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Argumentative Bluff in Eristic Discussion: An analysis and evaluation

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ABSTRACT: How does the evaluation of argumentation depend on the dialogue type in which the argumentation has been put forward? This paper focuses on argumentative bluff in *eristic* (or: polemic) *discussion*. Any arguer conveys the pretence that his argumentation is dialectically reasonable and, at least to some degree, rhetorically effective. Within eristic discussion, it can be profitable to bluff that these claims are correct. However, it will be defended that such bluffing is dialectically inadmissible, even within an eristic discussion.

KEYWORDS: argumentative bluff, critical discussion, dialogue types, eristic discussion, fallacies

1. INTRODUCTION

In order to understand and assess an argumentative discourse we need to investigate the circumstances of the discourse. Argumentation is typically put forward by a particular speaker towards a particular collection of addressees within a particular kind of situation. One component of this "situatedness" or "contextuality" is the type of dialogue in which the argumentation is located. Walton and Krabbe distinguish between six basic types of dialogue, based on more elementary distinctions pertaining to the initial situation of a dialogue, the individual aims of the participants and the collective main goal of the dialogue (1995). These six types are the persuasion dialogue, the negotiation dialogue, the eristic dialogue, the inquiry dialogue, the deliberation dialogue and the information-seeking dialogue. This paper restricts its scope to what is only a subtype of the eristic dialogue, namely *eristic discussion*.[1] An eristic discussion (also referred to as "sophistical dialogue" by Walton 1998, p. 195) forms an highly adversarial and competitive kind of conversation where each party tries to create the impression on the part of an attending audience that it is he who is the most clever and skilful discussant, in a shared attempt to settle upon an appropriate intellectual hierarchy between the participants. What

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[1] The other subtype is the quarrel and is dealt with in more detail by Krabbe and Walton (Walton and Krabbe 1995; Walton 1998).

consequences does an argumentation's being situated within an eristic discussion have for its evaluation?

In this paper I will first sketch the problem of evaluating argumentation in the context of an eristic discussion. Next, I will characterize the eristic discussion, elaborating on Walton's account (1998, chapter 7). Third, I will discuss a peculiarity of offering argumentation in this kind of setting, starting from the pragma-dialectical perspective on argumentation as strategic manoeuvring between the dialectical objective of dispute resolution and the rhetorical objective of winning over the other side (Van Eemeren and Houtlosser 1999; 2002). Fourth, I will defend that eristic argumentation can be judged by the standards of a critical discussion and show that it is nevertheless useful to take the eristic dialogue context into account when evaluating argumentation.

2. THE PROBLEM OF EVALUATING ERISTIC ARGUMENTATION

Walton proposes to deal with models of types of dialogue as descriptions of kinds of dialogue in which we can be engaged, but also as normative models. In his view, argumentation that is situated within a particular dialogue type must be evaluated by determining to what extent the argumentation serves this dialogue type's main goal.

> [W]hen an argument is used it is a good argument (or a successful or correct argument) to the extent that it contributes to the goal of the dialogue. But there can be different goals because there can be different types of dialogue in which the same argument can be used. Thus in the new dialectical method of evaluating arguments, an argument is correct or reasonable if it is used at some stage in a dialogue to contribute the overall goal of that type of dialogue by fulfilling the requirements for the kind of move an argument is supposed to be at that stage. (Walton 1998, p. 30)

For example, Walton and Krabbe state that "[i]n the eristic discussion, an outrageous fallacy may be the best and most successful technique to persuade your audience" (1995, p. 79), suggesting that the eristic context makes an otherwise fallacious move non-fallacious. In the course of section 5, I will offer two reasons for adopting an alternative view, according to which we ought not to adopt different argumentative norms for different dialogue types, and so for the view that we should not adopt a more liberal perspective when evaluating reasoning used for polemic purposes.[2] But then, in what other way could the argumentation's being localized in a particular dialogue type be relevant for our assessment of the argumentation?

Van Eemeren and Houtlosser defend that argumentation must always be evaluated by determining to what extent it serves or hinders the goal of a genuine critical discussion, that is, the resolution of a difference of opinion, taking into account the merits of both sides. Nevertheless, they hold that the evaluation of argumentation can be improved by taking the so-called *argumentative activity type* into account. First, knowledge of the argumentative activity can be used in order to reconstruct the discourse adequately, for example by enabling us to unearth the commitments of those involved (Van Eemeren et al., forthcoming). For example, it is because we know what role a prosecutor is supposed play that we know that his question must be reconstructed as part of an argument. Second, the activity type can provide us with context sensitive criteria

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[2] See Krabbe and van Laar (2007) for an account of the functions of reasoning.

with which it can be decided whether a discussion move complies with a general rule for critical discussion (van Eemeren *et al.*, forthcoming). The application of the general norms for critical discussion can depend on the features of an activity type. For example, the rules for critical discussion allow a discussant to employ the so-called *pragmatic argumentation scheme*. When using this scheme, the discussant argues in favour of a course of action by pointing at desirable consequence of the course of action. If the discussion is part of a parliamentary debate the desirability most plausibly pertains to the interests of the public at large and if the discussion is part of a mediation session between parents on the verge of a divorce, the desirability most plausibly pertains to the interests of the child. So, the context can provide a criterion with which to determine whether a consequence counts as desirable or not. To my mind, these criteria can be reconstructed as contextual specifications of the norms for critical discussion that the participants can agree upon in the opening stage of a critical discussion. By entering a particular argumentative activity type, a person implicitly commits himself to this outcome of the (implicit) opening stage.

Krabbe (forthcoming) holds that the normative model for critical discussion prescribes a high level of cooperation between the participants, while at the same time allowing the parties some level of competitiveness. Various dialogue types can be seen as forcing the participants to raise the level of cooperation beyond the level prescribed by a resolution oriented critical discussion.[3] For example, an inquiry or a deliberation dialogue requires participants to work more closely together in a shared attempt to reach an outcome that either can count as shared knowledge or as an agreed upon course of action. The additional norms can be applied when evaluating the argumentation. Again, these norms can be reconstructed as implicitly agreed upon by entering the inquiry. In other words, they are additional procedural starting points that the participants have fixed in the opening stage of their discussion. So, both Krabbe and van Eemeren *et al.* assign a direct evaluative role for the argumentative activity type in letting the (material or procedural) commitments of the participants be partly determined by the argumentative activity type. When evaluating argumentative discourse we can, then, determine whether the argumentation follows both the general rules for critical discussion, as well as the additional or specified norms agreed upon in the opening stage.[4]

A problem, however, is that this solution seems to work fine for all dialogue types, except for the eristic one, for a crucial characteristic of an eristic discussion seems to be that there is *less* cooperation than prescribed by the norms for critical discussion, and that the contestants are typically unwilling to bind themselves to propositions or procedures.[5] Even a whole-hearted commitment to the rules for critical discussion cannot

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[3] Krabbe (forthcoming) examines three ways in which this idea can be modelled: by separate normative models for each kind of dialogue type; by one normative model that allows the parties more or less room for manoeuvring strategically, depending on context; and by encompassing models that assign more or less competitive tasks to subordinated models.

[4] However, not every additional rule can be accepted as established by a legitimate decision in the opening stage. At the least, the additional rule must not be inconsistent with the general rules for critical discussion.

[5] When the eristic discussion takes place in a further type of argumentative activity, for example a parliamentary debate, then there could be institutional constraints that apply to the manoeuvring of the eristic disputants. In Dutch parliament, for example, the disputants are always to address the speaker of the house and not each other. It is more precise to state, therefore, that when a conversation becomes eristic,

be taken for granted here. Lacking such commitments, how could contextual knowledge of this kind of activity be useful when evaluating argumentative discourse that is to serve polemic purposes?

3. ERISTIC DISCUSSION

What could be meant by saying that two parties are engaged in an eristic discussion? The account that I am going to provide is fully descriptive, in the sense that it aims to give a *description* of the objectives and norms that play a role in this kind of conversation. Starting from the sketch given by Krabbe and Walton (Walton and Krabbe 1995; Walton 1998), I will explicate the idea of an eristic discussion as a particular game performed in front of an audience. Whether this conceptual construal is adequate for the study of antagonistic discourse is a matter of empirical research.[6]

Eristic discussion has been described by Walton and Krabbe as a dialogue between participants who start from an "unsettled intellectual hierarchy" (1995, p. 78), who collectively try to "settle the intellectual hierarchy" (p. 79) between them and who, individually, aim at striking and defeating the other side by appearing to be verbally more skilful. As said above, I try to model eristic discussion as a game, played by two disputants in front of an audience. The audience serves as a jury, eager to find out who deserves to be declared the honourable winner. Typical examples can be found in heated exchanges where politicians try to outmanoeuvre one another or where academics aim at humiliating their scholarly opposition intellectually.[7] A prototypical historical example is provided by the confrontations in Plato's Euthydemus.[8]

The game starts from an antagonism between the two disputants. Part of the antagonism is a so-called difference of opinion, such that the parties have avowed opposite positions regarding one and the same proposition. Another part of the antagonism is the lack of a fixed intellectual pecking order between the disputants. Often, but not necessarily, the antagonism is loaded with emotions and the stakes are high.

The disputants can be strongly opposed and the eristic discussion can be quite chaotic. But there is a main goal that makes the skirmish into a type of conversational game. Just as the shared goal of competing soccer teams is to fix the athletic hierarchy between them, the collective goal of an eristic discussion is to determine the intellectual hierarchy as regards discussing the topic at issue. Eristic discussion is the kind of game that aims at finding out who is most capable, shrewd, smart and artful when it comes to devising and presenting argumentation. By entering the eristic discussion, the disputants commit themselves to the realization of this main goal. Consequently, even though an eristic discussion allows the participants plenty elbow room for vicious and deceptive

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this shift does not bring additional constraints while existing institutional constraints could remain operative after the shift.

[6] It will often be difficult to make a strong case for the claim that a particular conversation forms a clear example of an eristic discussion, due to the fact that this dialogue type is partly defined in terms of the objectives of participants and that participants will often be reluctant to admit that these are their objectives. Still, the model provides a fruitful perspective on argumentation and dialogue insofar as it explains features of the discourse.

[7] Formal debating competitions provide a special kind of example where the stakes are mostly educational.

[8] A notion that is closely related to the eristic discussion is Tannens *agonism*, described as "*ritualized adversativeness*" (Tannen 2002, p. 1652).

tactics, there are various restrictions that they need to take into account. For example, a participant is committed to giving the other side a chance at having a say; physical violence and open threats are considered inappropriate; each contribution must at least to some minimal degree be relevant for the difference of opinion that underlies the antagonism; lies are improper; etcetera. The main goal of this kind of dialogue generates a minimal level of *internal normativity* (cf. van Eemeren *et al.*, forthcoming).

Given that the main aim is to find out who is the most skilful arguer, the individual aim of each disputant is to create the impression, on the part of the audience, that he or she prevails. In order to create the impression of victory, a party tries to outmanoeuvre the other side. By thus testing the verbal and logical skills of the other side the parties further the main goal. So, the individual aims of the disputants are conflicting, making up the agonistic, polemical and adversarial nature of an eristic discussion.

Given that argumentation and criticism is understood as strategic manoeuvring between dialectical reasonableness and persuasiveness (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 1999, 2002), the *individual aim* of a disputant in this eristic game is likewise complex, having a dialectical as well as a rhetorical component. The aim is not so much to act dialectically reasonable and rhetorically successful, but to create the *impression*, on the part of the judging audience, that one's strategic manoeuvring is successful. I will deal with the two components of this manoeuvring in turn.

First, the aim of any disputant is to create the impression of being a *reasonable arguer*, that is, a person who offers reasonable argumentation. Depending on circumstances, there can be several means available for producing this impression, varying from dressing in a particular manner to explicitly stating that one is a very reasonable. However, the main device is that of presenting argumentation of such a kind and in such a way that it creates the impression, correctly or not, of being reasonable in the sense of genuinely contributing to the resolution of the difference of opinion.

Second, the aim of any disputant is to create the impression of being an *assertive arguer*, that is, a person who presents effective, persuasive argumentation. Depending on circumstances, there can, again, be several means available. The impression of being an assertive, effective discussant might, depending on the contextual specifics, be served by diverging devices such as announcing one's assertiveness, or announcing one's reasonableness, or even stressing one's position as an underdog. Still, I expect that one of the main devices, if not the crucial device,[9] will be that of presenting argumentation with which one appears, correctly or not, to be making progress towards persuading and winning over the respondent. An eristic discussion, therefore, is a clash between disputants who try to create an image of argumentative reasonableness and assertiveness.[10]

The audience keeps the score and, in the end, declares the winner if it does not declare the discussion a draw.[11] The audience can choose from various criteria by which to decide who won the game. Depending of the set of criteria chosen, we could distinguish various variants of the eristic discussion. The audience can assign more weight to the degree of reasonableness a disputant exhibits. That would steer the eristic

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[9] A necessary condition is that the audience has a minimal level of critical acumen.

[10] The parties can be seen as being primarily concerned with the construction of an appropriate ethos.

[11] I think it is not unusual for members of audiences to make their decisions, about who to vote for or about what opinion to adopt, depend on their verdicts on who is the most skilful debater.

discussion in the direction of a critical discussion. Or the audience could assign more weight to the rhetorical assertiveness a disputant exhibits. In that case, the eristic discussion is pulled towards a martial exchange of words. The audience could even assign positive points for fallacious moves, and do so even if they see though them in case they take the committing of the fallacy as evidence of the disputant's assertiveness.

Still, the value of rhetorical assertiveness can not be stretched too far. A disputant who does not seem to be concerned with his image of a reasonable arguer and who, consequently, employs all kinds of illegitimate argumentative tricks in an attempt to gain the upper hand, undermines his own position. An argumentative strategy can only be a rhetorically assertive strategy if it is brought forward with the pretence of being dialectically reasonable to a sufficiently high degree; for an obviously unreasonable arguer can hardly appear to be effective. The addressee needs to be under the impression that she changes her opinion for good reasons. This does not imply that a disputant needs to uphold his image of a reasonable arguer at each juncture of the dialogue. The audience can appreciate fallacious tactics, and assign the fallacy monger assertiveness points, if only these tactics can be considered part of a larger strategy that 'in essence' or 'upon the whole' is considered genuinely dialectically reasonable. I will assume that we are dealing with a kind of eristic discussion where the audience takes this latter approach, pushing the disputants to balance reasonableness and effectiveness in their overall performance but not at each individual conversational contribution.

There are further choices to be made when deciding what counts as reasonable and effective. For the sake of simplicity, and also in order to make the game interesting for the purpose of studying argumentation from a normative perspective, I now add the following two assumptions. First, the audience adopts the pragma-dialectical concept of reasonableness that is specified in the model for critical discussion. Second, the audience only judges an (elementary or complex) argumentation to be effective for the adversary if, in the end, the adversary both accepts the basic premises and the justificatory force of each of the reasoning steps.[12]

If we find argumentation brought forward within the kind of conversation that can properly be analysed as an eristic discussion, we are now provided with a framework by which to explain the argumentative behaviour of the disputants. In such a vein, Krabbe and Walton explain the occurrence of a number of fallacies, such as the *ad hominem* (Walton and Krabbe 1995, p. 111), straw man and irrelevancy (Walton 1998, p. 196), as the result of a shift from a persuasion dialogue to an eristic dialogue. In the next part I will elaborate on a special strategic aspect of offering argumentation in eristic discussion, an aspect that is missing in a genuinely critical discussion. This explains a different characteristic of eristic discussion, namely, what will be called, *argumentative bluff*.

4. ARGUMENTATIVE BLUFF

Argumentation and the pretences to reasonableness and effectiveness go together, as we have seen. If party A conveys an argumentative pretence to something, then this can be understood as getting across the message that A wins the sub-discussion that would ensue from party B's challenging this pretence. In the sub-discussion, A would have to

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[12] These basic components of effectiveness are also covered by the appropriateness conditions for the speech act of advancing argumentation (Van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992).

substantiate his pretence. If he succeeds the pretence apparently was justified, if not party A apparently has bluffed or blundered. So, the word 'pretence' is not used in its pejorative sense, but in the neutral sense of laying claim to something—in a dialogue –, whether or not that claim is correct. I focus on the pretence to effectiveness, although what follows also can be made to apply to the pretences to reasonableness.

Argumentative pretences have a special strategic flavour within the context of an eristic discussion. This is due to two connected features. First, the argumentation officially addresses the adversary, but the ultimate judge is the attending audience. There is, as will be shown, reason for the arguer to think that this audience will accept his argumentative claims on his say-so. Second, the dialogue is not primarily about the merits of the opinions, but about the argumentative skills of the disputants. As a consequence, there is a risk involved for any addressee who would want to challenge a claim. These two features give rise both to bluffing when conveying argumentative pretences and to the avoidance of calling one's bluff.

Characteristically, eristic discussions take place among politicians or other professional or experienced public speakers. The audience, however, is heterogeneous and mainly made up of laymen, both with regard to the topic at issue and to the techniques of discussion. That makes the score-keeping audience a potential target of the disputants' alleged expert opinions on the issue of who is winning and who is losing. So, by pretending to be effective, a public speaker often can be seen as appealing to his credibility as an experienced debater.

Suppose, a disputant, such as the Dutch politician Wilders, argues "Each non-western immigrant family costs us 230.000 Euros, so the multi-cultural project costs us 100 billion Euros!" The mere pretence to the argument's being logically strong[13] could increase the likelihood that the audience (here: those who read and watch the news) accepts that claim. It gets across the message to the audience "trust me, you can assign me the point, for my opponent will not be able to challenge me successfully." Such a pretence can be strengthened. One way is to act as though the adversary has already accepted the claim, for example by using the argument to support a further argument. Another way is to act as though any challenge towards the validity pretence would be a non-starter or fallacious, for example by saying something like "*of course*, the one thing implies the other." The pretence can be weakened by adding phrases such as 'probably.' We could call these *strengthening* and *weakening devices*. In such cases, the arguer can be seen as engaged in eristic scorekeeping, scribbling down, more or less firmly, a point on the audience's scoreboard in his own favour. In short, the presence of a judging audience consisting of laymen enables a disputant to influence the score, not just by expressing the propositions that make up the argumentation, but also by conveying the argumentative pretence to the argumentation's being effective.

Of course, this attempt at influencing the audience would not work if the adversary would challenge the pretence and thereby force the arguer to substantiate his

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[13] The supposition is that it is a matter of simple arithmetic. But in fact, the reasoning is very weak, for these non-western immigrant families also generate money and other assets and it is not at all clear that these profits have been taken into account. The further suggestion that the multi-cultural project is expensive is also unjustified, for who knows what are the costs for western immigrant families or for non-immigrant families? If these groups are relatively expensive, the multi-cultural project might be considered a bargain.

claims. So why could the arguer take the risk and hope for the critic to remain silent and let him get away so easily? The answer I hypothesize is that in an eristic discussion there is also a risk involved in challenging pretences.

The primary aim of presenting argumentation is that of creating the appearance of one's being reasonable and effective. Suppose, the adversary challenges an argumentative pretence to effectiveness, rubbing out, as it were, the score scribbled down by the arguer. Then a sub-discussion ensues, resulting either in the arguer's substantiating his claim or in the addressee's substantiating her challenge. If the addressee succeeds in substantiating her challenge, then this success brushes up her image of an assertive arguer (or of an assertive critic, for that matter). If, however, the addressee fails to substantiate her challenge, and is forced to withdraw her challenge, this event damages her image as an effective disputant. An unsuccessful criticism counts against the skills and strike power of the addressee. She becomes vulnerable to ridicule and contempt. The arguer increases the possible damage by having employed strengthening devices such as "of course." Such a strategic consideration on the addressee's part does not play any role in a critical discussion for the reason that a critical discussion is fully tailored to the *promotion* of criticism. There ought not to be any heavy penalties for unsuccessful criticisms.

So, whether or not the addressee chooses to challenge an argumentative pretence is the result of her estimation of the expected value of the act of challenging the pretence and of that of accepting the pretence. Accepting the pretence clearly leads to a particular loss for the addressee. Challenging the pretence involves a risk: the critic assigns a particular chance to her success and a positive value to the success and she assigns a particular chance to her possible failure and a negative value to the failure. (To be more precise: the critic assigns chances to particular verdicts by the audience and values to those results as fixed by the audience.) Depending on such considerations she must make her choice. If the chance of failure or the cost of failure is too great, she had better accept the loss that results when accepting the pretence.

So, in an eristic discussion, offering argumentation can be seen as the placing of a bet such that the other side can choose to 'call the cards' and challenge the pretence, or 'pass' by refraining from calling and thus accepting her loss. A speaker can be seen as argumentatively bluffing, when he intentionally conveys an argumentative pretence that he considers himself false or unwarranted. Given the addressee's risk of a damaged image, a strategy of bluffing can work out positively for the arguer: there still is a real possibility for the arguer to get away with it, thereby improving his chances of getting a positive verdict from the audience. Of course, a strategy of permanent bluffing will not be successful, for as soon as the critic finds out about such a strategy she knows that challenging the pretence will be profitable.[14] The arguer can increase the stakes by strengthening the pretence: "Of course, A implies B," or reduce the stakes by weakening the pretence: "Probably, A implies B." Not only the arguer but also the addressee might 'raise the bet'; she could do by responding to the argument saying something like "that's ridiculous," hoping for the arguer to back off.

So, we have seen two connected explanations of the existence of argumentative bluff in eristic discussion: an audience is prone to accepting claims by experienced debaters and the expected value of accepting a pretence can sometimes be greater than

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[14] It would be interesting to examine strategies in eristic discussion from the perspectives of game theory.

that of challenging it. This is part of the context within which the pretence to effectiveness must be understood.[15]

5. EVALUATING BLUFF IN ERISTIC DISCUSSION

From the perspective of the eristic discussion's intrinsic normativity, bluffing is correct or legitimate in so far as it serves the purpose of establishing the appropriate intellectual hierarchy between the disputants. Here, however, we are concerned with the dialectical admissibility of argumentative bluffing. To what extent can bluffing be considered correct from the perspective of resolving the differences of opinion on the merits?

When the bluffing pertains to the acceptability of the propositional content of argumentation, the bluffing can be analysed, within the pragma-dialectical theory, as a violation of the rule for critical discussion according to which it is not allowed to falsely present a proposition as a shared starting point (2004, pp. 145-147, 193). When the bluffing pertains to the justificatory connection between reasons and standpoint, the bluffing can be reconstructed as a violation of a rule that, among other things, states that the protagonist has successfully defended the justificatory force if the argumentation exemplifies a logical schema that has been accepted as valid or an argumentation schema that has been accepted as admissible (2004, pp. 148-150).[16] This view can summarised as stipulating that a party is not allowed to falsely present the propositional content as acceptable to the interlocutor or the justificatory force as sufficient within the context of the discussion. Given that a fallacy is defined as a violation of a rule for critical discussion, the circumstance that argumentative bluffing is done intentionally does not make the contribution more fallacious than it already is.

Why would we be enticed into thinking that argumentative bluffing is less problematic in an eristic discussion as compared to dialogue types that are more cooperative? One answer could be that, as a matter of fact, the parties are not *really* engaged in a serious resolution oriented discussion. If the conversation is eristic, the norms for critical discussion seem to be far-fetched and irrelevant for evaluating what the disputants are doing. They are not collectively trying to achieve a resolution of their differences. Instead, they are outmanoeuvring one another in a verbal match. Applying rules for critical discussion therefore, would be like applying the rules for dancing to a wrestling match, or so the critique could go.

I mention two reasons that weigh against this position. First, when we are interested in argumentation, we are justified to employ the normative theory of a critical discussion when sifting out and evaluating the argumentative aspects of the discourse. Even if a disputant is not at all concerned, mentally, with dialectical reasonableness, that does not count against the appropriateness of the choice to reconstruct and evaluate his contributions from the stance of reasonable argumentation. (Dancing could provide an interesting perspective on wrestling.)

Second, we have seen that even in an eristic discussion, the participants uphold a pretence to reasonableness that applies to their overall performance (even if it does not

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[15] The same reasoning can be made to apply to the pretence to reasonableness.
[16] This is to be determined by following the intersubjective inference procedure in case the argumentation is presented as logically valid or the intersubjective testing procedure in case the argumentation is presented with less strict aspirations.

apply to each individual utterance). So, there is a commitment to argumentative reasonableness, and, in principle, there is some ground for pinning a disputant down on the results of an evaluation that has started from the norms for reasonable discussion. Consequently, rules for critical discussion can be made to apply to argumentation that has been brought forward in an eristic discussion. The audience may happen to value rhetorical assertiveness higher than is desirable from a critical perspective. That, however, should not lure us into conflating the notions of assertiveness and reasonableness.

So, why then is the study of the eristic activity type relevant for evaluation purposes? The reason that van Eemeren *et a.l* and Krabbe put forward, namely that a particular argumentative activity type binds the participants to additional material or procedural commitments, is not plausible in the case of an eristic discussion for the reason that this dialogue type just seems to provide the participants with more room for manoeuvring, instead of less. Still, it is important to have a clear grasp of the eristic context, for it prepares analysts (and the participants who, now and then, adopt the role of analysts) for the types of problems and fallacies that can be expected in these kinds of circumstances.

1) Given that parties are enticed to bluff, now and then, an analyst should be on his guard for the conveyance of argumentative pretences. Eristic not only invites disputants to commit straw man fallacies and *ad hominem* fallacies, but the disputants can also be strongly motivated to violate the starting point rule or one of the rules for justificatory force by *argumentative bluffing*.

2) Given that parties are enticed to avoid calling one's bluff, at least now and then, an analyst should be on his guard for the lack of critical acumen displayed in the behaviour of the disputants. In this type of dialogue, critics can develop the intention not to challenge pretences they consider risky. A silent critic cannot be criticized so easily as having committed a fallacy. Still, there is a kind of flaw on her part. Her mistake is not so much that she violates the rights of the other side, but that she thinks it to be opportune to remain silent on a particular issue, disregarding her critical duties, as an antagonist, to critically and systematically test the protagonist's position.[17]

3) When evaluating a polemic discourse, the mere circumstance that the addressee does not respond to claims of the speaker or writer should not be taken as a strong indication of this claim's being acceptable. The 'silence means assent' assumption (cf. Mackenzie's use of this assumption in his formal dialogue systems, 1990) should not be taken for granted in this kind of context.

6. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have been working towards a game-like model of the argumentative activity type of eristic discussion. The model needs further specification by stating rules with which the audience can determine the score. Such a more complete model provides a experimental-like set-up in which to study the strategic manoeuvring of discussants who are involved in such polemical discussions. More in particular, I have dealt with the

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[17] She can then be said not to behave in conformity with one of two basic requirements for dialectical reasonableness, namely that one ought to try to win the discussion (the other requirement being to obey the rules, Krabbe 2001).

strategic significance of presenting argumentation as rhetorically effective, providing in that way an explanation of argumentative bluff. Even though the intrinsic normativity of an eristic discussion cannot be used when evaluating polemic argumentation from the dialectical perspective of dispute resolution, still a clear grasp of what can be expected in this kind of situation guides an evaluation by informing us about what to expect in this type of dialogue. A theory of eristic discussion might further prove helpful for developing the means with which disputants can reshape circumstances in directions that are more congenial for genuine resolution oriented discussion.

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