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M Agnes van Rees
Univ. of Amsterdam

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Title: Argumentative functions of dissociation in every-day discussions

Author: M.A. van Rees

Response to this paper by: Daniel O'Keefe

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Introduction

Dissociation is one of the two main categories which Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca distinguish in their taxonomy of argumentative techniques (the other being association). They define dissociation as an argumentation scheme in which the speaker separates elements which previously were considered by the auditorium as a whole or a conceptual unit (1969, 190). An example is the separation of the concept of 'law' into two new concepts, 'the letter of the law' and 'the spirit of the law'. The purpose of dissociation is to remedy an incompatibility or contradiction. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca view dissociation, in which a more or less profound change is brought about in the conceptual basis of an argument, as different from an attack against an association, through which elements which were previously separate are connected or brought together (1969, 412).

Up till now, not much study has been made of dissociation. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca are the only authors who have treated the technique in detail.¹ But their treatment, apart from the fact that it suffers, like their work in general, from a lack of consistency and method, has the drawback that it, being rhetorical in nature, has a monological orientation.²

A number of authors have pointed out that dissociation, even though it is an argumentative technique in the sense of a means to influence the point of view of an opponent, contrary to what Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca claim, is not an argumentation scheme. Garsen (1997, 72) states:

[dissociation] is not a specific way to relate a starting point with a standpoint in such a way that the acceptance of the standpoint is increased. (...) Dissociation, at the most, can play a role *before* the speaker brings forward his argument: he performs a dissociation in a concept and subsequently makes use of this in the argument for his standpoint'. Grootendorst (1999) views dissociation as an attempt to change one of the common starting points of the protagonist and the antagonist (1999, 286).

There are many aspects of dissociation that merit further study. First, there is the conceptual problem that the difference between, in general, making a distinction and, particularly, dissociation is not always sharp (Goodwin 1991, 1992). A first task would be conceptual clarification of the notion of dissociation, which also would deal with the relationships between dissociation and precization and between dissociation and definition. Next, there is the question

¹ Goodwin (1991, 1992) treats similarities between making a distinction and dissociation. Schiappa (1985, 1993) points out the essentialistic basis of dissociation. Grootendorst (1999) analyzes an example of inappropriate dissociation.

² For criticism of Perelman and Olbrecht-Tyteca's taxonomy, see Van Eemeren *et al.* (1996).

in which ways dissociation becomes evident in argumentative discourse. This necessitates research into the various indicators which may signal the use of dissociation. Third, the question rises in which ways the technique can be used dialogically in the negotiations between protagonist and antagonist to bring about the solution of a conflict of opinion. This implies empirical study of the contexts in which dissociation is used in argumentative discourse. Fourth, one may ask what the dialectical and rhetorical consequences of the use of this technique are. This means that a functional analysis of the use of the technique must be undertaken. And, finally, one might want to know under which circumstances the technique is dialectically sound. This would imply a study of dissociation from a normative dialectic point of view.

In this paper, I concentrate on the third question. I leave the matter of conceptual clarification aside, for now (I feel justified in doing so, because, even though the boundaries between distinction and dissociation are not clear, in the context of an argument, both techniques may be used in the same way). I will explore the dialogue contexts in which dissociation is used, and the consequences of that use for the resolution of the conflict of opinion around which the discussion revolves. In addition, I will make some remarks with regard to the matter of the dialectical and rhetorical effects of the use of dissociation in these contexts. The material for the analysis consists of various kinds of texts: newspaper and radio interviews, discussions, parliamentary debates, argumentative newspaper articles, and newspaper articles in which discussions are rendered or reported upon.

Dialogue contexts of dissociation in solving a difference of opinion

Dissociation can occur in various stages of the process of solving a difference of opinion: in the confrontation stage, the argumentation stage, and the concluding stage of a critical discussion. In all cases dissociation is a move which brings the discussion back to the opening stage, since dissociation brings about a change in the starting points of the discussion. This is because through dissociation an existing and accepted conceptual unity which in some way or another serves as a point of departure for the discussion, is broken up.

The technique can be used both by the protagonist (defending), and the antagonist (attacking) of a standpoint. That results in several possibilities for placement in the succession of moves in the discussion.

Confrontation stage

In the confrontation stage, the protagonist can use dissociation to reply to criticism against his standpoint. The antagonist can use it to criticize the standpoint of the protagonist.³

³ Strictly speaking, we cannot speak of protagonist and antagonist here, since in the confrontation stage the roles of defending or attacking have not yet been distributed. But since the one who brings forward a standpoint, usually will be the one who will take upon him- or herself the task of defending it, and the one who questions it, the task of attacking it, for briefness sake I use the terms in this context.

Defending

An example of the use of dissociation for the defense in the confrontation stage can be found in the following passage of a newspaper report of a feud between Eurocommissar Frits Bolkestein and TV personality Fons de Poel.

[Fragment 1]

Eurocommissar Frits Bolkestein must stop his accusations against Netwerk presenter Fons de Poel. In addition, he must publish a different rectification in *Vrij Nederland* [a weekly magazine – MAVR]. This is what De Poel's attorney demanded, this past Friday before the court in Amsterdam, in a case against Bolkestein.

The latter accused the Netwerk presenter some time ago in *Vrij Nederland* of making a fraudulent declaration against him with the IRS 'and, as you know, this is a crime'. According to his attorney, N. Meijering, De Poel never made a declaration, 'let alone a fraudulent one'.

Bolkestein earlier did place a rectification in VN. In this, he says: 'I meant "fraudulent declaration" not in the technical sense of the word, but in the sense of cooperating in giving a patently false impression of things with regard to my tax declaration'. [*De Volkskrant*, November 13, 1999.]

Bolkestein has presented the standpoint that De Poel made a fraudulent declaration. De Poel denies this. Bolkestein agrees that De Poel did not make a fraudulent declaration in the technical sense of the word, but persists in his opinion through making a dissociation: he states that De Poel made a fraudulent declaration in another, 'non-technical' sense. The dissociation is brought about by distinguishing two meanings, one of which is new, of the term 'fraudulent declaration'.

In the next example, too, the protagonist responds to criticism against his standpoint with a dissociation, albeit that the standpoint here is a virtual one (for the term 'virtual standpoint', see Jackson 1992). Only, in this case the protagonist does not persist in his original opinion, but gives it up. The fragment comes from a radio interview with the public relations officer of the Public Prosecutor of Rotterdam, in which he announces that Rotterdam, unlike Groningen, will not prohibit posting an offending poster by the artist Serrano whose work is exhibited in Groningen:

[Fragment 2]

W: yeah well this is the Rotterdam point of view what I just told you

I: isn't it a bit strange that in a small country like The Netherlands such diverging opinions reign between two large cities?

W: eh well for the moment yes you assume that there is a difference of opinion it could very well be the case that in practice in the end it will lead to the same result

An implicature of Wesseling's first utterance is that Rotterdam has an opinion of its own. When the interviewer questions the desirability of this, Wesseling's distances himself from this implicature; he says that 'in practice' there is no difference of opinion between the two cities. He makes a dissociation between opinions in the abstract, and opinions in practice.

Attacking

An example of the antagonist using dissociation as an attack in the confrontation stage is offered by the following passage from a newspaper interview with a grand-daughter of Maria Montessori.

[*Fragment 3*]

That her grandmother is known for being ambitious and vain, she also deems irrelevant. And incorrect, as well. 'She loved beautiful clothes, but was not vain. She had the gift of a profound scholarly modesty. She was driven, something different from ambition. She saw the education of the children of this world as her task. Rather, she was a medium. I remember that in a discussion with my father she picked up a book by herself and said: "Look, it says here". So not: I say. She relayed what she knew'. [*De Volkskrant*, October 5, 1999]

Renilde Montessori attacks the standpoint that her grandmother was vain by making a dissociation between 'loving beautiful clothes' and 'being vain'. Subsequently she gives an argument for the standpoint that Montessori was not vain. She does the same with regard to the standpoint that Montessori was ambitious. There she dissociates between being 'driven' and 'ambition', and subsequently gives arguments for the standpoint that Montessori was driven and for the standpoint that it was not the case that she was ambitious. The pairs of concepts which are dissociated here, in ordinary speech generally are considered to be identical. The dissociation is brought about by opposing the two aspects which are distinguished (p', but not p), and by denying their similarity (p' which is something different from p).

The same dissociative technique is applied in the following example. In a newspaper interview with the soccer player Jonk, the latter suggests that the level of play at the Sheffield soccer club, to which he was transferred, is below what he was used to.

[*Fragment 4*]

A good, elegant soccer player thus started to play below his level. 'At that time that was a choice, because I had few other options'. But he has no regrets. 'It's a pity, but a pity is something else than regret'. [*De Volkskrant*, August 18, 1999]

From the summary of the interviewer in the first sentence, and Jonk's reaction in the second, one might deduce that he regrets his choice. However, that is a standpoint which the player does not subscribe to. He attacks it by dissociating between feeling something is a pity and feeling regret. In ordinary speech the two concepts, which here are placed in opposition, usually are regarded as identical.

Argumentation stage

In the argumentation stage, dissociation is always used to attack an argument of another party. In a non-mixed difference of opinion, the antagonist can attack the protagonist's argument; in a mixed difference of opinion, the protagonist of the one standpoint can attack as an antagonist the argument of the protagonist of the opposite standpoint. In the latter case, the protagonist gives an indirect defense of his own standpoint, but that makes no difference for the attacking character of the move. Dissociation can be used in two ways: to attack the tenability of the argument, or to attack the connection between argument and standpoint.

Tenability of the argument

When the tenability of the argument is attacked, dissociation is used in the way which Garssen specifies, in order to attack a starting point for applying an argumentation scheme. In principle, an attack on the tenability of an argument through dissociation does not differ from such an attack on the tenability of a standpoint. Yet it is worthwhile to investigate it on its own, because the attack does indeed have consequences for the application of the argumentation scheme.

In the symptomatic scheme, the starting point consists in declaring an entity equivalent to another entity or class of entities (such that the characteristics of the latter are conveyed to the former). This equivalence can be attacked through dissociation. That is what happens in the following example. Minister Jorritsma has been called to book in Parliament because she wants to adapt the allowable noise levels for Schiphol airport. Parliament is of the opinion that adaptation is the same as tolerating that the standards are exceeded, and had the minister earlier not asserted that such a policy of tolerance should no longer be put into force? The symptomatic argument which Parliament applies is: adaptation is not to be allowed, because adaptation comes down to tolerating, and tolerating is no longer an allowable option. The minister defends her policy in the following manner:

[*Fragment 5*]

According to Jorritsma, the cabinet will not revert to a tolerance policy, as it was applied in 1997. 'That was once, but never again, we said at the time. But tolerating is something quite different from anticipating on a change of law which everybody thinks should be put into effect.' [*De Volkskrant*, January 22, 1998]

Jorritsma contests the argument that adapting the allowable noise levels is the same as carrying out a tolerance policy. She dissociates between tolerance and anticipating a change of law which everybody thinks should be put into effect. The dissociation consists in distinguishing two aspects of the same thing: allowing the violation of current legal regulations. The dissociation serves to attack the starting point of the symptomatic argument which Parliament brings forward.

In pragmatic argumentation, the starting point for the argument posits a causal relationship. The starting point for this causal relationship can be attacked as well. That is what happens in the following fragment from a parliamentary debate about the voluntary resignation of Minister Peper after rumors of financial malversation during his period as Mayor of Rotterdam.

[*Fragment 6*]

Mr. Marijnissen (SP): I gladly will do so, because it is the task of a member of Parliament to bring to light inconsistencies and that is what we have a case of when we are talking about 'the interest of public administration'. In the interest of public administration Peper, according to his own say-so, has taken his decision. The prime minister has said that in the interest of public administration it is better to fight back in this kind of situation. He also said that in the interest of public administration it would be sheer folly to resign only on the basis of rumors and insinuations from anonymous sources. All this raises the question whether Mr. Peper in resigning does not do a disservice to public administration, because with regard to those insinuations and facts nothing has changed.

Prime Minister Kok: I understand your observation and Minister Peper certainly will have taken that into account in his own considerations. It is good that there is an exchange on this matter, but it seems to me some distinction must be made between imputations against people in office against which they can defend themselves and the consequences which can or can not be drawn from that, that is, more in general, and the indeed very special situation which is in evidence here, namely that now no other than the Minister of Interior Affairs, the first one responsible for public administration, possibly for a longer period would be a party, could be discredited if only in connection with being a party, in a situation regarding the accountability for expenses related to his past, to his former responsibility. That *is* a different case, if I may say so. That is something different from an incidental accusation, a reproach, a publication or certain outcomes of an investigation, which, by the way, may very well be extremely irritating, but against which one can defend oneself. If one really has the impression that one will be a party in a conflict in which these two roles will completely be mixed up, possibly will stay mixed up, and will increase being discredited, mind you: if it has to do with the responsible minister for public administration, than that is something essentially different.

Marijnissen points out an inconsistency: Prime Minister Kok earlier had defended the standpoint that Minister Peper should stay in office, because that would be in the interest of public administration; now he agrees with Peper that he should not stay in office in the name of that same interest. Kok defends his current standpoint through dissociating between staying on in a situation of incidental accusations and staying on in a situation in which one would be discredited for a longer period. In the former case, it would serve the interest of public administration, in the latter, it would not.

Connection between argument and standpoint

When dissociation is used to attack the connection between argument and standpoint, this can be done in several ways. These possibilities correspond with the types of critical questions which can be asked with regard to the application of the various argument schemes:

does X result in/ is X characteristic for/ is X comparable to Z?

does X not result in/ is X not characteristic for/ is X not comparable to something else than Z?

is it X, and not something else, which results in/ is characteristic for/ is comparable to Z?

The first critical question regards the connection as such: it denies that such a connection exists. The second critical question concerns the second member of the relationship. The third critical question concerns the first member of the relationship.

The first critical question

The first critical question attacks the heart of the relationship: the existence of a connection is denied. This means that the association which is made by the other party is undone. Such an attack usually is only dissociative in the wider sense of the term, since in the relationship (X results in/is comparable to/ is characteristic of Z) two independent, different entities are brought

together. But when the attack is directed against the connection in a symptomatic scheme in which identity is claimed, the attack is dissociative in the proper sense of the term, separating into two entities something which is regarded as one and the same thing. In such a case the scheme is used as follows: X is Y because X is Z and Z is the same as/comes down to/means Y. The attack involves the breaking up of this identity. An example can be found in the following fragment from a radio broadcast of a press conference in which the director of a hospital is questioned about an allegation of culpable negligence.

[*Fragment 7*]

S: it is not correct that in our hospital fatal consequences have occurred on account of culpable negligence in our medical treatment ((...))

I: one of the complaints for instance that was filed could be heard in the program here the story was told of a patient who asked six times for a gynaecologist which did not come all that time but according to the hospital this does not say anything about culpable negligence.

S: a complaint was filed that was treated by the grievance committee and they declared the complaint justified ((...)) the complaint was filed with reason which means that the gynaecologist should have responded earlier to the request of the nursing staff

I: so culpable negligence after all?

S: I made a distinction between a complaint, a justified complaint and culpable negligence

I applies the symptomatic argument that a justified complaint is the same as culpable negligence. S denies that identity, and dissociates between the two.

The second critical question

The second critical question is used to attack the application of the argument scheme by pointing out that the argument leads to/is comparable to/ is characteristic of something else than what is postulated. That distinction can be prepared through a dissociation in the second member of the relationship. An example in which this is the case with regard to a causal relationship can be found in the following fragment of a newspaper interview with a genetic biologist on cloning.

[*Fragment 8*]

The discomfort at cloning of humans seems to me to be the product of a confusion between the notions 'identical people' and 'genetically identical people'. When you have two genetically identical flower bulbs, you can exchange the one for the other without any problem: genetically identical for bulbs means identical. In other words: the value of an individual bulb decreases, the more genetically identical ones there are. One black tulip is very special. But if the Keukenhof is full of them, no tourist will come and look at them.

But people are not bulbs. The value and dignity of people is not determined by their genetic make-up, but by the fact of them being humans. Or are identical twins (a 'natural' clone!) worth less than two 'ordinary' brothers? Someone married to half of a twin wouldn't want to exchange the one for the other, would they?

There is a simple reason for that: 'genetically identical' in humans is something quite different from 'identical'. Individuality does not reside in the genes.

That is why humanity or human dignity is not threatened by cloning as such. That only happens if we start to value people differently on the basis of their genes. As happens now, already as well, by the way, under the name of 'racism'. [*De Volkskrant*, April 11, 1997]

The speaker contests the viewpoint of people who reject human cloning because it would lead to identical people (and thus loss of human dignity). The causal relationship which underlies the argument of these opponents is attacked through dissociating between identical and (merely) genetically identical: cloning produces humans with only the latter characteristic, not the former.

In a symptomatic scheme, too, the second member of the relationship can be attacked through dissociation. An example can be found in the following (reported) conversation fragment.

[*Fragment 9*]

A: he is a good manager

B: well, he certainly couldn't prevent that subsidy cut-off

A: yes, he isn't a good crisis manager, but as a general manager he's just fine

B uses the symptomatic argument that not being able to prevent a subsidy cut-off is a sign of not being a good manager. A attacks that connection by dissociating between management and crisis management and by claiming that not being able to prevent a subsidy cut-off is not a sign of not being a good manager, but of something different, namely, of not being a good crisis manager.

The third critical question

The third critical question attacks the relationship between argument and standpoint by pointing out that it is not that which is stated in the argument, but something else that leads to the postulated result/ is comparable to the postulated object/ has the postulated characteristic. That distinction can be prepared through a dissociation in the first member of the relationship. An example is offered by the following fragment from the television debate program 'De Worsteling'. Film maker Ate de Jong claims that producer Matthijs van Heijningen has lost his passion. Van Heijningen tries to refute this claim by pointing out that he is producing no less than four movies at that moment in time.

[*Fragment 10*]

dJ: I think that Matthijs's flame has subsided (...)

vH: well ((mentions four movies he is producing at that moment)).... no certainly not, no no just just

dJ: yes but I have the feeling that Matthijs does this because he is a producer and is supposed to do something again, not because he really wants to do that specific production

Van Heijningen makes use of a symptomatic argument scheme: producing a lot of movies points to passion. De Jong attacks the first member of the relationship which the scheme applies

by dissociating between movies which are produced because the producer really wants to, and movies which are produced because the producer has to. Only producing the first type shows that the producer has not lost his passion. De Jong does not contest that Van Heijningen is producing four movies (in this sense he does not contest the tenability of the starting point), but he does contest that Van Heijningen produces the kind of movies which enables the application of the symptomatic relationship.

The concluding stage

In the concluding stage, dissociation can be used to give a precization of the conclusion that was reached. In the material I have only found an example of a distinction being used in this fashion, but the use of dissociation in a similar move can be easily envisioned. The example comes from a parliamentary debate, in which Minister of Justice Korthals discussed the desirability of an amendment proposed by Mrs. Halsema purporting to set up a right to complain for youthful detainees. MP Rouvoet wants to know what the outcome of the debate exactly is.

[*Fragment 11*]

Minister Korthals: Mr. Chairman! I think it will not go like this. I gave my arguments against this amendment. If the members see a lot of advantages in accepting it, they should vote in favor of it.

Mr. Rouvoet: Mr. Chairman! I find this an important matter. The minister says that he has given his arguments against acceptance of the amendment. However, I want a clarification after the debate with Mrs. Halsema. Is the minister against the amendment because in his opinion article 65, 1, already comprises that a youth in certain cases can file a complaint against the decision of a selection officer to use violence, or does the minister think that this right to complain can not be considered part of it because a youth should not be allowed to complain against the use of violence which a selection officer has decided on?

Minister Korthals: No. In principle I am of the opinion that everyone should be able to complain if in any way violence is used against them. If a selection officer in any way acts wrongly, the decision which he has taken can be tested by another authority. That authority can evaluate the decision of the selection officer, also in the case of the application of violence, and pronounce on it.

Mr. Rouvoet It comes down to this: you feel that it should be possible to file a complaint, but you do not think that there is an omission. That is what the argument of Mrs. Halsema was about. So you do not agree with her that in article 65 an omission is made.

Minister Korthals: I think I have been clear in this.

Member of Parliament Rouvoet makes a distinction between two potential conclusions from the debate and asks which one the minister subscribes to. The minister commits himself to one of the two interpretations.

Dialectical and rhetorical effects

The dialectical effects of a dissociation depend on the question in which stage and by which party the dissociation was made. The rhetorical effects, as well, to some degree are determined

by this. But there are also more general remarks which can be made about the rhetorical effects of dissociation.

As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca point out, dissociation is used to prevent or remedy an inconsistency. As we have seen in the above, this needs not always be an inconsistency in the position of the speaker him- or herself. It may also be an opposition between a conclusion which might be drawn from the given starting points, and the conclusion which the speaker would like to draw.

Another inherent rhetorical effect is that through dissociation a term receives redefinition. And by substituting the new definition for the old one, a different picture is given of the state of affairs. As Schiappa phrases it: [dissociation] 'solidifies one conception of reality while undermining rival conceptualizations' (1985, 80). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca state that [dissociation] 'remodels our conception of reality' (1969, 416). And since dissociation involves the application of a hierarchy of values, the evaluation of the state of affairs is changed as well.

The rhetorical effects of dissociation are enhanced because the dissociation usually is presented as self-evident and is introduced without further argument. Since dissociation changes the conceptual starting points which protagonist and antagonist share, the acceptability of a dissociation certainly is a point of debate, potentially requiring a sub-discussion (Grootendorst 1999). But through presenting the dissociation as self-evident, the opponent is confronted with a *fait accompli*, on which it is difficult re-open the discussion.

Confrontation stage

Defending

A dissociation in the confrontation stage can be used by the protagonist in two ways. First, P persists in his standpoint after the antagonist's criticism, while at the same time admitting that the antagonist is right. P says as much as: in one sense, you are right, and I have to withdraw my standpoint, in another sense I persist in my opinion and disagree with you. The latter sense is what I really meant. An example is fragment (1), Bolkestein's manoeuvring with the term fraudulent declaration. The dialectical effect is that the protagonist retracts his original standpoint, and shifts the difference of opinion to a different standpoint. A rhetorical effect is that the speaker withdraws to a different standpoint, which is easier for him to defend, and that without seeming to give up his original position. Both dialectical and rhetorical effects are clearly illustrated in the sequel to the example, in which the responses of the lawyers of both Bolkestein and De Poel (in that order) are related.

According to his lawyer, with this statement he takes back the term 'fraudulent declaration'.

De Poel does not agree. His lawyer Meijering deems the text unclear and is of the opinion that Bolkestein does not distance himself from the allegations. 'When you read closely, he says the exact opposite'.

Bolkestein's lawyer describes the dialectic effect of Bolkestein retracting his original standpoint; De Poel's lawyer complains about the rhetorical effect of Bolkestein persisting in his accusation.

The second way of using dissociation in defense in the confrontation stage is in effect when

P withdraws his original standpoint after criticism of the antagonist, but acts as if that does not mean a change. P says as much as: originally my words were used in the one sense, now I am saying the same thing, but then in another sense, in which I agree with what you are saying. An example is fragment (2), in which the public relations officer of the Public Prosecutor of Rotterdam renounces the virtual standpoint he is committed to that Rotterdam has a position of its own. The dialectic effect is that there is no longer a difference of opinion, because the protagonist gives up his original standpoint and goes along with the opposite standpoint. The rhetorical effect is that the speaker wriggles out from something which he is committed to, while disguising the fact that he takes the opposite standpoint to the one which he originally took. He acts as if it is just a matter of a shade of meaning.

Whether the protagonist uses dissociation to maintain his standpoint or to relinquish it, in both cases the rhetorical effect is that he defends against a potential accusation of inconsistency. In addition, in both cases a redefinition is achieved, and the definition which the speaker chooses to use is given priority.

Attacking

A dissociation by the antagonist in the confrontation stage dialectically has the effect that the antagonist brings forward not just the opposite standpoint to that of the protagonist, but another one as well. The difference of opinion is made into a multiple mixed difference. The rhetorical effect is that the speaker sweeps the original standpoint off the table and brings about a shift in the question that the difference of opinion is about. The force with which this is done is increased by the fact that the dissociation is often presented as self-evident. Fragment (4), in which soccer player Jonk denies regrets about his choice, presents a clear example: no argument is given.

The dissociation brings about a redefinition of the crucial terms, while invoking a value hierarchy. The qualification which is used in the standpoint which is attacked is considered negative, and possessed with negative implications. The dissociation is used to attack these negative qualifications and implications. By positing a different qualification, with positive connotations, a positive judgement comes in place of the negative judgement. This goes for Montessori's personality, as well as for Jonk's emotional state: the latter suffers less loss of face by substituting the dissociated concept 'a pity' for the original 'regrets' (if he regretted his decision he would have to admit that he took a wrong decision which he would like to reverse).

Argumentation stage

The dialectical and rhetorical effects of an attack against the argument of the opponent depend on whether or not the attack takes place within the context of a mixed difference of opinion. In a non-mixed dispute, the dissociation is purely offensive, in a mixed dispute, an indirect defense of the standpoint of the speaker is attempted at the same time.

Mixed

In a mixed dispute, the dialectical effect of an attack on the argumentation of an antagonist is that the protagonist gives an indirect defense of his standpoint, as well. The general rhetorical effect is that of any indirect defense: while the standpoint still stands in need of a defense, the

attention is shifted to the standpoint of the other party.

When the dissociation is directed against the tenability of the opponent's argument, the speaker attacks the starting point of the argumentation. The protagonist accepts that the conclusion which the antagonist draws can be inferred from the starting point, but he denies the tenability of that starting point. A rhetorical effect is that the speaker wriggles out from a consequence which he would have been committed to otherwise, without being able to be accused of inconsistency. An example occurs in the Schiphol debate (example 5). Jorritsma tries to escape the consequence which she could be held committed to on the basis of her earlier statements ('once but never again'). She achieves this by denying the tenability of the starting point through a dissociation involving a redefinition of the term 'tolerance policy'. The same type of thing happens in the Peper debate (6). In both cases, the speaker made earlier statements in virtue of which he could be held committed to the conclusion which the opposing party draws and which he subsequently denies.

When the dissociation is aimed against the argumentation scheme which the other party applies, the speaker does not reject the argument as such, he accepts the argument, but tries to establish that it is irrelevant for the standpoint which the opponent brought forward. A rhetorical effect of the dissociation is that the speaker wriggles out from under a conclusion which he could be held committed to on the basis of the acceptance of the argument. The more established the connection which the application of the argumentation scheme invokes, the more difficult this is. When the speaker attacks the first member of the relationship, he tries to wriggle out from under a starting point which he can not very well deny. He does so by suggesting that the starting point does not necessarily lead to the conclusion which the antagonist wishes to draw, notably through dissociating an aspect leading to an exception to the postulated relationship. Again, a rhetorical effect is that the speaker escapes an accepted connection, while defending himself against an accusation of inconsistency. De Jong cannot deny that Van Heijningen is producing movies, but through the dissociation he establishes that they are not the type of movies which warrant the conclusion which his opponent wishes to draw (10). When the speaker attacks the second member of the relationship, as in (8) and (9), another rhetorical effect occurs, as well: the speaker agrees with his opponent on a point which he makes into a minor point, and for the major matter claims his standing in the right.

Non-mixed

In a non-mixed dispute, in the argumentation stage, dissociation is used only as an attack on the protagonist's argument. In an attack on the tenability of the argument, the dialectical and rhetorical effects are the same as those of an attack on the tenability of the standpoint of the protagonist, only on a lower level. The argument is forcefully swept from the table; on the sub-level a mixed multiple dispute is brought into existence. Rhetorically, the effect is that the argument is depicted as concerned with an unimportant, unessential aspect of the matter. So far, I have not found any examples of this use of dissociation, but it can easily be imagined. Thus the following hypothetical dialogue might be imagined.

[*Fragment 12*]

A: she is the right candidate for this job

B: how so?

A: well, she is a very good manager

B: how can you say so, she is merely a good crisis manager

B attacks the tenability of A's argument by making a dissociation between management and crisis management.

When the antagonist attacks the argumentation scheme, he denies that the postulated conclusion follows. An example is offered by the following response by minister Van Aartsen to reports about Minister of Finance Zalm not mentioning new sums.

[*Fragment 13*]

Van Aartsen reacted irritably to reports that Zalm according to his spokesman did not mention new sums. 'A spokesman is not the same as the minister', according to Van Aartsen. [*De Volkskrant*, March 23, 1999]

Reports express the opinion that Zalm did not mention new sums, invoking the authority of his spokesperson. Van Aartsen attacks that symptomatic relationship through a dissociation between the word of a spokesperson and the word of the minister (which ordinarily are supposed to coincide). He does not deny that the spokesperson said what the reports say, but he contests that this means that the minister in actual fact did not mention new sums. Once again, the argument of the opponent is forcefully swept from the table, without further argument.

Conclusions

The above investigation of the dialogical contexts in which dissociation occurs, shows that dissociation can be used in a variety of ways. But it always is used in reaction to the standpoint or argument of another party. It is a typically dialogical technique. That is why it is important to describe the dialogical possibilities of the use of this technique and the dialectical and rhetorical effects of that use in the various places in the dialogical profile in which it can occur.

Dissociation does indeed, as some authors pointed out earlier, not function as an argument scheme. What this investigation further shows, is that it may be used as an argumentative technique in the confrontation, in the argumentation, and in the concluding stages of a critical discussion. In the confrontation stage, it may be used both in maintaining and relinquishing standpoints, and in attacking standpoints. In the argumentation stage, it may be used to attack the argument, as well as the argument scheme of the opponent, and the latter in various ways, corresponding to the critical questions that may be asked about the scheme. In the concluding stage, dissociation may be used to precizate or to bring about a shift in the conclusion which is drawn from the preceding discussion.

The dialectical and rhetorical effects of the use of dissociation were only marginally touched upon in this paper. Further investigation is necessary. But it does transpire that dissociation plays an important role in shifting the discussion in the direction which the speaker desires, while at the same time, in many cases, protecting the speaker against an accusation of inconsistency.

As I indicated in the beginning, there is a lot more to be learnt about dissociation: its conceptual boundaries, the way in which it manifests itself, and the degree to which its use is acceptable in a dialectical framework, all these are topics for further enquiry. In later publications I hope to report on findings with regard to these topics.

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