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Jan Albert van Laar

University of Groningen, University of Amsterdam

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“I Suppose You Meant to Say ...”: Licit and Illicit Manoeuvring in Argumentative Confrontations*

JAN ALBERT VAN LAAR

*Department of Speech Communication, Argumentation Theory and Rhetoric
University of Amsterdam
Spuistraat 134
1012 VB Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

*Department of Theoretical Philosophy
University of Groningen
Oude Boteringestraat 52
9718 CW Groningen, The Netherlands
j.a.van.laar@rug.nl*

ABSTRACT: When interlocutors start to talk at cross purposes it becomes less likely that they will be able to resolve their differences of opinion. Still, a critic, in the confrontation stage of a discussion, should be given some room of manoeuvre for rephrasing and even for revising the arguer’s position. I will distinguish between licit and illicit applications of this form of strategic manoeuvring by stating three soundness conditions.

KEYWORDS: confrontation stage, critical discussion, dialectical profile, rephrasing a standpoint, revising a standpoint, soundness conditions, strategic manoeuvring, straw man fallacy

1. INTRODUCTION

According to textbooks, we should in argumentation steer clear of erecting and attacking straw men (Govier 1985, pp. 109-112; Ennis 1996, p. 172; Groarke et al 1997, p. 123). When interlocutors start to talk at cross purposes it becomes less likely that they will resolve the initial difference of opinion (Van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992, p. 125). Still, a critic in a discussion or debate should be given some room of manoeuvre for rephrasing the arguer’s position in his own words and even for trying to get the proponent to recognize a somewhat different position as his own. How much room should we leave a party when rephrasing or revising his adversary’s standpoint in a manner that suits his own individual purposes in the dialogue? In this paper, I will deal with this issue from the pragma-dialectical perspective of *strategic manoeuvring* between the shared dialectical objective of resolving a difference of opinion and the individual rhetorical objective of persuading the other side.

In section 2 I will elaborate the notion of *confrontational manoeuvring*, that is, of strategic manoeuvring between dialectical and rhetorical goals that arise from the confrontation stage of a critical discussion. In section 3, I will characterize the form of manoeuvring where an antagonist reformulates or modifies the protagonist’s

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standpoint in an opportune way. In section 4 I will examine the conditions under which applications of such manoeuvring can be sound and legitimate from a dialectical perspective and I will relate these conditions to the straw man fallacy.

2. CONFRONTATIONAL MANOEUVRING

According to the pragma-dialectical methodology that has been developed by Van Eemeren and Grootendorst, an argumentative discourse must be reconstructed and evaluated from the perspective of a *critical discussion* (Van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984; 1992; 2004). When following the normative procedure of a critical discussion, discussants start by putting their difference of opinion into words in the *confrontation stage*, they proceed by deciding on the procedural and material starting points in the *opening stage*, by exchanging arguments and criticisms in the *argumentation stage*, and they bring their discussion to a close by deciding, in the *concluding stage*, on whether the initial difference has been resolved and if so in whose favour. According to the division of labour in a critical discussion, the protagonist has the individual task of defending the acceptability of a standpoint with argumentative means while the antagonist has the task of testing the parts of that defence. In an ideally reasonable discussion, no moves occur that hinder or obstruct the final aim of resolving the difference of opinion. With a set of fifteen rules, Van Eemeren and Grootendorst specify the procedure such a discussion should follow in detail (2004).

This critical procedure provides an analyst with a perspective that can be used to extract those components of a discourse that are relevant, positively or negatively, to the resolution process. Speech acts such as advancing a standpoint, expressing doubt, offering argumentation or requesting for a clarification of what has been said, can be expected to be needed in order to resolve differences of opinion. So, those parts of the discourse that instantiate such speech acts or that can be justifiably reconstructed as such (for instance by seeing them as indirect speech acts, Van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004) will be looked upon closely, while elements of the discourse that can not be understood as (indirect) performances of such speech acts will be left aside as analytically irrelevant. After having reconstructed all the dialectically relevant elements of a discourse, the discourse can be evaluated by determining to what extent the argumentative elements in the discourse do in fact advance resolution of the difference of opinion. Argumentative contributions that are only construable as violating a rule for critical discussion are called *fallacious*.

Van Eemeren and Houtlosser have enriched this standard pragma-dialectical methodology by integrating rhetorical insights (2000; 2003). The discourse is understood, not only from the assumption that the parties are attempting to resolve their issues, but, in addition, also by understanding each party's contributions as directed towards persuading and winning over the interlocutor. In short, a party is assumed to manoeuvre strategically, that is, to balance between his dialectical and rhetorical objectives in an attempt to resolve the issue in his own favour.

The dialectical and rhetorical objectives can be specified for each of the four stages of the critical discussion procedure. I will focus on the first one, the confrontation stage. In this stage, the parties start from an issue. They try to find out whether they disagree with respect to that issue, and if so, how this difference is to be put into words in a way that enables its resolution in the subsequent stages. The result of this first stage is either a non-mixed difference, where one party has advanced a standpoint and where the other party has merely expressed critical doubt, or a mixed

dispute, where both parties have expressed contradictory or contrary opinions (Van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, p. 60). I will restrict myself to the most elementary kind of dispute where only one party advances a standpoint.

In a confrontation stage there are five pertinent kinds of speech act or dialectical moves. First, a standpoint is to be advanced, that is, a party must take responsibility for a position with respect to an expressed opinion (Houtlosser 2001, p. 32). Second, doubt is to be expressed with respect to the acceptability of that position regarding the opinion. (It should be noted that this is not exactly the same as challenging a standpoint and getting the protagonist to offer argumentation.) Third, it can be needed to request for usage declaratives, such as definitions or disambiguating reformulations, if the speaker has failed to make himself sufficiently clear. Fourth, it can be needed to provide such usage declaratives in an attempt to clarify oneself, for instance in response to a request for clarification. Fifth, each party must have a device for making it clear that, as far as he is concerned, the difference of opinion has been put into words adequately so that the next stage, the opening stage, can be started.

Three of the fifteen rules for critical discussion are pertinent to the confrontation stage (Van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004) and I paraphrase some relevant elements of these rules. According to rule 1, a party has the unconditional right to advance any standpoint (p. 136). According to rule 6, an antagonist may not attack a standpoint in any other way than by calling into question its propositional content or (in the case of a substandpoint) its justificatory or refutatory force. According to rule 15, a party has the right to request for usage declaratives, a party is obligated to provide the appropriate clarifications when requested to do so, and a party has the unconditional right to provide usage declaratives even when there is no such request.

As I understand it, a discussant in a real dialogue situation needs to make two kinds of choices. If it is his turn, he must first make a choice for the type of speech act that he will perform, and second make a choice for the specific manner in which he will instantiate that speech act. Similarly, a speaker or writer with the task of creating a longer stretch of argumentation must make several such choices and anticipate a number of them by the members of the audience to be persuaded.

The notion of the confrontation stage can be made more precise with the help of a dialectical profile (cf. the discussion on dialogue profiles in Walton 1999; Krabbe 2002; Van Laar 2003). A dialectical profile is a tree-like representation of the sequences of types of moves that the parties are allowed to choose from in order to achieve a particular dialectical objective (cf. the definition by Van Eemeren, Houtlosser & Snoeck Henkemans 2005, p. 29).

As said, the dialectical aim of following a procedure for the confrontation stage is to find out whether there is a difference of opinion between the two parties with respect to a specific issue, and if so, what this difference amounts to. A confrontation stage starts from an issue, that is, a question such that the parties assume that they disagree about it, and from the shared decision to explore their difference and of to put it into words. Even though the dialectical roles are to be distributed over the parties in the second stage, the opening stage, I will refer to the party who advances the standpoint as the *protagonist* and to the party who expresses doubt as the *antagonist*. In this paper I discuss the most relevant part of the dialectical profile for the confrontation stage (for a more complete treatment, see Van Laar and Mohammed 2007). According to this profile, the first move is made by the protagonist when he

advances his positive attitude towards an opinion.¹ The antagonist then has two options: to express doubt or to request for a usage declarative. If she requests for a usage declarative, the protagonist must give a different formulation of his standpoint. Advancing a (reformulated) standpoint is abbreviated as '+', casting doubt on some formulated opinion as '?', requesting for a usage declarative as 'clarify.' (These sequences can be extended further and not all options for the parties are made explicit.)

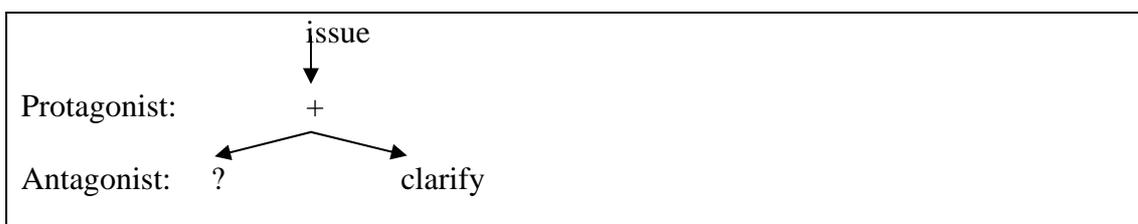


Figure 1. Part of the dialectical profile for the confrontation stage

As the profile sketches the dialectical tasks at an abstract level, a writer or speaker needs to instantiate these slots in order to produce a real discourse.

In real life the individual discussants are taken to be concerned about aims that are rhetorical, in addition to aims that are dialectical. It is possible to achieve a rhetorical aim through means of persuasion that are illicit from a dialectical point of view. By attributing *fallacious* moves to the *protagonist* or the *antagonist*, one would diverge from the meanings of these terms. Therefore, I will refer to the party in a real argumentative situation who has taken primary responsibility for carrying out the tasks of the protagonist as the *arguer* and to the party who first of all has the part of the antagonist as the *critic*. Given the specification of the confrontation stage, the rhetorical aim of a party that is directly relevant when he pretends to contribute to the confrontation stage, is to make the confrontation stage result in a formulated difference of opinion that is favourable to his position.² Consider as a case in point an antagonist who tries to get the protagonist to choose a formulation that makes his position harder to defend. In the light of such rhetorical objectives, the arguer and critic are considered to embody the roles of the protagonist and the antagonist. How will they give shape and content to the abstract dialectical obligations?

A direct way of strategic manoeuvring is to instantiate the slots in the dialectical profile (Van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2007). (As we will see in the next section, there are also indirect ways of manoeuvring, for instance by starting a sub- or metadialogue in an attempt to direct the ground level discussion into a particular course.) When talking about the direct forms of manoeuvring, Van Eemeren and Houtlosser propose to distinguish between three aspects. When instantiating a *prima facie* relevant type of move, a party has the option to make opportune choices from (1) the set of topics, (2) the set of linguistic devices and (3) the set of devices by which to adapt to audience demand (Van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2000, pp. 298-299). So, each node in the dialectical profile can be considered to have three slots: a discussant must make a choice with respect to the propositional content of his move, with respect to the linguistic presentation of this content, and with respect to devices relating to the demands that his audiences impose on him. The analytically relevant

¹ A negative standpoint towards *S* then has to be reconstructed as a positive standpoint towards *not-S*.

² Bringing it about that the other party withdraws from the discussion is a rhetorical aim that is not of central importance to the topic under consideration.

types of speech acts can be represented as having three slots, or in special cases less than three. For instance, the node in the dialectical profile that represents the speech act of advancing a standpoint can be phrased as '+ / x / y / z', where x is a choice from the set of topics, y from the set of linguistic devices and z from the set of devices by which to adapt to audience demand, while it suffices to mention just the slot for presentational devices when formalising the request for a usage declarative, 'clarify / y', y being a linguistic device. (Topical choice, presentation device and audience adaptation are not independent variables. So, not all combinations of choices are possible. For example, a choice for a particular sentence excludes many choices for a particular topic, and vice versa.)

For the purpose of examining particular conditions on instantiations of types of speech acts, these three sets can be specified in further detail. One condition is that the formulations used must not contain expressions that immunise a standpoint from being criticized. Another is that it must not convey the message that the standpoint is beyond criticism and in that sense *sacrosanct* (Van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, 166). A third requirement is the topic of this paper: the expression of doubt should relate to the position advanced by the protagonist. Given this topic, I will restrict attention to presentational devices. In order to have a simple example, let us suppose that there is an exhaustive inventory of the choices that can be made. Let the set of linguistic devices be the set of sentences {S, T, U, ...}. It is further supposed that the issue from which the confrontation starts is characterised by a particular elementary question with a subset of the above set of sentences as its direct answers. By specifying the possible choices of the participants, a descriptive model is formulated from which all possible discussion situations can be derived and by which all possible instantiated moves can be described, whether these moves are legitimate or fallacious (which is why the model is not normative but merely descriptive). With the above set up a complete inventory can be drawn of the ways the types of speech acts in the relevant part of the dialectical profile can be instantiated.

Some possible choices are legitimate, but others will be fallacious. Drawing that distinction on the level of instantiated moves is instrumental for the development of the criteria by which it can be determined whether a discussion rule (which is stated at a higher level of abstraction) is violated in a discourse (cf. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992, pp. 104-106; Van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2003). In this paper, I start from the following straightforward rule: if the protagonist has used a particular formulation in order to express his standpoint, the antagonist is only allowed to use that very same formulation when expressing her doubt regarding the protagonist's position. One reason why this very strict rule can be upheld in a discussion between the protagonist and the antagonist is that in their conversation the arguer and critic have, as we shall see, still some room left for manoeuvring with linguistic devices.

Given our inventory of possible choices, the protagonist can advance the following standpoints: '+ / S', '+ / T', '+ / U', etc. Due to the rule proposed in the preceding paragraph, a possible choice by the antagonist such as '? / T' in response to the protagonist's advancing '+ / S' is fallacious. Two other plausible rules will be presupposed as valid: the standpoint must be one of the sentences contained in the issue and a request to clarify a particular sentence is only allowed if the preceding move contains that very sentence.

The following profile gives those instantiated moves that are allowable according to these rules (supposing here that the issue is {S, T}).

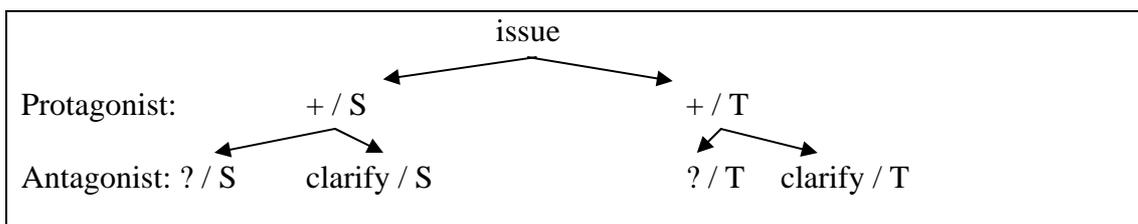


Figure 2. Part of the dialectical profile with only allowable instantiations

3. RECONSTRUCTING THE CRITIC'S REPHRASING AND REVISING OF A STANDPOINT

The form of manoeuvring that I will deal with is a contribution by the critic, that is, the party with the role of the antagonist.³ When expressing her doubt she uses a formulation which differs from the one used by the protagonist.

Dialogue 1.

Arguer: standpoint S

Critic: why T?

The general pattern of this dialogue admits of several varieties. (1) The critic may use a *rendition* or *translation* of the original formulation that is meant to capture the original formulation perfectly. In response to 'Bob is Ann's brother', a critic may ask 'why do you think Ann is Bob's sister?' (2) The critic may use a *paraphrase* that is meant to leave the propositional content unchanged but that conveys a somewhat different connotation. In response to 'Bob is Ann's brother', a critic may ask 'why do you think our next-door fellow citizen is Ann's brother?' (3) The critic may use a formulation that is assumed to be a *disambiguating reformulation* (a precization, see Naess 1966) of the formulation used by the arguer. In response to 'Ann is Bob's sister', a critic may ask 'why do you think Ann is the daughter of Bob's natural parents?', excluding in that way a reading according to which Bob is Ann's stepbrother. (4) The critic may cast doubt on a proposition that constitutes a somewhat different position within the very same issue. Given that the issue is who the one brother of Ann is, the response to 'Bob is Ann's brother' could be 'why do you think Chris to be Ann's brother?' (5) The critic may express a proposition that is a *logical consequence* of the position advanced by the arguer. In response to 'Bob is Ann's brother', a critic may ask 'why do you think Bob has any family?' (6) The critic may express a proposition that is closely related to the position put forward by the arguer, but that is different by being *more informative* (such as an exaggeration or a generalisation). In response to 'Bob and Ann are related', a critic may ask 'why do you think they are brother and sister?' or 'why would everyone be related?' (7) The

³ The manoeuvre, by the arguer, of representing the commitments of the antagonist differently as she stated them herself would amount to a related but different form of manoeuvring that can also derail into a kind of straw man fallacy. Further, Talisse and Aikin (2006) distinguish 'the selection form of the straw man fallacy', where someone makes an opportune selection of objections to refute, leaving the strongest objections to his position unexamined. In that case the arguer "straw mans her *opposition* more generally [than when straw manning one person] by refuting only her weakest opponents."

critic may express a proposition that is closely related to the position put forward by the arguer, but that is different by dealing with *an adjacent issue*. In response to ‘Bob and Ann belong to the same family’, a critic may ask ‘why do you think they are intimately acquainted?’ (8) The critic may express a proposition that the arguer seem to be *contextually committed* to by virtue of the fact that he advanced his standpoint. In response to ‘Bob is Ann’s brother’, a critic may ask ‘why do you think I care about that?’

These are eight ways by which the critic can explore the disagreement space that had been engendered by arguer’s act of advancing his standpoint (Van Eemeren et al 1993). I understand the disagreement space as a notion that applies to parts of argumentative discourses (and not to the ideal critical discussion procedure). If the arguer advances a standpoint S this can be seen as a proposal to start a critical discussion about S. If the critic then responds by doubting S this contribution is most plausibly reconstructed as a way to instantiate the expression of critical doubt, in line with the dialectical profile for the confrontation stage. However, if the critic responds by doubting T then, in principle, the move admits of two distinct kinds of reconstructions. First, it can be reconstructed as a way to instantiate the expression of critical doubt in a way that conforms to the dialectical profile for the confrontation stage that contains instantiated moves. If this interpretation is chosen, the critic commits a fallacy.

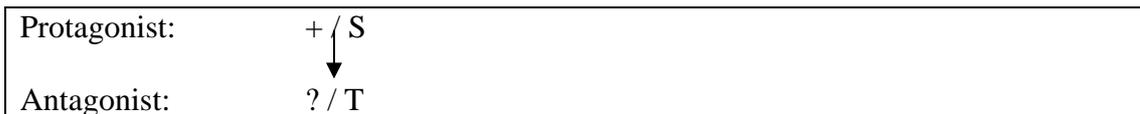


Figure 3. A straightforward reconstruction of dialogue 1

Second, doubting T can be seen, not as a way to instantiate a speech act that is assumed to take the critical discussion one step further, but as a containing a remark about the direction of the discussion. In all eight varieties the contribution of the critic can be taken to contain a proposal for rephrasing or revising formulation S into formulation T, and to contain the anticipation of the arguer’s acceptance of that proposal by raising doubt about T. Whether the first or the second type of reconstruction is the most plausible one depends on contextual information. Depending on the nature of the proposal the dialogue can be reconstructed as a sequence of instantiated moves in the dialectical profile for the confrontation stage or as containing, in addition, metaremarks about how to proceed the critical discussion under construction.⁴ In the latter case, a distinction is made between proposals for starting the same confrontation stage with a different formulated standpoint and proposals to leave the current discussion and to start a new one.

Category I, containing the varieties 1, 2 and 4: If the critic has used a translation or a paraphrase or a different position in the same issue, she can be taken to propose the use the formulated opinion T instead of the one brought forward by the arguer, S. Starting from the dialectical profile, this boils down to the proposal to go back to the start of the critical discussion and replace the protagonist’s formulation S by T. In these cases the proposal is to retrace some steps (Barth and Krabbe 1982, p. 76) and use a different formulation of more or less the same position or a different position in the same issue, remaining in that way within the same issue and the same confrontation stage.

⁴ In those cases, the dialogue is at least in part a contribution to a metadialogue (cf. Krabbe 2003).

Category II, containing variety 3: If the critic has used a disambiguating reformulation, she can be take to propose to insert the following sequence of moves in the critical discussion that is under construction: the antagonist requests for a usage declarative that clarifies S, the protagonist responds by disambiguating S by way of formulation T, the antagonist responds by casting critical doubt on T. In this case the proposal is to proceed in the same confrontation into a particular direction (without retracing any steps). The critic's contribution can be seen as containing a short implicit discussion that can be reconstructed as containing only moves that instantiate speech acts in the dialectical profile for the confrontation stage.⁵

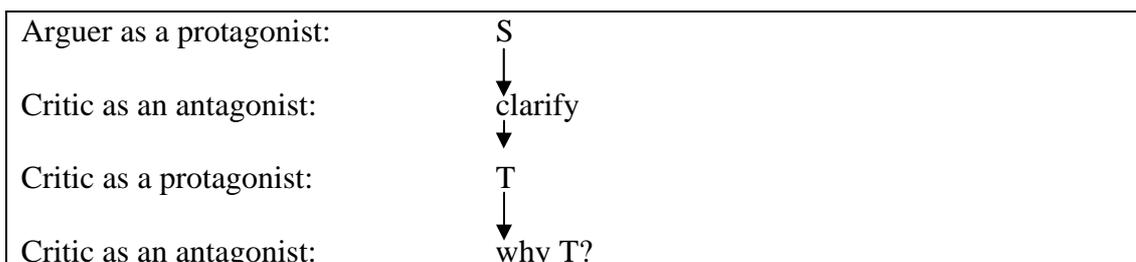


Figure 4. Anticipating a choice for a disambiguation analysed as an implicit discussion

Category III, containing varieties 5, 6, 7 and 8: If the critic raises doubt about T, while T is either a logical consequence of S or a generalization of S or a position in an adjacent issue or a contextual commitment of the arguer, she can be taken to propose to leave the current critical discussion and to start a new confrontation stage about a (somewhat) different issue where the protagonist advances the standpoint T.⁶

4. EVALUATING THE CRITIC'S REPHRASING AND REVISING OF STANDPOINTS

Van Eemeren and Grootendorst define the straw man fallacy as a violation of the standpoint rule, according to which an attack must relate to the standpoint advanced by the protagonist (1992, pp. 126 - 127). This rule is violated by attacking a distorted version of the respondent's standpoint or by imputing a fictitious standpoint to the protagonist.⁷ A distortion or false attribution of a standpoint in the confrontation stage (i.e. when no critical questions have been posed), are also considered straw man fallacies by Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992, pp. 125, 215). By manoeuvring in the manner under discussion, the critic runs the risk of distorting the initial standpoint or of imputing a fictitious standpoint.

But it is too simple just to rule out all strategic manoeuvring in argumentative confrontations, that is, in those parts of a discourse or a conversation where the parties can be taken to make contributions to the confrontation stage. They need to be able to inspect the disagreement space. One reason to allow the parties some leeway is that

⁵ See (Van Laar 2007) for a formal treatment of dialectical anticipation.

⁶ The consideration for including doubting a logical consequence T of a standpoint S is that it is possible that T is not part of the issue that started the confrontation.

⁷ According to Johnson and Blair a critic commits the fallacy of straw person if "1. A critic attributes a particular position to an opponent. 2. The opponent's position is not the one the critic attributed to him or her but a different one. 3. The critic criticizes that different position as though it were the position actually held by the opponent." (1994, p. 96). My concern here is with a fallacy committed by merely doubting (instead of criticizing) the position.

the parties need some room to manoeuvre in order to find a difference of opinion that they both find interesting and worth the discussion. It might, for one, be much more significant to discuss a stronger formulation or even a stronger position than a weaker one. Another reason for leaving some room for manoeuvre is that the parties must be given an opportunity to work towards their individual, rhetorical aims. For one, the antagonist may want to obtain a reformulation of the arguer's position in order to allude to the objections she will raise. A third reason is that the critic can use a different formulation or express a different proposition in an attempt to get at the real, underlying position of the arguer. For instance, she may surmise that he formulated his standpoint too carefully or that he expressed a proposition that is only a poor substitute for what he really believes on the issue.

Under what conditions does this kind of manoeuvring derail into the fallacy of straw man and in what circumstances can the critic's contribution be dialectically licit? I propose the following three soundness conditions.

1. The critic is obligated to make it clear to the arguer that his contribution contains a proposal for a new formulation or even a new standpoint. In this way it is clear to the arguer that it remains completely up to him to either accept or reject the proposal. In order not to block the arguer from rejecting the proposal, it must be clear to him that the critic does employ a different formulation or raises doubt about a proposition that is somewhat different. Within a particular context of utterance this can be fully clear. If not, the message can be conveyed by adding a phrase like 'I suppose you meant to say ...' or 'isn't that what you said?' A device for camouflaging the proposal would be to start offering reasons against the revised or rephrased standpoint. A different device for hiding the fact that a change has taken place is to misquote the protagonist, or to wrench a quote or paraphrase from context. In addition, Van Eemeren and Grootendorst mention the following techniques: putting forward the denial of T with great emphasis (1992, p. 126) or conveying that the arguer as a member of this group must hold that T (1992, p. 127).

This condition also applies to situations where the critic alleges to translate or rephrase the arguer's standpoint: the arguer has a right to be on his guard. He may surmise that part of what made his standpoint interesting has been lost or that the new formulation carries suggestions that he does not want to take responsibility for. When the initial standpoint has proven to be ambiguous, it remains up to the arguer in what direction to disambiguate it. Further, if the critic alleges that a proposition is a logical consequence of the initial standpoint together with some additional premises, the arguer may think otherwise (for instance he does not consider himself committed to a premise added by the critic, see De Morgan 1847, p. 281), and if he does agree with T being a logical consequence of S, he may refuse to defend T for the reason that he does think it to be uninteresting and not worth the discussion.

2. The raising of doubt towards the newly formulated standpoint is fallacious if it is, in the context of utterance, already abundantly clear that the proposal will be rejected by the defending party. For instance, using expressions that reflect a strong bias against the protagonist will be unacceptable to him, so anticipating acceptance of the proposal is inappropriate. Similarly, proposals for disambiguations, generalisations and adjacent positions can be pointless in the context of utterance, in the sense that it is known beforehand that they will be rejected. Such avoidable detours must be considered fallacious.

3. The critic should be clear what the proposal amounts to. Given the three types of varieties, this third condition differs per category:

3a. When the pretension of the antagonist is to be staying within the same confrontation stage, that is, to have proposed either a new formulation of basically the same position or a different position within the same issue, the third condition is that what is expressed by the newly proposed formulation is actually part of the same issue. Parties are not allowed to shift the issue while pretending to stick to the issue.

3b. When the pretension of the antagonist is to raise doubt about a *reading* that he expects to be the intended one, the third condition is that the reformulation used must indeed be a disambiguating reformulation of the formulation used by the protagonist, that is, the new formulation must only express propositions that are also expressed by the initial one while the initial one must express at least one additional proposition not expressed by the reformulation (cf. Naess on precization, 1966).

One kind of failure to comply with this condition occurs when a formulation is presented as a reading of the initial standpoint while in reality it expresses simply a different proposition. Such a violation of the condition brings the danger that the topic of the dialogue gradually shifts away from the initial topic while the change remains unnoticed by the participants.

3c. When the pretension of the antagonist is to have formulated an implication, a generalization, an adjacent position or a proposition that is incurred by the act of advancing a standpoint, then she is not allowed to falsely present it as a concession of the arguer that T is an implication of or a generalisation of or adjacent to or contextually generated by the assertion of S.

A distinction can be made between setting up a straw man, which is a mistake in the confrontation stage and the attack on the straw man thus set up, which is a mistake in the argumentation stage. The three conditions suggest three ways in which the rephrasing or revising of a standpoint by the critic can derail into a confrontational version of the straw man fallacy by distorting the arguer's position or by imputing a fictitious one to him.⁸

5. CONCLUSION

In an ideal procedure for critical discussion, the antagonist's doubt must relate to the standpoint advanced by the protagonist. Still, the dialectical process is served by giving critics some room for manoeuvre when playing the part of the antagonist. Starting from the dialectical profile for the confrontation stage, three categories can be distinguished in the ways in which a critic can rephrase or revise a standpoint and cast doubt about it. First, the critic can be taken to propose a newly formulated position or a new position within the same discussion, second, she can be taken to propose to proceed the same discussion with a disambiguating reformulation of the standpoint, and third, she can be taken to propose to start a new discussion on a (slightly) different issue. It has been shown under what three conditions this kind of manoeuvring does not obstruct or hinder the resolution process. The possibility of legitimate reformulations and revisions on the part of the critic can be used in order to explain why straw man fallacies often have the semblance of reasonableness, even in

⁸ Walton contends that the notion of a straw man fallacy has three parts: it is a sophistical and deceptive tactic; it is counterproductive from the perspective of conflict resolution; and the "[s]traw man fallacy is not simply the misrepresentation of someone's position, but the use of that misrepresentation to refute or criticize that person's argument in a context of disputation" (Walton 1996, p. 124). Failing to comply with the first or the third condition makes the manoeuvring deceptive, while failing to comply with the second makes the manoeuvring counterproductive.

cases where the parties did not forget what formulation was exactly uttered by the arguer at the start of the discussion.

[link to commentary](#)

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