrary, we meet a description that is very difficult to support with perceptual attributes: “Under the soles there slides the loneliness of the field-path as the evening declines”. Such a description is deeply poetic, but I doubt that it will lead the reader to see the same in the painting.

I miss in Heidegger’s approach dealing with the work as a work of art; rather it seems that he uses it as an instrument to find something else. The theory that Van Gogh’s painting only makes such interpretation of the tool possible is not supported. It works as if the painting was in reality only an illustration of what Heidegger already knew about the “toolness” of the tool. As Meyer Schapiro also notes, Heidegger’s concept of the metaphysic power of art here remains a purely theoretic idea (Schapiro 1994: 139). Moreover, Schapiro also finds out that the subject here is Van Gogh’s own pair of shoes that had special importance to their owner, which shows Heidegger’s interpretation as completely out of range, identifying the painter’s city boots as the shoes of a peasant woman. Based on these findings, Shapiro presents the shoes as a metaphor of the artist’s life, basing this both on biographic data and perceptual description. Summing up, Schapiro’s approach is much more convincing than Heidegger’s.

In my opinion, the confusion arises from Heidegger’s approach of a perceptually relevant work as a perceptually irrelevant one, while he sees its outstanding, world-opening and truth-controlling nature in its perceptual stratus. If the reader principally accepts Heidegger’s theories about the role of art, the description strengthens this acceptance. In contrast, the example brought up to support the theories does not convince the skeptical reader either of this being the most suitable approach to Van Gogh’s painting, or of accepting Heidegger’s position on the power and role of art.
References


Debating Contemporary Internet-Based Apocalyptic Discourse in Class

Some remarks regarding personal experience in teaching and discussing applied rhetoric and communication with students

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Abstract

With the emergence of the internet, new ways of communication and social interaction have formed in the realm of electronic media. Anonymousness together with the opportunities offered by the new participatory media has brought substantial changes in the ways people communicate with each other. While fundamental discourses – like “apocalyptic rhetoric” – suffered no significant changes, online rhetoric and narratives may be characterized by special features of “secondary literacy.” Religious fundamentalism is just one movement (field) that readily took advantage of the new ways of communicating; and various extremist, apocalypticist, conspiracist groups formed in turn their own dramaturgy of “ritual deliberation.” As a lecturer in rhetoric and communication studies with interests in apocalypticism, I investigate such online groups and forums and try to discuss with my students the uses and misuses of the new means of interpersonal argumentation and participatory media.

Keywords: web rhetoric, participatory media, virtual groups, apocalypticism, ritual deliberation

As a lecturer in communication studies with interests in apocalypticism I investigate visual and textual elements and the apocalyptic rhetoric of online religious websites, groups and forums and try to discuss with my students the uses and misuses of the new means of interpersonal argumentation and social interaction. The present paper mirrors this effort and is also part of my preparatory investigations for a longer research into the study of

14 see also: <http://www.apokaliptikum.lap.hu>
ideological web-semiotics and -rhetoric. For this investigation and discussion I have chosen some Hungarian and U.S.-based websites and online communities formed around them, and through which I presented for the students the apocalyptic narratives at work:

- http://www.elragadtatas.hu/
- http://www.raptureready.com/
- http://www.mt.net/~watcher/

We tend to think of apocalypticism as a long-extinct extreme religious mentality centered on some catastrophic end-of-the-world scenario. We usually suppose that people thought this way only very long ago, or even if some still do today, they are very few, or very far away, maybe somewhere in America, or in some underdeveloped Muslim fundamentalist countries, even farther away... In any case: not now, not here – not among us. Not in an age of such technical advancement and scientific enlightenment, like our era of the Internet. In this paper, however, I would like to show that neither is there need to think of apocalyptic and apocalypticists in such extreme terms, nor should we put away such phenomena in the distant past or the indefinite elsewhere. As we will see, the core narrative of apocalyptic discourse survives in many variations adapting to the ever newer contexts and to the necessities of their users. In our specific case I proposed for class debate how (extreme) religiosity, especially apocalypticism can find its way into the channels of hypermedia and also how such stories and argumentations of apocalyptic origin are imported and converted for contemporary messages in some fundamentalist or conspiracist online communities.

My paper on debating debate consists of two main sections: a theoretical part and one of research applied in education, where the summoned theories have been tested in class discussions with the students. The first part is also built up of two subsections, one dedicated to communication- and media-related issues, the other to the summary presentation of a specific problem of rhetoric. Thus, first I present some necessary terms in communication and media, like participatory media as opposed to unidirectional media, online group formation, secondary literacy (as part of computer literacy) crucial for this discussion, then I discuss rhetorical issues as religious deliberation, sustainable apocalyptic discourse and certain social-psychological phenomena connected to them such as topical online community formation, conspiracy beliefs and cultural mistrust. In the second subsection I turn to the presentation of argumentative problems characteristic to the formations in case: membership categorization, self-victimizing and demonization, spiritual warfare, virtual drama-performance, ritual deliberation and insulated discourse of online apocalypticist communities. In the second main part I resume in brief the results of
seminar discussions with the students, deliberating on the presented subject, and then a short conclusion will be drawn, with a proposal for further investigations.

As curious as it might seem, apocalypticism and the Internet do have more things in common than one would suppose, which make them fit for each other, and strangely enough one of the key features they share is rhetoric. Argumentation, the central issue plays a major role in showing the other faces of reality. As Dino Cardone points it out there is a strong interconnection between the World Wide Web as media and apocalyptic thinking as paradigmatic mindset, both providing opportunities for the irrational or alternative “mytho-logics” to find expression through recombinant narratives (Cardone 2007: v-vii), while Robert Glenn Howard stresses the links between the Net as virtual battleground and ritual deliberation as form of participatory media (Howard 2009a, 2009b). Both authors highlight the importance of online rhetoric producing, reproducing and sustaining contemporary apocalyptic discourse. In order to better understand however the relations between these elements and the way they work intertwined, first some short definitions and nutshell explanations are needed.

While the term “apocalypse” – coming from the Greek “α ποκάλυψις”: “revelation,” that is: uncovering (of some hidden transcendent truth) – means in today’s discourse rather some catastrophic “the-end-of-the-world-as-we-know-it”, its derivations like “apocalyptic” and “apocalypticism” have come to denote a religious expectation of the end, respectively, certain ideological/religious social movements that live in such end-expectation or even actively propagate (in extreme cases, urge) it. The Apocalyptic is an organic and central element of monotheistic faiths that offers an ultimate resolution to the uneasy theodicy problem of evil’s presence in this world (O’Leary 1994), but generally remains between the banks of mainstream religiosity without leading to extreme verbal or behavioral manifestations. In critical situations or under the stress of some perceived crisis, fringe elements, anxious individuals or communities may activate normally standby motives of the apocalyptic paradigm and turn to a more fundamentalist end-of-the-world rhetoric. Argumentation becomes more debating or more persuasive and also more authoritative as compared to earlier or to mainstream religious discourse. Both in-group and outbound communication intensifies, either with proselytizing-exhortative and/or combative-apologetic character. Stephen O’Leary (1994) argues that apocalyptic is basically of rhetorical nature, and as such its essence is persuasion. Thus apocalyptic and apocalypticism are necessarily strongly dependent on communication, and the more so in the realm of the cyber media. We will return to this problematic, but first we shall review some communication and media issues for a better understanding.

Propagating ideas, sharing opinions and beliefs got new impulses with the rise of every new communication technology. Within the larger picture of communication, mass communication, mass media has always been serving power: religious or political
authorities ruling or competing for rule. In simpler terms, mass communication has always meant – beside information and entertainment – mass persuasion; beginning from the oral art of the agora rhetoricians, through the imperial scrinia or the programmatic frescoes of medieval church walls, through the Gutenberg galaxy with its militant “Flugblätter” of Reformation – Counter-Reformation, or later the printed watchdog of modernity, up to the propaganda machines of the twentieth century like moving pictures, radio broadcasts and television empires. Reaching an ever growing number of people, these latter media, especially television, are all powerful tools in massaging their (mass) audience; and their quasi omnipotence comes partially from the fact that the lack of possibilities for interaction – that is, dialogue – assures a hypnotic effect, thus greater persuasive efficiency. Furthermore, in contrast to earlier mass media, epitomized as Gutenberg-galaxy (McLuhan 1962), electronic media lent a new prominent role to oral communication: in Walter Ong’s terms, secondary orality (Ong 1982). This secondary orality, together with the pictorial turn opened an even wider influencing opportunity for mass communication – communicators can deliver their message to a larger public, thus reaching even the illiterate or those not having fully mastered the advantages of literacy. Verbal expression and visual images have a more immediate impact than written text. All in all, whether the Gutenberg or McLuhan galaxy, traditional mass media was and still is predominantly unidirectional, giving little to no chance for any reaction from its recipients.

With the emergence of the Internet, however, new ways of communication and social interaction have formed in the realm of electronic media. As opposed to earlier media the Internet is highly interactive and bidirectional, especially since its most recent iteration as Web 2.0. Individuals now have not only access to a virtually infinite variety of media content, but also the possibility to modify, reproduce, combine and create such content themselves; what’s more, anybody can share, communicate, and debate freely within this new platform. Termed “participatory media” by Robert Glenn Howard (2008b, 2009a), the World Wide Web invites its users to actively partake in the information flow. In a time when hundreds of millions own personal computers and almost everyone can have 3G mobile phones, Net-surfers are not mute and dumb recipients of mass-produced messages any longer, but regular communicators, “first-person publishers” who have their say and talk back and share their opinions just like in a real-world agora. On the other hand, “participatory media” means not only the active partaking in the process of communication but also implies a social aspect. Again, like the ancient agora, the Net is where people can meet, gather and socialize: chat rooms, forums, instant messaging platforms, newsgroups, p2p file sharing, weblogs, wikis, twitters, social networks are all different aspects of the same phenomenon: social media (Mayfield 2008).

This online socialization dominated by multimedia communication resembles very much real-life socializing, with one essential difference however: it is literally global, just as its supporting platform, the World Wide Web is global. McLuhan’s vision (1964) of the Global
Village, though originally conceived for the role of television networks, has actually come to materialization thirty years later in the form of the Internet. Regardless of the various critical interpretations of the term, I see it in it a very useful metaphor for our study. Just as in the marketplace, or in the tavern of a village or an old town, people gather, form little groups around a table, discuss their problems, share their opinions, know each other by their nicknames, so on the Web as well, only in this case the “village” is really global, comprising the whole world from Singapore to Johannesburg to Anchorage. Important for us are those “little groups gathering around a table” in the virtual space, with most of their members possibly never meeting each other in real but doing the same as people have ever been doing when gathered: talk about their common things. If the gatherings get repeating or become regular around some perpetuating issue, then a community is formed. Here’s how Robert Glenn Howard explains this phenomenon in its online variant: “Topical community formation occurs when discourse-based communities form based on shared topical interests. Topical community formation enables the social norm of issue exchange. . . . Issue exchange occurs when individuals involved in the discourse discuss the relevancy of a specific fact to a larger shared issue of concern without any expectation of a final solution or resulting action emerging from the discussion” (Howard 2006: 43).

While online communities that form practically around any topic generally thrive on the continuous exchange of thoughts based on the principle that divergent ideas lead to the formation of an online ethos of pluralism, the case of religious (or ideological) online communities may differ from this general rule (Howard 2008a). In loose religious congregations formed on the Web, the community’s shared discourse frequently works in the opposite direction, namely to exclude outsiders or even members dissenting with the core narrative – this is often the case with the phenomenon of “virtual ekklesia” (Howard 2009) which is of real interest for our study. Howard means by this term a religious – particularly Christian – community or fellowship that formed and thrives on the Internet, with its members hardly knowing each other, identifying themselves only by their shared ideas, in our specific case, concerning the End (of) Times (Howard 2009).

Online communication as well as community formation induced new modes of exchanging messages: web rhetoric and narratives are characterized by peculiar features of orality. One might disregard this oral aspect of internet communication as irrelevant in respect to online apocalypticism, but it really does matter. From among the basic qualities of orality described by Walter Ong (1982) we will highlight here only some: as far as we are concerned verbal utterance is agonistically toned, empathetic and participatory, homeostatic and also conservative or traditionalist, in contrast to written expression, and these particularities are preserved in the secondary or residual orality. Furthermore, these characteristics of orality are transferred into the typewritten “on-screen orality” of our digital era (Corcoran 1995; December 1993). It is important to note however that this
“netspeak” as David Crystal (2001) calls it, is also a “secondary literacy” in the sense Balázs Géza (2007) describes it, or in other words, a textual (post-) literacy dominated by orality.\textsuperscript{15}

On the other hand, religious practice is characterized by orality rather than literacy, even in the Faiths of the Book\textsuperscript{16} and even more so in their apocalyptic segments. Apocalypse is an oral genre \textit{par excellence} (cf. Barr 1986 also Peterson 1969), against all those many ancient apocalyptic texts survived to us through centuries and millennia. Considering these premises we can understand why Cardone, referring to Ongian terms, argues that apocalypticism and the oral nature of the Internet are so closely related, even while showing significant differences:

Viewed through an Ongian framework, apocalyptic rhetoric evinces significant connections to orality, particularly in its use of commonplaces, mythopoeticism, and dualist good vs. evil rhetoric. Nevertheless, Web-based apocalyptic and other rhetorics which partake of apocalypticism are not primarily oral in the Ongian sense. Nor are they wholly mythopoetic. Rather, Ong’s theory shows new media technologies as transformative rather than displacing, so that a new medium such as the Net is wholly dependent upon the forms of literacy which preceded it. Accordingly, apocalyptic rhetorics deploy written texts and apocalypticists are literate persons, else they could not effectively deploy digital technologies. (Cardone 2007: 29-30)

Beside a high degree of residual orality, the Internet ensures another strong advantage favoring the formation of topical, especially apocalyptic communities online: the relative lack of gatekeeping as opposed to older media. Gatekeeping, as a kind of media censorship blocking the flow of some messages while allowing other information to pass through (cf. Hargittai 2003) is a basic function in traditional electronic mass media that assures communicators a general control over the unidirectional transmission of “orthodox” information, thus also a relative control over their recipients. Lack of such gatekeeping means that virtually any alternative, “unorthodox” message can circulate freely, and with the bidirectional interactivity of the World wide Web any particular individuals or groups can launch their ideas, opinions, interpretations with a high probability of “being heard” and being answered.\textsuperscript{17} This aspect particularly benefits online apocalyptic rhetors, who –

\textsuperscript{15} Actually on the Internet both orality and literacy appear in their essentially altered secondary character.

\textsuperscript{16} Especially Judaism, Christianity, Islam.

\textsuperscript{17} Cf. Cardone 2007: 7-8: “Simply put, gatekeeping functions on the Internet mean that unorthodox discourse can find a home there. Indeed, the Web is the closest thing to a universal and more or less egalitarian publishing platform existent. Television and print, on the other hand, are not available as means of expression to most individuals. In older mass media, such as television and radio, in fact, gatekeepers, responding to corporate, political, advertising and ideological interests, enforce an orthodoxy whose bottom line is advertising sales, even while the same advertising-based orthodoxy upholds and enforces status quo orthodoxies in science, politics, and social issues. On the Web, on the other hand, the individual
except in the case of (fundamentalist) televangelism – rarely have the chance to propagate via mass media their good news concerning the End.

Count to this the generalized phenomenon of anonymity / pseudonymity of the Web. Though social networking (where people register usually by their real data) started lately to turn the tide, still forum participants, newsgroup members, blog-commenters frequently use only nicknames. Similar is the case with online apocalyptic communities, where members often know each other just by their nicks – and that proves to be enough for their identity as believers, or faithful ones, or pertaining to the virtual ecclesia. Witnessing the Lord/Scripture is more important than personal identification. Web-anonymousness generally ensures a greater audaciousness in expression, lesser circumspection for consequences and others’ sensibilities, and together with the lack of gatekeeping a higher freedom of manifestation.

Strongly related to this latter aspect is the quality that Cardone calls the “subversive nature of the Internet” (2007: 100), that is, its anti-institutional, anti-establishment, potentially radical character giving way to any alternative, unexpected, contradictory ideas. While the Net’s subversiveness is the result of an objective conjunction of a number of technical developments and social circumstances, the subversion of online apocalyptic discourse has an altogether other source. Apocalyptic is itself radically subversive – intentionally aiming the overturn of the status quo, the extant world seen in rather negative appreciation. Apocalypse is a rebel denial of the evil (in this) world. This is why (radical) apocalypticism is squeezed to the fringes even in institutionalized religion. Still, in troubled times somehow it has always find its way to get its message to a sensible audience, by going round the mainstream mass media – but until the advent of the new hypermedia this has been a cumbersome process. Lack of gatekeeping and the subversive nature of the Internet make room for free propagation and wider spread of apocalyptic subversion. As Cardone observes:

Both apocalypse and the Internet, then present the critic with a subversive aspect. The Internet represents a challenge to older electronic media and the status quo discourses they uphold, because it gives voice to a far greater number of individuals. This greater voice occurs in a context devoid of the conventional mass media gatekeeping functions that assure an “Establishment,” or orthodox, viewpoint in mainstream media venues. Apocalyptic is a discourse of subversion which seeks the overthrow of the established order. The apocalyptic, the conspiratorial, and the alternative find in the Net a welcoming medium which shares their subversive quality. (Cardone 2007: 103)

Indeed, orality, lack of gatekeeping, anonymity, accessible environment – assure an excellent constellation for online apocalyptic rhetors as well as online communities formed

is at the discursive center, a spinner of narratives, relatively unbound by limitations of geographic space, community membership, or gatekeeping censors.”
around the topic of millennialist issues to exploit with most fondness the subversive nature of both the Internet and of apocalyptic discourse itself.

Another important characteristic of online apocalyptic discourse is its sustainable or recombinant character. Authors in the field agree on the high adaptability of apocalyptic narratives and also of apocalyptic rhetors. While fundamental core narratives have barely changed through the centuries, superficial elements always have. Textual allusions, visual symbols, connotative references have continuously been adapting to the actual circumstances and exigencies of the apocalypticists. One maybe most notorious process of continual changing elements is the alteration of the mark, image and number (666) of the Beast from Revelation 13: 14-18. These ‘topoi’ (as O’Leary [1994], and in his wake Cardone [2007] call them) have had innumerable actualizations along western history from statues and coins of Nero through the emblems of papacy up to the TV-screens or commercial code-bars of our days. Thus, by applying these elements to the ever actual segments of their surrounding reality, apocalyptic rhetors have always been trying to update the Revelation message through literal or allegorical reinterpretations in order to persuade their audience. And they have always succeeded in doing so. Michael Barkun (2003: 64) citing Boyer claims that apocalyptic rhetors are themselves highly adaptable “bringing formerly secondary themes to the fore when circumstances require,” while Stephen O’Leary (1994) and Robert Howard (2006, 2008, 2009) both argue the essential sustainability of apocalyptic narratives with examples from modern media; and Cardone (2007) shows how the vigorous adaptability of apocalyptic “topoi” contributes to the success of “recombinant apocalypse” in the digital environment of the World Wide Web. The latter “recombinant” mode is assured directly by the characteristics of the Internet referred earlier, namely the relative lack of gatekeepers, the high degree of accessibility and interactivity, as well as the subversive nature. Beside these peculiarities, Cardone also invokes some other factors which he considers even more decisive:

the Internet offers a unique potential for syncretic narratives arising out of its non-linear structure, the result of which is an emergent syncretic epistemology of mythopoetic and rationalist elements in which surprising linkages between subjects seem possible or even necessary. A related phenomenon arising from this emerging syncretic epistemology entails the excision and reininsertion of topical constellations into what I have called “recombinant narratives.” (Cardone 2007: 216)

Composed of so many particular characteristics, online apocalyptic rhetoric is part of a more general, vernacular apocalyptic discourse on the Net; it is the basic mode of communication within and outward the mentioned online apocalyptic communities and virtual ecclesiae. Both for persuasion and apologetics apocalyptic arguments are systematically used in digital debate performed by those groups. Given the highly interactive nature of the Internet, we have to keep in mind that in contrast to earlier practice, online apocalyptic rhetoric is not a monologue but rather dialogic: convergent
inward and contentious outward. Accordingly, participants in the debate over apocalyptic issues may agree or dissent, and follow different patterns of argumentation. In the following lines some further peculiarities will be presented regarding apocalypticist communication.

First and most important among the distinctive characteristics of this communication is what Robert Howard calls "ritual deliberation" (2009). Here’s how he describes the essence of the process:

> With the continual consumption of information about specific (but constantly changing) world events, believers deliberate together online. This deliberation does not necessarily seek to discover new facts or come to any final shared decisions. Instead, it seeks to exchange and consume ideas within a shared ideological frame. In this sense, it is a performative ritual. (Howard 2009: 204)

Ritual deliberation is a specific case of online religious communication, which forms around a given topic, in our case apocalyptic, and generates an exchange of mutually reinforcing ideas, without coming to any given solution of a raised problem. Going often hand in hand with certain social-psychological phenomena such as conspiracy beliefs and cultural mistrust, these ritual deliberations characteristic for online apocalyptic groups are very exclusivist (just as fundamentalism itself) and lead to the discouragement of public deliberation through an insulating argumentation. Still, ritual deliberation does not settle for a simple reinforcement of (Christian) group identity for ecclesia members: it offers the experience of an active “participation mystique” in the cosmic apocalyptic drama enacted and extended in the virtual reality as well. Typical for this drama-performance are certain procedures of symbolic interactions, like membership categorization, self-victimization, scapegoating and demonization – all excellent means for subversion.

Membership categorization as a way to set up a sharp moral division of the world is as ancient as community formation itself, but as a way of analysis was first intensively developed by Harvey Sacks in the seventies of the past century (Clifton 2009). Jonathan Clifton has shown how efficiently works membership categorization in apocalyptic (millennialist) community both as a self-justifying rhetoric and as a powerful argument challenging the extant social order. In simple terms, membership categorization works as a division line separating “good guys” from “bad guys,” the members of the given community being naturally on the good side of the division line. Just like in the mediaeval Last Judgment frescoes: the saved on one side, on the other the damned. Membership categorization is a(n other) palpable actualization of the ethnocentric (or better said

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18 “Millennialist” — in overseas literature is often used in synonymy with apocalyptic. Given however its restricting connotations in the literal sense, I rather use the term “apocalyptic” with a broader semantic cover.
eclesiocentric) mentality of “US versus THEM,” with a dangerously simplifying logic: people are distributed along the axis of values according to affiliation. Someone is either “one of us” or “one of those” – *tertium non datur*. There is no such thing as neutral or innocent. Charles Strozier and Katharine Boyd, writing about the dualistic thinking of the fundamentalist mindset conclude, “[b]y defining those who are not in the group as evil, the fundamentalist mindset reduces, and can eliminate, empathy for the other and ultimately dehumanizing the out-group” (2010: 6).

Another aspect and in fact organic extension of this same dualistic rhetoric expressed in membership categorization is the complementary opposition of self-victimization and demonization of the other. Strozier and Boyd state based on Lee Quinby (1997) “‘Apocalyptic’ logic organizes dualistic thinking by establishing an ideology of ‘redemption and demonization’ which ultimately ‘polarizes camps between a victimized elect and an odious enemy.’” (Strozier–Boyd 2010: 6) Jonathan Clifton (2009) has called the attention on the importance of building oneself a victim identity, that is, self-victimization which gives a net moral superiority over the adversary presented in contrast as perpetrator, aggressor, evil; an argumentation that bears an inflammable degree of subversion, the more so, when the rhetoric is aimed against the status quo order, against authorities. In such a dualist structure the out-group is often scapegoated or demonized like in conspiracy discourse – as Chip Berlet repeatedly demonstrated (1998/1999; 2005) – while in apocalyptic rhetoric the whole world may be subject to demonization.

The victim-demon play offers an easily joinable high tension drama, very seductive for the members of an apocalyptic online community, or occasional participants of a similar ritual deliberation. Partakers know what their place, their role, their sense is in the unfolding apocalyptic drama. This is not a theatre piece to be contemplated as audience, but all participants, apocalyptic rhetors are ‘dramatis personae’. Salvation is at stake, there is a war going on, and by enacting this ritual drama-performance apocalyptics wage a spiritual warfare against evil. As Howard summarizes about these “crusaders,” “When their divine experiences are frequent and ongoing, both certainty and intolerance are tempered into the most extreme forms. For them, alternate views are not merely wrong – they are Satanic and needed to be actively combated. For these individuals, the Internet serves as an active battleground.” (2009b) Any small contribution, any witnessing one’s faith, any disagreement or rebuttal of a counter-opinion is a tiny victory in the virtual world as well as in the real. It is in this greater picture we should understand the ritual deliberation of online apocalyptic communities.

Since this paper aims only to present the experience gained from some experimental debates with the students during seminars I will strive here to summarize very briefly only the basic ideas and opinions discussed with students. The class discussions were part of two different seminars (applied communication studies: third year, PR; introduction to
mass media / hypermedia: first year, PR) in two consecutive academic years (2009, 2010). Considering that for the first discussion I didn’t take notes, not having in mind an eventual study later, I will try now to reproduce the essence of some student remarks from memory – for both occasions taken together. As a general observation, I have to add that in both cases fewer students were present than usual and even fewer students visited the websites previously designated for review – these facts inevitably influence the outcome of our short experimental investigation.

On a general level, it is more useful to delimit not the two occasions, but rather the two phases of seminar-discussions, very similar for both cases: a deliberative phase, after the basic ideas (described above) have been summarily presented, and an admissive phase, after those ideas have been explained and backed up with examples presented. Since in Hungarian and domestic Romanian (both real and virtual) environment the presented problematic of apocalypticism is quasi unknown for the larger public, and students were unaccustomed with the issues raised (almost at the level implying the ideas formulated in the introduction of this study) I had to introduce the basic ideas myself.

In the deliberative phase, when after the presentation of the basic notions like apocalypticism, topical community formation, subversiveness, membership categorization, self-victimizing and demonization, spiritual warfare, virtual drama-performance, ritual deliberation, the subject was proposed for class deliberation I observed an uneasy uncertainty among the students in starting the discussion (regardless of the study year). From the students’ remarks I reasoned two possible conclusions: first, a general conspicuousness toward religious issues, and second, a suspicion toward the existence and/or seriousness of apocalyptic discourse(s). The question was raised whether religion could be lived in virtual space. The issue met several objections from the very beginning. Students argued that online interaction lacked personal involvement, the feeling of being touched. Other doubts arose concerning sincerity, and as a direct consequence, online confessing, when mentioned proved to be a ridiculous idea for the students. Here it is worth noting that those students come generally from a traditional Roman Catholic environment and at the same time belong to the digital generation well accustomed with online mode. Still, when the question emerged whether real groups or communities could form in the virtual space, opinions divided sharply even among the fiercest net-surfers. Skeptics argued that due to the lack of personal contact no real bonds could have evolved between individuals and even the generalized trend of online anonymity might be a hampering factor for the formation of genuine communities online, while pros countered that there was no need for personal contact, repeated contacts did create bonds online as well, just as in real life, and finally anonymity was not considered to be a handicap, since in online groups often knowing each other by nicknames was a sufficient cohesive factor, and communicators might have been identified nonetheless. Discussing the issues of categorization and commenting on the last occasion one student recalled assisting or
participating at several cases of online controversies by commenting technical issues on various forums which induced repeated re-bursts of argumentations. The remark sparked again sharply divided opinions in the group. While one side sustained that no real “heated” arguments could occur in online debates due to the lack of personal involvement of the participants the dissenters objected with the very frequent presence of “flamers” that have usually proven inflammatory on forums against all cautions from moderators.

I termed “admissive phase” the closing part of both seminars, since after I have explained the issue in more detail and presented the students with concrete examples, bringing the subject closer to them through (better known) political examples as well, all debates ceased. Against my expectations with the websites and cases seeming provocative to me, students did not react to them – as if my explanations and interpretations would have exhausted the problem (or their interest). One late comment still reinforced the case of online community formation (even if not religious): according to her telling in a given social networking site real group has formed only by chatting and commenting; real personal emotional involvement has built up between members.

As a conclusion I would risk the impression that either the problem of online (and general) apocalypticism might be too strange and too unknown to really awaken the interest of students, and/or they have generally a skeptical approach toward religious phenomena (at odds with their traditional and religious background). Also, I dare not conclude but only hope that silence in final phase did not necessarily mean a blind or indifferent acceptance of ideas.

References


Argumentation Theories and the Search for Truth

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Abstract

According to some major argumentation theories the goal of argumentation is the resolution of disagreements. The rules and the evaluation of argumentation are tailored to secure this goal. There are no criteria or guarantee—stipulated by these theories—to make sure that the position agreed upon by the parties involved is a right (or reasonable) one. The weirdest ideas will do if accepted by the relevant actors. I will argue that this is an incomplete portrayal of argumentative practice. It overlooks the epistemic side of argumentation: we often use arguments in order to find the right position, the best solution, to acquire further knowledge etc. First, I will attempt to show that the epistemic goal is central in certain argumentative situations (while persuasion is negligible or secondary). Secondly, I will argue that epistemic import is expected even in those cases in which argumentation is about the resolution of disagreement. After having discussed a problem and reached an agreement, we generally presume that this consensus represents some sort of collective wisdom. The consensual position is supposed to be a reliable one not only arbitrarily agreed upon independently of its epistemic merits. Thirdly, it will be shown that agreement-driven argumentation can threaten the epistemic quality of the outcome of a discussion. Finally, the lesson from these objections will be drawn that persuasion and epistemic argumentation should be distinguished and treated separately.

Keywords: theory of argumentation, epistemic rules and criteria, pragma-dialectics, Toulmin

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Persuasion View of Argumentation

One of the most authoritative and encyclopedic sources defines argumentation as follows:

Argumentation is a verbal and social activity of reason aimed at increasing (or decreasing) the acceptability of a controversial standpoint for the listener or reader, by putting forward a constellation of propositions intended to justify (or refute) the standpoint before a rational judge. (Eemeren et al 1996: 5)

This definition is meant to provide a description of the core characteristics of argumentation suitable for a wide range of argumentation theories discussed in the book. Different theories characterize each elements of this definition (the role of speaker, listener and rational judge, the constellation of propositions etc.) differently; they determine the structure of arguments and/or the process of argumentation, and most importantly, the criteria of its validity. However, they all seem to agree on the essence of this definition that argumentation is persuasion by rational justification.

A persuasion dialog (sometimes it is called critical discussion) begins with the difference of opinion, and such dialogs are taken to be the model of argumentation. Each of the two participants has an opinion or a thesis on an issue; they are inconsistent with each other, and the parties want to resolve this conflict by persuading the other. The aim of critical discussions and argumentation is to resolve the difference of opinion, and the means to realize this goal is rational justification. Thus the goal is agreement, but how to reach this agreement is stipulated by rationality. Persuasion is to be achieved by valid/sound justifications that meet the standards of rationality.

According to Toulmin (1976) there are three concepts of rationality by which the soundness of argument can be defined (provided that infinite regress and circularity are unacceptable in a definition).

- **Geometrical rationality**—an argument is sound iff [if, and only if] it satisfies certain criteria. (e.g. the formal logical criteria of soundness)
- **Anthropological rationality**—an argument is sound iff it is accepted by a community.
- **Critical rationality**—an argument is sound iff it serves the purpose for which it is used (i.e., persuasion).

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20 The separate function of rational judge is missing and it is built into the reasonableness of the critic in Eemeren – Grootendorst (2004, 1): “Argumentation is a verbal, social and rational activity aimed at convincing a reasonable critic of the acceptability of a standpoint by putting forward a constellation of propositions justifying or refuting ... the standpoint.”

21 The difference between them is not important here so, for the sake of simplicity, I will talk of soundness.
Formal logical criteria of soundness are far too restrictive for the evaluation of our everyday argumentative practice. It is also generally assumed that geometrical rationality can have only a limited role in argumentation theories. So the last two conditions are available for the evaluation of justification. A justification is sound if it promotes persuasion (critical rationality) or if it is accepted by a community (anthropological rationality).

These two notions of rationality should grasp what is traditionally called practical and theoretical rationality that are involved in argumentation. Argumentation itself is seen as a rational activity in the sense that the means (justification) effectively promotes the attainment of its end (persuasion). This is the practical side. But argumentation should also be theoretically rational by giving good reasons for a conclusion that make the conclusion rationally acceptable belief.

Given that the goal of argumentation is persuasion, according to critical rationality, a justification is sound iff it persuades the other, and clearly it persuades her iff it is acceptable for her. Thus the critical definition boils down to the anthropological one in an isolated two-party discussion where the rational judge coincides with the party to be convinced. In general, however, the party to be persuaded about a thesis in a discussion does not necessarily coincide with the rational judge setting the standards of rationality, and judging the soundness of argumentations.\textsuperscript{22} A justification may be critically rational by effectively promoting the persuasion of the other party (and so it is also anthropologically rational for the community consisting of the other party) while it is heavily fallacious in the eyes of the community of the rational judge that is authorized by an argumentation theory to set the standards of rationality for the discussion.

The norms of rationality are partly built in the explicit rules of an argumentation theory and partly maintained by the rational judge\textsuperscript{23} that is authorized by the argumentation theory. In so far as an argumentation theory gives explicit criteria it falls back on to a geometrical notion of rationality. However, as it was said before, many argumentation theorists are restrained regarding the theoretical potentials of explicit rules of rationality. Eventually, if no such explicit rules of rationality are prescribed by the theory, then how the participants should generate agreement is stipulated by the rules of rationality agreed upon by the two parties and the rational judge. Without the agreement of the two parties on the soundness of a justification, the justification would not be effective in furthering agreement on the issue. Without the approval of the rational judge, the argument would not be rational and eligible.

\textsuperscript{22} The two are the same in Pragma-dialectics, and so the two kinds of rationality coincide in this theory.

\textsuperscript{23} The rational judge is also supposed to enforce the rules of the institution they represent.
Putting together the definition of argumentation and the critical and the anthropological notion of rationality, we get that argumentation is generating agreement on an issue by the agreed upon rules of rationality. Thus argumentation is doubly driven by consensus: its aim and the criteria of the soundness of justification are both consensus. This follows from that argumentation is persuasion by critically and anthropologically rational justification. Let us call this the persuasion view of argumentation.

A cursory look at three major theories of argumentation will be enough to show how widespread the persuasion view of argumentation. In Pragma-dialectics (Eemeren – Grootendorst 2004), the function of argumentation is the resolution of disagreement in a critical discussion. The dialectical rules given by the theory are tailored to help the realization of this purpose. Argumentation is a dialectical procedure, and it is sound iff it is efficiently furthering the resolution of disagreement, excluding fallacious (namely, not instrumental) moves and being intersubjectively acceptable to the parties. (Eemeren – Grootendorst 2004: 132 and Eemeren et al 1996, 278) There is no rational judge beyond the participants. Within the framework of rationality set by the dialectical rules of the theory, the debaters set the standards of rationality for their justifications. The opponents try to persuade each other by justifying their own claim (and criticizing the other’s), and any justification would do if it is acceptable for them (and if they observe the dialogical rules when advancing them).

Persuasion is even more central to Perelman’s and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s (1969) new rhetoric. It is meant to be a theoretical account of argumentation that we can use successfully in our everyday practice to win the approval of our audience for our standpoint. The audience plays the role of the rational judge, having the authority to supply the norms of rationality and to evaluate arguments. In this rhetorical setup, an argument is sound iff it influences the audience towards the acceptance of the speaker’s (writer’s) thesis. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca create two categories of audiences. A specific audience consists of a particular group of people addressed by a speaker (writer). A universal audience represents the ideal rational judge. It is not a group of actual people; it exists only in the imagination of the arguer. This ideal audience and the norms of rationality they represent depend on how the arguer conceives them. Thus, if a real audience is addressed then an argument is sound iff it is accepted by the audience; and if an ideal audience is invoked to evaluate the argument then the argument is sound iff it is acceptable for the arguer. When argumentation is a social activity then it is evaluated by a contingent audience who is only the recipient of message. If the speaker is not satisfied with the standards of rationality of an audience, she may try to address another one, or eventually she can turn to the ideal rational judge, that is, she can turn to her own ideal of the standards of rationality.

Toulmin’s (2003) model seems to be in sharp contrast to these two theoretical frameworks of argumentation though it is not by being committed to the persuasion view of
argumentation. He is primarily concerned with the epistemological merits of arguments: how to justify a claim by data and warrants. But then the epistemological criteria are reduced to agreement via the anthropological notion of rationality, for the standards of the evaluation of justifications, that is, the standards of knowledge, lie with the experts of the subject matter who are authorized to judge the soundness of justifications. Thus the epistemic evaluation of justifications comes down to the persuasion of a professional audience in a quasi-dialectical procedure. The audience is not an arguer proper; it has only the right to ask for arguments and it judges their soundness. The setup is rather rhetorical than dialectical. Sound argumentation has a general structure (data, warrant, backing, claim) independent of its subject matter; this general structure is the field-invariant component of the rationality of arguments. The more substantial components of rationality are field-dependent that can and has to be evaluated by experts in the subject matter (e.g., what sort of data and warrant can support a claim.) The soundness of an argument is determined by the consensus of the community of experts. This community is the ultimate rational judge: whatever they agree upon is rational and acceptable.

Most theories adopt the persuasion view of argumentation. In fact all theories that take a dialectical or rhetorical approach to argumentation and do not give logical or methodological criteria of the soundness of justification (i.e., if they do not fall back on to a geometrical notion of rationality). So the following objections apply mutatis mutandis to any of this kind of theories.

In what follows I will raise three objections against the persuasion view of argumentation and the theories embracing it.

Firstly, a cursory look at our argumentative practice will show that persuasion cannot be the only definitive goal of argumentation. Beside persuasion we use also arguments for primarily epistemic purposes.

Secondly, persuasion is neither necessary nor sufficient for the epistemic success of argumentation, thus the persuasion view cannot give explanation for the epistemic role of argumentation.

Thirdly, persuasion and consensus as goals of a discussion can, and often do hinder epistemic success.

I will conclude that primarily persuasive and primarily epistemic argumentations should be distinguished and treated separately.
Persuasion cannot be the Only Goal of Argumentation

The persuasion view of argumentation does not do justice to some important argumentative practices.

Inquiry is one of such practices. How much shall our family pay back to the bank for our mortgage? To know this, we will use inferences to find and justify the answer. The primary goal of the use of arguments in this case is to gain knowledge and not persuasion.

One could object to this criticism that inquire of this sort is excluded from argumentation by definition. (See Eemeren et al 1996) However this is an unhappy move. Though persuasion is not the primary aim by virtue of which inquire can be understood, to establish acceptability by justification is also one important goal of inquiry, and as such it should be taken as a form of argumentation and accounted for by the persuasion theories of argumentation. We also want to convince ourselves and each other of the acceptability of the results of our inquiry, and in doing so we will use the precisely the arguments (inferences) of the inquiry for the justification of the results.

There is another important phenomenon that would be baffling if persuasion were taken to be the only definitive goal of argumentation. Many times, we do not resolve our disagreement still we conclude the discussion by saying: “We don’t agree, but it was a good and useful discussion.” If persuasion were the definitive goal, then no discussion could be good and useful without reaching this goal. To account for good and useful yet unconvincing argumentation we need goals other than persuasion. By good and useful discussion we mean in such cases that we have learnt a lot from the discussion indicating that the discussion was good and useful because it realized epistemic goals.

Both inquiries and the good discussions ending with disagreement show that certain argumentations are governed by epistemic goals like truth, knowledge, finding the right position etc. and can be accounted for in the light of these goals.

No Explanation for the Cognitive Import of Argumentation

Argumentation and critical discussion have a cognitive function in our society. Prima facie they are reliable cognitive tools supplying us truths and knowledge about the world. When we wish to know something about galaxies or viruses, when we are to design a reliable machine, or if we would like to find a solution to our demographical problems; we engage in lengthy critical discussions about the issues with the conviction that the results emerging from these discussions will be more or less reliable, at any rate, better than without these critical debates. We firmly believe that arguments, pros and cons, are important for us to find out how things are or should be. (Again, the primary goal of
argumentation is not persuasion in such cases.) Truth and knowledge, in turn, are more than just talk on which we are free to agree!24

Argumentation must have a cognitive function since cognition is essentially a social enterprise. If arguments did not deliver us truths and knowledge, then cognitive cooperation would be impossible.

However, persuasion by rational justification and the targeted consensus are neither necessary nor sufficient for truth and knowledge (and probably for the realization many other possible epistemic goals). Many examples from the history of science can be cited here. For long it had been consensually thought—and people had been rationally justified to do so—that force was necessary to maintain motion until it was realized that certain kind of motion needs no force at all. And it may very well be the case that the majority view is the false one even today justified rationally by our everyday experience.

The link between persuasion by rational justification and truth is even more contingent than this. To see why, we should turn back to the distinction between practical and theoretical rationality. The persuasion view prescribes that the parties should persuade each other by rational justification. Each party should put forward justifications that make her views accepted and these justifications should also provide good reasons for the thesis. That is, one should use effective means to persuasion and these means are further stipulated by theoretical rationality. Theoretical rationality plays only a secondary role. One should use practically rational justifications that are also theoretically rational. Conversely, if a justification is theoretically rational but not convincing then it is not to be used for its use would be practically irrational to the aim of the activity. For instance, a formally sound but abstract and hard to follow mathematical deduction is unwelcome in a discussion if the other party is not keen on math. To avoid this conclusion, persuasion view theorist can try to suggest that those and only those justifications are convincing that are also theoretically rational. Arguers are so rational that they can be persuaded only by theoretically rational justifications. Clearly, either of these would be an absurd rationalism. Furthermore, and more importantly, this would not be enough. For one would still be allowed to be convinced by one sided considerations. The two parties with the approval of the rational judge could form consensus by considering only some of the theoretically rational pros for a thesis (without considering all the relevant pros and cons together) provided that they agree that this much is enough.

24 My argument is consistent with, but does not presuppose any sort of (naive, direct) realism. The claim is only that truth and knowledge cannot be equated with agreement (consensus) here and now.
In sum, it is odd that persuasion view theories of argumentation describe such an important cognitive activity, namely argumentation as directed to goals and using consensual justifications that are related so contingently to its epistemic success as if its cognitive import were only of marginal importance and supplied by argumentation only by chance. Furthermore, these theories of argumentation cannot give an account of the epistemic function and cognitive reliability of argumentation because there is no explanation for how we learn truths about the world that are more than just agreement.

**Persuasion and Consensus can Endanger Cognitive Results**

It is not only that persuasion view does not do justice to the epistemic function and cognitive import of argumentation, by urging persuasion and consensus it also endangers them. Social psychological studies on the cognitive performance of groups reveal that persuasion and consensus as goals of critical discussions threaten their cognitive success and, consequently, the cognitive success of the argumentation involved. Groupthink (Janis 1972, 1982), group polarization (see, e.g., Moscovici – Zavalloni (1969) and Myers – Arenson (1972)), persuasive argument theory (see, e.g. Pruitt (1971)) and other group decision-making phenomena show that striving for persuasion and consensus contributes under certain circumstances to poor decision-making and deteriorated cognitive performance.

Let me discuss only the phenomenon of groupthink briefly here. Groupthink is “a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members’ strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action.” (Janis 1972: 9)

According to Janis (1972 and 1982), consensus-driven decision-making results in the incomplete survey of alternatives and objectives, the failure of examining the risks of preferred choice. The collection of information is poor and selective. The group tends to focus on the confirming information, and to disregard the disconfirming information.

Decision-making groups do not necessarily fall prey to groupthink; Janis (1972) suggests seven ways preventing groupthink out of which the following three are the most relevant to our concern:

- Leaders should assign each member the role of “critical evaluator.” This allows each member to freely air objections and doubts.
- All effective alternatives should be examined and developed into a realistic alternative.
- At least one group member should be assigned the role of “Devil's advocate.” This should be a different person for each meeting.
To apply these and other results of the empirical research of cognitive social psychology on group decision-making to argumentation, we should only note that the group discussions are supposed to be critical discussion, meetings in which participants are to resolve the difference of opinions by putting forward justifications and criticisms – and indeed members conceive the situations this way.

These researches teach us that if the overwhelming goal of a discussion is the resolution of disagreement by persuasion then it is likely to be detrimental to the outcome, and maintaining dissent and alternatives can prevent this most effectively.

**Persuasion vs. Epistemic Argumentation**

What sort of lessons can be drawn from these objections against the persuasion view of argumentation? How to solve the problems raised by the objections?

The first and the most obvious lesson is that two different kinds of argumentation should be distinguished: persuasion argumentation and epistemic argumentation, respectively; and the two types of discussion: persuasion discussion, and epistemic discussion. The two have different goals: in persuasion argumentation each party has the *primary* objective to convince the other by justification, while in epistemic argumentation the primary goal of the two parties is to solve a cognitive task by justification, for example, to find the truth, the right position in an issue, the best solution to a problem, the best of the alternative courses of actions, etc. Realistically, such a complex social activity as argumentation has many aims, none the less it might be a legitimate theoretical idealization to pick one as a primary goal.

Parties have different commitments in each case. They are committed to their views in a persuasion discussion and to the search for truth etc. in an epistemic discussion.

Having different goals, epistemic and persuasion argumentation—as rational activities—have different means to their ends. One set of criteria of the soundness of justifications and one set of rules of argumentation can be effective in persuasion and another in the search for truth. Actually, it would be a surprise if the same set of criteria and rules suited such different goals equally well.

The two kinds of argumentation are different activities though both are social and linguistic ones using arguments. They are best seen as only contingently related to each other like, e.g., fitness running and professional running.

Epistemic argumentation can be defined as follows.

*Epistemic argumentation is a verbal, social and rational activity aimed at finding truth (or more generally, at solving a cognitive problem like choosing the best/good enough alternative, making a good decision, solving a problem, calculating consequences, etc.)*
predicting events etc.) by putting forward tentative solutions and a constellation of propositions justifying and criticizing (refuting) them, and by choosing the best solution in the light of the pros and cons.

Let me copy here the Eemeren – Grootendorst (2004: 1) version of the original definition, supplying now the definition of the persuasion argument.

Persuasion argumentation is a verbal, social and rational activity aimed at convincing a reasonable critic of the acceptability of a standpoint by putting forward a constellation of propositions justifying or refuting ... the standpoint.

It is important to note that the distinction between persuasion and epistemic argumentation is not a distinction between discussions or debates at the first place. We have many classifications of the discussions or debates. It is a distinction between different types of argumentation to be described by different, though related theories. Obviously, different types of argumentation are modeled on and play determinative role in different types of discussions though any type of argumentation may occur in any kind of discussions.

One may come up with the objection that the two definitions are actually the same; the first cannot add anything to the second. Since how do you get what you aimed at in an epistemic argumentation? You can get it by having one tentative solution justified well and overall better than the others; consequently, one tentative solution proves to be more acceptable than the others. Eventually epistemic argumentation is a persuasion argumentation convincing the parties about the acceptability of a tentative solution.

Contrary to what this objection seems to imply, agreement or persuasion is not a goal of an epistemic argumentation and they are not necessary for its success. It is not necessary for the parties to agree on what is the best of the tentative solutions, while one cannot be successful in a persuasion argumentation without convincing the other, without bringing about agreement. Consequently, epistemic argumentation is indeed substantially different from persuasion argumentation: agreement is neither the goal of epistemic argumentation nor is it a success factor, nevertheless acceptability and justification are important from both aspects.

Even if agreement is not necessary on what the best solution is—the objection can continue—agreement is necessary in a methodological sense in an epistemic argumentation as well. Parties should agree on how to evaluate the pros and cons and they should agree on what option is justified, all in all, best in order to accept one. The last

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25 See, e.g., the distinction made by Perelman – Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) between truth-oriented and victory-oriented debates or Walton’s (1989, 10) classification of the dialogues.

26 These are related to the points of my first and second objection to the persuasion view.
two are matters of the evaluation of justifications and eventually the norms of rationality. Parties should agree upon these norms in order to reach agreement on the evaluation of criticism and options. After all, what else could serve as standards of rationality then agreed upon norms? Though agreement is probably not the goal of epistemic argumentation; agreement on the evaluation of arguments is necessary just like in persuasion argumentation.

The answer to this objection is very simple: agreement on this issue is not necessary for finding the option best justified. A participant can find it without having the approval of the others. One party may have better criteria of the evaluation of arguments, or she may apply the same criteria in a more efficient way and, thereby, she may find the best option without consensus. Many personal and historical examples bear this out. Momentous discoveries, great political, economic decisions, respected moral actions etc. were made without consensus or majority support.

It is true, however, that agreement is necessary for social cooperation, and if inquiry in general, and epistemic argumentation in particular, are social ventures, then they need agreement. In order to engage in an epistemic argumentation, parties should share a lot of beliefs, but they need not agree on what new truth is gained by it. The divergence of beliefs on the long run, however, is detrimental to social existence and cooperation; therefore, sooner or later, they should persuade others in a persuasion argumentation about the new truths they discovered in an epistemic one. But this is quite another business. Epistemic argumentation does not presuppose and is not driven by the agreement of the parties on the outcome and on the standards of the evaluation of arguments—contrary to what the persuasion view assumes.

Eventually it may be that agreement has to come for the social reasons mentioned above, none the less it makes a huge difference how and when it comes. In a persuasion argumentation agreement may be reached without criticism, without a systematic search for alternatives and without the systematic weighing of the alternatives. In an epistemic argumentation agreement can come only after all these. This makes a difference not only in the content of consensus, both in the consensual claim and also in the consensual norms of the evaluation of arguments. The claim will be better if we suppose that the rules and the procedure of epistemic argumentations are more effective in solving cognitive problems than that of the persuasion argumentation because the rules and the procedure are devised precisely in this way. Everything being equal, also better norms of justification can be expected when the persuasion comes only after the epistemic argumentation than when persuasion comes first, because certain norms—certain bad norms—will be hard to

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27 Obviously people should agree upon a lot of things to be able to discuss anything. Discussion would be impossible if everything were called into question.
accept to the parties after having gone through an epistemic discussion that excludes those norms.

There is a further difference between the two kinds of activity. In a persuasion argumentation the participants try to decide whether a given claim is acceptable or which of the claims on the table are most acceptable. In an epistemic argumentation, they try to generate further and more acceptable propositions than they have initially.

One may object that this overstretches the concept of argumentation. One form of finding more acceptable proposition is consensually taken to be an integrated part of argumentation. This is when one refines one’s claim in the light of criticism. The definition contains a generalization of this process. Heuristics, justification and criticism go hand in hand; they cannot be separated psychologically and they go together in our argumentative practice.

**Some Remarks on Epistemic Argumentations**

Now how can the epistemic argumentation be accounted for? First of all, it should be noted that while the objections mentioned so far can be raised against all theories of argumentation adopting the persuasion view, the therapy must be tailored to the details of each theory. No theory of epistemic argumentation can be given here; let us see just one suggestion concerning the most prominent theory of our days, to pragma-dialectics.

Now, how should the pragma-dialectical rules be adjusted to fit epistemic argumentation? One of the amendments can be derived from the Devil’s advocate recommended by cognitive social-psychological studies to us for avoiding the poor cognitive performance in group decision-making. It should be noted that the Devil’s advocate can prevent blunders not because she is right against the majority view (though it may be the case) rather because she can catalyze the discussion towards the truth or, at least, better results. The Devil’s advocate, in fact, institutionalizes critical challenge and dissent in the process of group discussion. In this respect, it is similar to many other social practices where skepticism and dissent are part of the institution. Science, jurisdiction and politics try to safeguard their epistemic success by persons—like peer reviewers, attorneys and the members of the opposition—dedicated to criticize the claims made in the discussion.

Thus a rule of challenge, something like the following, could be part of a pragma-dialectical theory of epistemic argumentation:
Be critical and maintain dissent. For every thesis of the protagonist, the antagonist should advance the strongest alternative proposals, and the antagonist should find the strongest possible objections to the protagonist’s thesis and her justifications.28

By encouraging dissent and skepticism, some rule like this one is not only the best to safeguard discussion from the blunders that can be produced by consensus-driven discussions, but it also acknowledges that even the most rational consensus, even the most reliable knowledge can prove to be wrong. The best we can do to cope with the fallibility of our knowledge is that we keep on criticizing our beliefs and maintain an open minded attitude towards possible alternatives. Therefore, we should do these if we want truth and knowledge.

The point here is not that rational criticism is welcome and encouraged in a critical discussion. This is a truism, and many argumentation theories endorse this including Eemeren – Grootendorst (2004, 16-17). According to them, the conflict of standpoints brings about the adversarial nature of argumentation, and it is the drive for thoroughgoing criticism. However, pragma-dialectics still remains agreement oriented as the rules of critical discussion do not contain the universal obligation of rational criticism. Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004) give the antagonist only the right—and explicitly exempt her from the obligation—to criticize the protagonist’s claim.29 It depends on the antagonist’s psychological state or, at best, on her standards of rationality whether she criticizes, and how far she pushes criticism. Each party agrees or raises doubts according to her own temperament or her evaluation of the merits of the argument.

The point in the rule of challenge is that criticism (and putting forward alternatives) is not only a right but also an obligation or, in other words, criticism is not only possible but also necessary in an epistemic discussion aiming at truth and knowledge.

Some theories, mostly belonging to the so called informal logic and critical thinking traditions, have similar attitude toward criticism. They30 prescribe critical question for the evaluation of arguments. (For instance: Are the premises relevant to the conclusion?)

28 Of course, this rule of challenge cannot be simply added to Eemeren’s and Grootendorst’s 15 pragma-dialectical rules of persuasion dialogue. (Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, 135-157). Other modifications are necessary to avoid inconsistency. Furthermore, it should be born in mind that adding a rule like the one above is only one modification of the pragma-dialectical rules of persuasion dialog and many would be necessary in order to get an account of epistemic argumentation.

29 It is odd that they say in the section on methodological preliminaries that “[w]e should ... be skeptical with regard to any claim to acceptability, whoever makes it and to whatever it refers.” (Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, 16; my italics) Yet they exempt the antagonist from the obligation to attack the thesis or the argument of the protagonist. (151)

These questions guide the parties (and the outsider rational judge, should there be any) through a systematic critique of an argumentation to help the assessment of the epistemic merits of the argumentation. This procedure represents a version of critical rationalist methodology directed towards truth and knowledge. The explicit methodological rules give only a rather general framework of the rationality of argumentation, and leave the detailed evaluation of the soundness of a justification to the parties (and the rational judge). Even so these theories make criticism an obligation of the parties and, at the same time, they prescribe by and large how to do it correctly. A methodology of criticism—instead of a general obligation of challenge—is imposed on the parties.

The rule of challenge represents a more liberal approach. The parties have to criticize but it is their responsibility to find the best way to do it. The best way will be dependent on the parties’ (and the rational judge’s) standards of rationality. I think both approaches can work.

One’s attitude toward relativism may influence the choice between the two approaches. It may be tempting to think that the choice depends on whether one believes in the existence of time and field-invariant criteria of epistemic rationality that can serve as a framework methodology for the evaluation of argumentation and for efficient criticism. I think it would be wrong headed to make dependent our theory of epistemic argumentation on our theory about universal rationality. (If there were any theoretical connection between the two, then it would rather work on the other way round.) It would be better to choose between the two approaches by virtue of how effective they are in safeguarding the realization of the epistemic objective of discussions. The question is whether building in some norms and the methodology of critical rationalist theory of argumentation provides more effective framework to find truth and knowledge than the general encouragement of challenge, that is, whether we can tell better in terms of certain generalities how to criticize or the parties on the spot know it better. It is an empirical matter.

Again, it is clear that agreement cannot be disposed of in argumentation, neither in its epistemic version governed by the rule of challenge. However, agreement on a proposed thesis and on the soundness of its justification is always partial, (tentative) and temporal. It is partial because there is always at least one arguer dissenting. It is tentative and temporal because the other side (lead by the Devil’s advocate) is always granted with the possibility to make a breakthrough.

Consequently, a discussion can—in theory—go on ad infinitum. Practically, of course, we should terminate the discussion and act on the results sooner or later. We have good

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31 Earlier I myself, too, thought that epistemic aspects of argumentation can be grasped only by such methodological questions or rules. (Margitay 2007)
indicators to show when the objections become weak, when the discussion becomes idle and when it is time to close it temporally. The Devil’s advocate is run down temporally and some view is taken to be steady by the other party, or by the majority.

It is clear from all this that no rules of epistemic discussion including the rule of challenge, can guarantee truth but the rule of challenge supplemented by others does more in this respect than the rules of the persuasion view theories, pragma-dialectics included. The observation of the rules of epistemic argumentation is only necessary but not sufficient for the realization of the desired epistemic goals—just like the pragma-dialectical rules cannot guarantee agreement.

In sum, it has been argued that persuasion and consensus as goals of argumentative discussion are not only inadequate to certain types of argumentative practices and harmful to others, but critical dissent is utterly useful and indispensable for the search for truth.

References


Training in Argumentation. Didactical Reflections Based upon Teaching Rhetoric at Södertörn University

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Abstract

The didactic form of training in argumentation is based upon what is an easy and what is a difficult task in argumentation. The studies should proceed from basic to advanced. But what is basic, easy to understand and can give rise to argumentation? What are the necessary basics on which we build more complex argumentative patterns?

It is also important that students should be able to identify different forms and aims in argumentation. They have to be able to separate the correct from the incorrect way of arguing. They should also be able to develop a sense for qualities, such as validity, relevance and weight.

Which are the suitable ways of training? When do the teacher use the form of group-work and when use exercises for the individual; oral or in writing tasks? Another question is the function of the pupil in the exercise. Do they have the role of a creator of argument, a supervisor or a questioner?

Keywords: teaching rhetoric, didactics in rhetoric, argumentative skills, teaching argumentation

The timeframe for education in rhetoric at Södertörn University

The first semester of studies in rhetoric is the Basic course (A-course, 20 weeks) and the second is the (Fortsättningskurs) (B-course, 20 weeks). Each of the 20 weeks is divided into four periods of 5 weeks.

The A-course has following content:

Period 1-2: The basics of rhetoric
Period 3-4: Argumentation, Rhetorical analysis
The B-course has a more complex content:

Period 1: Advanced argumentation
Period 2: The history of rhetorical ideologies (Retorikens idéhistoria)
Period 3: Rhetorical elaborations (different kinds of analytical models in use, argumentation, dispositions, analysis of the language figures and tropes, semiotic analysis, narrative analysis)
Period 4: Thesis (Mostly analysis of rhetorical artifacts – e.g. series of debate articles, commercial films of advertising, programs of political parties etc.)

Advanced levels are the C (candidate) and D (magister) courses.

The A-course, period 1-2 has content lectures on the six partes (intellectio, inventio, dispositio, elocution, memoria, actio) and the performance of eight speeches (3 minutes) and an examining speech (8 minutes). At the beginning of the course students receive detailed instructions at the beginning of the course about each of the speeches. Students write an Intellectio (rhetorical plan) for each speech and give it to the teacher before the performance. Two listeners begin to comment, one of them the content and the other the performance (actio). Each seminar group has about 18-22 students.

The process of training in argumentation

The following order is a didactic assumption on the process of the students understanding and development of skills to use argumentation. It is based on the idea of what is basic, easy constructing and easy to recognize in texts, and what is advanced, in other words - more difficult.

1. To learn the character of logos, ethos, and pathos in argument and working them into a statement (thesis). The persuasive importance of exemplum.

2. To learn what type of arguments are used in the three rhetorical genres – genus. demonstrativum, genus deliberativum and genus judiciale. The necessity of connecting it to real everyday life communication.

3. To learn use different topoi, viewpoints for finding arguments in accordance to subjects as usefulness, costs, material, process of production, history, aesthetic aspects etc. The topoi are related to persons (also cities, rivers and so on) character. The topoi of persons in complimentary (epideicticon) speech (genus demonstrativum), virtues and vices; for a thing – its usefulness, history, buildings, transportation systems, beauty and so on. For genus judiciale students have to learn and use argument out of the strategies (juridical stasi as status fitionis, relatio criminis, remotio criminis etc).
To learn topics of logic (syllogisms, enthymeme, induction, deduction etc.), general and special (subject-related) topics.

4. To learn the **qualities of an argument**: validity, relevance and weight. To develop ability valuate arguments from other texts and create arguments of different qualities.

5. To learn the differences between **correct and incorrect argumentation**. The types of propagandistic argumentation (simplification, bifurcation, synthesis, presupposition, lie, etc.)

6. To learn the use of structured **multi-level argumentation**.

7. The use the **Toulmin model of argumentation** – in analysis and creation of students’ own texts. It is to connect statement and argument with supporting arguments.

8. The analysis of argumentation in **narratives**. The persuasive elements in corporative storytelling. Persuasiveness in dramaturgical structures.

9. The **semiotic analysis of argumenative elements** in images, advertisements and films.

**Work forms in the classroom**

The students at SU have two different official ways to learn argumentation – in seminars led by a teacher and in so-called referential groups (4-6 students) without teacher assistance.

Because of different levels in skills and knowledge, we find the process of **rhetorical socialization** important. It is to accommodate to those conventional forms of verbal communication and ways to use narratives. The work in referential groups, where students have the possibility to discuss, preparing and rehearse their speeches, is an important forum for rhetorical socialization.

When **warming up**, students make exercises in speech-flow, story-telling, argumentation, different social styles of language, breathing and pronunciation etc. They work in duos, trios and in larger groups. The whole class works at the same time with same task.

After the presentation of a speech **students analyze** it, e.g. by counting arguments, commenting the character and quality of arguments and the positions of different arguments in the speech as a whole. It is a moment of observation and verbalization of it, also a way for increasing skill to “read” content and learn to use rhetorical vocabulary.

The rhetorical event is constituted and its quality granted by the encounter of speaker and audience. For that reason and for the psychological confidence of the individual, we use what we call a **Policy for positively positioned audience behavior**. It is a kind of regulation of the audience attitude.
We, teachers know of experience that most of the students learn argumentative skills better through verbal exercises than by writing alone.

We also introduce forms of disputing contests but mostly for fun; we found detailed instructions for individual speeches more effective in a didactic sense. The student individual has more freedom to choose an engaging subject from the topics of the public life. Furthermore, the agonistic forms of teaching build lasting hierarchies in the classroom.

**Research project:**

A didactic of topical thinking – the many-sides-thinking in education

The study of topics is useful in a concrete way in arguing but also in an abstract way, as a pluralistic attitude in a pluralistic society. In connection to the revival of the sophistic theory in modern time, SU accomplished a three-year research project involving Sweden, Finland and Hungary. The corpus of the project was a series of roundtable discussions at high schools for teacher education. We examined the possibilities for a type of didactic led by the idea of topical thinking, the many-side perspective for use in the classroom. In this turn the teacher educators discussed contradictions in the national plan of education, and ways to cope with those contradictions. They also talked about the relationship between theory and practice in teacher education and the teacher educators positioning to the hegemony of teaching methods. A final report about this project is due to be published later this year (2010).
Evaluating Reasoned Dialogues.
A case study: Euthyphro

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The purpose of these studies is to raise problems, not to solve them; to draw attention to a field of inquiry, rather than to survey it fully; and to provoke discussion rather than to serve as a systematic treatise.
(Toulmin 2003: 1)

Abstract
The purpose of this paper is to present a critical thinking approach in analyzing reasoned dialogues. Fundamental theoretical aspects are first to be presented, including those advanced by van Eemeren et al. (2002) and Walton (1989, 2000, and 2006): dialogue theory, argumentation theory. Some of these theoretical tools are then to be applied in the particular case of a Platonic dialogue, Euthyphro. The process of critical analysis reveals fundamental skills necessary for this type of research, skills that are included in the process of identifying and evaluating argumentation. The analysis of Euthyphro also presents some specific argumentative techniques that could be used by Socrates in early Platonic dialogues and some difficulties that appear in interpreting this particular dialog. The final part of the paper attempts an answer to the question concerning the adequacy of this type of analysis in the case of philosophical dialogues.

Keywords: dialogue theory, argumentation, critical thinking, philosophical dialogues
1. Critical Thinking for Reasoned Dialogues

Some would say that one of the disturbing question encountered particularly in Literature classes in high school was, “What did the author mean by his text?” The peculiarity of the question was usually surpassed by a number of comments on that poem that the pupil was supposed to read in order to grasp the meaning of what the particular author intended to embed in the text. Of course, different texts need different approaches because of the different “keys” of interpretation. It seems that, in order to reach a personal interpretation of the text, it is needed to read many other interpretations. In most of the cases this request cuts off the reader from reading the original text, either because this is time consuming, or because of the lack of practical use of the reading, or lack of curiosity, or, perhaps, all of them. The particular situations in which the pupil tries by himself to grasp the original text, corroborating his own interpretations of the text with the interpretations offered by the more experienced scholars in the comments seems to be very rare.

Philosophy courses and particularly seminars at university level studies encounter a somehow similar problem. The difficulty to understand a philosophical text is mostly due to the particularity of the philosopher. However, this aspect of the problem is not of our concern here. It is a fact that a good comprehension of a philosophical text implies, besides a proper analysis of the original text, also the reading of many comments on that text, philosopher, the philosophical school and so on. The presupposed effort seldom causes students to limit themselves to read only the comments, because these could offer full synopsis of the texts, and the keys for their understanding. Still, some of the students read the original text together with the comments and find it difficult to connect specific aspects of the comments with the original text. Then a familiar question emerges: “where did this comment came from?” In face of such a new difficulty, the perspective is not one that could be painted in vivid colors. However, one possible solution could be seen in the practice of critical thinking skills. My paper will try to critically support such a thesis.

In recent years, critical thinking (CT) and argumentation books, courses and critical thinking tests have been written, published and applied in various countries all over the world. For our interest here, the CT skills needed are those connected with that kind of investigation that concerns reasoned dialogues, particularly philosophical dialogues. The present paper tries to advocate the clarification brought by such a perspective in understanding philosophical texts, especially philosophical dialogues, as it was mentioned before. For this purpose some theoretical tools are first to be mentioned, according to Walton’s Dialog Theory (DT) and some aspects of van Eemeren’s Theory of Argumentation. These theoretical devices are to be applied to a particular Platonic dialogue, Eutyrphro. Finally, some remarks concerning the adequacy of such an analysis will be made.

The study of any particular dialog needs a theoretical framework, a necessity fulfilled by some reputable works in the field: Fundamentals of Critical Argumentation (Walton 2006),

Dialog Theory for Critical Argumentation (Walton 2007), La Nouvelle Dialectique (van Eemeren–Grootendorst 1996), Coalescent Argumentation (Gilbert 1997), A Systematic Theory of Argumentation (van Eemeren–Grootendorst 2004), Argumentation, Analysis, Evaluation, Presentation (van Eemeren–Grootendorst–Henkemans 2002), etc. For the requirements of this paper we will ground our investigation mostly on the works of Douglas Walton (2006, 2007) and on some aspects revealed by the works of van Eemeren et al. (2002, 2004).

In Walton’s own words, DT is “the underlying structure on which to base the analysis and evaluation of argumentation and fallacies” (Walton 2007: 1). Because the goal of dialectics is normative, we must first define our concept of dialog and set the rule for a rational dialog. Many definitions for the concept of dialog could be found. Still we would accept as a starting definition the one that says that dialog is “a verbal exchange between two parties, according to some kind of rules, conventions or expectations.” (Walton 2007: 20). The basic structure of a dialog includes four building blocks of any formal dialectical system (Walton 2007: 21):

- the two participants: the proponent and the respondent;
- the types of moves (taking the form of various speech acts) that the two participants are allowed to make, as each takes his or her turn to speak;
- the sequence of moves, in which the appropriateness of each move depends on the type of preceding move made by the other party;
- the goal of the dialog as a whole;

There are four types of moves that are important for a dialectical system (Walton 2007: 22): (a) the asking of questions; (b) the making of assertions; (c) the retracting of assertions; (d) the putting forward of arguments.

If the aspects (b), (c) and (d) seems not to be problematic, being treated in typical argumentation books (Walton 2003: 9–10; Walton 2003: 227; van Eemeren–Grootendorst 2004: 86; 132), the asking of questions is specific to a dialogue. There are at least four types of questions (Walton 2006: 192): yes-no questions, whether-questions, why-questions and conditional questions. We will follow Walton in presenting some properties of the above mentioned types of question. Thus, the yes-no questions admits only direct answers (yes or no) and are conceived to eliminate the possible “I don’t know” answer from the respondent. These kinds of questions are seen as choice questions, limiting the options for the respondent. The why-questions leave room for a more detailed and free choice answers from the opponent. There are two types of why-questions: one type is a request for an explanation, the other is a request for an argument. The whether-questions (disjunctive or multiple-choice questions) offer a number of alternatives to the respondent together with the invitation to choose one of them. The last type of questions is conditional questions. These questions contain a conditional proposition (if-then). Other
The types of questions are *who*-questions, *which*-questions, and *deliberative questions*. An important aspect concerning questions is the distinction between an answer and a reply to a question. A reply is any verbal response given to a question in a dialogue. An answer is a response to a question that is relevant to the dialogue. Relevance in a dialogue is concerned with the purpose of the particular dialogue (exchange information, resolve or clarify issue, prove or disprove hypothesis, etc.) and with critically questioning the arguments of the opponent. In fact, relevance in a dialogue is strongly connected with “the use of reasoning in a chain of argumentation” (Walton 2006: 296).

Walton (2007: 23) offers us a classification of dialogs. There are persuasion, inquiry, negotiation, information-seeking, deliberation, and eristic types of dialogs. Each type of dialog has an initial situation, a goal of the dialog and participants’ goals. It appears that a dialog could have apparently different goals from their participants, and that dialog is a sort of rational move from an initial situation toward what could be seen as its goal. The important feature of any kind of dialog seems to be the fact that to reach the goal of the dialog, each participant should fulfill its own goal.

A couple of things should at least be mentioned before the start of the analysis. One of these implies the concept of “commitment” that seems to be particularly important for dialog theory. According to Walton (2007: 24), “‘commitments’ refers to what an arguer has gone on record as accepting, as far as one can tell, from what she has said (and/or done).” This is available from the text or the context of the discourse. The reason for preferring commitments over belief lies in argumentations primary goal, which is the evaluation of a given argument. In this situation, the arguer actual beliefs could be difficult to determine. We are going to embrace this theoretical position.

The Platonic dialog we are going to investigate is a typical early Platonic dialog in which Socrates and his interlocutor Euthyphro enter into a sort of teaching-learning dialog led by Socrates. Socrates wants us to believe that he will let himself being persuaded (or taught) the meaning of piety. This particular kind of dialog is somehow a species of persuasive dialog (see Walton 2007: 23). Walton calls it critical dialog or critical discussion and claims that the stages of a critical discussion could be found in every kind of reasoned dialog. We will follow Walton (2007: 26) and van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992: 35) in this classification of the stages:

1. **the confrontation stage**: the two parties agree on the issue to be resolved;  
2. **the opening stage**: both parties accept procedural and material starting points and agrees to abide by them;  
3. **the argumentation stage**: each part puts forward arguments to support its standpoint, and attack the arguments put forward by the opposing side; the purpose of this stage is to test the justifiability of the standpoints previously expressed by both parties to the discussion at the confrontation stage.
4. **the concluding (closing) stage**: in this part of the dialog it is determined which side is the winner; the outcome resolves the conflict of opinion.

If the first stage of the dialog could be seen as the stage of the issue identification and the second stage is that stage in which the starting positions of each participant are stated. The argumentation stage of the critical discussion is governed by fifteen rules (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004: 136–157) or ten to eight rules in a simplified version (van Eemeren–Grootendorst–Henkemans 2002: 109–138; van Eemeren–Grootendorst 1996; Walton 2006). Due to its importance in conducting our investigation, we will give a short version of them (van Eemeren–Grootendorst 1987: 184–293):

1. Parties must not prevent each other from advancing arguments.
2. An arguer must defend her argument if asked to do so.
3. An attack on an arguer’s position must relate to that position (and not some other position).
4. A claim can only be defended by giving relevant arguments for it.
5. An arguer can be held to his implicit premises.
6. An argument must be regarded as conclusively defended if its conclusion has been inferred by a structurally correct form of inference from premises that have been accepted by both parties at the outset of the discussion.
7. Arguments must be valid, or be capable of being made valid by the addition of implicit premises.
8. Formulations must not be unduly vague or ambiguous.

In our attempt to analyze the Platonic dialog, we will consider these rules as a being assumed by the participants to the dialog. Therefore, all their moves inside the dialog frame are supposedly performed under the normative pressure induced by the rules.

Even if the DT presented by Walton (2007) encompasses many other aspects relevant for an argumentative analysis, it is not our intention here to use an exhaustive amount of theoretical tools for the analysis. Instead we will add to those mentioned above only the general critical thinking tools concerning argumentation: deductive and inductive inferences with the usual encountered fallacies of the kind.

2. **The argumentative analysis of the dialog**

The main concern in this part of the paper is to grasp the dialog’s ideas through the very aspects of the arguments that the two participants are advancing in the course of their dialog. The analysis must proceed with the common steps of evaluation of a reasoned dialog, as well as of a particular argumentation. It therefore has to do with identification of arguments, and their analysis and evaluation.
As it could be very easily seen, *Euthyphro*\(^1\) is that sort of persuasion dialog that was called *dissent* (Walton 2007: 25): it has two participants (the proponent and the respondent), only one of them has a thesis to be proved, the other one has to cast doubt on the proponent argumentation. This form of persuasion dialog, even that is an asymmetric type of dialóg has the same four characteristic stages as a critical discussion (Walton 2007: 26).

To facilitate the identification of the questions and replies/answers of the two participants to the dialog, their lines are counted and a number is attributed to each line. Thus, Euthyphro’s first question in the dialog has the mark E1, and Socrates’ reply/answer to it is marked by S1. This procedure is repeated until the last line of the dialog, the line marked with S116.

The first lecture of the dialog enables us to identify its stages. According with the above classification, the **confrontation stage** could be seen as ranging between E1 and E17. It is in this part of the dialog where the “piety/impiety” issue is established. The next part, ranging from S17 to E20 is the **opening stage**, the stage where Euthyphro and Socrates accepts the way in which their dialog will continue. The **argumentation stage**, ranging from S20 to E115, the stage where Euthyphro and Socrates put forward arguments to support their standpoints and attack the arguments of the opposite side. The final stage, the **concluding stage**, it is represented by the unexpected abandon of the dialog by Euthyphro (E116) and the final, conclusive line of Socrates, S116. We will discuss each of the stages on their turn on a more detailed manner in the lines bellow. Because the length and the purpose of the paper would not allow for a complete analysis of the dialog, we will use some parts of the dialog for our analysis in order to illustrate and support our thesis. The other omitted parts of the dialog could be treated in an analogous manner as well.

**The Confrontation Stage**

This first part of the dialog presents the two lawsuits that explain the possibility of the dialog: that of Socrates, indicted by Meletus, and that of Euthyphro, who prosecutes his own father. The succession of questions and answers are illustrating their particular cases and seem to be organised as to facilitate an analogy. For instance, the first line of the dialog belongs to Euthyphro who asks a why-question that requests an explanation from Socrates as an answer:

\[ E1: \text{What trouble has arisen, Socrates, to make you leave your haunts in the Lyceum, and spend your time here today at the Porch of the King Archon? Surely you of all people don't have some sort of lawsuit before him, as I do?} \]

This why-question asks for an *explanation* form Socrates. Instead of a direct answer, Socrates’ reply is directed toward a term from Euthyphro’s formulation of his question (“lawsuit”). There seems to be no need for further analysis here, and perhaps there are no real interesting clues for understanding the dialog, except, probably for the fact that Socrates is very careful in using terms, and/or an indication that Euthyphro is not quite
familiar with the Athenian way of speaking. For our concern here the important thing is to follow the succession of moves of the two protagonists of the dialog and to see if their answers are relevant to the questions being asked and, in the same time, to identify their arguments, where they are needed for our analysis.

The succession of moves appears to be a description of their situation. Thus, from E1 to E9 Socrates’ lawsuit is described, and from S9 to E17 Euthyphro’s lawsuit is the one that is being presented to the reader. The questions and answers that draw both of the lawsuits are typically those concerning the cause of the indictment, the person indicted, and the person that is indicting. The space of the article does not allow us to dwell into a step-by-step description of the moves in the dialog. However, following the lines of the dialog, there are some similarities that could be noticed between the questions addressed by the protagonists of the dialog:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Euthyphro</th>
<th>Socrates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E1: “What trouble has arisen, . . .”</td>
<td>S9: “…what is this case of yours, Euthyphro? Are you defending or prosecuting?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2: “What’s that you say? Somebody must have indicted you, since I can’t imagine your doing that to anyone else.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E4: “Who is he?”</td>
<td>S10: “Whom?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E5: “…what is this indictment he’s brought against you?”</td>
<td>S14: “…what is the charge? What is the case about?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These similarities suggested by the text of the dialog could lead to a pattern of inference that can be schematized as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Socrates Lawsuit</th>
<th>Euthyphro’s Lawsuit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who is indicted?</td>
<td>Socrates</td>
<td>Euthyphro’s father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By whom?</td>
<td>Meletus</td>
<td>Euthyphro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the accusation?</td>
<td>religious innovation and corruption of the young</td>
<td>crime</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As the dialog continues both of the accusations appear to have a common ground, because both the religious innovation and the corruption of the young are rooted in the knowledge of what religion is, or, as it appears from the dialog itself, in the knowledge of the meaning of piety, and the accusation of crime is connected with the religious behavior through Euthyphro’s own words (E17): “It's ridiculous, Socrates, that you should think it makes any difference whether the victim was a stranger or a relative, and not see that the sole consideration is whether or not the slaying was lawful. If it was, one should leave the slayer alone; but if it wasn’t, one should prosecute, even if the slayer shares one’s own hearth and board because the pollution is just the same, if you knowingly associate with such a person, and fail to cleanse yourself and him by taking legal action. . . .” (italics mine). The fact that the meaning of the pollution (the greek term for pollution is μιασμα) has a religious connotation is emphasized by Socrates’ reply (S17): “But heavens above, Euthyphro, do you think you have such exact knowledge of religion, of things holy and unholy?” (italics mine). The identification of a common ground for both lawsuits rise the possibility for an analogy. Their situations are analogous, and what is not explicitly said could be inferred from the analogy:

(i) The young (poet Meletus) is prosecuting an old man (Socrates) for impiety (true - it represents a fact).

(ii) The (relatively to Socrates) young (prophet and soothsayer Euthyphro) is prosecuting an old man (Euthyphro’s father) for impiety. (true - it represents a fact).

(iii) Euthyphro’s indictment of his father is a rightful one. (disputable - considered true by Euthyphro, doubted to be true by Socrates).

[Therefore, (probably) Meletus’ indictment of Socrates is a rightful one.]²

Socrates seems to be sensitive to this kind of inference, because he unusually (Beversluis 2000: 164) attacks the premise (iii) of the argument above, at first showing himself surprised by Euthyphro’s unpopular decision to prosecute his own father (S13)³, then through asserting in full amazement that he must be very advanced in wisdom in order to take such an action (S15)⁴ and doubting that the victim could be an ordinary man (S16). Even the last line of Socrates intervention (S17)⁵ could not make Euthyphro to change his confidence about his own knowledge as a special kind about things that are holy and unholy, and that his action of prosecution was a rightful one. His explanation of the facts is offered in E17. The argumentative analysis of a fragment from E17 will show that Euthyphro thinks he is perfectly justified in his act:

E17: It's ridiculous, Socrates, that you should think it makes any difference whether the victim was a stranger or a relative, and not see that the sole consideration is whether or not the slaying was lawful. If it was, one should leave the slayer alone; but if it wasn’t, one should prosecute, even if the slayer shares one’s own hearth and board because the pollution is just the same, if you knowingly associate with such a person, and fail to cleanse yourself and him by taking legal action. . . .
The argumentation of Euthyphro seems to go as follows:

If 3: it [the slaying] was [lawful],
[then] 4: one should leave the slayer alone
but if 5: it wasn’t [lawful],
[then] 6: one should prosecute even if the slayer shares one’s own heart and board,
because 7: the pollution is the same, if you knowingly associate with such a person and
fail to cleanse yourself and him by taking legal action

[Therefore] 1: It’s ridiculous, Socrates, . . . and 2: not see that the sole consideration ......
if we are symbolizing the proposition 3: “The slaying was lawful” by letter “P” and the
proposition 4: “One should leave the slayer alone” by letter “Q”, the argument appears to
go like that - for the propositions 3, 4, 5, and 6:

If P, then Q
if non-P,
then non-Q

Written in this form, the argument is a fallacious one (negation of the antecedent).
However, it still could be possible that the relation between the action of slaying a person
and the action of prosecution is one of equivalence and not one of implication. In such a
case, the argument should be written in a different manner:

P ≡Q, and non-P=non-Q

It follows from this interpretation that, for Euthyphro, “what is lawful” and “what is non-
lawful” are equivalent with “what is non-indictable”, and corresponding, with “what is
indictable.” If this pattern of thinking would be followed by Euthyphro, perhaps his replies
to Socrates questions would have been different.

Some other inferences could as well be performed from the text of the dialog:

• from S5: “The indictment? I think it does him credit. To have made such a major
discovery is no mean achievement for one so young: he claims to know how the
young people are being corrupted, and who are corrupting them. He's probably a
smart fellow; and noticing that in my ignorance I’m corrupting his contemporaries, he
is going to denounce me to the city, as if to his mother. ...” It could be inferred that
Meletus thinks himself more religiously competent than Socrates. This relation could
be symbolized through an order symbol “>”: “Meletus > Socrates” and could be read
as meaning “Meletus is more religiously competent than Socrates”. This assertion of
Socrates could be taken into consideration at its face value; even the way it is
asserted by Socrates shows exactly the opposite value of the sentence. Yet this
aspect would be proven by the rest of the dialog.

• from his own words, Euthyphro thinks he is more religiously competent than his
father, family, even most of the Athenians (E7 and E17, and as we shall see, E20 -
italics mine):
E7: I see, Socrates; it’s because you say that your spiritual sign visits you now and then. So he's brought this indictment against you as a religious innovator, and he's going to court to misrepresent you, knowing that such things are easily misrepresented before the public. Why, it's just the same with me: whenever I speak in the Assembly on religious matters and predict the future for them, they laugh at me as if I were crazy; and yet not one of my predictions has failed to come true. Even so, they always envy people like ourselves. We mustn't worry about them, though we must face up to them.

E17: ... That's why my father and other relatives are now upset with me, because I'm prosecuting him for murder on a murderer's behalf. According to them, he didn't even kill him. And even if he was definitely a killer, they say that, since the victim was a murderer, I shouldn't be troubled on such a fellow's behalf because it is unholy for a son to prosecute his father for murder. Little do they know, Socrates, of religious law about what is holy and unholy.

From the lines above, we could say that there is an order relation between Euthyphro and his own father, a relation concerning their ability to know what is right thing to do in religious matters, and we could symbolize this relation with a mathematical symbol: “>”.

Thus, from the sentences cited above we could write that: “Euthyphro > Euthyphro’s father” and read it as “Euthyphro is more religiously competent than Euthyphro’s father”.

Another relation that could be inferred from the text is the one that connects Euthyphro and Meletus (E5 and E19). This relation could be commonly inferred from the fact that Meletus is unknown to Euthyphro and from his lack of concern regarding Socrates lawsuit. All these could support Euthyphro’s superiority in religious matters (E7: “... Even so, they always envy people like ourselves. We mustn't worry about them, though we must face up to them.” and E9: “Well, I dare say it will come to nothing, Socrates. No doubt you'll handle your case with intelligence, as I think I shall handle mine.”)

If these interpretations are correct, we could have three relations or order:

(a) Meletus > Socrates
(b) Euthyphro > Euthyphro’s father
(c) Euthyphro > Meletus

From (a) and (c) it could easily be inferred (a transitivity relation of order, or a Barbara Syllogism) that

(d) Euthyphro > Socrates.

In attacking Euthyphro’s point of view and most of all his position as expert in the field of religious matters, Socrates (and Plato as the author of the dialog) seems to search for a way to induce doubt on the other important premise of the analogous reasoning. Let us take a look at the possibility that Socrates > Euthyphro. This proposition corroborated with
the one that could still be accepted referring to Meletus’ and Socrates’ competences in religious issues (Meletus > Socrates) and the one that is as well accepted as probable (Euthyphro > Meletus) will generate two different ordered relations between competencies in religious matters: (i) Socrates > Euthyphro > Meletus and (ii) Euthyphro > Meletus > Socrates. But the last one cannot be accepted, because Euthyphro has proven through the dialog lines that he is not as good as Socrates in matters of religion. Or, better said, Euthyphro cannot prove his expertise. Another consequence of the dialog could be that Euthyphro cannot prove that his prosecution on his father is a rightful one, and by that the argument by analogy would look different:

(i) The young (poet Meletus) is prosecuting an old man (Socrates) for impiety
(ii) The (relatively) young (prophet and soothsayer Euthyphro) is prosecuting an old man (Euthyphro’s father) for impiety.
(iii) Euthyphro’s indictment of his father is not a rightful one (or is not proven to be a rightful one).

[Therefore, (probably) Meletus indictment of Socrates is not a rightful one (or could be doubted to be a rightful one.]

All these conclusions are not explicit in the dialog, but it could organize what we could call the meta-purpose of the dialog in order to offer at least some doubt about Socrates indictment.

The Opening Stage

The Opening Stage in *Euthyphro* is a short one and takes into consideration the declared purpose of the dialog: that in which Euthyphro will prove his expertise in religious matters by offering a definition of piety (holiness) and impiety (unholiness). Socrates declares in S19 that he will become Euthyphro’s student in order to learn from him the true knowledge of religion and to be able to fight with Meletus in court. For this Socrates establishes the type of definition that he needs:

S19: ... So now, for goodness' sake, tell me what you were just maintaining you knew for sure. What sort of thing would you say that the pious and the impious are, whether in murder or in other matters? Isn't the holy itself the same as itself in every action? And conversely, isn't the unholy the exact opposite of the holy, in itself similar to itself, or possessed of a single character, in anything at all that is going to be unholy?

The rule requested is one that asks for the essence of the piety (holiness) and impiety (unholiness). To this Euthyphro agrees. He is now committed to give Socrates the true and essential definition of piety.
Before starting with a partial analysis of the dialog (a complete one is not possible for purposes of this article), let us look a bit on what Walton would consider to be an evaluation of an expert, and what kind of questions should be asked in order to test his expertise in a particular domain. Walton proposes six questions that should be answered before any appeal to expert opinion (Walton 2006: 88):

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?

We should try to consider these questions in Euthyphro’s situation. Question number 2 (the Field question) seems to be already proven by the text of the dialog from its first part, where he mentioned his speech in the Assembly (E7). In the same way we could concede an affirmative answer to the first question, based on the same evidence (he is credible, at least for some Athenians, because otherwise they would not accept him into the Assembly). Still, Athenians express their doubt about Euthyphro’s prophecies, even that these prophecies have never been proven wrong. The third question could be treated as involving either his predictions that are proved correct, or his prosecution of his own father that he pretends to be a pious act. In the second case, it is still to be proved. The fourth question seems to be out of doubt, because Euthyphro is entirely devoted to his profession, in such a way that he is capable of prosecuting his own father in order to not betray his own principles. There are some doubts that are attached to the question number 5, but not according to some other experts, but to the people in the Assembly, who aren’t on the same position as Euthyphro concerning some religious issues. The sixth question seems to be another one that must be answered in the course of the dialog.

Yet, taking into consideration all these six questions that will prove Euthyphro’s expertise in religious matters is not enough, in my opinion. Socrates’ investigation is grounded on another premise that is not explicit in the text. The kind of wisdom and expertise that Euthyphro should possess is one that consists of two kinds of knowledge: the knowledge how and the knowledge that, in other words, a practical and a theoretical knowledge. Euthyphro has offered until now only the proofs for the practical type of knowledge (he predicts the events to come on religious grounds, he pretends to know if an action is pious/holy or not). It is Socrates’ challenge that will test his theoretical knowledge as well. The only question here to ask is that if he will not be proven to be in possession of such kind of knowledge, then what kind of expert is he? Or his practical expertise will be removed from him if he will not be able to prove his theoretical knowledge? Or does this mean that his practical knowledge is worthless?
We will not answer to either of these questions, even if these questions could be used as a starting point for further developments in the analysis of this particular dialog. Instead we will proceed to analyze some of the Socratic (Platonic) argumentation.

The Argumentation Stage

At the line S20 Socrates asks the first question concerning the definition of piety and as the text shows, Euthyphro’s answer contains a sort of definition that is justified in his view by some general rule that he claims, and by some godly support from Zeus (italics mine):

E21: All right, I'd say that the holy is just what I'm doing now: prosecuting wrongdoers, whether in cases of murder or temple-robbery, or those guilty of any other such offence, be they one's father or mother e or anyone else whatever; and failing to prosecute is unholy. See how strong my evidence is, Socrates, that this is the law evidence I've already given others that my conduct was correct: one must not tolerate an impious man, no matter who he may happen to be. The very people who recognize Zeus as best and most righteous of the gods admit that he put his father in bonds for wrongfully gobbling up his children; and that that father in turn castrated his father for similar misdeeds. And yet they are angry with me, because I'm prosecuting my father as a wrongdoer. Thus, they contradict themselves in what they say about the gods and about me.

It seems that instead to offer an essential definition of piety, Euthyprho, who just agreed to the conditions of the dialog proposed by Socrates (E20), offers an ostensive definition of it. Yet this is a kind of the definition that Socrates will certainly not accept, for what Socrates wants is an intentional definition, one by genus proximum et differentiae specificae. However, a closer look at Euthyphro’s first definition of piety could give us some interesting perspectives.

Separating the text as it is customary in CT analysis will lead to the following logical propositions:

2: [because]: prosecuting wrongdoers, whether in cases of murder or temple-robbery, or those guilty of any other such offense, be they one's father or mother or anyone else whatever [is holy].

3: failing to prosecute is unholy.

4: [and] See how strong my evidence is, Socrates, that this is the law evidence I've already given others that my conduct was correct: one must not tolerate an impious man, no matter who he may happen to be.
5: The very people who recognize Zeus as best and most righteous of the gods admit that he put his father in bonds for wrongfully gobbling up his children;
6: and that that father in turn castrated his father for similar misdeeds.
7: and yet they are angry with me,
8: because I'm prosecuting my father as a wrongdoer.
9: Thus, they contradict themselves in what they say about the gods and about me.
1: [Therefore] I’d say that holy is just what I’m doing now.

Representing the argument according to Toulmin’s model could give us the following relations between propositions:

Is this argumentation correct? We cannot yet offer an affirmative answer. We should first analyze all the inferences that Euthyphro has made in this argumentation.

It is correct to say that the contraposition of the proposition “Holy is prosecuting the wrongdoers” is the proposition “Failing to prosecute the wrongdoers is unholy,” and Euthyphro assert them both in a correct manner. Likewise, it seems correct that from the following premises:

(i) Zeus is the best and most righteous of the gods
(ii) Zeus puts his father in bonds for wrongfully gobbling up his children.
(iii) Zeus’ father castrated his father for similar misdeeds. Together with the tacit premise:
(iv) [Any god who is the best and most righteous of the gods will do only pious things.] Will lead to the following conclusions:
(v) Zeus’ prosecution of his father is a pious thing.
(vi) Zeus’ father prosecution of his father is a pious thing.

Then, by analogy, from (v), (vi) and the evidence offered by the argument (8), will probably follow that Euthyphro is doing a pious thing:
(v) Zeus’ prosecution of his father is a pious thing.
(vi) Zeus’ father’s prosecution of his father is a pious thing.
(8) Euthyphro is prosecuting his own father for wrongdoing.
Therefore, (probably) Euthyphro is doing a pious thing.

We will stop with Euthyphro’s argument analysis here, pointing on some difficulties or errors that perhaps are already apparent.

First of all, the tacit premise (iv) is not necessarily true, even it is a necessary premise in order help the argument lead to the wanted conclusion. For how else could we infer that Zeus’ act is a pious one instead by admitting as a general premise that all that Zeus does is pious. So this premise is in the best case a challengeable one.

Another difficulty seems to be fact that the analogy presupposes a kind of essential similarity between Euthyphro and gods that should be proven: both Zeus and his father are in an essential way similar to Euthyphro. What could be this essential and relevant characteristic that they all share? Perhaps they all should be in the possession of the knowledge of what is holy, and all that they are doing should be pious as well. But this is not a thing that is evident by itself, and it was not proved at all. In fact, this is the very assertion that needs to be proved.

If these difficulties are overlooked, the argument that Euthyphro offers to follow the exact way of the Athenian thinking, leads to a contradiction. We cannot infer that Euthyphro is doing a pious thing (which seems to be naturally deduced from the stated premises) and to assert in the same time that Euthyphro is not doing a pious thing. Therefore, Euthyphro’s argumentation seems reasonable, at least in this respect.

Yet Socrates is not following this way of attacking his opponent’s position. Instead of going into such analysis, he seem to question the very truth of the stories about gods (S21, S22), preparing an attack on what will be an improved definition of piety. Euthyphro enters into Socrates’ trap, and overconfidently asserts his knowledge about the truth of what it is said about the gods: that the gods make war upon each other, and so on (S22, E23).
From this position, the argument offered by Euthyphro is attacked by attacking the Backing, because the Backing is what gives strength to the Warrant and it shares with the tacit premises from the counter-argumentation against Rebuttal the same ground on what gods are saying and doing.

Socrates’ first move is to dismiss Euthyphro’s first definition of piety, on the ground that it is not what he requested: an essential definition. In this Socrates is apparently right, but we could wonder why he didn’t make this move just after Euthyphro’s definition, and not to dwell into apparently digressive moves toward the reality of gods empyrean. In showing to Euthyphro that he, Socrates, is right in what he says, Socrates reminds him the premises to which Euthyphro agrees (§19 and §20). Yet the definition that Euthyphro first offers for piety does not seem to be an entirely ostensive definition at all, as we could see above. Because of Socrates remarks, Euthyphro accepts to offer a new definition for piety, one that is grounded on what gods think to be agreeable:

E28: In that case, what is agreeable to the gods is holy, and what is not agreeable to them is unholy.

Using the logic of categorical propositions the definition could look this way:

(1) “All that is agreeable to the gods is holy” (“A a H”, ‘a’ - Universal Affirmative) and

(2) “No thing that is not agreeable to the gods is unholy”. (“non-A a non-H”)

If the new definition of Euthyphro would be considered to be only the proposition (1), “All that is agreeable to gods is holy”, (“Every A is H”, or “A a H”), this could not by itself lead to the proposition “non-A is non-H” (“What is not agreeable to the gods is unholy”), because from “A a H” follows “A e non-H” (obversion), then “non-H e A” (conversion), “non-H a non-A” (obversion), and finally “non-A i non-H” (conversion by accident), a particular proposition, not a universal one. Therefore, Euthyphro cannot sustain a relation of identity between holiness and the property of being agreeable to the gods only on one proposition. A definition could be seen as an equivalence relation between the definiendum and definiens. What could be Socrates’ difficulty in accepting Euthyphro’s definition of piety? One of the reasons could be to test it for its adequacy (extensionally and intentionally). As could be seen by reading the dialog, Socrates finds out a break into the apparently correct definition. He tries to test the definition by dissociating the apparent unity of the gods in their relation with the holy/unholy things. He seems to anticipate the fallibility of the Euthyphro’s definition and starts his attack just like a chess-player. To all Socrates’ moves, except to the last one, Euthyphro had nothing to say but to confirm the argumentation. Yet, instead of accepting Socrates’ conclusion, his final objection to Socrates’ last claim is to ignore the entire argumentation with which he agree and to assert a special situation...
for what he had said in the first place, without offering any argumentation or evidence for his position:

E43: Yes Socrates, but I don’t think any of the gods do differ from one another on this point, at least; whoever has unjustly killed another should be punished.

Before going further with the analysis, let us take a closer look at Socrates’ argumentation:

Premise 1: All that is loved-by-the-gods is holy, and all that is hated-by-the-gods is unholy (considered true by Euthyphro).

If E28 said that “what is agreeable to the gods is holy, and what is not agreeable to them is unholy” and it was formalized as “Every A is H” and “Every non-A is non-H”, then for Socrates’ assertion to be logically equivalent with those offered by Euthyphro it is necessary to identify the expressions “is agreeable to gods” and “is not agreeable to gods” with the expressions “is loved-by-the-gods” and “is hated-by-the-gods.” This seems to represent no difficulty at all. Therefore, “A is H” is logically equivalent with “LBG is H”, where LBG symbolize “loved-by-the-gods” and “non-LBG is non-H” is logically equivalent with “non-A is non-H”, where “non-LBG” is logically equivalent with “H” (hated-by-the-gods).

Premise 2: All gods quarrel and have their differences and have mutual hostility among them. (This premise is considered true by Euthyphro and is confirmed by him in his 23rd line as an answer to Socrates question7).

What do the gods quarrel about? What does it mean that gods have quarrels? Socrates searches for the answer by using an analogy. He compares gods with men and identifies the issues on which men quarrel on the kind of things on which there is no common evaluating criteria: things that can be judged to be just or unjust, honorable or dishonorable, good or bad, and of course, holy or unholy. The things that could use objective criteria of evaluation (things that could be numbered, measured, weighted and so on) could not generate differences and therefore no quarrel is possible. We suggest here a possible formalization for such a situation:

• Let an agent Z₁ be committed to the proposition P: “X is holy” (a proposition that could be written as “Every part of X is holy” or “X a H”) and agent Z₂ be committed to the proposition Q: “X is not holy” (a proposition that could be written as “No part of X is holy”, X e H or by obversion “Every part of X is unholy,” X a non-H).

• the relation between these two propositions is one that could be interpreted as a contrariety relation between two universal categorical propositions.

• If there is an objective criterion to assert the truth of one of the propositions (as it happens in the case of measurement procedures stated by Socrates), the reasoning could follow one of those paths:

  a. XoH is true or XeH is true; XoH is true, then XeH is false
b. $X \neg H$ is true or $X e H$ is true; $X e H$ is true, then $X a H$ is false
   o But, if there could not be any second true premise in the argument, no conclusion could be reached, and therefore, the conflict cannot be resolved.
   o In this particular domain composed by things like those that can be judged as just, holy, unjust, unholy and so on, the conflict could not be resolved. Premise 2 could be written then as two universal categorical propositions: “$X$ is $H$” or “$X$ is not $H$” (“$X$ is non-$H$).

**Premise 3.** Gods love the things they regard as holy and hate the things they regard as unholy. The conclusions could simply result from *Barbara* syllogisms:

- [Major premise]: Everything that is holy is loved-by-the-gods - (H a LBG)
  
- Minor premise: X is holy
  
- Conclusion: X is loved-by-the-gods

- (X a LBG)

and

- [Major premise]: Everything that is unholy is hated-by-the-gods - (non-H a non-LBG)

- Minor premise: X is unholy

- Conclusion: X is hated-by-the-gods

- (X a non-LBG)

In each case, the major premise is implicit, because it was asserted a couple of lines before, and supports the conclusion. It follows from here that the same X is in the same time loved by the gods and hated by the gods. Socrates leads Euthyphro toward a contradiction, and thus is showing the inadequacy of the definition advanced by the soothsayer:

- “A thing or a person LBG is $H$” and “A thing or a person HBG is non-$H$”
- Gods quarrel and have their differences and there is mutual hostility amongst them.
- Quarrel is a phenomenon that could be observed (it is mentioned in the traditional books), and an explanation could be advanced for this phenomenon.
  - the reason for this could be a conflict that could not be resolved in a rational manner.
  - a rational manner could be one in which it could be possible to rationally decide between to opposed propositions (contraries or contradictories)
  - instead of rationally deciding which of the two is true, the proponents could simultaneously assert both of the propositions: therefore the causal mechanism for the existing quarrel could be a particular sort of difference of opinions.

Conducting his interventions in the conversation in such a way, Socrates leads Euthyphro toward the acceptance of the fact that he did not provide a correct definition for piety, because, as Socrates asserts in S42: “So then you haven’t answer my question, my admirable friend....”

As it is well known, the next set of questions and answers by which Socrates tries to find the right definition of piety/holiness are not conclusive in the way of producing a
reasonable definition. The dialog shows us an innovative Socrates and a confused religious expert in Euthyphro’s person. Socrates uses his logical and rhetorical skills and sets the ground for what could be seen as one of the hardest logical puzzle in Platonic dialogues. He starts with a surprise whether-question (S54):

S54: “..... is the holy loved by the gods because it is holy? Or is it holy because it is loved?

If Socrates agrees with Euthyphrfo’s statement that: “whatever all the gods hate is unholy and whatever all the gods love is holy”, then he would accept the fact that between holiness and “the love of all the gods” there is an equivalence relation:

X is holy = X is loved by all the gods

This equivalence relation could be written as conjunction of a double implication:

“X is holy” → ”X is loved by all the gods” and “X is loved by all the gods”→”X is holy”

Yet Socrates seems to transform conjunction into a disjunction and asks Euthyphro his whether-question:

“X is holy” → “X is loved by all the gods” or “X is loved by all the gods”→”X is holy”

The explanations that followed this question and the above mentioned Socratic puzzle (S59) could only confuse Euthyphro to the extent that he seems not to understand what he is supposed to do in the dialog:

E70: The trouble is, Socrates, that I can't tell you what I have in mind, because whatever we suggest keeps moving around somehow, and refuses to stay put where we established it.

And when Socrates himself tries to propose a definition for piety, the single definition that reaches the standard of defining the essence of a concept, defining holiness in closed relation with justice, Euthyphro somehow reasserts the statement that leads him into contradiction (S111–S114):

S111: Then, once again, it seems that this is what the holy is: what is loved by the gods.

E112: Absolutely.

S112: Well now, if you say that, can you wonder if you find that words won’t keep still for you, but walk about? And will you blame me as the Daedalus who makes them walk, when you're far more skilled than Daedalus yourself at making them go round in a circle? Don’t you notice that our account has come full circle back to the same point? You recall, no doubt, how we found earlier that what is holy and what is loved-by-the-gods were not the same, but different from each other? Don't you remember?
E113: Yes, I do.

S113: Then don't you realize that now you're equating holy with what the gods love? But that makes it identical with loved-by-the-gods, doesn't it?

E114: Indeed.

S114: So either our recent agreement wasn't sound; or else, if it was, our present suggestion is wrong.

The Concluding Stage

The Concluding Stage of the dialog appears suddenly by the unexpected abandon of the dialog by Euthyphro and by Socrates reply to this event:

E116: Some other time, Socrates: I’m hurrying somewhere just now, and it’s time for me to be off.

S116: What a way to behave, my friend, going off like this, and dashing the high hopes I held! I was hoping I'd learn from you what acts are holy and what are not, and so escape Meletus' indictment, by showing him that Euthyphro had made me an expert in religion, and that my ignorance no longer made me a freethinker or innovator on that subject: and also, of course, that I would live better for what remains of my life.

What Socrates is saying through this final line is obvious: Euthyphro failed to teach Socrates what is holy and what is not. We could ask: “why?” Is it because he does not possess the kind of knowledge that could enable him to explain and clearly define what lies at the core of any religious life: holiness/piety? What kind of knowledge is that? How could someone possess the knowledge of what something is, and still be unable to define it in a clear and distinct way? It seems that this possibility leads us to a contradiction. For only a sort of unity between different types of knowledge could lead to such a contradiction, and only this could be seen by Socrates as true knowledge. The other explanation is inadequate: it appears suddenly in the dialog and has no other motivation except the lack of direction that characterizes Euthyphro’s replies.

The consequences of Euthyphro’s failure are multiple:

- first, Socrates cannot escape Meletus’ indictment by showing him that Euthyphro made Socrates an expert in religion;
- second, Socrates remains ignorant and therefore a freethinker or innovator (Meletus’ accusation remains in place);
- third, Socrates will not live better for the rest of his life.

As the Socratic irony goes, and the argumentation scheme advanced in the first lines of this analysis, the meaning of the sentences above should be reconsidered:
If “Socrates > Euthyphro and Euthyphro > Meletus, Therefore: Socrates > Meletus,” then Meletus’ accusation seems to be undermined by his lack of understanding of the main reason that could support his accusation: he is probably unable to define piety as well, and therefore unable to understand if Socrates behavior is a pious or an impious one. As a consequence, he should drop his accusation on Socrates.

Therefore, the truth should be seen in the negation of the sentences mentioned by Socrates in S116 above:

• Socrates should escape Meletus’ indictment (if Euthyphro, who is a greater expert than Meletus in religious matters cannot define piety/holiness, neither Meletus can, and therefore his accusation is unjustified);
• Socrates is not an ignorant, but the true expert in religious matters (at least in the quest for defining piety/holiness, it is Socrates who proposed a better definition);
• Socrates should live his life in his own way, for he seems to be closer to a state of lack of ignorance that those involved or mentioned in the dialog.

3. Conclusions

It was not our intention to completely analyze the reasoned dialog, nor to use for the analysis only the logical apparatus available for Socrates and Plato. It is well known that for Plato (and Socrates as well) the truth is not to be found as a conclusion of an argumentative process (by διάνοια), but through the remembering the truth through an intellectual intuition (νόησις) (Dumitriu 1975 :107–123). As we have already mentioned, the complexity of the dialog needs more than an argumentative analysis. Yet, our purpose here is to emphasize the opportunities for a deeper philosophical and logical analysis offered by critical thinking and critical argumentation skills applied to reasoned dialogues. Some directions of analysis could be augmented with help of modal logic, some other with that of the logic of relations, dialogic logic or game theory.

However, these are directions for further investigations. In either case it appears as a necessity to read more from Plato’s works to get used with his pattern of thinking and with Socrates techniques of questioning and reasoning. Many comments on the text of the dialog are not intended to go beyond some traditional views on Plato’s philosophical dialogues. It was seen that some of the comments are either a step-by-step paraphrasing of the lines of the dialog, or a general survey of the ideas in the dialog, depending on author’s intentions. In our opinion, a critical analysis of the dialog is indispensable not only for widening the understanding of Plato’s dialogues, but to get in touch with some of the profound ideas of ancient philosophy in general, and to find new directions for philosophy in the future.
In this complex context, what could actually be inferred from this kind of analysis of the Platonic dialog is that some of the conclusions of the dialog could be obtained through logical reasoning. Thus, the inadequacy of Euthyphro’s definition of piety, the process of identifying the possible errors in definition, the possible attacks on Euthyphro’s definition and the relevance of the questions and answers are all logically and critical thinking evaluable. For this reason we could appreciate that critical thinking used for analyzing reasoned dialogues could offer some philosophical insights, not to be neglected to fully comprehend the meaning of a philosophical text of this kind. This kind of approach in analyzing reasoned dialogs could be successfully used for any other Platonic dialog and is, in our opinion, a useful tool for answering the questions concerning the possible meaning of the dialog.

Notes

1. The entire dialog is taken from an online classic English version of the dialog: The Dialogues of Plato. Translated into English with Analyses and Introductions by B. Jowett, M.A. in Five Volumes. 3rd edition revised and corrected (Oxford University Press, 1892). (10.05.2010) <http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/766>

2. Right parentheses are going to be used every time a proposition does not appear explicitly in the dialog; such a proposition could be inferred (is a conclusion) or is a hidden premise in an argument.


4. S15: Good heavens above! Well, Euthyphro, most people are obviously ignorant of where the right lies in such a case, since I can’t imagine any ordinary person taking that action. It must need someone pretty far advanced in wisdom.

5. S17: But heavens above, Euthyphro, do you think you have such exact knowledge of religion, of things holy and unholy? Is it so exact that in the circumstances you describe, you aren’t afraid that, by bringing your father to trial, you might prove guilty of unholy conduct yourself?

6. It is important to notice that love and hate are in strong opposition, like holy and unholy are; this sets the discussion in a spiritual context; see Aristotle, Topics, Book I, Part 15 for the relation between terms.

7. S 22: And do you believe that the gods actually make war upon one another? That they have terrible feuds and fights, and much more of the sort related by our poets, and depicted by our able painters, to adorn our temples especially the robe which is covered with such adornments, and gets carried up to the Acropolis at the great Panathenaean festival? Are we to say that those stories are true, Euthyphro?

   E 23: Not only those, Socrates, but as I was just saying, I'll explain to you many further points about religion, if you'd like, which I'm sure you'll be astonished to hear.

8. Let A= “what is agreeable to the gods”, H=“holy” , non-A (or ~A) = “what is not agreeable to the gods” and non-H (or ~H) = “unholy”. 

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9. Because Eutyphro’s definition of holiness/piety as was written in the relations (1) and (2), both propositions could be used as premises. Therefore, in order to assert a conclusion like “the things each of them regards as honorable, are also the things they love”, another premise is needed.

References


Countering Argument Stoppers

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Abstract

The subject of this paper is argument-stopping dispositions or techniques, and how to counter them to make room for reasoned discussions. I will start from a description of the mental dispositions the 18th-century philosopher Isaac Watts, saw as detrimental to rational debate. In his influential and for almost a century repeatedly reprinted major work Logick, he discerns several character traits the expression thereof in different ways will halt or impair debates or discussions. Watts personalizes these dispositions as the figures of e.g. the Credulous Man, the Man of Contradiction, the Dogmatist and the Skeptic.

I will give a theoretical interpretation of how expressions of such dispositions impair reasoned discussion, and then suggest how to effectively counter them. The theoretical grounds for this will be the argument theory first developed by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess coupled, and modern epistemological rhetoric.

Finally, I will reflect upon the presupposition that the dispositions always are detrimental and argue that there is proper room for attitudes of dogmatism, relativism and skepticism in rational reasoning as well.

Keywords: argument-stoppers, debate, argumentation, rhetoric, dogmatism, scepticism

Man: An argument isn't just contradiction.
Arguer: It can be.
Man: No it can't. An argument is a connected series of statements intended to establish a proposition.
Arguer: No it isn't.
Man: Yes it is! It's not just contradiction.
Arguer: Look, if I argue with you, I must take up a contrary position.
Man: Yes, but that's not just saying “No it isn't.”
Arguer: Yes it is!
Man: No it isn't!

This excerpt from the Monty Python sketch “The Argument Clinic”[1] illustrates one of the detrimental attitudes towards argumentation identified by Isaac Watts in his once standard textbook “Logic” (Watts 1811: 164). Watts would have called the Arguer of the
sketch a Contradictor, and he goes on to explain this and three other detrimental tempers or attitudes that he gives the personas of the Dogmatist, the Skeptic and the Credulous Man.

At Södertörn University in Stockholm (Sweden) we use these concepts when training students to be better arguers. In this paper I will first give a theoretical foundation of good arguments and good arguers. Thereafter I will explain how Watts’ attitudes may be problematized from that theoretical perspective by establishing how the attitudes or personas give rise to effective argument stopping techniques. Then I will present what strategies we teach our students to counter the argument-stoppers that persons expressing these attitudes will use, and indicate how such bad arguers can be made into positive contributors to a debate or discussion. Finally I will question my findings and argue for a view that these attitudes are not always bad, but, properly adopted, they are important to efficient debating.

Arne Naess’ theory of good argument

For purposes of my thesis, I will give a brief introduction into the concept of a good argument as understood by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess. The introduction is following the elaboration of Naess’ theory found in the book Argumentationsanalyse by Björnsson, Kihlbom and Ullholm from 2009. In Naess’ terminology an argument is one or more propositions supporting or undermining a conclusion, i.e. what is more common described as an argument’s premises. I will follow Naess and use argument as meaning the premise(s) and not involving the conclusion. According to Naess good arguments for conclusions have Force towards that conclusion and the better the argument the stronger its Force. The Force of an argument depends on two qualities, Beliefworthiness and Relevance. An argument is worthy of belief if, on balance, the reasons for accepting it are stronger than the reasons for rejecting it. The Beliefworthiness of an argument, or properly its propositional content, increases with the relative strength of reasons for accepting it compared to reasons for rejecting it. Imagine an old-fashioned balance with two cups, one for reasons for accepting and one cup for reasons for rejecting the proposition. If the acceptance-cup is heavier than the other the argument is sufficiently beliefworthy. An argument is Relevant if, give that it is true or maximally Beliefworthy, it increases the Beliefworthiness of the proposition it supports as a conclusion. The stronger this hypothetical increase would be, the stronger is the Relevance of the argument. Both Relevance and Beliefworthiness are in Neass theory relative to the person making the estimation. Thus an argument may have a strong Beliefworthiness for person A, due to her background knowledge, and at the same time weak Beliefworthiness for person B. Thus, a good argument has strong Force, due to both strong Beliefworthiness and strong relevance, all of them relative to person. Strictly speaking, this could be given a
mathematical formulation. If we assign a value between 0 and 1 to Beliefworthiness and Relevance respectively, and assuming that 0.5 equals the state where an argument is equally supported by reasons for accepting and rejecting it and neutral Relevance respectively, the simple multiplication of Force = Beliefworthiness x Relevance would represent the relations. Good argument would then be those with a force above 0.5. Just do not let the exactness of mathematical formulations give the impression that the factors are more than rough estimates in real argumentations.

Whenever we think of what to believe, alone or in a debate, Naess proposes that we identify the good arguments for or against the proposition we are discussing and by balancing the sides formulate a provisional judgment on the Beliefworthiness of the proposition. If the compound Force of the arguments for the proposition is stronger than the compound Force of the arguments against it then the proposition is acceptable to believe. And the belief should be stronger the stronger the Beliefworthiness of the proposition is. To conclude, debating is in Naess view about challenging your own and others’ judgments on the Force of arguments and make a balanced judgment of what is acceptable to believe, until further arguments may toss the balance.

The detrimental attitudes or personas

In this paper I will use these concepts to describe the attitudes more fully and how they affect the goals of argumentation. However, I will start by citing the original descriptions from Watts Logic. In this book Watts discusses four tempers or personalities that are detrimental to reasoning, the Contradictor, the Credulous person, the Dogmatist and the Skeptic, and he describes them as follows (Watts 1811:164-167):

The Contradictor

“The man of contradiction . . . stands ready to oppose everything that is said: He gives but a slight attention to the reasons of other men, from an inward and scornful presumption that they have no strength in them. When he reads or hears a discourse different from his own sentiments, he does not give himself leave to consider whether that discourse may be true; but employs all his powers immediately to confute it.”
The Credulous Person

“The credulous man is ready to receive everything for truth that has but a shadow of evidence; every new book that he reads, and every ingenious man with whom he converses, has power enough to draw him into the sentiments of the speaker or writer. He has so much complaisance in him, or weakness of soul, that he is ready to resign his own opinion to the first objection which he hears, and to receive any sentiments of another that are asserted with a positive air and much assurance. Thus he is under a kind of necessity, through the indulgence of this credulous humour, either to be often changing his opinion, or to believe inconsistencies.”

The Dogmatist

“By what means so ever the dogmatist came by his opinions, whether by his senses or by his fancy, his education or his own reading, yet he believed them all with the same assurance that he does a mathematical truth; he has scarce any mere probabilities that belong to him; everything with him is certain and infallible; every punctilio in religion is an article of his faith; and he answers all manner of objections by a sovereign contempt. Persons of this temper are seldom to be convinced of any mistake: A full assurance of their own notions makes all the difficulties on their own side vanish so entirely, that they think every point of their belief is written as with sunbeams, and wonder any one should find a difficulty in it. They are amazed that learned men should make a controversy of what is to them so perspicuous and indubitable.”

The Skeptic

“Skepticism is a contrary prejudice. The dogmatist is sure of every thing, and the skeptic believes nothing. Perhaps he has found himself often mistaken in matters of which he thought himself well assured in his younger days, and therefore he is afraid to give his assent to any thing again. He sees so much shew of reason for every opinion, and so many objections also arising against every doctrine, that he is ready to throw off the belief of everything : He renounces at once the pursuit of truth, and contents himself to say, there is nothing certain.”

Richard Feldman has suggested that Watts’ list should be amended with a persona or temper called the Relativist (Feldman 1999: 13). In my experience many students use relativistic argument stoppers and I will therefore include a Relativist among the personas discussed.
The Relativist

The Relativist holds that what is worth believing for you will depend only on your own point of view, and therefore other persons’ views do not enter into the reasoning of the Relativist. She will be fully content to draw her own conclusions and hold them to be valid only for herself.

How these attitudes stop argumentation

Naess’ theory of a good argument will enable us to have a deeper look into the tempers and explain how they are detrimental to debate or discussion. First I will connect the tempers to their respective ways of stopping arguments. Argument stoppers are phrases used to opt out of an argument, make it halt or severely diminish its efficiency. If we put a procedural view on debates the argument stoppers are those maneuvers or speech-acts that will or at least will aim at stopping the process or part of it or as in the case of the Contradictor of the sketch lead it into an infinite regress of “Yes it is!” and “No it isn´t!”.

In fact, the contradictor effectively stops the argument from moving on towards goals such as finding out the truth or reaching agreement. By never actually replying to the substance of the argument she confronts, but instead only negating it, the Contradictor either makes the other part to turn into a Contradictor herself as displayed in the sketch or to leave the discussion.

The Credulous person stops an argument by making statements such as “I definitely agree,” “You are absolutely right there” or any other speech-act that pose no objection or call the other side’s views into question. This may be due to genuine credulity or more strategically, merely played credulity. As a strategy, I remember using it as an adolescent against my parents when they wanted to discuss my doings. By agreeing in words, though not in mind, to whatever they said, arguments were cut short.

The Dogmatist will stop arguments with statements such as “this is how it is”, “The truth is that ...” Since the dogmatist sees no point in discussing what she is already sure of, she will stop any questioning or counter-argumentation by using her authority and simply declare what is to be believed on the matter. Objections will be cut short with phrases such as “No, no, no that is all wrong, listen to me now...”

The Skeptic will stop argument by always demanding more evidence or better evidence or simply dismiss whatever evidence there is as insufficient making statements such as “No, that won’t do, I am not convinced.” She may also make the argument go into a regress by always questioning the grounds given for any argument, and then question the grounds for those grounds and so on. The argument will stop because the Skeptic will never admit that
any argument has any force, and her opponent will be pinned down trying to reach ever higher demands on the quality of her proofs.

The Relativist sees no point in accommodating others views into her own reasoning and cannot understand why her views would be interesting to any other person. She will regularly dismiss discussion of arguments by saying “That is your truth” or “Everyone has her own opinion.” A relativist often refers to the liberties of speech and thought whenever being asked to stand up for her views in debate, thereby waiving any duties to give grounds for her opinions. By making arguments relative to the person expressing them she will stop arguments from clashing or even support views at all.

Why these attitudes are detrimental to reasoned discussion

The Contradictor is detrimental to good debate because she will never engage in critical evaluation of any arguments qualities. Superficially it will seem as if she contests the beliefworthiness of the arguments given, but in fact she will not give any argument for an argument lacking (or having) beliefworthiness. Instead, she will simply negate the argument or position given and state the negation as her position or counter-argument. And according to Naess view this does not amount to arguing at all since argumentation should consist in investigating the beliefworthiness and relevance of arguments.

The Credulous person also fails to take beliefworthiness seriously. She will not test or investigate that quality but instead of negating it she will accept any argument as fully beliefworthy, and thereby make any serious investigation superfluous. It is even possible that a credulous person will move from believing an argument to be beliefworthy to accepting its negation as fully beliefworthy without any judgment going on, she will only copy the view of the person discussing with her. It might even be so that a credulous person may hold two contradictory views, such as an argument and its negation, both to be full worthy of belief at the same time and have no inclination to get out of that state.

The Dogmatist makes investigation into the qualities of arguments difficult by never contesting neither the Beliefworthinesss nor the relevance of her arguments and therefore holds her conclusions to be Beliefworthy for her and so they should be for everyone else to. She will not engage in discussion on the qualities of her argument since the matter is already sufficiently settled Instead, she will demonstrate the quality of her argument to her listeners. There will therefore be no need for a dialog or clash of views since everything that is necessary from the point of view of the Dogmatist is that others pay attention to her demonstrations of her conclusion, or if time is short, simply accept her conclusions to be Beliefworthy.
The Skeptic will avoid to ever reach the point where she has to judge arguments as Beliefworthy or Relevant. She will do this by questioning the grounds for Beliefworthiness, and/or Relevance without ever in advance give away when her standards of proof or good argument are met. And no matter how probable arguments are made by evidence, no matter how well relevance is established, her hidden standards will not be met. She will always raise her standards whenever needed. Any argument discussed will therefore fail to be good or good enough. No conclusion will consequently be established, since no argument will on balance give it sufficient support.

The Relativist is not helpful to a discussion because she will fail to engage in a common investigation into the Beliefworthiness or Relevance of any argument. She will avoid this because she holds the force of evidence to be relative to persons. What may seem worthy of belief to you may on the same grounds fail to do so to her. Even if you agree that some fact is well established to both of you, the relativist may hold it to be of deepest relevance to a conclusion and at the same time accept that you cannot see any connection between the fact and the purported conclusion. So what she sees as a highly relevant argument, you may even fail to see as an argument. And for the relativist, this is not problematic, only a good reason not to engage in discussion with others. She will not feel compelled to state her grounds for having contrary views to yours and has no genuine interest in your grounds for your views. The relativist will therefore regularly avoid investigations with others into the Beliefworthiness or Relevance of arguments.

Turning an argument stopper into a discussion partner

If the personas described above are problematic to discussion, a simple way of avoiding the problem is to exclude any Contradictor, Skeptic, Dogmatist, Relativist or Credulous person from discussions and only to debate with reasonable arguers who are not tempted to stop arguments. This solution is possible but has a major flaw. Discussions are better if more perspectives and views are allowed to meet and contribute to problem solving or curiosity satisfaction. Perhaps the most important contributions to the discussion you are involved in are hidden within an argument-stopper. It is therefore good to be able to turn an argument stopper into a contributing debater or discussion partner. I will therefore in this section suggest how to do this. The methods are not guaranteed to work, but I have used them in practice with results sufficient to promote them. So, how may one turn a Credulous person into a reasonable discussant? I would propose that a credulous person is met with a strategy called didactic questioning.

Dialectic questioning is a method to listen with a distinctive focus on learning another person’s views. The questioning takes place between an interviewer and a respondent. It is a way for the interviewer of interviewing the respondent on her standpoint and her
balanced grounds for having that standpoint. The method is deliberately friendly, non-aggressive and non-conflicting. The interviewer never counters the views met, or even insinuates disbelief. The method consists of five stages that may be revisited during the interview. The first stage is the detection of standpoint. The interviewer will give the respondent freedom to express a standpoint on any subject or a subject of her choice. When the respondent starts to express a standpoint the interviewer will check if the standpoint is a normative or factual standpoint. If normative she will help the respondent to separate any problem description from the proposed solution (the standpoint). When a preliminary formulation of the standpoint is found, the interviewer will determine if it is clear enough, if not she will ask the respondent to clarify vague or ambiguous words or phrases. If the standpoint is a practical statement purporting to solve a problem, she will make sure that it is sufficiently clear who is supposed to do something to whom, what is to be done, how it is to be done, when is it to be done and where it should be done.

The interviewer will avoid putting words into the mouth of the respondent. Instead she will often ask if she has understood the respondent correctly and ask the respondent to confirm what has been stated. At the end of the first stage of the dialectical questioning the interviewer should have a clear and confirmed standpoint accurately depicting the view of the respondent.

The second stage consists in collection of pro-arguments. A pro-argument is a positive reason that the respondent have for holding the standpoint to be Beliefworthy. The interviewer should ask for the respondents best arguments and be prepared to follow up every given pro-argument with questions concerning clarity, and the respondents grounds for holding the arguments to be Beliefworthy arguments and relevant to the conclusion. The default questions may be “why do you find the argument worthy of belief?” and “why do you think that the argument make the conclusion more probable?” It is however much better if these questions are phrased using the gathered knowledge about the respondents standpoint and arguments so that the questions repeats the wordings from the standpoint and argument. If, for example, the standpoint concerns abortion and the respondent argues that women’s right to abortion must be fully accepted legally, and her argument is that every human has a right to her body, then the respondents’ grounds for the arguments’ Beliefworthiness may be found if the interviewer asks “why do you believe that every human has the right to her own body?” The grounds for Relevance may be found with a question such as “why does the right to your body make it more reasonable to legalize abortion?” If the respondent claims not to know really why she finds an argument compelling the interviewer may assist by suggesting that evidence may be drawn from the respondents’ own experiences, or from other persons’ experiences, books, films etc. that she has encountered, or if she is aware of any scientific work supporting her arguments, either its Beliefworthiness or relevance. Every argument given should be followed up and
the interviewer should repeatedly give feedback on how she understands the arguments and their relations to evidence and conclusion in order for the respondent to feel that the interviewer truly wishes to understand the grounds for her standpoint. The aim of the second stage is that the interviewer has a corroborated picture of the respondent’s pro-arguments and her reasons for judging these arguments good.

The third stage searches for background information on how the standpoint has been formed in the respondent. It begins by asking questions about when and under what circumstances the respondent began to believe the standpoint. Thereafter the interviewer asks the respondent consider herself an authority in the area, to which the standpoint belongs, and how often she discusses the standpoint with others and if she feels that people then tend to agree with her on the matter. The aim of this phase is to give the interviewer a picture of the ethos of the respondent concerning the standpoint in question and feed this picture back to the respondent for confirmation. The stage ends by the interviewer asking the respondent if she has met with persons not sharing her view.

That last question of the third stage will lead the interviewer to the fourth stage – the collection of counter-arguments and their rebuttals. A counter-argument is an argument that the respondent has encountered against her standpoint or that the respondent imagines possible that others may have as reasons against her standpoint. A rebuttal is the respondent’s reason for regarding the counter-argument to be weak, either lacking sufficient Believeworthiness or Relevance. This stage is similar to the second stage and consists of asking for the best counter-arguments, encourage the respondent to rebut them or judge them as good. If the respondent rebuts an argument the interviewer should make clear if the respondent finds the argument flawed because of lacking Believeworthiness or Relevance or both. If the respondent has difficulties she may be assisted by as specific and helpful questions as possible, resembling those used to activate the respondent’s grounds for accepting the pro-arguments in the second stage as good. It is important that the interviewer avoids inventing counter-arguments for the respondent to rebut. The aim of the stage is to capture the weaknesses of the standpoint such as conceived by the respondent.

Finally, the fifth stage consists of the interviewer repeating the standpoint, pro-arguments, ethos-factors, counterarguments and rebuttals of the respondent for a final check that she has accurately understood the position and arguments of the respondent. The aim of the stage is naturally to resolve any misunderstandings not yet detected, and let the respondent know that the interviewer has gotten her position right. The interviewer concludes the didactic questioning by thanking the respondent for sharing her views.
Properly conducted, the didactic questioning gives the interviewer a useful and full picture of how the respondent thinks and argues concerning the standpoint examined. It also gives the respondent a good possibility to structure her thinking on the matter. Later the interviewer may use the information gathered to constructively criticize the respondent’s standpoint or to judge if any argument of the respondent is good enough to incorporate into the interviewers own deliberation on the matter, or function as a case-study of how people think on an issue. This may also be useful for rhetorical purposes, as a part of the examination of the rhetorical situation before trying to resolve a rhetorical problem. But these later uses of the information gathered are no part of the didactic questioning.

After this long digression, let us return to the Credulous person. My suggestion was that she should be faced with a didactic questioning. Since the Credulous person needs to face the view of another person in order to copy it, the didactic questioning is a useful counter-strategy. The interviewer will not hand the credulous person any views for her to copy or uncritically adopt and consequently makes credulity an impossible strategy. The success is not guaranteed, the credulous person may be silent in lack of a view to copy or may copy a view she has already adopted previously, but surprisingly many times the method makes credulous persons think for themselves, thereby leaving their credulity and taking the first step towards being a contributing discussant. Especially stages two and four are useful for making the credulous person reflect critically on views she has adopted earlier without reflection.

The dogmatist may be countered in a more direct way. The problem with the dogmatist is that she takes her views for granted and does not listen to objections. A strategy that has been fairly successful in previous encounters with a dogmatist is to ask her for her best counter-arguments against her standpoint. A good starter is “what would be a good reason to reject your standpoint for you?” The question does not imply that there is a good argument against the standpoint, it only introduces the possibility. But if answered it gives us a way of starting the dogmatist to challenge her own views. This is effectively the fourth stage of the didactic questioning, and it works because the usual way of the dogmatist is demonstration, in which counter-arguments have no place. By asking specifically for the behavioral pattern is broken and the dogmatist may start to find weaknesses in her own views. It is important that the weaknesses are not suggested to her but that room is given for the dogmatist to start assessing the qualities of her own views according to her own standards. This may not work; the dogmatist may simply refuse the idea that her views may have good or interesting counter-arguments directed towards them, and thus remain outside the realm of reasonable discussion. But when the strategy works the dogmatist will stop being dogmatic and open up first for self-criticism and then for constructive criticism from others.
The Skeptic has no problem finding flaws in her or others arguments; she has a rebuttal for everything. The most useful strategy I have to propose is to reverse the question given to the dogmatist and ask for what the Skeptic would count as a sufficient argument to accept a standpoint. This works because the strategy of skepticism uses the hidden standards of proof, that as long as they are hidden always may be elevated to a higher more unreachable level. But if the Skeptic accepts publicly a standard to be met, then she is in the game of debating. Then we may either try to meet her standards or discuss whether they are reasonable. Either way the Skeptic will eventually start contributing to the discussion.

The Contradictor may best be met with the same strategy of didactic questioning as the Credulous person. Dialectic questioning will work against the contradictor as well as the Credulous person because both these argument stopper strategies need the view of another person, in the first case a view to copy or adopt, in the second case a view to negate or contradict. If the Contradictor is left without a view to contradict and given the freedom to expand her own views and the non-aggressive push from the didactic interviewer she may start to develop a standpoint of her own with arguments supporting her view. She may of course instead remain silent and refuse to engage in the questioning, but it offers a possible way out of the contradictor strategy that has proven successful often enough for me to propose it. I have met students that believed themselves to be thinking critically when applying the strategy of the Contradictor. After being interviewed didactically they reached the conclusion that in order to think critically you first have to think for yourself.

I would finally suggest the very same remedy for the Relativist. If the Relativist is met with didactic questioning she may of course refuse to play along as it from her point of view is meaningless for the interviewer to gather information only relevant to the relativist herself. The process of didactic questioning, especially the structuring of the arguments and the conscious examination of the grounds for judging an argument - good or bad - may nevertheless trigger the relativist into not only sharing her views with the interviewer, but responding to the curiosity shown towards her views with a curiosity towards other people’s views, especially the interviewer’s views. This reciprocal curiosity may be the motivating ground that makes the Relativist abandon the argument stopper strategy and willingly join in a reasoned debate examining the qualities of arguments.

**How these attitudes contribute to debate**

So far I have presented the personas of Watts and given them a theoretical footing as well as described counter strategies that have proven useful in my own teaching experience. In this concluding section of the paper I would like to think critically about the assumption of
Watts that I have tried to develop in more modern theoretical form. Specifically I would like to question that the personas are always detrimental to debate and reasoned discussion. I will argue that this presupposition is partly wrong, that there are useful aspects of all the detrimental personas that we have examined so far, and that a complete success for the counter strategies proposed in this paper may be a very bad thing for debate and discussion. So let me turn to the advantages of dogmatism, credulity, skepticism, relativism and contradiction from a perspective of critical thinking and reasoned debate.

I would propose that a certain amount of *credulity* is useful in a debater since it gives her the possibility to wait with her criticism until she more fully has understood the position she is countering. Many debaters are too quick to find flaws in opposing views, often committing them to attacks on views no one really holds. This fallacious move would be balanced by a doses of credulity, that will allow you to, for the sake of a good discussion, copy the opposing view long enough to make it feel your own. I have always found a great deal of wisdom in Bertrand Russell’s recommendation “In studying . . . the right attitude is . . . a kind of hypothetical sympathy, until it is possible to know what it feels like to believe in his theories, and only then a revival of the critical attitude, which should resemble, as far as possible, the state of mind of a person abandoning opinions which he has hitherto held” (Russel 1999: 39). If we may at the beginning of a discussion adopt the stance of the Credulous person I believe many discussions would be much more fruitful.

I also believe there is room for a touch of *dogmatism* in a good debater. The reason why is that many debaters try to balance their views as the debate goes along and when met with an opponent that skillfully presents her arguments against their own view, perhaps less skillfully presented, they tend to give in before they should. A more dogmatic stance would not only give them more time to reflect, but would also require more than skillful presentation from the opponent, and force her to concentrate on really good arguments as the means of persuasion.

The *Contradictor* has at least two features that I would miss if she were removed from the repertoire of debaters. Firstly, to contradict is to formulate the opposing view, and while some views are easily negated others may be negated in a number of different, and differently interesting ways. Secondly the contradiction forces us to some extent to formulate arguments for our views, and thus makes dogmatism less possible as a full time strategy. So especially in a debate where a Dogmatist is present the Contradictor will counterbalance this negative influence by questioning the authorative stance of the Dogmatist.

In a similar vein the Skeptic is even more useful. Many of us with experiences from departments of philosophy remember with warmth that one skeptic philosopher that
hardly ever published anything. Instead, she would function as the wall you tried to climb. Going to the Skeptic is a way to force yourself to see the weaknesses in your reasoning, to collect enough courage to kill your darling arguments and to sharpen your presentation. You will never persuade the Skeptic, but she will make it much easier to persuade others with the good arguments that you have sharpened in a joint venture with the Skeptic. I would suggest that these Sceptics are best seen as active co-writers of many good papers and their contribution to preparing good debaters is not to be underestimated.

Finally I would like to comment on the relativist contribution to good discussion. The Relativist is useful because she will always remind us that there is more than one perspective from which to view a matter. She will also make it difficult for us to over generalize and propose simplified principles. In short she will make us debate with greater sensitivity to the different perspectives that fruitfully may be used to deepen the understanding concerning the matter of discussion, putting emphasis on the situational in every discussion. This will make us better at examining the strength of arguments in relation to the specific situation and it will make us better at adapting our arguments to different persons with whom we are discussing.

I would also like to comment on the difference between a persona and an attitude. Perhaps many of the readers would like to object to the idea that persons are Dogmatists or Relativists, these are merely attitudes that may be expressed in a situation and not integrated parts of character as the use of the word persona would suggest. I think that it is a good point to make and would like to elaborate on it. Firstly, I would emphasize that many students I have met have by some reason acquired one of these attitudes and uses it stereotypically in all or almost all discussions in which they take part. Persons that have such habits are not destined to ever retain the attitude. In fact, I suggest in this paper how to change them. However, whenever an argument stopping attitude is used as the only way of dealing with argumentations I think it useful to describe them in terms of personas, contingent but stable. These personas are not likely to be the effect of a conscious choice of the persons that have adopted them, it is more like a habit they grown into. And as I have suggested I think debate and discussion will be better if persons with these stable argument stopping strategies are helped to argue in a more reasoned way.

Moreover, I believe that some persons use these argument stoppers in a planned way in order to stop discussions. Debates and discussions may be manipulated by persons that have understood the mechanisms of argument-stopping techniques and who will use them propagandistically or at least with the intension to avoid reaching the goals of reasoned discussion.

Thirdly, I would like to propose to the trained debater that she, like the propagandist, will learn the strategies of the argument-stopping attitudes. However, she should not use them
propagandistically, but instead follow the ways indicated above to enhance the efficiency of discussion by applying the techniques, especially of credulity, skepticism and dogmatism in situation where this will contribute to reasoned debate.

Conclusions

I have argued that the attitudes of the Dogmatist, the Skeptic, the Credulous person and the Contradictor presented by Watts and extended with the Relativist are mainly detrimental to debate. They are detrimental to debate whenever they are used stereotypically or propagandistically. Used in these ways the attitudes will diminish possibilities of a common inquiry into the qualities of arguments and the proper assessment of their balanced strength. It will then be impossible or at least much more difficult to reach goals of argumentation such as reaching agreement, making a well informed decision or satisfying one’s curiosity. These detrimental uses will often be efficiently handled by adopting the counter-strategies that I have described, including the method of didactic questioning.

There is, however, also important to make room for a positive use of these attitudes. I have argued that in the right situation and adopted properly, these attitudes will not stop argumentation or diminish the chances of reaching goals of reasoned debate, but paradoxically perhaps, improve discussion and debate. I will therefore suggest the reader to broaden her debate repertoire with these techniques or strategies. In my view the most fruitful ones to master are the Dogmatist, the Credulous person and the Skeptic. If they are properly used they will both improve the reader’s own debating skills as well as her contribution to reaching common goals of argumentation.

Note

[1] The full text of the Monty Python sketch is available online (21. 06. 2010) at <http://www.mindspring.com/~mfpatton/sketch.htm>

References


Teaching Argumentation in Election Year: 

a Hungarian Pilot Project

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Abstract

Modern theories of argumentation have developed powerful tools for the analysis, reconstruction, and evaluation of natural-language arguments. Coming from various disciplines, including rhetoric, speech-communication, logic, linguistics, and philosophy, the theoretical frameworks investigated structural and functional properties of argumentative utterances. The impressive theoretical developments, however, require a didactic transposition to become part and parcel of general university education. In this transposition process, attention has to be paid not only to theoretical issues, but also to “local” factors, including the education system, prior knowledge of the students, their cultural background, etc. To map out the role of various factors was the motivation behind the experimental course developed and taught for 1st year M.A. students in Communication Studies at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics (BME). The article discusses the background, the theoretical motivation, the didactical challenges, the structure, and the outcomes of the course.

Keywords: teaching argumentation, political argumentation, pragma-dialectical approach, reflective thinking, strategic maneuvering

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1. The background

Unlike most Communication B.A. or M.A. degrees in Hungary, the BME offers specific courses on argumentation theory for both Bachelor and Master students. Some of these courses are built into the specialization tiers of both degrees (for B.A. students specializing in “Argumentation analysis,” and M.A. students specializing in “Argumentation planning”). But some courses are general, compulsory courses. These include an Informal and Formal Logic course for B.A. students and a “Ways of arguing, ways of analyzing” course for M.A. students. It is this last mentioned course will be discussed in detail.

The first M.A. students started their training in the 2009/2010 academic year, and due to curricular reforms, the last mentioned course was relocated to the Spring Semester. As instructor of the course, my aim was to attempt an integrative course, capable of motivating and engaging about 90 students in the weekly 4-hour sessions, providing a general overview of theories of argumentation, supplying the students with basic analytical tools, and enabling them to improve their own argumentative skills. These tasks had to be accomplished with a widely heterogeneous group, where some students have never been exposed to explicit instruction on argumentation (about 30 %), while others have already taken up special electives on numerous courses in argumentation theory (approx. 20 %), or did argumentation-related student-research projects. This heterogeneity meant that while for some students familiarizing themselves with the basic concepts of argumentation already was an intellectually demanding task, others wanted to learn about the nitty-gritty details of reconstruction, already familiar with basic tenets of informal logicians, or pragma-dialecticians. A significant part of the student population (about 50 %) had – usually a single – introductory course in their B.A. training, but for some it was logic, for others rhetoric, depending on the institution they received their first degree from.

A note is in order here, not only to provide a background to the course, but also to the status of argumentation theory in Hungary. Both Logic and Rhetoric, as generally understood, provide only a partial overlap with argumentation theory. Rhetoric in Hungary – as the textbooks in Hungarian also show – is primarily associated with “classical” rhetoric, with many historical details but few modern insights – even if more contemporary work is included, it is generally from the domain of rhetoric overlapping with literary theory and criticism, and is not stressing post-Perelman rhetorical theory and the branches that have interacted fruitfully with argumentation theory (Eemer and Houtlosser 2002).

As for logic, argumentation theory in Hungary – in an institutionalized didactical setting – has few connections to linguistics communities (with a few individual exceptions, like László Komlósy), but is strongly connected to communities of philosophers and logicians. Most present-day logic courses follow the respectable tradition of Hungarian mathematical logicians, with a sound textbook-tradition and “best-practice” teaching methods (Ruzsa.
and Máté 1997). Developing the courses so as to cover as much of the formalism of modern logic as is possible, is a legitimate didactical aim, but very different from developing tools for the appreciation of natural language arguments, the main field of study for argumentation theory. At the moment, while the traditional logical curricula still dominate, some courses under the rubric “Logic” started to teach aspects of argumentation theory. They usually develop the functional use of the formalism of logic to teach robust reconstructive skills (as in the courses developed by Zsófia Zvolenszky, ELTE), or teach didactically successful courses that uses a patchwork of theories and insights, to provide a useful toolkit in a one-semester introductory course – most symbolic of this tradition are the early textbooks by Zentai (1998, 1999).

To finish the note, it seems that at present the approaches to logic or rhetoric that would ease the M.A. level teaching of argumentation are mostly absent from university curricula and from the Hungarian textbook tradition. For this reason, the course was introduced through a rough dichotomy of “persuasion” and “justification,” both conforming to and growing out of the insights students had if they learned either rhetoric or logic previously.

The student group was not only mixed with respect to prior knowledge of the field, but also with respect to general attitudes towards learning in general, and the roles they associated with university teaching and learning. This – largely motivational – heterogeneity was explicitly addressed in class and even informed the evaluation criteria.

2. Theoretical motivation and didactical challenges

A number of distinct elements of the theoretical motivation behind the pilot course need to be introduced. The scholarly ambition was doubtless the putting together and structuring of the teaching material, both to develop analytical skills in the students, and to provide scaffolding for future successful argumentative performances. Due to the above described heterogeneity of the students’ previous education, I opted for an introduction to argumentation as an activity that can be analyzed with recourse to both persuasiveness (the “rhetorical” and psychological dimension) and to justification (the “logical” and epistemic dimension, leading to dialectical models). This provided entry-points for all subgroups of students discussed above. Starting with a very general notion of argument, I first introduced the “justificatory” dimension, with exercises on conclusion-premise identification, and argument reconstruction. Once an adequate level of understanding has been reached, the persuasive dimension has been brought in, mostly utilizing the modern understanding of strategic maneuvering as discussed in Eemeren and Houtlosser (2009). This enriching of the theoretical apparatus coincided with more and more exercises on production (as opposed to analysis) of arguments. The justificatory aspects, therefore, were connected more with the analysis, while the persuasive dimension more with the
production of argumentation. As peer-critique was used to evaluate the justificatory power of arguments produced by students in this second stage, the functional application of justificatory issues kept the course content of the first half-semester on the agenda of the course.33

The pilot course, however, was also challenging didactically. The theoretical motivation here amounted to the design of specific learning environments that were seen as conducive to both developing analytical skills and argumentative performance. In a group of 89 students, however, finding the time and the suitable feedback-mechanisms for individual or small-group argumentative performances required careful mixing of various approaches to classroom management.

Our department of Philosophy and History of Science has been experimenting with the use of training- and coaching-style dissemination methods in university courses of substantial class-sizes (from 25 to 90 people). Previous courses have shown that it is possible to use peers as critics and scaffold individual argumentative performance without direct intervention from the teacher.34 Furthermore motivational clarifications and feedback were found beneficial for a range of courses. Student feedback from previous years reinforced the general didactical intuition that most students find little help in the current educational system to formulate their expectations about their training. It is difficult for most to see their actions as conforming to university curricular expectations and at the same time to their own goals and aims. To ameliorate this, motivational elements were discussed both in frontally coordinated discussions concerning course aims and objectives at the beginning of the course, and in meta-level reflection tasks on general progress, on the understanding of the focus of the exercises, and on the actual grading system of the course (to be discussed below).

Meta-level reflection was not only used for motivational purposes. Training and coaching techniques often involve such reflective exercises, and these have for years been included in some of our regular university courses. As improving argumentative performance is influenced by framing-effects, reflection on and at times alteration of individual habits of participation in argumentative situations is a key element of successful improvement of the argument-production of students. Specific meta-level reflection was elicited via didactical interventions that specified a primary goal of an exercise. For example, the

33 As the course aims explicitly addressed the status of the teaching material, and described it as a toolbox, the above course-constitution was framed as first learning about the tools, and later learning about their uses.

34 Tihamér Margitay in many courses used stable working-partners as sources of feedback with noteworthy development in individual performances, and this suggests that the “natural” confirmation-bias towards one’s own position and the similarly robust critical attitude towards other’s position can be used as a didactical resource.
explicit goal was specified as the preparation of a persuasively argued 3-minute speech in small groups, based on the arguments in a specific individual home-assignment. These activities were, however, further used for reflection as a secondary goal. To continue the example, after a set of 3 minute speeches and a frontally coordinated discussion of these, the students were asked to fill in a questionnaire on their argumentative performance during the composition phase of the exercise (these types of questionnaires were first developed by János Tanács). This way, the unregulated argumentative activities during the group-work (while working to produce an argumentative product) could be reflected upon. An evaluation of products (homework assignments, small speeches, etc.), and of activities (coordinating group-works, solving emerging conflicts) provided students with insights on the functional adequacy of their argumentative performances in the given situation. This was used in order to help students pick individualized learning goals. (The course did not require all students to set such individualized learning goals, only provided time-slots to formulate these and encouraged the students to set such goals. 35)

A further didactic challenge to address was the repeated request of the students to make courses more life-like, to help improve so-called “real-life skills.” Students were well put to the test on this point, as the course-activities were channeled into a publicly visible internet-site, with weekly new posts appearing on a running election. These posts were assessed by the community (with each home-assignment receiving approx. 3. peer-responses) and the exemplary home-assignments, were selected each week by two groups of judges. This put the class in a precarious situation: the best products became public, and both the production and the evaluation of the class-work was in the hands of the students.

3. The low-cost and high-reward phases of the course

Home-assignments in the first half of the semester were “exploratory,” due to the heterogeneous prior education, and they were not assigned first and foremost to practice the content covered in class, but rather to enable students to come to class with an attempted solution of the home-assignment. As such, doing these home-assignments contributed to the course grade, but their quality was not assessed. These home-assignments were used in classroom non-frontal discussions (in pairs or small groups). This way the students were not motivated by the grading system to produce outstanding work. They were, however, clearly motivated socially, as their contribution to the group-work could be seen as beneficial or as detrimental by their peers. This created a peculiar social dynamics in the groups with local conflicts and attempts at conflict-resolution. These and other conflicts were reflected on in the classroom and used to introduce resolution

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35 One guest lecture was held by János Tanács, who explicitly and in detail addressed learning goals, learning trajectories and discussed how various types of exercises develop various aspects of understanding, internalization, and (functional) knowledge.
techniques. Examples from game-theory, social psychology and other allied disciplines of argumentation theory were used to channel these conflicts and introduce techniques like de-dichotomization (Dascal 2008), internal versus external critique, etc. It was repeatedly pointed out that experiencing the – sometimes frustrating – conflicts is conducive to learning real life skills. In line with research on framing and attribution, the scenarios where these conflicts arose were discussed and their inherent conflict-generating potential has been shown (e.g. by explaining that an exercise was consciously given out in terse, exceedingly precise statements and the insufficient time allotted naturally created stress in the group, enhancing the kind of argumentative performance that manifests itself under stress situations). By providing such explanations of the intra-group conflicts, students were motivated to think of themselves as heavily influenced by situational information, and as being able to exercise growing control over them by consciously reflecting upon the situational constraints and effects, and to take into account such effects on argumentative performance.

This low-cost exploratory phase on the “simple” concepts (what is a conclusion, a premise, an argument, and analogy, etc.) was followed by a high-reward phase, where exemplary work and communal service was rewarded, but “average” performance yielded minimum rewards.36 In this phase in class non-frontal discussions could be utilized to optimize individual efforts at gaining home-assignment points by providing room for mutual criticism and horizontal knowledge-transfer. Students were instructed in an inquiry-learning educational model, and knowledge transfer was primarily understood as contextual. Many students found this unusual, as the dominant model for knowledge transfer in Hungary is still the so-called “diffusion” model, with information travelling down from those who possess it (researchers, teachers) to those who do not (students, novices, laymen). For a comprehensive discussion of these models see Gregory and Miller (1998).

The contextual approach I used rewarded or penalized behavioral strategies of the group-working sessions. Cooperating groups with no or only occasional defectors yielded robust success and good grades for the individuals of these groups, while unprepared home-assignments and unprepared peers yielded individually weak outputs, with minimal rewards. The high-reward phase also forced a temporal dynamics on the individuals: those quickly internalizing critique could produce many successful home-assignments.

36 Anyone doing all the compulsory work passed the course. The grading system was designed to pass any student who simply uploaded all home-assignments, but good grades could only be achieved if exemplary home-assignments were produced or the students volunteered for communal work in the committees. Uploading a home-assignment yielded 2 points, making the minimum number of comments also yielded 2 points, while for producing an exemplary work 10 to 15 points were given (depending on the complexity of the home-assignment), members of the weekly elected committees also received 15 points. The final grades showed that high achievers dominated (with 1 as fail and 5 as excellent, the number of students receiving certain grades was: 1:5, 2:10, 3: 11, 4: 14, 5:43)
Latecomers could catch up, but their maximum achievable reward decreased as time went by.

The course – as the above discussion probably shows – was demanding for the students, and the features mentioned above required regular frontally coordinated discussions on the teaching aims and methods, as well as the student performances. The starting point for these discussions were generally provided by the peer-commentaries on the home-assignment assigned the previous week. Once uploading a home-assignment on an internal site (and improving it, based on the class-discussions in pairs or small groups), the students were required to comment on each other’s work, following specific ethical and methodological guidelines. The “code of conduct” regulating the comments was written by volunteers, and was discussed and refined in class. The home-assignments were assessed by two groups of students (max. 4 in one group) each week, and they commented on their selection criteria, the general problems, and the properties of the best home-assignments in front of the class. 37 These comments regularly pointed to low-level desiderata that were not fulfilled by a large proportion of the home-assignments, and thus precluded their inclusion in the publicly available selection of home-assignments. As such, they have clearly shown that the “real-life” situation requires care in areas that students often disregard, and have painfully shown how their own peers reject (e.g. on aesthetic grounds or for the lack of a coherent system of referencing) the kinds of works their teachers regularly (though grudgingly) consider acceptable. Discussing the conflicts that arise from such evaluative decisions was treated as integral and relevant parts of the course.

4. Teaching political argumentation in a politically volatile environment

All the above discussed features were secondary to the challenges connected to the topic of the course, as students were asked to critically examine the arguments advanced by the political parties during the campaign. Initial student reactions included skepticism that any politically unbiased evaluation of political argumentation could be carried out. Some feared that the teacher will manipulate the class to (un)favorably assess certain political views, and such fears were claimed to be based on previous experience. Even the legal acceptability of the course objective, the analysis of political arguments, was questioned (through an obvious misunderstanding of the Hungarian Educational Law). These initial reactions reinforced the view that many Hungarian students, even students of

37 Based on these decisions I finalized the list of “exemplary” home-assignments. This was done by evaluating the student-evaluations and weekly deciding on a procedure to finalize the list. In case the evaluators were harsh, for example, I usually included all home-assignments that any of the evaluating groups picked. If moderate, I usually cross-checked the home-assignments only selected by one group and developed some decision criteria. The evaluations were never lax, but on one occasion (the home-assignment on fallacies) the quality of the home-assignments was low, I only included the home-assignments that both groups categorized as exemplary.
Communication Studies, do not consider political argumentation as analyzable neutrally, and some reject its inclusion in university courses.

This attitude clearly challenged both the course aims and the methods of analysis taught. It also provided – if the “burden of proof” was taken up – a possibility to legitimate argumentation as a field of expertise. If it could be “demonstrated” for the majority of students that they themselves are capable of meaningful analysis that does not disclose their political views. If achieved, a major obstacle to legitimating argumentation in the classroom could be overcome. The home-assignments were therefore deliberately chosen not only to focus on specific skills in argumentation analysis, evaluation, and production, but also to show the rich insights argumentation-theory provides for understanding and producing political arguments.38

The introductions and explanations of home-assignment assignments were used to increase trust in both the discipline of argumentation-studies, and to develop the open-mindedness of students towards different political communicative strategies. The previously discussed non-frontal techniques and meta-reflective activities were repeatedly used with the same aim. Parallel to the home-assignments, and the in-class discussions, relevant chapters of the most detailed textbook on the market were assigned, and the students were asked to read these (Margitay 2007). Of course, not everyone did. They could also study from the online course-material heavily relying on the above textbook,39 but again, not everyone did. This created a very useful division in the class. Those interested in the subject read the very precise and somewhat technical textbook (or the internet-based learning aid). Those who did neither had to rely on their “naive” views on argumentation. In the group-works and pair-works these two learning strategies (i.e. diligence and laziness) were fruitfully mixed and thus increased the likelihood of conceptual change.

The early home-assignments targeted the views on arguments that the students had prior to the didactic intervention. After introducing very simple descriptions of “conclusion” and “premise,” the students had to individually select and analyze a 1,000-2,000 character text that they considered argumentative. They were asked to a) locate the premises and conclusions, b) reconstruct the structure of the argument, c) judge the strength of the

38 This was also an argument for letting the students do much of the evaluation: their responsibility increased as the authority of the teacher decreased.

39 The online resources were developed in a consortium, co-ordinated by Prof. Gábor Forrai (University of Miskolc), with most chapters written by philosophers working at either the University of Miskolc, the Eötvös University (Department of Logic), Budapest, or our department (Philosophy and History of Science) at the BME: <http://www.uni-miskolc.hu/~bolantro/informalis/tartalom.html>
arguments. In class the students were paired up and students were to read and discuss each other’s home-assignments.\textsuperscript{40}

After long discussions and various exercises (frontal, frontally coordinated group-work, etc.), the second home-assignment was to

A: Find an example of political argumentation with an implicit conclusion (or relevant premise). After explicating the implicit element(s), argue whether in your view the implicit content could influence the persuasive power of the argument.

B: Find an argument where a group of premises could be reconstructed as either coordinated or independent. Does this ambiguity have strategic benefits? If yes, analyze the example.

These were used to thematize some issues considered problematic in argumentation theory, like the method of reconstruction of implicit elements, or the notoriously problematic distinctions between linked and convergent arguments. HW 3 and the connected lesson used a similar didactic structure; in this case the topic was “Analogies.” In all cases attempts were made to cover basic definition and some examples of key concepts in argumentation theory (level of complexity tuned to students with no prior experience), but also to include a few, theoretically puzzling examples, where the limits and differences of the frameworks used became evident. These examples targeted the students who already studied some form of argumentation theory and enrolled in the so-called “Communication Planning” M.A. specialization tier, covering problems similar to the ones discussed in (Eemeren 2001).

The next two lessons and home assignments (HW 4-5) included more frontally coordinated work, and the same text was given to all students as home-assignment. As some of the less experienced students even had difficulties finding texts that are argumentative, this provided them with the opportunity to use and improve their skills on texts that were selected by the teacher. (The earlier “failures” were reflected on and used to improve their grasp of the basic concepts of argumentation). To give something to grapple with for the more advanced students, the argument-reconstruction exercise (HW 4, a part of an article accusing the governing party of financial crimes) contained an \textit{ad logicam} fallacy, and the reconstruction had to discuss what is claimed as “logically following” by the author, and why this is not substantiated. This example was revisited when fallacies were introduced and discussed.

\textsuperscript{40} All home-assignments on paper were made in 3 copies. This way the students could hand in a copy, work in pairs and freely make notes on each other’s works – both to keep and to give back.
The 5th home-assignment revisited the problem of analogies, but now requiring students not only to reconstruct and analyze, but also to produce analogies (HW 5a), or, optionally, to rewrite HW 4 to produce a stronger argument for (a weaker) conclusion, retaining as much as possible of the original argumentation. To help students internalize the critiques they received, they had to hand in an improved version of any of their previous assignments (HW 6), and this was graded. Grading (on a scale from 0-10) provided feedback, and prepared the students to the second, internet-based part of the course, the high reward phase of the semester.

Once basic skills of argument-reconstruction and evaluation have been developed, the second part of the course utilized this knowledge-base (closest to a traditional “informal-logic” curriculum) with both an explicit dialectical and rhetorical dimension. Picking the exercises for the home-assignments required very subtle balancing from this moment on. First, as the best home-assignments were posted on the internet (http://erveles.komm.bme.hu/), the tasks set had to yield results comprehensible (if possible interesting) for “outsiders”. Care also had to be taken to formulate the assignments so as to induce works that prove to the students themselves that political arguments can be analyzed without exhibiting partisanship on either side.

To introduce dialectical situations (and the various types of argumentative exchanges, like forensic debate, rational debate, etc.) students were asked to collect examples where political parties show willingness to engage in debates with other parties or not. As all Hungarian political parties in this campaign excluded even the possibility to debate certain issues with certain other parties, this exercise was used to map the argument-space of the campaign, and to show how openness to debate or rejection and exclusion of other parties commenced along common lines from “communist” parties (a category still commonly used in non-formal discussions) to radical right-wing parties, covering the whole political spectrum. The similarities in these argument-schemes provided an opportunity to discuss argument schemes and fallacies (HW 8, also repeated, as the first results were rather meager).

As the first round of the elections came, the students could reflect on political communication in “real-time,” and were given various topics to work on. They could either analyze arguments for or against a controversial decision made by the National Election Committee (Országos Választási Bizottság), first allowing information-providers to publish election results, but at the last minute banning them to publish and analyze the results for hours on the evening of the election. As in a few voting-circles people were still queuing to vote several hours after the official closing of the election urns, tension increased and, this decision was again changed, and well into the night election results could be published even though some voters were still waiting for their turns to vote (HW 10a). The students
could also analyze the first reactions to the results: how rhetoric of winning and losing cut across the political parties (either by comparing winners and losers at this election, or comparing speeches of specific parties with earlier election speeches given by other parties (HW 10b)). A more pointed exercise allowed students to compare the way success was claimed by parties and the way failures were blamed on other parties, the media, etc. (HW 10c). This last option was later used to introduce the fundamental attribution error, when rhetorical aspects were discussed in class. In all cases the students had to pick texts (max. 3,000 characters) and provide an analysis (min. 1,000 characters).

The first round of elections forced the parties to strategically maneuver, and mobilize their voters for the second round, and these weeks were used to introduce – once basic dialectical and rhetorical insights were discussed – the notion of strategic maneuvering. In HW 11 they were asked to pick short argumentative texts and provide an analysis of the strategic maneuvering, along the line suggested in Eemeren and Houtlosser (2006). In HW12 the previous home-assignment was further developed. Students were instructed to rewrite HW 11 with different presentational devices, or attuned to a different audience, and to prepare them for the final assignment. The last assignment (HW 13) was given after the second round of the election, when all the results (and the over two-thirds majority win by FIDESZ) were known. Students had to pick any (existing or imaginary) NGO and write a petition requesting the new government to act in their interest concerning a specific issue. As many students already had strong ties to various NGOs, the exercise was, again, used to address “real-life” problems and problem-solving skills. And, as all home-assignments had to present the requests and arguments as conforming to (some) elements of the FIDESZ rhetoric, it portrayed the potentials of strategic maneuvering.

5. From home-assignments to group-work: designing learning environments

As is visible from the above, argumentation was not portrayed as analyzable via a unified theory. Instead, students were presented with various tools, increasing in complexity, to reconstruct, analyze, evaluate, and produce arguments. The use of this toolbox was tested both during the home-assignments, but also during the group-works in class. I have in some detail discussed the home-assignments, showing the various considerations that had to be co-ordinated to scaffold the learning process. The same was true for the in-class group-work and presentations. Many examples could be given: first only positive

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41 An earlier but didactically potent example from a course held together with Gábor Kutrovátz at the ELTE was also discussed. We had the good luck to have a class the day after the biggest political scandal in the last years, the infamous “Öszöd”-speech by then Prime Minister Gyurcsány. The students have all heard of the incident by the time of the class, but as a poll has shown, 90% of them judged it (favorably or unfavorably) as was expected from their political orientation.
evaluation was elicited for the products in frontally coordinated discussions. Later contrastive evaluations were requested on various aspects of the arguments presented by groups (like: Group A had stronger arguments, but Group B structured the arguments better). Finally negative (but constructive) critique was also facilitated. Below I will only discuss one further example, and show how the learning environment was tailored to scaffold the learning process.

In one of the in-class group-works the groups had to represent various political parties. I gave short news items from the previous day (a brutal family-massacre and the weakening of the national currency), and the groups were asked to prepare (30 min.) and present (2-2 min.) argumentative responses to these news items “as if” they were prepared by the specific parties. The exercise had multiple functions. As the same parties were picked by two or three groups, their performance could be contrasted and analyzed in frontally coordinated discussions. Evaluation could therefore be distanced from political orientation. But as individuals could pick the parties they sympathized most with (afterwards I confirmed that this was indeed a motivation for many), they also had the chance to present their own political views. Previously such engagement generated significant problems, and students mentioned cases from previous semesters, where bitter disputes emerged after some heated and politically biased comment. The specific orchestration of the exercise, however, yielded a very different outcome. The slightly competitive nature of the exercise shifted attention from the political views proper to the presentation of these views and the arguments supporting the conclusions. Even more importantly, as the groups had to present their speeches in front of the class, radical views were portrayed as either ironic, or were softened. Among peers, in a classroom setting, freely allowing students to present their viewpoints had a very different outcome from the chat room or blog-disputes that students had negative experiences with. Literature on argumentation in the classroom robustly shows how the social dynamics in the classroom affects the positions taken up. In general students tend to decrease the level of commitment to views if the social costs are significant (Erduran and Jiménez-Aleixandre 2008). While usually seen as a problem to be overcome, especially in science education, this effect was put to good and constructive use, as the problem in political argumentation is more the extreme confirmation-bias that some students exhibit than the lack of clear opinion, adversely affecting the level of argumentation in science classes. Students showed relief when they saw that the kind of political partisanship and the usual disputes they are accustomed to did not surface in the class – or during the breaks. This effect, again, was

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42 This was expected. In recent studies on argumentation in science education, well-designed role-plays appear to be an ideal way to elicit argumentation and to contribute to conceptual change. As a researcher recently stressed, role play “was the first [of all the studies] in which changes of opinion were observed” (Simonneaux 2008: 185).
discussed in class, and the role of framing and other psychological mechanisms on the argumentative performance was highlighted.

The learning environment was designed to target specific skills and scaffold the argumentative practice of the students in most cases. In certain situations, however, the aim was to generate conflicts or unwelcome situations that could be addressed in class, as part of the meta-level reflection on argumentation. I already described an exercise using time-constraints as a factor influencing argumentative performance, but another example is worth mentioning.

In the second phase of the course, the original home-assignments uploaded on a website had to be commented on by 3 peers. These comments were supposed to help the students improve their home-assignment, and to help the two groups doing the evaluation by pointing out flaws or highlighting positive aspects of the work. Usually the comments did not live up to either of these aims. Gentle, face-saving, non-confrontational comments dominated instead. Meaningful content was usually lacking, instead praising the author and praising the work in general was the road taken by the majority. The social psychological models that explain this effect were discussed and students were reminded how psychological processes influence argumentative performance, and how – at least in this case – this can adversely affect the usefulness of the comments. Commenting was the only activity that was not rewarded with respect to quality, and the students were constantly reminded that these comments nevertheless could greatly improve the products. The comments, however, never improved significantly in the high-reward phase of the course, and remained a painful reminder that for many students only directly rewarded tasks were taken seriously and lack of commitment to improve on the comments adversely affected the performance of the whole class as well as made the evaluation of home-assignments more demanding.

6. Feedback and conclusions

The course was assessed by the students according to the standard online evaluation at the BME. (I use the evaluation data available at the end of July 2010 with 28 responses.) Heterogeneity was also displayed here, but in general the participants considered the course to be work-intensive. The average value of 2,9 (2=required much more work than average, 3=required more work, 4=required work equivalent to the assigned credit, etc.) suggests that in future semesters the work-load should be decreased. The only written comment (“I worked much more, but don’t mind it, it was useful”) and the fact that more than a third of the students considered the course to contribute to their knowledge-base outstandingly (scale 1-5, 1=not at all, 5=outstanding contribution) suggest that many found the course structure and content helpful.
Evaluating the course in general displayed the heterogeneity in a more pronounced way. On a 5-step scale only approx. 10% considered it average (3), approx. 30% as bad or very bad (1 and 2), and more than 50% as good or excellent, yielding a bimodal distribution. The written comments also exhibited this mixed response. “I needed time to get used to this style of teaching, and get used to working with the blog [the internet-based resource developed by some of the students], but in the end I got to like both” was one view, “One can’t have a seminar with 90 people” was the other.

The educational resources provided were considered good (3.9 class-average, with 3=average, 4=good), with much less standard deviation: here 50% of the responded graded the course-materials the same way (4). The questions on the quality of the course and the grading similarly displayed no bimodality (with averages of 3.2 and 3.3), only some polarization. The final verbal comments, however, show the range of opinions. Some comments testify to further adherence to the “deficit-model” of education, and the rejection of basic methodological tenets introduced and used in the classroom: “It was not the teacher who corrected my home-assignments week to week, but my cohorts – that was the task. Therefore Gábor Zemplén could not have had any ideas as to what level I really mastered the course contents. The class was enthralling, but the method of evaluation he devised – the classmates grading each other’s work – was untenable.” Some, however, testified to finding this evaluation method useful: “The exercises during the semester were suitable for the evaluation, and even “forcing us” to look at each other’s work was not bad. At first I would not have thought that we could profit from this, but yes, it was profitable.”

Finally, a comment still showed resistance to the whole approach: “An institute of higher education has no right to force students to admit to their political orientation using their names, or make value-judgments in this domain. The political blog of the course [the internet-based repository] therefore not only goes against good taste, but also against the rights of the students.”

These comments show that the course was viewed with some suspicion, even though these issues could be openly discussed in class and arguments were given to justify the method of evaluation, and the exercises were designed clearly in ways that bracket political orientation. But as political argumentation remains a volatile area with few examples of unbiased evaluation in the Hungarian public sphere, such comments were to be expected.

In general the pilot course demonstrated that many students welcomed novel class-management techniques, with a visible minority openly rejecting these. Those demanding more traditional teaching techniques, however, also demanded focus on “real-life” skills, not recognizing the inherent conflicts between frontal teaching, a diffusion-based position
on knowledge-acquisition, and exercises with clear “right-wrong” solutions on the one hand and the need to practice group-coordination, to respond to challenges in underdetermined situations, and to learn individually from cues present in the environment. I believe that such a split between expected teaching style and expected results is lamentable. Nevertheless I was positively surprised to see many students re-evaluate their position on these issues during the semester.

The course helped many to overcome the stereotype widespread in Hungary that analyzing political argumentation is done necessarily along the lines of (previous) political orientation. It also provided an incentive to develop the web-based infrastructure that can be used for later courses (coordinated by Viktor Adorján), and enabled them to experience a kind of classroom-management they are not generally accustomed to. As an educator, the course was amongst the most challenging ones I have had, both with respect to the topic, the selection of the content, the formulation of the exercises, and developing the methods of evaluation, and I am grateful for the very candid (at times blunt) feedback I received from the year-group, often displaying impressive argumentative skills. These will help redesigning the course for the 2010/2011 academic year, this time targeting science communication and the public understanding of science, to provide live feedback to the re-launched the science-communication project of the Hungarian Academy of Science, “Mindentudás Egyeteme 2.0.”

References


Political Debates – Consensus or Conflict

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Abstract

Democratic systems are the outcome of a complex process of political and social pressures, ideas, and political decisions. Most democratic systems in Western Europe achieved their final form till first half of 20th century. It means that the fundamental values, ideas and beliefs do not fundamentally change over time. In Central and Eastern Europe we could see a political transformation from a totalitarian regime to a pluralistic democracy. These democracies differ in what they see as being the core of the democratic system and also differ in their political culture and civil society.

In every democracy political elite plays a key role in shaping political argumentation and debate. What is their goal: consensus or conflict? How does this appear in political debates? How can it be explained in the classroom? This paper attempts to get us closer in answering those questions.

Keywords: political culture, political elite, consensus and conflict, political argumentation and debate

This lecture is an analysis of political debates. It lists the factors at the core of the culture in political debate of a given society, and it tries to explain the consensus-bent or conflict-generating attitude of the political elite. At the same time we will try to present methods by which all this can be brought closer to the audience so that they can recognize and interpret these phenomena on a practical level.

First of all let us see the factors the joint effect of which determines the political discourse of a given society. After having created a theoretical frame, let us examine the ways of practical implementation.

As early as the fifties, during the analysis of the functioning of Western European democracies, the question rose: how can the differences between the functioning of various democratic
systems be explained why some of them are stable and others unstable. In order to be able to
give an answer to these questions, we need to clear the concepts of electoral system, party
system, political borders, and political culture, because these will define the attitude of the
political elite in a given country and they will obviously influence the attitude of voters as well.
These are all related concepts as the electoral system has a determining impact upon the party
system which influences the discourse of the elite and all these integrate into the political
culture. So let us examine these in short.

The electoral system

The competition for governing power in between parties is decided by the votes of the
electorate. In modern representative democracy the sovereignty of the people is manifested in
the functioning of the legislative system created during the process of elections. The most
general form of civil participation is that of the elections. Besides, institutions of direct
democracy may function as well: referendum, popular referendum. Let us examine in short the
roles and ways of electoral systems.

The role of elections

The chief task of parliamentary elections is the election of politicians in public offices, thus the
renewable nature of public authority, the chief source of the legitimacy of democratic
governments. Thus, elections simultaneously authorize decisive factors and the entire political
system. The role of elections is the expression of political power, recruiting and mobilization in
the direction of values, objectives and programs.

But the rules of election are never politically neutral. Various electoral systems for instance
produce different parliamentary divisions besides the same elective preferences. This means
that certain models and methods are always paired by different political interests (Reynolds
2006). Nevertheless these interests are usually implemented with a respect for political
tradition. The electoral system influences the entire political system and the party system as
well.

Electoral systems are country-specific. What determines the electoral system of a given
country? Usually the following factors: the size of the parliament, the proportions of people
entitled to vote, the size of electoral districts, the conditions for becoming a candidate, the way
of obtaining a mandate and the laws of guarantee.

Electoral systems have two sub-types:

- majority electoral systems (Single-Member Direct System – SMD)
- proportional electoral systems (Proportional Representation – PR)

Majority electoral systems are an earlier development; they function with individual electoral
districts within which voters vote directly for the candidate.

In the case of proportional electoral systems, voters vote for regional/national party lists or candidates running for several-mandate electoral districts. In such party-list voting systems the distribution of mandates is arranged according to a certain mathematical formula (Fábián 1997).

There are various political viewpoints at work within various electoral systems. Within majority systems the chief priority is the ability to form a government – this supposes definite majority. Nevertheless in countries with multi-party systems this way of mandate distribution leads to great disproportions, it is profitable for big parties and disadvantageous for small or medium parties.

Depending on the given country, this electoral system has got various sub-cases:

- **simple SMD** (relative/plural) (Great Britain, U.S., New Zealand)
- **absolute SMD** (50%): one solution is the *alternative* (preferential) voting (the last candidate is out, his/her votes being distributed) (e.g. Australia), or the *two-tours* voting (between the first two candidates) – in this case the disadvantage for small parties is smaller (e.g. France).

At the same time, there are mixed systems in various countries – for instance a more proportional distribution of mandates paired with the preservation of the individual districts of the SMD system.

**Majority and proportional electoral systems**

1. **the method of limited votes**: voters in several mandates districts have got one vote and the district can give several mandates (e.g. Japan before 1993)
2. **transferable vote**: preferential voting in several mandates districts (e.g. Ireland)

Party list systems:

- **national list, national distribution** (Israel, the Netherlands)
- **regional list, national distribution** (Germany, Italy, Sweden, Denmark)
- **regional list, regional distribution** (Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Greece)

Within proportional systems the rigidity of the list, the mathematical formula applied for mandate distribution, the size of electoral districts, the threshold limit and the number of compensational mandates may be crucial (Sartori 1976).

To summarize: the advantage of the majority system is governability while its disadvantage is the ignorance of a true mirroring of the electoral will while in the case of proportional systems is the opposite. The majority system fits collective parties with almost similar ideologies and “attractive” politicians. In exchange, proportional systems secure representation for minorities,
usually within a multi-party system, multi-party parliament and coalitional government. Within this system less popular politicians and experts may be elected. A good system adapts to the political traditions, political culture and political institutions of a given country.

The party system

The electoral system, as we have seen, greatly influences the party system of a given country. But what exactly is this party system? According to the simplest definition, the party system is the sum of such power relations and interactions between parties that have a decisive impact upon political decisions as well.

The “power” of a party depends on the number of its mandates in parliament and its position in government or opposition. System-based approaches take into account historical traditions, the political culture – this is expressed in the number of parties.

Relevant parties are those who succeeded in making it into the parliament (simplifying analysis). In order to determine their political weight, we need to know the relative weight of a given party (e.g. ability to form a coalition, etc.) The functionality of parliaments and the stability of governance may depend on the number of relevant parties and upon the extent to which the party system is a fragmented one. Beginning with the fifties a relevant party typology was required. The first substantial work in this respect was that of M. Duverger, who produced a relatively simple set of categories that determined the discourse on party systems for a long time. According to his categorization, democracies have got two-party systems or multi-party systems (Duverger 1954).

A more sensitive typology is the one elaborated by Jean Blondel. Blondel lists the following systems: two-party, two and a half parties (two big parties and a small one), multi-party with dominant party (several parties with one owning over 40%), multi-party without dominant party.

The categorization elaborated by Giovanni Sartori is still valid. He differentiated at first between competitive and non-competitive party systems, defining their characteristics. Non-competitive party systems are the mono-party systems and the hegemonic party systems, unimaginable in a democratic country.

The categorization of competitive party systems according to Sartori (Sartori 1976):

- predominant party system: the same party wins the elections for a longer time (after at least three elections) in honest competition, in a stable electoral system.
- two-party system: there are several competing parties while two are governing at turns, obtaining the majority of votes needed for government at turns. The competition of parties is centripetal, sharp – the objective being to win centrist voters.
- tempered pluralism: there are usually 3–5 parties competing for power, with only slightly
different ideologies. There is a bipolar system with alternative coalitions / a centripetal competition, without parties opposing the system.

• extremely polarized pluralism: more than five parties in parliament with huge ideological differences. Deep conflicts, possible system-opposed party – centrifugal competition.

The party system of a given country influences the attitude of the political elite and the character of the political discourse. Nevertheless all these greatly depend upon the political culture of the given country as well.

Political culture

As differences between Western democracies became obvious, during the fifties the number of research on political socialization increased. The first to emphasize the role of political culture in the “shaping of democracy” was G. Almond (1956).

The thesis of Almond and Verba (1963): - it is not sufficient to have a formal institutional framework consisting of free elections, plural media, multi-party system, etc. Certain basic attitudes, behavioural routines are needed both among voters and politicians.

Citizenship-related culture is also important, as a kind of equilibrium in political participation and ignorance, between trust/mistrust in politicians and interest/disinterest for representational democracy to work properly.

There always appears dividing and uniting issues in politics, parties usually represent them while the political preferences of voters are distributed accordingly. Dividing issues are frequently formulated along social and political dividing lines. The formation of these dividing lines is the first spontaneous social mechanism that counteracts total instability in the relation of parties and their voters (Lipset–Rokkan 1967).

According to Almond (1956), Western democracies basically display two types of political culture. On the one hand there is homogenous political culture, characteristic of Anglo-Saxon countries, usually of countries with a two-party system. This model functions better, the author states.

The other type is fragmented political culture, characteristic of continental Western European countries with multi-party system, this combination (according to the author) leads to malfunctions. Almond lists four arguments to reinforce his statement concerning the better functioning of the Anglo-Saxon homogenous political culture (Almond – Verba 1963).

1. Parties in these democracies are characterized of multiple relations that “extinguish” each-other.

2. Various political or social spheres are well isolated (media for instance is an economic enterprise, not a political matter; trade unions are actually representations of workers’
interests and not political groups; parties are independent political groups) while all these are related in European democracies.

3. Political conflicts in democracies of a homogenous culture are of a material nature while on the continent they are ideological.

4. Another important difference is that two-party or similar systems are usually more functional than multi-party systems because they reduce competition and imply more “serious” governmental responsibility.

If we analyze the Western European democracies of the fifties, it is clear that continental countries in that period displayed more problematic political systems; by the sixties and seventies it became clear that the democracies in France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Finland and Denmark were nonetheless functional. This is why the theory formulated by Almond et al needs to be completed. This is what A. Lijphart and H. Daalder tried to do by creating the theory of consensual or segmented democracies (consociational democracy) (Lijphart 1968).

They have examined most of all segmented democracies with sharp political and social conflicts where along the dividing lines certain phenomena of towering and buttressing occurred. According to the previous set of categories, these democracies of fragmented political culture could not have worked properly nevertheless reality proved different. Researchers arrived at the conclusion that in this case the key actor was the political elite capable of keeping together the highly fragmented society. Consequently the competitive or cooperative attitude of the elite determines the functionality of a given society so if the political elite of a country with fragmented political culture is cooperative, it is capable of creating consociational democracy. This consensual democracy can function as well as Anglo-Saxon democracies; thus in this case, besides political culture, the behavioral models of the political elite are determining factors for the functioning of the model.

Lijphart’s model (1968) presents homogeneous and fragmented political cultures:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elite</th>
<th>Homogeneous political culture</th>
<th>Fragmented political culture</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>Centripetal democracy (e.g. Great Britain)</td>
<td>Centrifugal democracy (e.g. Italy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative</td>
<td>Non-political democracies (Scandinavian countries)</td>
<td>Consensual democracies (e.g. Belgium)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We have seen how the electoral system influences the party system, which influences the sharpness of competition between parties and how political culture influences all of these. The political elite of a given country is also important, as the consensual or conflicting attitude of the elite might influence the functioning of a given political system to a great extent. The key question in most of the cases is the nature of political debate because democracy is in all cases...
The nature of debates characteristic of a given country says a lot about the democracy in that country and about the structure of public life there. Based on the aim of the debate, Angelusz Róbert created the following typology (Angelusz 1995):

1. **cooperative debate**: – the aim is to establish the truth  
2. **debate meant to convince**: – the aim is to convince or defeat the enemy  
3. **informative debate**: – the aim is to map the interests of the other party (e.g. diplomacy)  
4. **demonstrative debate**: the aim is not to convince each-other but to present a point of view  
5. **public-oriented debate**: – the aim is to convince the greater public (one-sided debates).

It is a great challenge for teachers of political science and public communication to have, beside the broad theoretical knowledge of all these debates, a good didactical approach to teaching them for students. This is why after a theoretical presentation of basic concepts, processes and phenomena we have to try and grasp the practical side of the matter. This means to take into account the political debates that are characteristic of our society and to examine them in parallel with the practice characteristic of other countries. During seminars it became clear that the previous experience of students counts a lot. It is important whether they are trained in the techniques of argumentation, whether they know them, whether they have learnt rhetoric or not, etc. These experiences are organically related to the theoretical analysis of the actual political debates.

By analyzing political debates we tried to reveal their nature, their logic and argumentation, also trying to explain why is a certain debate characterized by a certain style and voice – for instance the debates between candidates for president and prime minister, the debates around political round-tables or political program discourses. In many cases the precise identification of messages and the targeted public, of argumentation techniques or even the avoiding of existing stereotypes is problematic. Our practice of several years demonstrates that results are better if we complement analyses with a certain type of practice, namely having our students formulate a speech according to a given situation or by requiring them to model a debate after having discussed various techniques of argumentation. These are always followed by common discussion and analysis of the output.

Nevertheless, due to the nature of this subject there is little time for such practical exercises. This is why it is most welcome if they have already acquired this knowledge and this practice studying other subjects. For instance, it helps a great deal if they are studying rhetoric or are drilled in the technique of debates, if they know various techniques of argumentation and know how to apply them in practice. Because this set of experiences helps in elaborating an analysis of political debates, it is important to match theory and practice, but the existence of this type of previous experience/knowledge and their successful simultaneous use is of similar importance.
References


