University of Windsor
Scholarship at UWindsor

OSSA Conference Archive | OSSA 2

May 15th, 9:00 AM - May 17th, 5:00 PM

Commentary on Blair

Erik C W Krabbe

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/ossaarchive

Part of the Philosophy Commons

Krabbe, Erik C W, "Commentary on Blair" (1997). *OSSA Conference Archive*. 11.
https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/ossaarchive/OSSA2/papersandcommentaries/11

This Commentary is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences and Conference Proceedings at Scholarship at UWindsor. It has been accepted for inclusion in OSSA Conference Archive by an authorized conference organizer of Scholarship at UWindsor. For more information, please contact scholarship@uwindsor.ca.

COMMENT ON J. ANTHONY BLAIR'S PAPER: "THE LIMITS OF THE DIALOGUE MODEL OF ARGUMENT"

Erik C. W. Krabbe
Faculty of Philosophy
University of Groningen
©1998, Erik C.W. Krabbe

I found Professor Blair's classification of types of dialogue most instructive. For one thing, it is completely different from anything Douglas Walton and I ever tried in the way of classification. Ours did not even deserve the name of classification: we just listed the types that we thought were important for the study of persuasion dialogue, because linked to them through dialectical shifts. Persuasion dialogue itself we saw as the home station of argument.

We did not use the term "argument dialogue", but if we had adopted it we would probably have restricted its use to dialogues that start from some conflict situation, i.e., in our set-up: persuasion dialogues, negotiations, and eristic dialogues. The dialogues of other types—inquiry, deliberation, and information-seeking dialogues—however useful in the study of argument, do not themselves contain literal arguing (though dialogues that do contain arguing may be embedded into them). One might even go further and restrict the term argument-dialogue to persuasion dialogues. Anyhow, for there to be any arguing, it is crucial that there is a conflict of sorts.

Professor Blair's classification, or hierarchy, of argument dialogues seems, on the face of it, to pertain to just persuasion dialogues, i.e., no reference is made to negotiation or eristics. Douglas Walton and I distinguished several subtypes of persuasion dialogue, but professor Blair's approach is novel and, whether or not meant to be so, of considerable interest for the development of dialogue models of argument.

Before I get to what I see as the principal issues of this paper, the conclusions drawn from the hierarchy, I first want to run through the hierarchy itself in order to remark on some details.

The Blair Hierarchy

Group A contains relatively simple Question and Answer Dialogues, exemplified by Greek dialogues. These types of dialogue are interesting in their own right, but the idea that just one party controls the direction of the exchange seems misguided. No interesting type of dialogue can structurally admit such one-sided control, since it would virtually reduce dialogues to monologues. Also, the feature that "at each turn after the opening one, the party responds to the immediately preceding turn in the exchange" —a feature later put forward as the essence of a "fully engaged" dialogue and as a characteristic of all dialogues of types A and B—cannot be taken literally, since it would exclude all dialogue in which several separately expressed commitments are brought together, and hence all syllogism. Of course, there are viable types of dialogue in which one party is bounded in this way, but to require "full engagement" of both parties would be simply disastrous.

It is interesting to compare Greek dialogues with Lorenzen-type dialogues, however in that case I would identify the Questioner with the Proponent and the Answerer with the Opponent, rather than the other way around.

Group B.4 could be split into dialogues that admit just one sentence in one turn (where putting forward this sentence may be interpretable as arguing) and dialogues that are not thus restricted. Lorenzen-type dialogues would constitute a model for the restricted type (this time with the Proponent as the answerer and the Opponent as the questioner), whereas the pragma-dialectical model of critical discussion (with the Protagonist as the answerer and the Antagonist as the questioner) would link up with the unrestricted type. In general, the labels Proponent and Opponent, seem more appropriate than those of answerer and questioner, especially since the Proponent in Lorenzen-type dialogues happens to be the one who asks questions (to obtain concessions), whereas the so-called questions of the Opponent are better designated as "challenges".

After the introduction of arguments for doubts on the side of the Opponent at level B.6—a form of active criticism[1]—it would be senseless not to admit role switching between the two parties: the original Opponent now has a thesis to defend. One therefore passes straightforwardly into a dialogue of type B.7, and this latter type need not be separately mentioned.

In type C.8 a "line of argument" appears to be presented in a single turn and, as an argument structure, to be restricted to depth 3. So it is something quite different from the series of turns (of any length) Else Barth called a "chain of arguments" (Barth and Krabbe, 1982: 63). Of course it may be similar to what other people have called a "chain of arguments".

The Permissive Persuasion Dialogue (Walton and Krabbe, 1995: Section 4.3) permits several complex arguments to be presented in one and the same turn, so as a type of dialogue it should be located at level C.11. Extensions of Permissive Persuasion Dialogue could reach level D.13.

Is there a sea change?

Notwithstanding the possibility of highly complex turns in the higher level dialogues, I would maintain that all types of dialogue in the Blair hierarchy are genuinely dialogical in that dialogues of these types admit of serious interaction between parties. Take the worst case, the D.13 type of dialogue. Even D.13 moves involving a number of arguments can often be presented in a reasonably short time, say ten minutes, after which the other party could react immediately to seek out weak spots, etc. in a turn of, say, five minutes. This could go on for quite a while, each speaker using at most five minutes for the next turn. One might call this "quasi-monological dialogue", but dialogue it is. One should not forget that the various enrichments of turns are optional, and that the option for a faster rate of dialogical exchange is not lost at the higher levels. Most important, at no level of complexity is *dialectical completeness* enforced as a norm, that is: it is not incumbent upon the Arguer to fairly represent both sides of the issue. There might be the possibility of presenting "a whole case", but one may also propound "a partial case" and await critical response.

On the other hand, if dialectical completeness functions as an explicit or implicit norm for the discourse, that is: if the Arguer is ideally supposed to present not only his or her own point of view but equally the point of view of as many kinds of relevant opposition as one might think of in the given context, then dialectical interaction would become dispensable; in that case we would not have a quasi-monological dialogue, but, at most, quasi-dialogical monologues. This is where I would be inclined to put the Harman-Thomson exchange.

No Limit to the Use of Dialogue Models

The pragma- and other dialecticians in argumentation theory hold that all argumentative texts must be analyzed in terms of dialogue models. No limits are acknowledged. If the argumentative text itself happen to be a quasi-dialogical monologue, the model used in the analysis will of course not be a model of quasi-dialogue, but a model of dialogue. Similarly, if the text happens to constitute a complex turn of a quasi-monological dialogue, say at level D.13, the analysis will use a model of dialogue, but this model will, presumably, not put us at level D.13, but at some lower level. The Blair hierarchy presents us with interesting possibilities of hierarchical analysis.

The dialectical point of view may be programmatic, and at the moment it might not be everyone's choice of a way to study arguments (not yet) but the existence of fairly complex types of persuasion dialogues and of quasi-dialogues does not in itself constitute a serious objection to it or impose a limit to its field of application. Though I would agree with professor Blair that not all argumentation is explicitly dialogical, I also want to maintain the methodological principle that all argumentation must be analyzed as if it were dialogical, that is: in terms of dialogue models.

A Limit to the Usefulness of Dialogue Models

Let A be a non-dialogical piece of argumentation that one wants to analyze in terms of a suitable dialogue model DM. Do the norms derived from DM apply to A? Not directly! From A one has first to reconstruct an implicit dialogue D, and it is to D that the norms of DM apply in the first place. Usually, it is taken for granted that a fallacy in D (the implicit dialogue) corresponds to a fallacy in A. I shall here assume that this is unproblematic, though it would be worth while to take a closer look at this transfer. So the norms of DM apply to A, be it indirectly. In this I disagree with professor Blair who maintains that these norms do not all apply. The presuppositions of these norms (or rules) may not be satisfied in the context of A itself; that does not exclude their applicability to the dialogue D implicit in A.

More important is the point on which I agree with professor Blair: there are a number of factors that need not worry the "duet arguer", but are very important for the evaluation of "solo arguments." I would put it this way: the norm of dialectical completeness, though it refers to types of opposition and hence to possible dialogues and to a model of dialogue, is not itself a norm of the dialogue model to which it refers.

Hence a straightforward analysis in terms of an implicit dialogue, as sketched above, does not suffice for a thorough evaluation of a given piece of non-dialogical argumentation. Not all fallacies are spotted that way. For instance, it would seem that those relating to insufficiency are not. A more complete type of dialectical analysis would have to take account of the norm of dialectical completeness, including its variations and ramifications through contexts of argument. In that sense there is, indeed, a limit to what can be achieved by straightforward argument analysis in terms of dialogue models.

Note

1. Active criticism is one of the types of critical reaction to an argument. It was briefly discussed in Krabbe 1995: 338, Case 4d.

Bibliography

Barth, Else M. and Erik C. W. Krabbe (1982), *From Axiom to Dialogue: A Philosophical Study of Logics and Argumentation,* Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter.

Krabbe, Erik C. W. (1995), Can We Ever Pin One Down to a Formal Fallacy? In: Frans H. van Eemeren, Rob Grootendorst, J. Anthony Blair and Charles A. Willard (eds.), *Proceedings of the Third ISSA Conference on Argumentation (University of Amsterdam, June 21-24, 1994) II: Analysis and Evaluation,* Amsterdam: Sic Sat, International Centre for the Study of Argumentation, 1995, pp. 333-344. Also published in: Theo A.F.

Kuipers and Anne Ruth Mackor (eds.), *Cognitive Patterns in Science and Common Sense: Groningen Studies in Philosophy of Science, Logic, and Epistemology,* Amsterdam and Atlanta GA: Rodopi, 1995, pp. 151-164 and in: Johan van Benthem, Frans H. van Eemeren, Rob Grootendorst and Frank Veltman (eds.), *Logic and Argumentation,* Amsterdam, etc.: North-Holland, 1996, pp. 129-141.

Walton, Douglas N. and Erik C. W. Krabbe (1995), *Commitment in Dialogue: Basic Concepts of Interpersonal Reasoning,* State University of New York Press.

View Paper by J.A. Blair
View Index of Papers and Commentaries
Return to Main Menu