

May 22nd, 9:00 AM - May 25th, 5:00 PM

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Wagemans, Jean H. M., "Commentary on: Michael Hoppmann's "Preciseness is a virtue: What are critical questions?"" (2013). *OSSA Conference Archive*. 75.

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# Commentary on: Michael Hoppmann's "Preciseness is a virtue: What are critical questions?"

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Hoppmann aims at providing a “theoretical background for applied argumentative criticism” or, more in particular, at providing a “simplified taxonomy of critical questions” that can be used for the evaluation of real life argumentative texts. The main reason for undertaking such an endeavor, so he says, is the “undesirable widening gap” between the theory of critical questions and the critical praxis for which that theory has been designed. In order to develop a new taxonomy of critical questions that serves practical needs, Hoppmann first presents an overview of contemporary definitions of the concept. Second, he suggests a simplified taxonomy consisting of three types and gives some concrete examples of each of them. Third, he shows how the taxonomy may be of use in practice by analyzing a real life argumentative text. In my commentary, I will address some issues concerning the relation between the first and the second part of the paper and the broadness of Hoppmann’s understanding of the concept of ‘critical questions’.

## 2. THE EXCLUSION OF SOME ACCOUNTS OF ‘OBJECTIONS’

In the first part of the paper, Hoppmann reviews a number of contemporary definitions of the concept of ‘critical question’ and related concepts. Among the latter he counts the concept of ‘objection’. For the purpose of developing a simplified taxonomy of critical questions, so he announces, Hoppmann will only discuss definitions in which ‘objection’ designates “something roughly equivalent to ‘critical question’ (but in a different grammatical form)”. This means that, for instance, Walton’s “procedural objections” and Govier’s “objections against the circumstances of the arguer” are left out of the discussion. However, the taxonomy Hoppmann presents in the second part of the paper does seem to contain criticisms of the type just mentioned, namely under the heading of C.1 (general dialectical argumentation process level questions). So my first comment is: “What is the reason for excluding the accounts of ‘objections’ just mentioned from the discussion of the literature in the first part of the paper?”

### 3. THE PRAGMA-DIALECTICAL ACCOUNT OF CRITICAL QUESTIONS

Another issue regarding the relation between the first and the second part of the paper arises from Hoppmann's treatment of the pragma-dialectical account of critical questions. Within pragma-dialectics, as he correctly observes, the concept of critical questions is closely connected to the concept of argument schemes. However, all of the groups of critical questions that are part of the taxonomy presented in the second part of the paper can be related to pragma-dialectical concepts that are not discussed in the first part of the paper. The distinction between group A.1 (scheme-independent argument level questions) and group A.2 (scheme-dependent argument level questions) relates to the pragma-dialectical distinction between criticisms raised against the propositional content of an argument and criticisms raised against its justificatory force (see for instance Hitchcock & Wagemans, 2011, pp. 193-197). The distinction between group B.1 (presumption-sufficiency questions) and group B.2 (counterargument sufficiency questions) relates to the distinction between cumulative and complementary argumentation (see Snoeck Henkemans, 1997, pp. 71-99). Group C.1 (general dialectical process questions) does not only contain, as Hoppmann rightly remarks, questions concerning the arguer's compliance with procedural rules like the ones listed in the pragma-dialectical model of a critical discussion, but also some questions concerning the fulfillment of higher-order conditions that in the pragma-dialectical view are considered as necessary but non-sufficient conditions for resolving a difference of opinion on the merits (see Van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004, pp. 36-37; 189-190). Finally, group C.2 (setting dependent special process questions) contains questions related to the conventions that have to be taken into account in order to analyze and evaluate argumentative discourse in institutionalized contexts (see Van Eemeren, 2010, pp. 129-162). So my second comment is: "Why is the discussion of the pragma-dialectical literature in the first part of the paper restricted to the account of critical questions and to which other accounts of critical questions do the groups in the taxonomy – except group A.2 (scheme-dependent argument level questions) – exactly relate?"

### 4. THE BROADNESS OF THE CONCEPT OF 'CRITICAL QUESTIONS'

A final issue concerns the broadness of the concept of 'critical questions'. Hoppmann remarks that he is "aware that some people might prefer to restrict the label 'critical questions' to only one particular segment of argumentative criticism." He indicates that the choice is an arbitrary one and that he wants to employ the label to "questions that test what is critical". However, indicating that a choice is arbitrary does not exempt one from the dialectical obligation to defend the choice in view of the terminological status quo. Reflecting on the fact that the term 'argumentative criticism' is widely used as a generic term that covers various sorts of criticisms like 'critical questions,' 'objections,' and 'fallacies,' my third and last comment is: "What is the reason for calling the taxonomy developed in the paper a 'taxonomy of critical questions' rather than a 'taxonomy of argumentative criticisms'?"

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