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ARGUMENT AND AUTHORITY: ON THE PRAGMATIC BASES OF ACCEPTING AN APPEAL TO AUTHORITY AS RATIONAL

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Abstract:

According to an everyday concept of 'argumentation' the presence of authority rules out the possibility for argumentation. However, in the case of appeal to authority, e.g., argumentation and authority coexist. The analysis of (idealized) teacher-and-student interactions shows that a teacher's utterances are critically evaluated by the students, although these may lack relevant knowledge for adequate evaluation. The teacher cannot rely upon his authority alone; if the students accept what she says, the acceptance can be said to be the positive result of a critical evaluation based on the students' knowledge about the subject. Therefore, a dialogical concept of argument acceptability, related to a conception of a genuine argumentativity of language use, is introduced which 1) states that acceptability is connected to the knowledge/information available to an addressee, and 2) can account for why appeals to authority are accepted as rational arguments.

The present paper deals with what is traditionally known as the *argumentum ad verecundiam*, or the *appeal to authority*. It deals, that is, with fallacious reasoning, with a kind of argument which should not be used in a rational discussion.

Introduction: Sketching out a phenomenology of the appeal to authority

Indeed, if I am discussing something with somebody, and if I have put forward a claim that has subsequently been doubted by this person, then there is no possibility whatsoever to argumentatively support this claim by appealing to my own or someone else's authority. By appealing to someone's authority I cannot provide the person who doubts with insights about what makes my claim acceptable. I am telling my opponent, instead, that I say so, and that the authority A says so, too. However, if I am denied my claim by my opponent, she may well deny it the authority A, whom I quote as saying so, too. Therefore, I have failed to give reasons for the acceptability of my claim; I have not added to the argumentative resolution of a problematic situation; and therefore my reasoning may be called fallacious.

It is well known that things are not so clear in everyday life. If I go to a lawyer because I have serious troubles with my neighbour who continues to pick the apples from the tree in my garden, I trust her authority when she advocates this-or-that procedure. I simply do not care about the reasons which make this procedure acceptable or relevant to the problematic situation. Nobody, probably, would call this "irrational." Appeals to authority, then, are fallacious in some instances, but are perfectly acceptable in others. This is why most of the scholars in the field agree that the appeal to authority is a somewhat delicate matter; and this is why many of them, when dealing

with the appeal to authority, elaborate lists of conditions which specify in which circumstances such an appeal is acceptable and in which circumstances it is not.¹ One of these lists is given by the Dutch linguist Peter Jan Schellens. He formulates the conditions he proposes in terms of questioning the credibility of the authoritative source present in what he calls an "argumentation on the basis of authority" (*argumentatie op basis van autoriteit*), which according to Schellens has the form: the authority A says that P; therefore P. The list he sets up includes eight questions.

- I. Is P clear and unambiguous?
- II. Is P quoted correctly, not separated from its context, and (if applicable) correctly interpreted or paraphrased?
- III. Does P correspond to other statements of the same source?
- IV. Does P correspond to the statements of other authoritative sources?
- V. Does P correspond to other available information?
- VI. Is the presented statement not obsolete?
- VII. Is A an expert? (Has A had the opportunity and is A capable of giving a correct description and an informed judgment of the circumstances relevant for P?) b) Has A a legitimation for statements like P?
- VIII. Is A sincere? (Are there reasons to doubt A's sincerity, impartiality, or objectivity?) b) Is A reliable? (Are there reasons to believe that A abuses her legitimation or is not careful in exercising it?)] (Schellens 1985: 186-7; my translation)

Lists like Schellens's state more or less precisely the conditions which must obtain for an appeal to authority not to be a fallacy, but rather a rational and acceptable argument. Lists like Schellens's therefore suggest that an appeal to authority might be acceptable if it is the only way out, but that appealing to, and accepting an appeal to, an authority should be avoided as far as possible. It is something less rational or even irrational and will always remain a foreigner, never acquiring full citizenship in a rational discussion.

What is interesting for the purposes of the present paper is not so much the conditions themselves that Schellens proposes. What is interesting is, rather, that he formulates the conditions as evaluative questions an addressee of an appeal to authority might ask in a dialectical encounter. Even though this might be over-interpreting Schellens, it seems natural that the person who asks these evaluative questions is the person who will evaluate the argument. And as is stressed by Questions III through VI particularly, the evaluation will be based essentially on the information available to the addressee.

By taking seriously what this interpretation of Schellens's evaluative questions suggests, the analyst may be led to assume that the standards of acceptability are not unconditional standards. The standards and conditions of acceptability which must obtain and can be questioned are heuristic tools that help the arguers make sense of the context in which the argument takes place. Accordingly, this paper is not concerned so much with the normative level of conditions of acceptability as with the factual level of acceptance. For its main argument will be about what addressees of an appeal to authority might have to go on when they accept it as rational.

The theoretical interest of trying to do this is that by placing the analytical instance of evaluating the arguments within the very communicative process, it is possible to account for the fact that we do not usually feel less rational when we defer to an authority. The rationality involved here may turn out to be something other than normatively grounded scientific rationality; but it will turn out as well that this "everyday rationality," although

different, is not a deficient rationality.

Showing this involves three steps. First, an everyday concept of rationality has to be accounted for in order to respond to the conversational and interactive nature of argument. The second step concerns a dialogical concept of argument acceptability, which is closely related to a specific feature of the appeal to authority that may be called the "addressee's paradox." At this step, there will be a focus on the epistemic interests of argument. And the third step concerns argumentativity in language, a concept related to, but not identical with Anscombe & Ducrot's concept of argumentativity; this step will allow us to focus on the ongoing argumentative process. At first sight, these steps may seem rather independent of each other; they will be linked to each other, though, by the assumption that in an appeal to authority, the proponent and the addressee are above all an epistemic proponent and addressee. The nature of this combination of the different steps will be shown by a case study that concludes this paper.

Everyday Rationality

No theory of rationality will be set out here, a broad sketch of what such a theory might look like will suffice. This concept of rationality—which is a concept of an instrumental and processural rationality—will allow to model argumentation as an ongoing communicative process of information evaluation; and this argumentation-as-information processing view, in turn, will make a plausible case for why deferring to an authority may be something perfectly rational.

Note that everyday rationality has something to do with the fact that argumentative as well as other communication is part of the social lives of the communicating individuals. This is why any conclusion reached, any decision made *within* the communication may have important consequences *outside* the communication.

If I live in a dorm and in a discussion I agree with my roommate that I should clean the bathroom on Saturdays and he on Wednesdays, I cannot continue as if nothing had happened. From now on, Saturday is cleaning time. Anything else will give rise to new discussions, aiming at new agreements. The agreement we have reached is acceptable for me because I am capable and ready to respond to all the obligations which the argument I found acceptable and therefore agreed upon may give rise to. And it is acceptable for me because I can assume my roommate will do likewise. He too will respond to all the obligations the agreement raises for him; more precisely: Wednesday is cleaning time for him.

The implications the agreement has for our social lives sheds light on why my roommate and I tried to reach this agreement. We want the agreement to have these implications for the future; we want it to be valid beyond the given situation; we want our agreement to be reliable. If an agreement were not reliable beyond the situation in which it has been reached it would not make any sense to try to reach it. Accordingly, being ready to respond to the obligations which argumentatively reached agreements may raise, and wanting agreements to be reliable are two sides of the same coin. My roommate and I construe situationally a universality which deep in our souls we know to be an illusion, but which helps us to reach a reliable agreement. We act *as if* our agreement were universal and *as if* both of us were unconditionally bound to it, even though we are conscious of the fact that it is subject to modification.² But at the same time we are ready to share our part of the burden of this universality; we are ready, that is, to do whatever depends on us to guarantee the agreement's survival. Accepting an argument is then saying "yes" to this construed universality and accepting to share one's part in making the agreement reliable.

An everyday concept of rationality, then, may be conceived of as follows: accepting a rational argument is accepting an agreement that one believes to be, and that one is ready to make, reliable. In other words, it is being ready to respond to the obligations raised by the agreement, and believing that all the other parties in the agreement will do likewise.

The "addressee's paradox" in an appeal to authority

Introducing the "addressee's paradox" is a precondition of modelling a dialogical concept of acceptability. The "addressee's paradox" is related to the fact that agreements on the basis of everyday rationality are reached by social actors and that, consequently, these social actors are "part of" their agreements. This is to say that such agreements are not about context-independent propositions but about the social relations between interactors. Even when argumentatively reached agreements are chiefly about propositions, the social relations of the arguers have their part in the communicative process of reaching the agreement. And this is also to say that differences in communicative rights and obligations, differences of social and institutional status, differences of knowledge, and so on, are essential elements of the argumentative process. In trying to model this argumentative process it is difficult to neglect the fact that argumentatively reached agreements are always biased by these differences. These differences biasing the process of reaching the agreement may be irrelevant to a product-centred approach to argumentation, but it is difficult to neglect them in a process-oriented approach.

Of these biases, the difference of knowledge is the most prominent one with respect to the appeal to authority. The communicative situation is most favourable to an appeal to authority if one or all of the interactors lack knowledge required to evaluate adequately the acceptability of a claim or a conclusion. In such a situation a proponent of an argument can appeal to the authority of someone who can be assumed to have the relevant knowledge—whether this person is the arguer herself or somebody else, absent from the situation.

Viewed from the perspective of the addressee of an appeal to authority, accepting this appeal is equivalent to admitting that one's own knowledge about the subject is in fact inferior to the (assumed) knowledge of the authority. Rejecting the appeal to authority as an acceptable argument, consequently, is equivalent to refusing to admit that the authority's knowledge about the subject is significantly superior to one's own. Because of these equivalences, to be consistent an addressee of an appeal to authority who accepts this appeal has to add the authority's position to her knowledge. At least, she can legitimately be held to have reorganized, restructured, modified her knowledge and beliefs in a such way as to integrate the authority's position. Insofar as, for the addressee, there are always epistemic effects involved in an appeal to authority as described above, the argument is evaluated as acceptable or not on the grounds of the knowledge and beliefs the addressee holds and of the information she has at her disposal, and the argument, therefore, introduces new information which is supposed to modify the addressee's beliefs if she does not reject the argument.³

Oddly enough, this presents the addressee of an appeal to authority with a paradoxical situation. If, on the one hand, to evaluate an appeal to authority as acceptable means committing oneself to the authority's position, and if, on the other hand, it means admitting that one's own knowledge is significantly inferior to the authority's, then deferring to an authority means evaluating something as acceptable which at the same time one admits one is incapable of evaluating adequately; namely, the authority's position. We can avoid this paradox with the help of the concept of an evaluative process that determines the acceptability of an argument with respect to the information available to the evaluator.

This means that the argument is acceptable for the addressee, given the information the addressee has. All she can say is that on the grounds of the given information, the authority's position is plausible enough to be evaluated as acceptable. Metaphorically, the addressee is capable of finding a way from her given knowledge and beliefs to the modified version of it, proposed by the authority's position.⁴

A dialogical concept of acceptability

The view of the appeal to authority sketched out so far has two major implications for modelling argument. The first implication concerns the way argumentation is conceived of in the analysis of the ongoing argumentative process; the second concerns the status of factual acceptance.

If an argument is evaluated as acceptable with respect to the given information, and if an argument always has epistemic effects for the addressee (and often for the proponent as well), then it may be promising to model argumentation as an interaction in which the interactors try to handle the information they have and to create reliable new information in order to overcome problematic situations. In such a view, the claim present in an argument is modeled as the projection of a modified version of the knowledge and beliefs of the interactors.

By way of this projection, the proponent of a claim proposes to rearrange intersubjectively the addressee's knowledge and beliefs in a way that integrates the claim and therefore commits the addressee to what is claimed. The projected rearrangement occurs, however, only if the addressee evaluates the proposed claim as acceptable, i.e., if she finds her way from her knowledge and beliefs to the proposed modified version of them. Analytically, the argument can therefore be split into two phases—which inextricably intermingle in the actual communicative process. The first phase is the projection phase: a proponent projects a modified version of the interactors' knowledge and beliefs to which every addressee will be committed if she accepts the modification.⁵ The second phase is the evaluation phase in which the addressee evaluates the projected rearrangement as acceptable or not; with respect to her given knowledge and beliefs and to the information she has at her disposal.⁶

What an addressee evaluates, then, is not an authority's position or a proponent's claim *per se*, but the relation between her present knowledge and beliefs and the modification projected by the proponent's claim or the authority's position. Insofar as projection and evaluation phases are performed by the proponent and the addressee respectively, we may speak of a dialogical notion of acceptability.

The label *dialogical* is even more justified if the following is taken into account. The proponent of an argument projects a modification of knowledge and beliefs. Evidently, her starting point is *her* knowledge and *her* beliefs. However, in the evaluation phase the addressees check if they can find their way from *their* knowledge and beliefs to the projected modified version of it. This, in turn, leads to the second implication of a view of argument acceptability as acceptability-given-the-information-I-have, viz., the status of acceptance, which is peculiar and maybe even delicate in such a perspective.

As the knowledge and beliefs of the proponent and the addressee may differ, the modification a proponent projects may be evaluated as acceptable by herself on the grounds of her knowledge and beliefs. But it may seem totally unacceptable for the addressees on the grounds of their knowledge and beliefs. Whereas the proponent does find her way from the given to the projected version of knowledge and beliefs, the addressees do not. Here, we touch upon the second implication: since the evaluation depends largely—if not entirely—on

the information available to an addressee, acceptance is always an acceptance with a caveat, is always conditional acceptance; for what has been evaluated as acceptable may be revealed to be unacceptable in the light of further information occurring or being created in the information-processing argumentative interaction. Hence, any utterance is inherently disputable. It may be problematic in a variety of ways and therefore acts as the centre of what van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson, and Jacobs (1993) have called a disagreement space, made up of a set of virtual standpoints.

Argumentativity in language itself

For reasons which shall be obvious at the end of this section, it is preferable for the purposes of this paper to speak, with respect to the appeal to authority, of "argumentativity in language" instead of "disputability," and of "potential argumentative conclusion" instead of "virtual standpoint." These reasons have to do with the influence that the Theory of Argumentation within Language, associated with the names of Oswald Ducrot and Jean-Claude Anscombe, has on the analysis presented in this paper. Given this influence, a few remarks may be in order as to similarities and differences between the approach proposed in the present paper and this theory.

The most important similarity certainly is that what is examined is not isolated utterances or propositions nor their refutatory or justificatory potential with respect to a claim or conclusion; what is examined are the relations utterances may have to other utterances which may be explicit or implicit. To give one example, the semantic and lexical properties of sentence connectors such as *but*, or *and*, are accounted for by the Theory of Argumentation within Language as follows. Let us take two sentences:

- (1) Go see that movie: it's poorly directed *and* very well acted.
- (2) Go see that movie: it's poorly directed *but* very well acted.

Why is it that *and* sounds odd in this context and *but* sounds o.k.?—Because, says the Theory of Argumentation, within language two sentences connected by *and* will have the same argumentative orientation, whereas two sentences connected by *but* will have opposite argumentative orientations. In the example, [7](#) *the movie is poorly directed*, can argue for the implicit conclusion, *it is poorly acted as well*, which is plainly contradicted by, *it is very well acted*. Because of the existence of such an implicit conclusion the opposite argumentative orientations are manifest, and it can be explained why *and* sounds odd and *but* sounds ok. in this context.

To make sense of this concept, however, we need to know why and how a sentence carries with it such implicit conclusions it can argue for. In the example, the sentence, *the movie is poorly directed*, can argue for the—implicit—conclusion-sentence, *it is poorly acted*, because there is an unspoken but known third element, a *tertium* that links these two sentences to each other in a specific manner. This linking *tertium* has a relational structure, and what it puts into a relation are two scales, so that it may be expressed as: "the more an individual X has the property P, the more an individual Y has the property Q." Where X and P are elements of the argument, and Y and Q elements of the (implicit or not) conclusion. In the example of the movie, this *tertium* happens to have the corresponding negative orientation, "the less X is P, the less Y is Q": "the less well a movie is directed, the less well it is acted." [8](#) The structure of this *tertium* and the way it works in argumentation resemble very much what the rhetorical tradition calls a topos; [9](#) accordingly, Anscombe and Ducrot call the relation between scales a topos.

Thus far, it is clear how the argumentative orientation of a sentence assures its capability to argue for another sentence to which it is linked by such a topos. But the question remains why language users should know that

such a topos exists and why, accordingly, they should actually accept that an argument-sentence can argue for a conclusion-sentence on behalf of it.

The answer the theory gives to this question is perhaps the most radical one imaginable (and therefore this approach is sometimes referred to as radical argumentativism). The theory states that these topoi are part of the semantic and lexical properties of the linguistic entities. Whoever is a competent language user of a natural language knows these topoi because they are part of her linguistic competence. The topoi are elements of the Saussurean *langue*. Therefore, these topoi can be described in the framework of a structural semantics,¹⁰ and—as may be obvious from what precedes—the linguistic entities the theory focuses on are sentences insofar as they may be conceived of as structural entities of the language system. This is where the most important difference between the approach proposed in the present paper and the Argumentation within Language approach is to be found.

Here, there is also an emphasis on the point that the potential of an utterance¹¹ to support another utterance argumentatively does not stem in the first place from specific argumentative relations between these utterances which they acquire because they occur in an argumentative interaction. It stems, rather, from relations which are "always there," so to speak, and can become explicit in an argumentative interaction. In the present paper, these relations are conceptualized somewhat "the other way round," though. No implicit conclusions an utterance carries with it are assumed, but rather the Theory of Argumentation within Language's assumption is stressed that "*it is constitutive for the sense of an utterance to attempt to predict the evolution of the dialogue,*" even though the dialogue does not always go on as the utterance would seem to have predicted (Anscombe & Ducrot 1983: 30; my translation); This means that there are not only implicit conclusions to be considered. Instead, and more broadly, the fact, established by discourse-analytical research, e.g., by Jacobs & Jackson (1982), is stressed that utterances admit only certain utterances as meaningful continuations of the dialogue but others not. In terms of argumentation, this means that an utterance can only argue for another utterance if it admits that utterance as a meaningful continuation in a dialogue—be this continuation virtual or actual.¹² Moreover, it should be borne in mind that—contrary to what the concept of adjacency pairs is likely to suggest—the continuation-admitting utterance is itself an acceptable continuation of a preceding utterance.

The semantic and lexical properties of the linguistic entities, as represented in the competence of a language user, in Saussurean *langue*, are part of what makes an utterance a meaningful continuation of a preceding one; and probably they may be described structurally. But for an utterance to be a pragmatically meaningful continuation of a preceding one more is required than that. It must be possible for the utterance to enter into the interactors' construction of the universality which grounds the reliability of their argumentatively reached agreements, without leading to any inconsistencies in this construction. This means essentially that it must not contradict the knowledge and beliefs of those who construe this universality. Therefore if it is evaluated as acceptable, as with any utterance processed in an argumentation, this is an acceptance with a caveat. For any new information may prove the provisionally accepted utterance to be unacceptable. What makes an utterance acceptable, then, involves the concept of dialogical acceptability proposed above.

Therefore, an utterance, even when it does not give rise to communicative problems, is nonetheless a potential argumentative conclusion in that it is dialogically accepted with a caveat and may be revealed to be unacceptable later on in the dialogue when new information may have occurred. The one who projects a modification of the given knowledge and beliefs of the addressee proposes a "way" the addressee should walk from her knowledge and beliefs to the proposed modification of it. The addressee may find her "way" without any problems; the addressee may refuse to walk that "way" altogether, and in both of the cases no argument will occur. However,

the addressee may also be willing to reach the projected modification but not recognize how to get there; in this latter case the proponent of the projected modification is supposed to "show the addressee how to get there." In other words: she is supposed to give further information which will make the projected modification of knowledge and beliefs fully acceptable. To do this, a proponent argues.¹³ It may be obvious, that according to this dialogical concept of acceptability, an utterance never meant to be argumentative may become argumentative because the modification it projects is unproblematic if one has the information the proponent has, but is not unproblematic if considered from the addressee's information.

Argumentativity, therefore, is not so much a function of the semantic and lexical properties of linguistic entities, as they are stored in the language system, Saussure's *langue*. Argumentativity is an emergent effect of the interactive dialogic encounter of social individuals using a language on the ground of their individual knowledge, beliefs, taken-for-granted, presuppositions, etc.; therefore the main domain of argumentativity is language use, Saussure's *parole*.

A Case Study

It can be shown by a case study, how everyday rationality, dialogical acceptability, and argumentativity of language use, together ground the rationality of deferring to an authority.

Let us assume that I have no idea about astronomy. All I know is that the Earth is some kind of galactic ball wandering more or less circularly around the Sun and itself acting as the centre of the Moon's wanderings. Now a friend, who is very fond of astronomy, tries to make me accept that there is life on every planet in the universe.¹⁴ This example demonstrates a situation in which differences of knowledge very obviously will bias any possible agreement because my friend knows much more about the subject than I do.

Let us further assume that in a few previous conversations my friend has been successful in making me evaluate as acceptable his hypothesis that there may be life on every planet in the universe. In the terminology adopted in this paper, this reads: he has projected several modifications of my knowledge and beliefs which I have evaluated as acceptable. His main point in making his argument acceptable has been that all the planets in the universe are sufficiently similar to each other; therefore, one has reason to believe that there is life on all of them, given the fact that there is evidently life on one of these similar planets, namely, Earth. However, I have neither evidence nor even sufficient knowledge to check how acceptable this argument about the planets' being sufficiently similar to each other is. Consequently, I am left to accept it on nothing but my friend's authority, it seems.

In fact, I do not accept it *merely* on my friend's authority. It can be shown that I have heuristic tools at my disposal by which I can provisionally evaluate utterances I lack information or knowledge to adequately evaluate.¹⁵ Let us now assume that in our discussions about life on every planet we come across comets—which I, who have no idea of astronomy, conceive of as planets on an irregular trajectory. Comets, I observe further, have tails and beards. And tail- and beard-wearing planets, I add, counter the principle of universal similarity among planets which has been affirmed. And since this principle has been all dialogue long the main, if not the only, support of the claim that there is life on every planet, by pointing out that there are "dissimilar" planets and that there is, consequently, some problem with the principle of universal similarity, I attack the main support of my friend's claim and I therefore weaken considerably the tenability of his claim as well.

My friend may now answer that, first of all, comets are not planets, as Jupiter or Mars, and that furthermore the

tails and beards are caused by the reflection of the sunlight; they are not essential to comets. Even though comets may be viewed, by an astronomic layman, such as myself, as planets, they are not "dissimilar" to the others because what seems to make them so, is accidental, not essential to them.

It is interesting to note, in presenting this example, that my attack on the principle of universal similarity may not be reformulated as: "Your point about life on every planet is untenable because the supporting argument is wrong." Instead, it is something like: "How am I to fit the existence of comets into your picture of universal similarity?" I neither accept nor reject a single utterance, as van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson, and Jacobs's (1993) notion of virtual standpoint would suggest. I point out that there are inconsistencies between the hypothesis that has been accepted so far and some element of my given knowledge, namely, the existence of "dissimilar" planets. And I point out that thus the hypothesis qualifies as untenable unless it can be integrated into the picture of universal similarity. This is exactly what my friend does in consequence. The tails and beards are mere optical accidents, he says, nothing really essential to comets. Comets are not really, only accidentally, "dissimilar," and consequently a few beards and tails do not harm the principle of universal similarity.

This is one of the paradigm cases of how the argumentativity of language use can become explicit. In this case, it becomes explicit because of the interactors' different knowledge and beliefs. My friend's knowledge and beliefs comprise at least one element not comprised by mine; namely, that these seemingly "dissimilar" planets called comets are not really "dissimilar" to the others. The way to be walked from the given knowledge and beliefs, viz., there is life only on the Earth, to the projected modification, viz., there is life on every planet, a way indicated by fact that the other planets are sufficiently similar to the Earth—this way is unproblematic if one has this element of knowledge. Without it, this way cannot be taken because there is some incompatibility involved with the principle of universal similarity on the one hand and the existence of tail- and beard-wearing planets on the other.

Conclusion

The very brief analysis of the example sheds light on why I cannot be said to have accepted what my friend said before comets on his mere authority alone. To conclude, the paper therefore turns back to its main subject. In the discussion with my friend, I do not yet have this element of knowledge about the accidental nature of comets' beards and tails. That is why I perceive some inconsistency in the whole argument as soon as comets enter. Once comets enter and I find some unexplained incompatibility with respect to my given knowledge, I point out that there is a problem and that I feel entitled to evaluate the projected modification as unacceptable as long as the proponent of this modification is not able to show me the way I have to take if I want to arrive at the projected modified state of my knowledge and beliefs. Moreover, my friend, the proponent, has to show that this way can be taken with no difficulty starting from my, *the addressee's*, given knowledge and beliefs, no matter how unproblematic this way may seem starting from his, *the proponent's*, knowledge and beliefs.





To account for this correlation of acceptability with the given knowledge and beliefs of the interactors, a dialogical concept of acceptability has been proposed. Based on this concept, a second one has been introduced, namely, a genuine argumentativity of language use, which allows us to say that my evaluation of what my friend says is, even though I lack the knowledge he has, not based on his authority alone. Instead, it is


*the use of heuristic tools such as checking if the projected modified version of my knowledge and beliefs can be reached, starting from my given knowledge and beliefs, without any incompatibility or even inconsistency, and


*the anticipation of the possibility to re-evaluate any accepted utterance as problematic or even unacceptable later on in the communication in the light of further information.

*The results of this account of the *argumentum ad verecundiam* are that the acceptance of an appeal to authority may be qualified as rational in terms of everyday rationality because deferring to the appealed-to authority helps interactors construe situationally the universality which makes their argumentatively reached agreements reliable. It fulfils this task as some kind of heuristic shortcut,¹⁶ and it can assume this function because of the anticipation of the possibility of re-evaluation later on in the communication, an anticipation based, in turn, on the genuine argumentativity of language use. Any problem with the appealed-to authority herself or with what she is quoted as saying, arising from new information, may give rise to closer scrutiny and re-evaluation of what has—hastily, it seems in the light of the new information—been evaluated as acceptable by a heuristic shortcut. Once the shortcut proves to be insufficient for dealing with the problem, interactors are entitled to question the authority. The rationality of deferring to an authority, then, is based on this anticipation, is based on the fact that interactors construe their communication as a genuinely unfinished process during which re-examination of any previously achieved state of knowledge and beliefs is always possible in the light of new information.


Notes


1. Such as Toulmin, Rieke, & Janik (1979) or Kienpointner (1992). A more systematic account of *argumentum ad verecundiam* as well as of other fallacies, which are conceived of as harmful distortions of the ongoing dialectical process, can be found in van Eemeren & Grootendorst's (1992) new dialectic and Walton & Krabbe's (1992) dialectical-shifts approach. 
2. This has some correspondence to what Charles A. Willard (1981; 1983: 216-217) calls the "AS IF maxim." 
3. This can be modeled in terms of Hamblin's (1970) or Walton & Krabbe's (1992) "commitment store." In fact, what is said here about the *argumentum ad verecundiam* equally applies to other arguments, insofar as an addressee who does not overtly reject the acceptability of an argument may legitimately be held to have modified her beliefs and, consequently, her commitments in accordance with what the argument says. 
4. This account of the "addressee's paradox" may be related to Cristopher W. Tindale's (1992) notion of cognitive environments. 
5. Indeed, stating that an argumentatively reached agreement always has epistemic effects and that, accordingly, any interactor is supposed to commit herself to these effects the agreement has, is equivalent to saying that arguing is fundamentally a normative enterprise. This point is stressed particularly by John Biro and Harvey Siegel (1992). Their account seems, however, to lack a descriptive component which would provide the analyst with tools to apply their framework to actual discourse. In stressing that descriptive and normative insights should best be fruitfully combined for the analysis of argumentation, I agree with van Eemeren & Grootendorst (1992) and van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson, & Jacobs (1993). Unlike the pragma-dialectical approach of the Amsterdam School, and perhaps more akin to Sally Jackson's and Scott Jacob's conversation-analysis based


approach, it would seem important to me that the descriptive element "comes first." 


6. This account of arguments as two-phase stages of an information-processing communicative activity has substantial similarities to Richard Hirsch's (1989) Theory of Interactive Argumentation. However, the theoretical background proposed in the present paper differs in important respects from Hirsch's. Whereas here the information processing is viewed as an interactionally organized communicative activity, Hirsch relies heavily on the computer metaphor of cognitive processes and, more particularly, on Philip Johnson-Laird's (1988) Procedural Semantics. Terminologically, these differences are manifest in the renaming of Hirsch's "generation phase" as "projection phase." Nonetheless, it deserves to be mentioned that Hirsch's account has a noteworthy influence on the reconstructive method proposed here. 


7. Example taken from Anscombe & Ducrot (1989: 73). 

8. This formulation suggests that the approach can only deal with adjectives. In fact, the argumentative properties of (characterizing) adjectives and adverbs (preferably scalable ones, such as, *hot*, *long*, *nearly*, *little*, etc.) are one of the favourite domains of research. Nonetheless, there are linguistic devices by which language users can "create" scales stemming from nouns. (See Ducrot (1995), who calls these devices "(de-)realizing modifiers.") 


9. More specifically, this notion of topos is neither exactly Aristotle's notion of general and specific topoi, based on the four predicables of definition, genus, proprium, and accident, nor is it the notion of topos current in Roman rhetoric (*Ad Herennium* or Cicero's *De inventione*), based on Hermagoras of Temnos' doctrine of *stasis*. It is, rather, the interpretation given to it by Boethius in his *De differentiis topicis*, expressed in terms of topical maxim and topical difference, which has been commented upon and elaborated throughout the Middle Ages and which Stephen E. Toulmin (1958) is said by Otto Bird (1961) to have rediscovered. What the New Rhetoric calls "argument" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1976) is also best viewed as topos in this Boethian sense. (The relevant definitions are in Boethius' *De diff. top.*; *Patr. lat.*, vol. LXIV, cc. 1185-86; for an introduction to Boethius's views on rhetoric and dialectic, see Leff (1978). The medieval tradition is accessible through Murphy (1974); *Fundamentals* (1996) gives an overview over the ancient tradition of rhetoric and dialectic; a brief account of the topical tradition from Aristotle to our days may be found in Kienpointner (1992; sections I.3 and II.1.4).) 


10 This goal is emphasized in recent work carried out by the proponents of this approach. They also stress the point that the topoi are in fact lexical topoi constituting lexical topical fields, not argumentative topoi in the traditional sense (see Ducrot 1993; Anscombe 1995). 

11. Note that, as opposed to the Theory of Argumentation within Language, the basic unit is not the sentence, but the utterance. 


12. A similar approach is suggested from a more discourse-analytical point of view by Christian Plantin (1990). 

13. This account may be related to Daniel J. O'Keefe's (1977) subscripts to the word *argument*. Transferred to his terminology, any utterance is an *argument*₁ without there occurring always, but only in the described circumstances, an *argument*₂. There is a similar point in Josef Kopperschmidt's (1989) account when he says that every utterance by which something is asserted about a thing or a state of affairs in the world has the

character of an affirmation that this assertion is in fact true. This insight, however, is part of a completely different theoretical framework. Kopperschmidt's account is less interested in the discourse-organizing moves because he makes use of Habermas's (1981) idealistic concept of a counterfactually anticipated ideal speech situation. 

14. This example reproduces the situation as described in the French Enlightenment writer Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes habités*, published in 1686. Fontenelle's text is discussed in more detail in Rühl (1997). There it is also stated why relevant insights can be gained for conversational argument from a text which presents a literary elaboration of an idealized teacher-and-student dialogue that may take place as it does in the literary work but is unlikely to do so. These problems are irrelevant in the given context, and therefore only the core elements of Fontenelle's argument are given. 

15. These tools may be conceived of in terms of Craig A. Dudczak's (1995) Inverse Inference Model of Evidence. 

16. Jackson (1995) proposes seeing fallacies as such heuristic shortcuts in conversational arguments. As regards *argumentum ad verecundiam*, the present paper can be viewed as supporting this view. 

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