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# Cognitive communities and argument communities

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**ABSTRACT:** Since Toulmin's discovery of the field-dependency of arguments, and Perelman's emphasis on audiences, argumentation theorists have developed the notion of "spheres of arguments" or "argument communities". Since argument communities are communities of discourse guided by the participants' cognitive experiences, they are also cognitive communities. "Cognitive breaks" between different argument communities will produce misunderstanding and futile argument. The paper will investigate "cognitive breaks" and describe in which ways they may obstruct reasonable argumentation between communities.

**KEYWORDS:** Argument community, argument field, audience, cognitive break, cognitive environment, cognitive response, culture, deep disagreement, discourse community, sphere of argument.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since more than fifty years ago Stephen Toulmin called attention to the field-dependency of arguments, and Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca emphasized the pivotal role of the audience in argumentation, it has become almost a commonplace that arguments are fundamentally determined by their audiences, that is, by the respective communities they are addressed to, and hence that in practical argumentation universal validity of arguments is an exception rather than the rule. The same argument may not have the same effect on different audiences. On this same note, Tom Goodnight has differentiated between "spheres of arguments", and Raymie McKerrow has distinguished different "argument communities".

In the following, I will first demonstrate how Toulmin's original concept of argument fields was variously interpreted in argumentation studies, how the concepts of fields, spheres, and communities of argument interrelate, and what distinguishes the concept of communities from the other two approaches. In a next step, I will basically define argument communities as communities of discourse, yet since discourse is essentially guided by cognitive experiences, habits and abilities of its participants, they will further be interpreted as cognitive communities. In that context, I will also demonstrate their applicability to the analysis of particular cases, since this will turn out to be their essential function in argumentation studies. Finally, I will apply Marc Angenot's concept of "cognitive breaks" to argument communities qua cognitive communities, in order to explain the occurrence of deep disagreements between argument communities that ultimately lead to a failure of reasonable argument and to what Angenot calls a "dialogue of the deaf".

## 2. ARGUMENT FIELDS, SPHERES, AND COMMUNITIES

One of the most significant contributions of Stephen Toulmin's to argumentation studies, besides his structural model of arguments, was most certainly his notion of the field-dependency of arguments. Drawing on Wittgenstein's language games (see Godden 2003: 370), Toulmin insisted that the types of data and backings involved as well as the criteria for evaluation of arguments were not universal, but field-dependent (1953: 83; 1958: 14-15; 36-38; 255; see van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Snoeck Henkemans, et al. 1996: 160). Unfortunately, Toulmin was never sufficiently clear about how argument fields were to be defined. In the first essay of *The Uses of Arguments*, he associated them with "logical types":

Two arguments will be said to belong to the same field when the data and the conclusion in each of the two arguments are, respectively, of the same logical type; they will be said to come from different fields when the backing or the conclusions in each of the two arguments are not of the same logical types. (Toulmin 1958: 14)

Yet he did not give any definition of what he meant by logical types (for criticism see Willard 1980 and 1981a), but only a list of examples comprising mathematical proofs as well as nautical calculations, arguments from empirical observation and statistical probability, categorical subsumptions to taxonomies in natural science, and applications of legal regulations (Toulmin 1958: 14-15). So what he apparently had in mind was epistemological rather than logical categories (Hannken-Illjes 2005: 222).

In essay four, however, he rather seemed to imply that "fields of argument are different, [...] because they are addressed to different sorts of problems." (1958: 167). In later publications, he again revised his view by linking argument fields first to "'rational enterprises' which he equates with intellectual disciplines" (Zarefsky 1982: 191; see Toulmin 1972: 85; Wenzel 1982: 205-206), introducing a hierarchy of "compact", "diffuse", and "would-be" disciplines, according to the level of "suitable professional organization" and collectively agreed research ideals (Toulmin 1972: 379-382; see Rowland 2008: 240), then to "locations or *forums*" of argumentation (Toulmin, Rieke, and Janik 1979: 14-15, 193-337; see also Toulmin 1992: 9: "it is not just the 'warrants' and 'backing' that vary from field to field: even more, it is the *forums* of argumentation, the *stakes*, and the contextual details of 'arguing' as an *activity*.").

For a certain period, Toulmin's concept of argument fields spawned a thriving special field of research. The debate about field theory reached its peak in the 1970s and early 1980s, when it became a central topic of the first and second Alta Conferences 1980 and 1981, and of a special issue of the *Journal of the American Forensic Association* (18, 1982). Mostly owing to Toulmin's own vagueness, however, "the discussions captured in these volumes present a diversity rather than a consensus of opinion" (Godden 2003: 370; see also Hanson 1989: 281), and hence a plurality of different perspectives (for useful inventories see Zarefsky 1982; Rowland 2008: 241-242; Godden 2009: 3-5): Argument fields may be (and have been) differentiated *logically* according to argument types (Toulmin 1958?), *ontologically* according to subject matter (Klumpp 1981: 50), *epistemologically* according to "disciplined rational enterprise[s] with an epistemological purpose" (Wenzel 1982: 204; cf. Kneupper 1981: 81), *pragmatically* according to shared problem-solving purposes (Rowland 1981; 1982; 1990; 2008; Wenzel 1982: 205; Hanson

1989), or *socio-culturally* according to social interactions within communities of arguers or audiences (Willard 1981b: 24; 1982; 1983: 169-172; McKerrow 1980a, 1980b, 1990; Gronbeck 1981; Newell 1984). Moreover, in these interpretations, argument is variously looked at as product, process, or point of view (Zarefsky 1980). There is not even complete agreement among analysts as to the attribution of these different perspectives to individual researchers. As a result, the “idea of argument fields is notoriously vague” (van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Snoeck Henkemans et al. 1996: 204).

The “diffuse and open-ended nature” (Willard 1981b: 21) and the “conceptual fuzziness and confusion” (Zarefsky 1982: 203; see also 191) of the concept of argument fields seems to indicate its limited value and may be one of the reasons why the topic has disappeared from the top agenda in argumentation studies in recent years (Godden 2003: 370; Rowland 2008: 236). Yet nonetheless, for good reasons, Zarefsky suggests to resist the “temptation” of “abandoning the troublesome concept altogether”, since it is “a potential aid to explaining what happens in argumentative encounters, to classifying argument products, and to deriving evaluative standards” (1982: 203).

In the light of Chaïm Perelman’s and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca’s emphasis on the role of audience in argumentation and the importance of the adaptation of arguments to audiences (1958: 22-34; 40-53; 132-140; 655-664), approaches that determine fields by reference to audiences should be among the more promising. Charles Willard, for instance, regards argumentation as a process of social interaction between arguer and audience and defines fields as audiences (1981b: 24; 1982: 44). Corresponding to types of audience, he distinguishes “relational fields” (among personally related individuals), “encounter fields” (particular day-to-day interactions), and “issue fields” (major schools of thought or movements) (1981b: 26; 39-40).

In a related sense, Thomas Goodnight (1982) suggests to avoid the term “fields” (as a term primarily appropriate for scientific argument) and to replace it by the more general term of “spheres” of argument, to be defined by the sets of persons deemed competent to evaluate an argument. He differentiates three such “spheres”: the private, the public, and the technical, the second of which would encompass all kinds of public political deliberation, and the third would be equivalent to expert argument in scholarly disciplines.

Goodnight’s concept of spheres is sufficiently general to steer clear of the linking of fields to any kind of subject matter or discipline. But there are also problems with Goodnight’s concept: The three spheres may not be exhaustive, and there is a certain categorical inequality between them. The technical sphere appears not to be situated on the same categorical level as the private and public spheres, which are as it were complementary (unless both of them in combination constitute a non-technical sphere as a counterpart to the technical sphere). Willard, too, expresses some misgivings especially with Goodnight’s public sphere (has it got a commensurate discourse at all? 1990: 136; see also Hauser 1987, Rowland 1990, and Whidden 2008) and declares defining the public sphere as an argument field a “normative move” (1990: 149).

It should be noted that Goodnight’s primary objective in that paper had not been to give an exhaustive taxonomy of spheres, but to save public deliberation from its diminution by what he perceived to be an encroaching expansion of both the private and technical spheres (for Goodnight’s focus on the public sphere, ultimately informed by Habermasian ideas, see also Farrell and Goodnight 1981; Goodnight 1987a, 1987b, 1992; Goodnight and Hingstman 1997). Yet his concept of spheres was generally interpreted as

a genuine development of field studies and proved influential enough as to provide a framing topic for the sixth Alta Conference (1989).

Yet in view of the various points of criticism, it may ultimately be preferable to opt for still another alternative description which was suggested by Raymie McKerrow. McKerrow prefers to speak of “argument communities”, which he also defines by the nature of their audiences. In the first draft of his concept (1980a: 215), he distinguishes between social, personal and philosophical communities (which would seem to coincide roughly with Goodnight’s public, private, and technical spheres), which he supplements in a sequel paper with technical communities as a fourth kind (1990: 30), thereby separating the philosophical argument community (as the most formal and rule-governed community) from the various technical argument communities of individual disciplines (mainly characterized by their specialized and arcane vocabulary).

McKerrow defines a community as “a collective group of people interacting in a space-time continuum” that shares “a set of rules for verbal or non-verbal behavior” which are authorized and observed by the group members (1990: 28). Communities may be real or imaginary products of our personal and social environment, composed of individuals that ascribe to them either by choice, by conditioning, or involuntarily by external authority (1990: 28-29). McKerrow’s perspective on “argument communities” has a number of significant assets: First, as McKerrow himself observes, it does not necessarily draw a sharp distinction between arguments as products or processes: “In moving from one ‘variety’ of argument type to another [...] the relative importance of conceptualizing argument in process or product terms may necessarily shift” (1980a: 214). Second, it does not define a community with respect to audience alone (as does Willard 1981b: 24; 1982: 44), but a community encompasses both arguer and audience; to guarantee felicitous argument, both should ideally ascribe to the same cognitive community; if they do not, the success of the argument will be imperiled. And third, argument communities are basically permeable: “one may move within the personal to social or social to technical community”, and “a person may spend time in only one or in a multiplicity of communities at any one moment.” (McKerrow 1990: 30).

One and the same person may hence be a member of various distinct or overlapping argument communities. A professor of logic, for instance, will argue in completely different ways and on different terms with his colleagues at an OSSA conference on a topic of his discipline, with a friend (who might or might not be a professional colleague) about political matters, with a policeman about the justification of a parking ticket, with his wife about the destination of the next holiday trip, and with his children about proper comportment in school (see McKerrow 1990: 31).

Rowland importantly observes that, while field studies are of limited value by themselves (that is qua studies of individual fields), they are highly useful when applied to the analysis of particular cases, which should hence be their essential function in argumentation studies (2008: 237-238). He further observes that as a rule larger argument fields may contain smaller, more specific sub-fields (1982: 239), and that in individual debates there may be an overlap of several fields and sub-fields (2008: 239). It seems obvious that all those features can best and easiest be addressed using the flexible perspective of “argument communities”, as can also be seen from McKerrow’s remark that what is found in most case studies is detailed description rather than application of the theoretical framework of a given field theory (1986: 185).

It would thus seem that McKerrow's model of argument communities is in many ways methodically and pragmatically preferable to fields or spheres. In a next step, we will develop what ultimately constitutes an argument community.

### 3. ARGUMENT COMMUNITIES AS DISCOURSE COMMUNITIES AND COGNITIVE COMMUNITIES

As McKerrow himself remarks, "one common feature which all communities share, and which serves to distinguish them, is the discourse in which they engage. Discourse—language aimed at members or at outsiders—constitutes the community by presenting it with those symbols which it defines itself" (1990: 29). Since argumentation is a special form of discourse, argument communities will also necessarily be "communities of discourse" (McKerrow 1990: 30), created by the use of language.

The concept of "discourse community" was modeled on the notion of "speech community", as introduced in sociolinguistics by Dell Hymes (1972, 1974). It was then first introduced in composition studies by Patricia Bizzell:

Discourse analysis goes beyond audience analysis because what is most significant about members of a discourse community is not their personal preferences, prejudices, and so on, but rather the expectations they share by virtue of belonging to that particular community. These expectations are embodied in the discourse conventions, which are in turn conditioned by the community's work. (1982: 219; see Beaufort 1997: 488).

The concept was further refined by Swales who defined discourse communities as "socio-rhetorical networks that form in order to work towards sets of common goals" (1990: 9; on the concept, see also Porter 1986, 1992; Freed and Broadhead 1987; Rafoth 1990; Borg 2003; Bamford and Bondi 2005).

Yet Swales also makes important distinctions between speech communities and discourse communities, the most significant of which being that "speech communities are centripetal (they tend to absorb people into that general fabric), whereas discourse communities are centrifugal (they tend to separate people into occupational or specialty-interest groups)" (1990: 24). Whereas the nature of speech communities is integrative, discourse communities have a tendency to bar those who are not members from participating in the discourse. This is an exact parallel to what is observed in argument communities. Different discourses serve to demarcate different communities. And since academic disciplines serve as examples of discourse communities as often as of argument communities, it seems to make a lot of sense to treat argument communities as subspecies of discourse communities with all their characteristic traits, positive as well as negative.

Furthermore, since all discourses are essentially guided by the cognitive experiences, habits, abilities and standards of their participants, a next step would be to identify discourse communities as essentially cognitive communities. This applies to argumentative discourse in particular. Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson have developed a model of communication based on what they call cognitive environments (Sperber 1982; Sperber and Wilson 1986). According to them, "[a] *cognitive environment* of an individual is a set of facts that are manifest to him" (Sperber and Wilson 1986: 39), being manifest meaning that a fact is either perceptible or inferable to the individual. Consequently, "[a]n individual's total cognitive environment" (the set of all the facts he can perceive or infer) "is a

function of his physical environment and his cognitive abilities” (p. 39). If the same facts or assumptions are manifest within the cognitive environments of different people, “these cognitive environments intersect, and their intersection is a cognitive environment that these two people share” (p. 41). If, moreover, a cognitive environment is not only shared but it is also manifest in it which people share it, this is called a “mutual cognitive environment” (p. 41) and all respective facts and assumptions “mutually manifest” (p. 42). Christopher Tindale has adopted this notion of “mutual cognitive environments” for his rhetorical model of argument (1999: 101-115), and in a similar sense Jean Goodwin has spoken of “the normative environment the arguers inhabit together” (2005: 111). In more common parlance, this is to say that every argument needs common ground between arguer and audience. But such common ground is ultimately based on cognitive processes.

If Sperber and Wilson are right in stating that “when you communicate, your intention is to alter the cognitive environment of your addressees” (1986: 46), this must be all the more true for argumentative communication processes. But since by arguing we cannot possibly alter the addressees’ physical environment, what we do when we argue is try to alter the addressees’ cognitive abilities. We actually and literally want them to see things differently.

An active and cognitive part of the audience in processes of argumentation and persuasion is emphasized in the so-called “cognitive response model” of argument, as expounded by Greenwald, Cacioppo, Petty, and others (see Greenwald 1968; Perloff and Brock 1980; Cacioppo, Harkins, and Petty 1981; Petty, Ostrom, and Brock 1981; on a cognitive view of argument, see also Hamble 1980, 1981). According to this model it is the auditors who, in response to an argument offered, create pro-and-con-arguments in their minds and weigh them against each other, and are thus themselves accountable for any process of persuasion. If we adopt this model, a change in the audience’s cognitive environment will inevitably be at the basis of any act of acceptance of a claim.

On the other hand, it is equally obvious that argumentation will only work if a certain cognitive environment is shared between arguer and audience. It is thus possible to say that it is the particular cognitive environment shared that constitutes a particular argument community, so that every argument community is by the same token a discourse community and a cognitive community.

Yet cognitive communities, like argument communities, are not fixed eternal entities, but are constituted anew according to each particular case. An immigrant will naturally have a perception on immigration problems different from an indigenous well-off middle class citizen’s; a unionist’s views on employment issues will be quite different from those of a trade association member. Yet all these community borders will be of little or no importance whenever issues such as climate change, the war in Iraq, abortion, the creationist/evolutionist debate, or the separation of francophone Québec from Canada are at stake. These examples amply illustrate the paramount significance of individual cases. Boundaries of cognitive environments are neither universal nor fixed, but they will realign according to each individual case. Individuals who find each other sharing certain cognitive environments, will easily find each other disagreeing deeply on other issues.

It is a lesson to learn from the model of argument communities, that beliefs and assumptions do arrange themselves into sets of beliefs or belief systems that may inform an argument community, thus facilitating argument within the community, but that on the other hand such belief systems are also “relative to different individuals in different

groups in different contexts” and may thus come into conflict with each other (Gough 2007: 499). We will now lastly see how such conflicts and disagreements come about.

#### 4. COGNITIVE BREAKS AND DEEP DISAGREEMENT

We have seen earlier that argument communities have a tendency not only to make arguing possible and appraisable within a community in the first place, but also to wall one community off from non-members and other, rival communities. Hence, if arguments are exchanged across communities which do not share their cognitive environments, the addressee may not be able to cognitively process the argument.

It was for such cases that Robert J. Fogelin introduced the notion of “deep disagreement” that would be characterized by “a clash of framework propositions” in a Wittgensteinian sense (Fogelin 1985: 5). Fogelin distinguishes between two kinds of argumentative exchange: He assumes that “an *argumentative exchange* is normal when it takes place within a context of *broadly* shared beliefs and preferences” (p. 3). This is clearly the case when cognitive environments are shared by a community or communities. In cases, however, “when the context is neither normal nor nearly normal”, for Fogelin “argument [...] becomes impossible,” since “the conditions for argument do not exist” (pp. 4 f.). “The language of argument may persist, but it becomes pointless since it makes an appeal to something that does not exist: a shared background of beliefs and preferences” (p. 5). In such cases, Fogelin speaks of deep disagreements (ibid.). One could also say that there is no overlap in cognitive environments.

This connection is even more prominent in the description given recently by Marc Angenot. Angenot notes that between groups of arguers there are in cases obvious “breaks” (“coupures”) in argumentative logic (2008: 15) and cognition (“coupures cognitives” pp. 17; 19) that are more or less “insurmontables” (p. 17) and separate arguers from each other in such a way that they cannot understand each other’s arguments, since they don’t use the same “code rhétorique” (p. 15). As a consequence, each side will bluntly deny the rationality of the other side’s arguments and declare them plainly absurd, a situation Fogelin describes in terms of “radical perspectivism” (2003: 73-74), which means that “conceptual frameworks” may even “wall us off from others enveloped in competing conceptual schemes” (p. 74). If under such conditions an argument continues—as indeed it often does—the result can only be a “dialogue of the deaf”, as Angenot dubs it (p. 19).

It is easy to see that it is these “cognitive breaks” that are responsible for the cases of deep disagreement, which is an additional argument for interpreting argument communities as cognitive communities. But where, when and how do such cognitive breaks come about? According to Sperber and Wilson, in such cases either the physical environment or the cognitive abilities of the two parties must be somehow different.

The obvious first candidate that may account for diversity of cognitive environments between arguers, and hence also for deep disagreement between argument communities, is most certainly the cultural background or environment an individual has been brought up in or conditioned to. Following a taxonomy developed by Barry Tomalin and Susan Stempleski, different cultures can be defined (and contrasted) by three interrelated elements or layers: 1) ideas (values, beliefs, institutions); 2) products (e.g. customs, habits, food, dress, lifestyle); 3) behaviors (e.g. folklore, music, art, literature) (1993: 7). Or-



dered by dignity and relevance, first and foremost there are values, norms, codes, and institutions. These may be of religious provenance, or associated with political ideas, or of a more general philosophical and ethical kind. A second layer is represented by the elements that form the collective memory of a cultural group, such as the narratives of a society's myths and history, but also cultural achievements such as products of literature and art, etc. A third tier is formed by the standards that regulate everyday life, such as language, customs, habits, etiquette, fashion and general lifestyle.

Yet diversity of cultural background is not the only possible cause for cognitive breaks. A second factor may be the diversity of social groups, strata, or classes, such as the wealthy and the poor, workers and entrepreneurs, locals and foreigners, indigenous people and immigrants, but also the young and the old, or perhaps even men and women (if we believe Deborah Tannen 1990, there are also serious cognitive breaks between those two species). This factor will be most relevant in private (or personal) communities.

Finally, of course differences of intellectual levels come in as a third major element. A complex argument from McKerrow's philosophical community, or even from one of the technical communities, may not be easy to grasp for an outsider. Especially technical communities as a rule wall themselves off from non-members by the intellectual standard presupposed in their arguments.

But, most importantly, these potential causes for cognitive breaks are not separated from each other. In individual debates, they are usually inextricably intertwined, so that in reality it is as a rule rather a complex network of various layers, tiers and groupings that is responsible for the success or failure of an individual argument. In today's pluralistic societies, a multiplicity of different argument communities coexist within one society. And each individual is at any given moment a member and an agent of various different argument communities.

Hence, the concept of argument communities has two sides, after all. On the one hand, it can be very useful for the description and evaluation of actual processes of argumentation. But on the other hand, it also explains the reasons why and when arguments do fail.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, from the preceding reflections it has turned out that McKerrow's concept of argument communities has a number of advantages to offer over Toulmin's original concept of argument fields, and even over Goodnight's argument spheres. In particular, it does not share the notorious fuzziness of the concept of fields, but it also appears more balanced, more flexible, and more detailed than the concept of spheres. In particular, it most easily adapts to the analysis of particular cases of argument, which proved to be the essential function of fields in argument studies.

It has further been demonstrated that argument communities can best be interpreted as discourse communities and as such also have a demarcating function. Yet precisely in their capacity as discourse communities, they can also be described as cognitive communities, based on mutually shared cognitive environments.

Finally, the demarcating function of argument communities qua cognitive communities offers an easy explanation for the disconcerting fact of deep disagreements, which can thus be explained as cognitive breaks that obtain between different argument communities that do not share a sufficiently extensive cognitive environment.

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# Commentary on “COGNITIVE COMMUNITIES AND ARGUMENT COMMUNITIES” by Manfred Kraus

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## 1. THE RISE AND FALL OF ARGUMENT FIELDS

Manfred Kraus not only has offered a substantial analysis of the topic of argument fields but also has brought back to mind a large literature that our field seems collectively to have forgotten about. Thirty years ago, at least within communication studies of argumentation, a hot topic was the concept of “argument fields” and related notions. The term “field” came from Toulmin (1958), who had written that two arguments are in the same field if the data and conclusions are of the same logical type. This view, however, defined fields as a formal property of arguments, whereas later work by Toulmin (1972) and others defined fields by reference to subject matter, academic discipline, or intellectual orientation such as behaviourism and Freudianism. This work rested on the belief that the standards for evaluating argument vary according to its substantive orientation. Goodnight (1982) focused on spheres rather than fields, in order to emphasize differences in the range of people eligible to participate in and to evaluate arguments. He distinguished among arguments in the personal, technical, and public spheres. And McKerrow (1980) introduced the notion of “argument communities” in order both to stress that standards for evaluating argument depend on the audience and to recognize that successful argument requires that arguer and audience share the same framework of basic assumptions that constitutes them as a community.

These three notions—of argument fields, spheres of argument, and argument communities—have in common the search for evaluation standards midway between the necessary (as in formal logic) and the arbitrary (as in commitment to pure relativism). One would think that this would be one of the most important topics for analysis. It was the central theme of the 1981 Alta conference on argumentation and the focus in 1982 of a special issue of *Argumentation and Advocacy* (Willard 1982). And then, during the early- to mid-1980s, the concept of fields almost completely disappeared from the literature—not because all problems had been solved but because discussion seemed to stalemate and perhaps because new and more interesting issues vied for our attention. At the 2007 Alta conference, Robert Rowland assembled and I participated on a panel offering reasons for the demise of “fields” as an overarching significant topic. I offered three explanations: the underlying commitment to a non-universal evaluative standard has been widely accepted; mapping the boundaries of any particular field has proved to be infeasible; and the metaphor of spheres has proved to be more potent than the metaphor of fields (Zarefsky 2009).

## 2. THE PROBLEM

But in neglecting the topic of fields (and its close cousins) we also have neglected the problem of how to articulate middle-range standards for argument adequacy. It is this problem to which Professor Kraus redirects our attention. He reviews the history of the concept's rise and fall in popularity and expresses his preference for McKerrow's term "communities" – I think because a community is a cognitive culture in which arguers and audiences participate, not just a demographic category. Kraus then notes that people participate simultaneously in different argument communities but that arguments across community boundaries may be impossible to understand. Those who see the world in utilitarian terms, for example, may be utterly incapable of understanding those whose world-view is grounded primarily in the Bible, and vice-versa. Just ask those who are convinced that the world will end at 6:00 p.m. tonight, or those who insist that anyone who gives this claim any credence must be mad.<sup>1</sup> These "cognitive breaks," Kraus indicates, mean that argument communities can be both a source of consensus (within communities) and a source of dissensus (between them).

This condition, incidentally, is not unique to "fields" or "communities." It applies, I think, to any effort to specify a unit smaller than the universal audience (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1958/1969) to which normative standards are applied. Although the analogy is not perfect, for instance, much the same can be said of "communicative activity types," the evaluative domains employed by the pragma-dialecticians to create norms for strategic manoeuvring (van Eemeren 2010). That arguments are differentially valid in different contexts is intuitively acceptable, yet determining the boundaries of an activity type is very difficult to do. This suggests that an additional heuristic benefit of the pragma-dialectical research program, beyond its own objectives, is that it has revived the long-dormant discussion of fields and communities! The ancient concept of rhetorical genres also draws our attention to this problem. That an argument has a different weight, say, in a forensic discourse from its weight in a deliberative or epideictic discourse makes sense, yet recent critical studies suggest that the boundaries among these genres are very hard to draw (there are many hybrid cases) and that there are quite likely several other genres besides these three.

So what we know about genres and activity types resonates with what Kraus has reminded us about fields and communities. But where do we go from here? Revealingly, Kraus ends his analysis at about the same place the discussion ended thirty years ago, feeding into the observation of van Eemeren *et al.* that "the idea of argument fields is notoriously vague" (van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Snoeck Henkemans, *et al.* 1996). It is not so much that it is vague as it is an insight without doubt and yet a conundrum without solution. Kraus, in fact, comes close to suggesting that argumentative discourse is radically individual, with every discourse constituting its own community.

True enough, from the standpoint of the arguers: they negotiate their own shared meanings and assumptive frameworks, usually at the outset of the controversy. But the argument theorist or analyst needs to be able to say that repeatedly, in situations in a given type, arguers do or should negotiate these meanings and frameworks in about the same way. Otherwise there is no standard against which to assess any given instance of argumentation, no basis on which to conclude whether it is a sound application or a derail-

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<sup>1</sup> A prominent California evangelist mistakenly had predicted that the world would end at 6:00 p.m. on May 21, 2011, the date this commentary was presented.

ment of strategic manoeuvring. Any normative exercise requires that a discourse be examined against something other than itself.

Equally, however, one cannot merely rely on the arguer's or analyst's own say-so to delineate fields, communities, genres, or activity types. Otherwise, how is one to say, for example, whether "legislative debate" is a sufficiently specific field or activity type, or whether "parliamentary debate" is a distinct though smaller argument community, or whether we need to specify "national parliamentary debate" or even "Dutch parliamentary debate?" In order to preserve the unique features of the particular case, the temptation may be great to delineate argument fields more and more narrowly, a reduction akin to inventing rhetorical genres without limit. This will produce a conflation of the descriptive and the normative, purchasing rich description of individual case studies at the price of inability to theorize or to evaluate.

### 3. THE PATHS AHEAD

Let me close with three suggestions to advance our understanding of argument fields and communities beyond the conundrum with which Professor Kraus has left us. First, we need empirical research and analysis of how actual arguers identify and define the argument communities in which they participate. The pragma-dialectics project was strengthened immensely, in my view, by the empirical work of van Eemeren, Garssen, and Meufels (2009) establishing that arguers do indeed regard as normative standards the expectations implicit in the "ten commandments." This finding strengthens the status of these statements as norms. They are not imposed artificially and *a priori* by argument theorists but are goals upheld by the actual arguers. Similarly, if one were to find that the principles arguers implicitly use to delineate argument communities match any of the candidates theorized in the literature—shared purpose, subject-matter orientation, intellectual perspective, type of warrant, and so on—the potency of that criterion will be enhanced and the stalemated understanding of what makes an argument field might be surmounted.

Second, we need to theorize paradigm cases of argument fields or communities in an attempt to identify their core characteristics. Many of the difficulties in identifying fields or communities result from encounters with borderline cases. If we began with what everyone acknowledges is an obvious case of legal or scientific argument, or of behavioural or psychoanalytic argument, or as negotiation or inquiry, for instance, we can see if high levels of agreement can be reached in characterizing that argument's features. High levels of inter-rater agreement would enable us to say that an unquestioned case of, say, political argumentation will have these and these features. We then can examine candidate specimens of political argumentation to assess the extent to which they share these characteristics and to examine significant departures in practice from the normative standard. We then can discuss anomalous cases, seeking to explain whether they fall short of the normative ideal or whether they are deliberate, purposive violations of the normative standard. These two steps could take us a long way toward validating specific argument communities and the concept of fields or communities itself.

Finally, we need to move beyond the recognition that discourse across argument communities can produce dissensus so that we explore how this obstacle can be surmounted so the discussion can proceed toward its goal. One promising lead in this regard is the concept of "interfield borrowing" offered by Charles Willard (1983) nearly 30

years ago, Willard suggested that, for the sake of the argument, one party to an interfield dispute might adopt the other's language or framework, "translating" his or her own arguments into the other arguer's terms so that the arguers might proceed toward resolving the dispute. Those who are sceptics about capitalism, for instance, might suggest that active state intervention in the market is the best way to *preserve* capitalism, hoping to enlist their opponents in support of a policy that the sceptics favour, even if not for the reason that the sceptics would prefer. How is interfield borrowing employed in practice? How do arguers discover the range of "topical choice" (van Eemeren 2010) through which they might execute interfield borrowing? Are there other strategic manoeuvres of subsumption or transcendence of seemingly stalemated positions that will enable an arguer to repair what Kraus describes as a "cognitive break," moving beyond an impasse of argumentative positions?

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This has been something of an oblique response to Manfred Kraus's paper. I have little to quarrel with regarding his selection of the critical literature or his reconstruction of the nature and problem of argument communities. Having brought this dispute over fields back into our consciousness where it belongs, however, he and we now have the responsibility to take this notion to the next level of understanding and of theoretical and critical utility. I thank Professor Kraus for stimulating me to think again about these questions 30 years later, and I hope that these comments might suggest some of the paths we could take.

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# Reply to David Zarefsky

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

David Zarefsky's comments on my paper have made it very plain to me that I have written only one half of the paper I should have written. Hence I have every reason to thank him for writing the other half and supplementing my diagnosis with appropriate therapy, without which the treatment of the topic would not be complete.

## 2. REVISIONS IN DIAGNOSIS

Zarefsky quite rightly emphasizes that the phenomenon of cognitive breaks is kind of universal and not unique to "fields", "spheres", or "communities", and that in my survey I should thus also have addressed (as Frans H. van Eemeren also pointed out in discussion) the pragma-dialecticians' "communicative activity types" as the most recent revivification of the concept, and also rhetorical genres as their more time-honored precursors.

I further realize that my approach is to a certain extent guilty of a tendency to individualize, if not atomize single instances or "cases" of argumentative discourse, and hence of creating a potentially infinite number of ad hoc "communities", at the price of losing sight of the normative standards that would however be indispensable for assessing arguments and processes of argumentation. Zarefsky is clearly right in insisting—as he did in his earliest contribution to the discussion (1982: 203)—on the requirement of such standards.

In this respect I regret that Zarefsky's and Rowland's most recent contributions (Zarefsky 2009; Rowland 2009) have been inaccessible to me. They might have put my analysis on a better track in the first place.

## 3. METHODS FOR THERAPY

I cannot but fully agree with Zarefsky's three ingenious suggestions as for possible solutions. Indeed empirical research in the way conducted by van Eemeren, Garssen, and Meuffels, more so than any amount of theorizing on concepts of fields or communities, will be a way out of the impasse, since certain normative standards will be intuitively applied and approved of by arguers, and so will be criteria of what constitutes an argument field or community.

The method of analyzing and theorizing paradigm cases, starting with most undisputed and widely acknowledged examples, is also promising and can usefully supplement empirical research, since its point of attack is half-way between individual cases and theoretical concepts of fields.

On the third point, I would like to add that Willard's suggested method of "inter-field borrowing" (1983) has in fact been profitably applied in cross-cultural argumentation studies, for example by Yameng Liu (1999), as a way of bridging clashes of civilizations in a globalized world.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In my view Zarefsky's remarks do not at all appear as "an oblique response" (p. 4), but as a natural and necessary complement to my paper. The reader will hence be well advised to observe his comments alongside my text.

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