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Meta-Argumentation in Deliberative Discourse: *Rhetoric* 1360b 05-1365b 21

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Abstract: Aristotle's *Rhetoric* assumes the exceptionable and multidimensional character of the allegations adduced as reasons for the conclusions of political (i.e., collective) practical arguments (*proposals*). This problem has been addressed in terms of the incommensurability of value-based argumentation, an approach that seems to lead us to an evaluative dead-end. In the Aristotelian text, we find a different tactic. Aristotle analyses how the continuum between argument and argument criticism and the meta-argumentative scaling takes place in deliberative discourse.

Keywords: Aristotle, deliberation, meta-argumentation, political argumentation, practical argument, proposals, rhetoric, weighing.

1. Introduction

In his 2013 monograph on meta-argumentation, M. Finocchiaro employs and explores this term in order to characterize several common argumentative modes of discourse: from those criticizing or opposing arguments in everyday contexts, to the more conscious and explicit analytical discussions typical of self-reflective fields such as Philosophy or Science, where, he says, “meta-argumentation is prevalent”, culminating with Argumentation Theory itself, as a particular way of arguing about argument (p. 1).

Later in the book, Finocchiaro (2013) discusses different issues currently addressed by Argumentation Theory for which a meta-argumentative approach might be useful—or even unavoidable—among which the most relevant for my own purposes relates to the problems posed by “deep disagreements”. To these he dedicates Chapter 7, stating as that chapter's conclusion at the end of his survey that: “meta-argumentation is one of several effective instruments for rationally resolving deep disagreements and fierce standoffs” (Finocchiaro, 2013, p. 243).

Deep disagreements (Fogelin, 1985) may occur in different fields and for different reasons but are characteristic of political and ethical discussions, being related to the peculiarities of practical arguments and the problems posed by value-based argumentation. As has been claimed by several authors (Kock, 2007; Vega, 2013), in a way that fairly corresponds to Aristotle's treatment of the *deliberative* or *citizens' assembly genre* (*genos symbouleutikon*) in his *Rhetoric*, political argumentation aims at supporting and justifying the kind of collective practical claims called *proposals*. According to Luis Vega's account (2013, pp. 2-3), the difference between an individual *purpose* and a collective *proposal* lays in the further commitments assumed by the interlocutors in the latter case. Thus, an individual *purpose*, expressible as “I intend (plan, set out) to do A”, involves two conditions:

- (i) The description of an action or course of action (A) *plus*
- (ii) A pro-active attitude towards it,

While for a *purpose* to become a *proposal*, expressible as “I propose we do A”, we need an additional condition:

- (iii) An invitation to the interlocutor(s) to share the commitment regarding the proposed action.

Moreover, a *purpose* and the reason(s) supporting it may be entertained at an internal, mental level, constituting thus a *reasoning* process, while a *proposal* has to be communicated and overtly argued for.

Now, Aristotle similarly assumes that the aim of political argumentation, a public discourse genre, is to exhort the assembled people to—or dissuade them from—*engaging in actions*. In fact, when stating his approach to deliberative argumentation and its persuasive goals, he employs terms which are different from those he uses in the case of theoretical persuasion or *pistis*. Here (*Rhet.* 1360b10) he identifies the goals of deliberative argumentation as *hai te protropai kai hai apotropai*, usually translated for “persuasions and dissuasions”, but literally conveying “activating and countering motion or action”, i.e., “mobilizing and demobilizing”.

We’ll see that, according to this setting, Aristotle will have to tackle the same complexities modern scholars have encountered when dealing with argumentation about *proposals*. These we may sum up in the following three points:

a) The obviously *gradual* (non-plausibly, not even ideally, bivalent) character of the terms expressing the correctness attributed to the claims (i.e., the *proposals*), which are not supposed to be justifiable as true or false but as *more or less* convenient or advisable; a characteristic which has to be added to the also gradual and comparative assessment of the arguments supporting them—something practical arguments share with theoretical ones. We will have to assume that we are dealing with better and worse arguments (not just valid/invalid or good/bad arguments) about the greater or lesser convenience of our claims (not about their truth/falsity). As Searle (2001) has pointed out, contrary to theoretical and constative claims, practical claims have a world-to-word direction of fit.

b) The usually value-laden character of the grounds supporting the claims which can make any process of weighing or balancing of reasons rather difficult. In relation to this problem, Kock (2007) makes several terminological precisions which may be usefully recalled:

1. In our modern democratic societies there is legitimate *value diversity*, that is to say, diverse values are in circulation among citizens, and we must admit the *prima facie* reasonableness of dissenting parties¹.

2. Moreover, each of us—or each group of coordinated or equally interested people—is attached to several values at the same time, which we will try to satisfy. Each of us has to live with her *value pluralism* and take decisions leading to various degrees of satisfaction of her different values. We all have experienced

¹ That is why Kock (2007) insists that the objective of political (counter)argumentation is not necessarily to show the incorrectness or unreasonableness of our opponent’s policies but instead try to expose and clarify our reasons for supporting our own proposals in order for an audience of citizens to understand the merits of each and decide for themselves.

the need to “rank our values”, to establish an order or hierarchy among them in order to select a suitable line of action.

3. And then we all have seen how difficult this is, because values seem to be *incommensurable*: it is not easy to find common criteria, a “common denominator” or “super value”, to base or justify our ranking or hierarchy. Each value seems to have its own measure or scale of satisfaction, and the *multidimensional* character of our reality remains insurmountable.

4. A problem which is additionally complicated by the possible *material incompatibility* between ideally complementary actions. We may not be able (not even subsequently) to engage in different actions that allegedly would jointly reach an optimum of value-satisfaction. In many cases, thus, our decisions require that we renounce to one or several of our pluralistic aims, something that is directly linked to the third problematic point about arguing for *proposals*.

c) Argumentation about (political) *proposals* usually takes place in contexts where either the need is collectively felt or there is, in fact, an explicit “institutional” requirement to reach a decision, to set a policy, to engage in some action or other. Suspension of judgement is not an option.

Consideration c) forces us to look for some solution to the assessment and decision conflicts mentioned by Kock (2007), among other scholars. Incommensurability, incompatibility and multidimensionality seem to lead us, though, to an evaluative and dialectical dead-end, typical of deep disagreement between different people in a pluralistic society or even within our own pluralistic selves.

In such a quandary, we may opt for a non-argumentative method of decision, like sorts or voting, which is not necessarily something unreasonable to do and might be inevitable in the long run. But that doesn’t mean that, as argumentation theorists, we have to stop our analysis here. Finnochiaro (2013) has suggested that meta-arguing is something we, at least, try to do in order to (rationally) overcome such standoffs. And if we take a look at Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* (1360b 05-1365b 21) it seems this was already his idea.

2. Aristotle on deliberative argumentation

In order to illustrate and discuss the problems of *multidimensionality* and *incommensurability*, Kock (2006, p. 255) refers to the *Rhetoric to Alexander* (1421b), mentioning the different (and not easily comparable) criteria listed by this ancient rhetorical treatise for supporting the eligibility of an action: i.e., that it be either “just”, “lawful”, “expedient”, “noble”, “pleasurable”, “easy to accomplish”, or, if difficult “practicable”, or in some way “necessary”. Again, more recently, Kock (2012, p. 282) has also made use of the classical *status theory* to point up similar questions. In my opinion, though, Aristotle’s meta-argumentative account in his rhetorical treatise is as illustrative of the difficulties faced by the theorist of political argument and much subtler about the means real arguers use to overcome them.

Aristotle does *not only* take into account what seems to be the first stage of deliberation, in which the arguers may chose possibly incompatible practical claims (in material terms) and

defend them with reasons based on possibly incommensurable values. He *also* tries to advance (at least a little bit) into the means to break the impasse and *continue* the discussion by engaging in some kind of meta-argumentation. In doing so, he most naturally assumes the debatable, exceptionable and multidimensional character of the kind of allegations, adduced as reasons for the *proposals* and for the critical meta-arguments supporting the values involved in their selection.

Aristotle’s text is an enlightening source which carefully analyses how the “continuum between argument and argument criticism” (Pinto, 2001) and the meta-argumentative scaling or ascent takes place in deliberative discourse (Finocchiaro, 2007; 2013). But it is also an example of the insightful fruitfulness of a meta-argumentative approach to tackle many intriguing issues within argumentation theory.

Aristotle dedicates chapters 4-7 of *Rhetoric*’s Book I to comment on the peculiarities of the deliberative or assembly’s speech genre (*genos symbouleitikon*), starting (1359a 30) with a definition and demarcation of the thematic contents of its typical claims:

[a]dvice is limited to those subjects about which we take counsel; and such are all those which can naturally be referred to ourselves and the first cause of *whose origination is in our own power*². [my emphasis]

He makes clear, thus, that he is speaking about human *voluntary* actions whose advisability would be the subject of practical argument. Among the usual topics for deliberation, Aristotle mentions the following five: “ways and means, war and peace, the defence of the country, imports and exports, legislation.” (1359b 21) whose particulars are the object of political science and not of rhetoric. Deliberative rhetoric just starts to care about them insofar as the actions or decisions they request become the content of exhortation and dissuasion and only from the moment we begin to explore and look for possible grounds to support them in argumentation.

Aristotle’s first and most straightforward response to this question, that is the question about “from which grounds” (*ex ὧν*) to counsel an action, is the allegedly universally shared quest for “happiness (*eudaimonia*) and its component parts”. This aspiration applies both to individuals and to communities and might be alleged as grounds to support a *proposal* in the simplest deliberative argument Aristotle contemplates. For such basic pieces of deliberative discourse—as the ones represented in the following diagrams—he provides us with an explicit multiple warrant, from which a number of usable simple warrants might be extracted: “For one should do (*dei prattēin*) the things which procure happiness or one of its parts, or increase instead of diminishing it, and avoid doing (*mē prattēin*) those things which destroy or hinder it or bring about what is contrary to it” (1360b 11).³

² Fragments from Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* are taken from the digital text in Perseus Project (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>) that corresponds to J. H. Freese’s English translation for Loeb’s Classical Collection (Harvard University Press), first published in 1926.

³ Here and throughout the paper, I will be using the diagramming system proposed by H. Marraud and used in his paper and web publications (e.g., *Breve curso de esquemas argumentativos*; “El argumento de la depredación”, both available at: <https://www.academia.edu>). The system is based on the basic components of the Toulmin Model, to which additional elements and interargumentative relations might be subsequently added. The basic components of a simple argument are represented as follows:

	Data
Warrant:	So
	Claim

	Doing A will bring us happiness (<i>eudaimonia</i>)
For one should do (<i>dei pratein</i>) the things which procure happiness:	So
	I propose we do A

	Doing A will increase our happiness (<i>eudaimonia</i>)
For one should do (<i>dei pratein</i>) the things which increase happiness:	So
	I propose we do A

	Doing A will destroy our happiness (<i>eudaimonia</i>)
For one should avoid doing (<i>mē pratein</i>) those things which destroy happiness:	So
	I propose we avoid doing A

However, happiness is probably a too abstract (and contentious) end and we usually will be aiming at some of its most obvious parts, conditions or means to procure it, which are *particular goods*. Among these, Aristotle mentions noble birth, good friends, wealth, good children, bodily excellences, good reputation, good luck or virtue. In such case, our practical or deliberative arguments might still be rather simple, requiring just serial argumentation.

	B is part of happiness	
What is part of (or a direct experience of) happiness is a good:	So	
	B is a good	Doing A will bring us B
What brings us some good should be done:	So	
	I propose we do A	

On the other hand, our proposed actions will only be expedient (*sumpheros*) and thus advisable if they *really* bring about such goods or, in the limit, if they are a kind of good in themselves, a direct experience of happiness (independence and well being).

Some (admittedly not very clear) words are said here (1362a 30-40) about the relationship between means and ends (about what amounts to bringing about, or following or resulting in):

Now things follow in two ways—simultaneously or subsequently; for instance, knowledge is subsequent to learning, but life is simultaneous with health. Things which produce act in three ways; thus, healthiness produces health; and so does food; and exercise as a rule. This being laid down, it necessarily follows that the acquisition of good things and the loss of evil things are both good; for it follows simultaneously on the latter that we are rid of that which is bad, and subsequently on the former that we obtain possession of that which is good. (*Rhet.* 1362a 30-40)

Because our actions are being supported as expedient means for rather obvious and desirable ends that, just a little bit later, will be categorized as “generally recognized goods” (*ta homologoumena*: literally things on which there is agreement). And in such a case the only disputable element of the argument is the instrumental one (“doing A will bring us B”), which could be opposed and therefore, in need of justification. For example in the way shown in the following diagram which tries to follow the pattern suggested by Aristotle in the paragraph above:

	B is part of happiness	A casually originates B [or A will make us acquire B]	
What is part of (or a direct experience of) happiness is a good:	So	So	What causally originates something is a means to obtain it:
	B is a good	Doing A will bring us B	
What brings us some good should be done:	So		
	I propose we do A		

As we have seen, one of Aristotle’s examples is exercise as a means to obtain health:

	Health is part of happiness	Exercise originates health	
What is part of (or a direct experience of) happiness is a good:	So	So	What causally originates something is a means to obtain it:
	Health is a good	Doing exercise will bring us health	
What brings us some good should be done:	So		
	I propose we do exercise		

It is in direct relation to this particular discussion that Aristotle states that “men deliberate, not about the end, but about the means to the end” (1362a 20) not meaning (as has been assumed by a long standing tradition) that ends are unquestionable, undisputable or irrationally elected but that deliberation *is about* deciding *on actions*. Actions are *what is at stake* in deliberation, what is in need of justification, and actions are typically supported as expedient means to chosen ends. But, of course, such ends could also be in need of further justification, and precisely most of Aristotle’s subsequent discussion is precisely about justifying ends, while very little indeed is said here about “instrumental rationality”.

In Aristotle’s own terms when discussing such a possibility (1362a 31ff), not all *goods* are “generally recognized as such” (*ta homologoumena*). For those on which we disagree—i.e., the disputed ones (*ta amphisbētēsima*)—we might need more arguments (grounds and warrants) not about the means to achieve them but about their alleged goodness. And Aristotle offers us at this point (1362a 31-1363b 4) a kind of list of criteria (genre topics or *idia*, cf. Braet, 2005) from which to construe allegations that will act as reasons supporting the goodness of proposed goods or ends. This inventory is not at all systematic or exhaustive and it is not easy to reduce it to a list of concepts as those offered for similar purposes in the *Rhetoric to Alexander* to support the

eligibility of an action (Kock, 2007). In any case, the inventory bears some relevant features that make of it a more sophisticated account of our argumentative resources.

First of all, Aristotle is very conscious about the merely plausible and exceptionable character of most of the grounds and warrants he examines and he freely uses expressions like “for the most part”, “as a general rule” (*hōs epi to polu*) or “speaking generally” (*holōs*) to qualify their applicability:⁴

That is good the opposite of which is evil, or the opposite of which is advantageous to our enemies; for instance, if it is specially advantageous to our enemies that we should be cowards, it is clear that courage is specially advantageous to the citizens. And, speaking generally, the opposite of what our enemies desire or of that in which they rejoice, appears to be advantageous; wherefore it was well said: “Of a truth Priam would exult”. This is not always the case, but only as a general rule, for there is nothing to prevent one and the same thing being sometimes advantageous to two opposite parties; hence it is said that misfortune brings men together, when a common danger threatens them.
(1362a 31-1363b 4)

In fact, with the possible (but still questionable) exception of some quasi-analytical warrants as “that is good the opposite of which is evil” (Diagram A), the criteria mentioned by Aristotle, like “that is good the opposite of which is advantageous to our enemies” (Diagram B) have a more or less evident but also evidently limited range of applicability (see e.g., Diagram C) that makes it worth the exploration of exceptions to the rule, or even the direct applicability of the contrary rule (Diagram D).⁵

Diagram A

	B is the opposite of C, which is something evil	
That is good the opposite of which is evil:	So	
	B is a good	Doing A will bring us B
What brings us some good should be done:	So	
	I propose we do A	

⁴ On the Aristotelian uses of the clause “*hōs epi to polu*”, see di Piazza (2012).

⁵ In the following diagrams (and in those of the next section), I provide the examples of the possible actions finally supported by the complex deliberative argumentation which is the explicit object of Aristotle’s discussion, even if the author does not refer to them in this part of the text where he focuses on the merits of the criteria employed for their justification.

Diagram B

	B is the opposite of C, which is advantageous to our enemies	
That is good the opposite of which is advantageous to our enemies:	So	
	B is a good	Doing A will bring us B
What brings us some good should be done:	So	
	I propose we do A	

Diagram C

	Our being courageous is the opposite of our being cowards, which is advantageous to our enemies	
That is good the opposite of which is advantageous to our enemies:	So	
	Our being courageous is good	Listening to Pericles will make us courageous
What brings us some good should be done:	So	
	I propose we listen to Pericles	

Diagram D

	Signing a peace treaty would be advantageous to both us and our enemies	
That is good which is advantageous to two opposite parties:	so	
	Signing a peace treaty is good	Sending an embassy will make us sign a peace treaty
What brings us some good should be done:	So	
	I propose we send an embassy	

3. Aristotle on deliberative meta-argumentation

The next step taken by Aristotle will finally take us to a meta-argumentative stage. Because, even in case we agree on the goodness of certain aims (and, accordingly, on the *prima facie* advisability of the actions granting them), we may have to decide on their relative priority.

As he neatly declares: “But since men often agree that both of two things are useful, but dispute which is the more so, we must next speak of the greater good and the more expedient” (1363b 5). Such an argumentative situation could be represented by the following diagram in which our problem is how to account for the priority expressed by the symbol “greater than” (“>”) which expresses the comparison between the strength of two arguments.

	B fulfils criterion C			B' fulfils criterion C'		
That is good which fulfils criterion C:	So			So		That is good which fulfils criterion C':
	B is a good	Doing A will bring us B	;>/<?	Doing A' will bring us B'	B' is a good	
What brings us some good should be done:	So			So		What brings us some good should be done:
	I propose we do A			I propose we do A'		

Accordingly, Aristotle will offer now a new and rather extensive list of criteria (1363b 5-1365b 19, a new and different type of deliberative *idia*) for the comparison and hierarchisation or ordering of alleged goods as aims justifying actions. With this new inventory, he is trying, in his own terms, to give a solution to the problems of incompatibility between A and A' (as alternative actions), multidimensionality between C and C' (or other goodness-criteria) and alleged incommensurability between B and B', that have already been mentioned.

The ways to account for our weighing (i.e., to account for “>” or “<”) might be different and show various degrees of argumentative complexity. For instance, with one of his typical compact expressions, “the greater good and the more expedient”, Aristotle is already talking about two very different argumentative possibilities:

- a) weighing the goodness of aims B and B'
- b) weighing the expediency as means of A and A'

But unfortunately, the ensuing inventory is not then so clearly divided into both strategies. In any case, the second possibility would require us to (re)evaluate the instrumental premises (“doing A will bring us B” and “doing A' will bring us B'”), going back to the kind of justification they may have in order to weigh their different merits for expediency.

The first one (which seems to be more in Aristotle’s mind, as he does not really address many issues of expediency in this particular text) amounts to comparing the justifying basis of premises “B is a good” and “B' is a good”. Such a comparison would be more clearly represented thus:

	B fulfils criterion C			B' fulfils criterion C'		
That is good which fulfils criterion C:	So		;>?	So		That is good which fulfils criterion C':
	B is a good	Doing A will bring us B		Doing A' will bring us B'	B' is a good	
What brings us some good should be done:	So			So		What brings us some good should be done:
	I propose we do A			I propose we do A'		

Again, in order to account for “which is the greater good” we might do two things. First, we might think of *additional criteria*, completely different and independent from the ones previously adduced as supporting the goodness of our goods that would incline the scale in favour of one of the goods over the other.

	B fulfils criterion D. B' does not fulfil criterion D				
What fulfils criterion D is preferable to what does not:	So				
	B fulfils criterion C			B' fulfils criterion C'	
That is good which fulfils criterion C:	So		>	So	That is good which fulfils criterion C':
	B is a good	Doing A will bring us B		Doing A' will bring us B'	B' is a good
What brings us some good should be done:	So			So	
	I propose we do A			I propose we do A'	

Some of the criteria (*idia*) included in Aristotle’s inventory will be typically used in that way. Such are those whose lack of fulfilment does not present itself to the author’s mind as in any way a plausible reason to support the goodness of an aim. They are, therefore, mentioned as *simple criteria*, with no comment on the possible merits of their “opposite” or “correlate” term. They could be used, in the first instance, to support the goodness of an end or meta-argumentatively to support its greater goodness over another good. For example, the authority of wise men may serve as an additional reason in favour of one good over another:

And that which men of practical wisdom, either all, or more, or the best of them, would judge, or have judged, to be a greater good, must necessarily be such, either absolutely or in so far as they have judged as men of practical wisdom. (1364b 12)

But interestingly enough, most of the items in Aristotle’s list are mentioned together with an opposite notion that could *eventually* be adduced as supporting as well the goodness of an aim. In such cases, it is conceivable that two different goods would have been initially supported by opposite notions. If we want to weigh them against each other, we need warrants that state the preferable quality of one criterion over its opposite. And, as we will see, there are warrants enough to do that, in one sense or the other (for these are matters in which a qualification “for the most part” applies). In such cases a couple of applicable warrants, instead of only one, are provided by Aristotle pointing to diverging weighing results. Here are some examples consecutively mentioned in the text (1364a 24-31):

And that which is scarcer is a greater good than that which is abundant, as gold than iron, although it is less useful, but the possession of it is more valuable, since it is more difficult of acquisition. From another point of view, that which is abundant is to be preferred to that which is scarce, because the use of it is greater, for “often” exceeds “seldom”; whence the saying: “Water is best”.⁶ And, speaking generally [*hōlos*], that which is more difficult is preferable to that which is easier of attainment, for it is scarcer; but from another point of view that which is easier is preferable to that which is more difficult; for its nature is as we wish.

According to Aristotle, in fact, scarcity and its opposite, abundance, may *both* primarily support the goodness of an aim. So can *both* easy and difficult attainability. What the author is telling us here is that the orators may and will use these criteria variously and look, in each case, for the warrants supporting their choice. The opposite examples given in the text in which Gold, as a desirable good, is weighed (advantageously) against Iron and then (disadvantageously) against Water might be diagrammed thus, with the explicit warrants provided by Aristotle supporting the balance:

Argumentation in favour of the greater goodness of Gold over Iron

	Gold is scarcer than iron				
That which is scarcer is a greater good than that which is abundant:	So				
	Gold is scarce		>		Iron is abundant
The possession of scarce minerals is valuable:	So			So	An abundant mineral is extensively useful:
	Gold is a good	Conquering Persia will bring us gold		Commerce with Hesperia will bring us iron	Iron is a good
What brings us some good should be done:	So			So	
	I propose we conquer Persia			I propose we try to commerce with Hesperia	
					What brings us some good should be done:

⁶ Pindar, *Olympian* I.1-2: “Water is best, and gold, like a blazing fire in the night, stands out supreme of all lordly wealth”

Argumentation in favour of the greater goodness of Water over Gold

	Pindar attests to the high esteem of abundance in his verse: “Water is best”				
Poets and men of repute may act as “witnesses” (1375b):	So				
	Often exceeds seldom:				
	So				
	Gold is scarce			Water is abundant	
The possession of scarce minerals is valuable:	So		<	So	What is abundant might be extensively beneficial:
	Gold is a good	Conquering Persia will bring us gold		Building an aqueduct will provide the city water	Water is a good
What brings us some good should be done:	So			So	
	I propose we conquer Persia			I propose we build an aqueduct	

As we see, such warrants might be pieces of received wisdom, reputed opinions (*endoxa*), in many cases qualified by the expression “generally speaking” (*hōlos*), proverbs, well-known verses or sayings by “poets and men of repute” (cf. 1375b 27ff, about recent and ancient “witnesses”). But also (in Aristotle’s case, at least, although probably less so in the citizens’ assembly) quasi-logical or semantic relationships as, for example: “whenever one class surpasses another, the greatest of that class will surpass the greatest of the other” (1363b 22). The inventory is as miscellaneous as the much better-known list of general topics in Book II, chap. 23 (cf. Braet, 2005; Olmos, 2016).

Some of them reveal particularly interesting features, expressing common and contradictory ways of using a pair of opposing terms. The already mentioned case of “easy and difficult attainability” is less developed by the author than the related opposition between abundance and scarcity, the text just referring to it in a cursory way. The facts, though, that

- a) these particular notions relate to commonly conceivable reasons to support the eligibility and “expediency” of an action and that
- b) the supposedly positive one (i.e. “easy to accomplish” or *rhaidion*) is also mentioned in the *Rhetoric to Alexander*

might help us see the great distance between Anaximenes’ somewhat naive and Aristotle’s more sophisticated (and realistic) approach to these matters.

Anaximenes, the supposed author of the *Rhetoric to Alexander*, assumes that “*rhaidion*” is *always* going to be a positive reason to support an action in a practical argument, thus:

	Action A is easy to accomplish
Easy actions are eligible on account of that quality:	So
	I propose we do A

He admits though, that this is no absolute matter. Sometimes, difficult actions are advocated *in spite of such quality* by adducing that they are at least “feasible” (*dynaton*) or even “necessary” (*anankes*). He is contemplating here the most basic level of meta-argumentation: the one represented and expressed by the argumentative connective “but”.

	Action A is <i>not</i> easy to accomplish	BUT $<$	Action A is necessary	
Actions are eligible on account of their being easy to accomplish:	So		So	Actions are eligible on account of their being necessary:
	I propose we <i>do not</i> do A		I propose we do A	

However Aristotle does admit of more possibilities (in fact he mentions first the one not contemplated by Anaximenes). And this reveals his consciousness about the ductile quality of our practice of giving reasons.

Let’s read again the fragment: “And speaking generally [*hōlos*] that which is more difficult is preferable to that which is easier of attainment, for it is scarcer”. This means, he is willing to admit the *prima facie* applicability (however limited) of a warrant such as “actions are eligible on account of their being *difficult* to accomplish” and even defend its meta-argumentative priority over the opposed warrant (“actions are eligible on account of their being *easy* to accomplish”) based on a new allegation which Aristotle simply puts as “for it is scarcer”, plausibly referring to the higher value and fame attached to demanding tasks.

Difficult actions are scarcer than easy ones				
So				
	Action A is <i>difficult</i> to accomplish	$>$	Action B is easy to accomplish	
Actions are eligible on account of their being <i>difficult</i> to accomplish:	So		So	Actions are eligible on account of their being easy to accomplish:
	I propose we do A		I propose we do B	

“But,” he continues, “*from another point of view*, that which is easier is preferable to that which is more difficult; for its nature is as we wish”. And this means, we may meta-argue, weighing the reasons with the opposite result:

The nature of easy actions is as we wish				
So				
	Action A is <i>difficult</i> to accomplish	<	Action B is easy to accomplish	
Actions are eligible on account of their being <i>difficult</i> to accomplish:	So		So	Actions are eligible on account of their being easy to accomplish:
	I propose we do A		I propose we do B	

The availability, within our inventory of “practical wisdom”, of plausible and usable “conflicting warrants” attests to the problems of *value diversity* and *value pluralism* as defined by Kock (2007). The availability, again, of additional maxims that embody ways and reason to justify our choice in case of conflict, reveal that we do not stop at an apparent situation of *value incommensurability*, but continue arguing and meta-arguing. However, we must realize that these additional maxims also have their conflicting counter-maxims that support the opposite weighing or balance of reasons. And this is all legitimate as long as we assume that we are not in a domain allowing or even requiring demonstrations. The better case will be contextually decided upon by the audience and still be subject to reconsiderations.

Probably the best confirmation that Aristotle was rather more sensible than could have been expected to all these complications (using his own terms and focuses, of course) is one of the examples given in this same part of the *Rhetoric*. When examining, in particular, the way orators may make use of such notions as “principle” (*archē*) and “end” (*telos*) to support the kind of comparative meta-arguments he has in mind, the author offers us the following account, including a rather paradoxical (or cynical) example that brings us to the context of the judicial genre:

It is clear then, from what has been said, that a thing may be greater in two ways; for if it is a first principle but another is not, it will appear to be greater, and if it is not a first principle [but an end], while another is; for the end is greater and not a first principle. Thus, Leodamas, when accusing Callistratus, declared that the man who had given the advice was more guilty than the one who carried it out; for if he had not suggested it, it could not have been carried out. And conversely, when accusing Chabrias, he declared that the man who had carried out the advice was more guilty than the one who had given it; for it could not have been carried out, had there not been some one to do so, and the reason why people devised plots was that others might carry them out. (1364a 15ff)

In this somewhat different but also practical and civic context the action in search of justification is a judicial decision for whose concretion, in one sense or another, the attorney (Leodamas, in this case) would plead.Leodamas' paraxodical double plea, apparently made *in a single trial*, as exposed by Aristotle could be represented by the following twin diagrams:

Argumentation in favour of the greater guilt of Callistratus

If he had not suggested it, it could not have been carried out						
So						
The man who gave the advice is more guilty than the one who carried it out						
So						
	Callistratus advised Chabrias				Chabrias acted on Callistratus' advice	
Advice acts as a principle for action:	So		>	So		Implementation is the end of advice:
	Callistratus was the principle of the crime	A guilty verdict befits Callistratus' participation		A guilty verdict befits Chabrias' participation	Chabrias carried out the crime	
The judge sentences according to defendant's responsibility:	So			So		The judge sentences according to defendant's responsibility:
	I ask the judge to condemn Callistratus			I ask the judge to condemn Chabrias		

Argumentation in favour of the greater guilt of Chabrias

		It could not have been carried out, had there not been some one to do so	
The reason why people devise plots is that others might carry them out:	So		
	The man who carried out the advice is more guilty than the one who gave it		
So			
	Callistratus advised Chabrias		Chabrias acted on Callistratus' advice
Advice acts as a principle for action:	So		Implementation is the end of advice:
	Callistratus was the principle of the crime	A guilty verdict befits Callistratus' participation	<
			A guilty verdict befits Chabrias' participation
			Chabrias carried out the crime
The judge sentences according to defendant's responsibility:	So		The judge sentences according to defendant's responsibility:
	I ask the judge to condemn Callistratus		I ask the judge to condemn Chabrias

This probably “mythical”, though thoroughly Greek in spirit, example reminds us of the well-known anecdote about the founding fathers of the rhetorical art, Tisias and Corax, and their paradoxical ways of pleading against each other (Schiappa, 1999). But here the attorney is just one and he has supposedly used both contradicting ways to weigh the relative guilt of the two defendants *in a single trial*. What this tells us about Leodamas as a cunning attorney is not my focus here, but what it tells us about Aristotle as an argumentation theorist is. He just states that both are usable, indeed used, ways of arguing and weighing arguments and he does not try to say which is better or more rational in absolute terms.

So, even acknowledging the usefulness of meta-argumentation to start trying to overcome problems of *prima facie* incommensurability and “fierce standoffs” problematic and debatable issues remain problematic and debatable and permanently reevaluable, as we experience every day.

4. Conclusion

This revision of some chapters of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* shows his consciousness about the argumentative peculiarities and evaluative difficulties of deliberative arguments supporting collective proposals. As we have seen, Aristotle naturally assumes that, in such an argumentative field, the continuum between argument and argument criticism, taking generally the form of meta-argumentation, is going to be prevalent, among other things due to the exceptionable and

debatable character of almost any piece of “practical wisdom” he can think of. Book I, 1359a30-1366a22, reveals not just the well-known value-laden multidimensionality of arguments aiming at supporting “what’s advisable” (emphasized by Kock, 2006; 2012), but an almost inescapable multi-level-multidimensionality as it is here, more than in any other part of the *Rhetoric*, that Aristotle feels compelled to engage in listing topics and criteria (*idia*) for explicitly comparative meta-argumentation (1363b5-1365b20).

Now, even if his search for meta-criteria yields not a definitive evaluative scale for value-laden argumentation (in my opinion that would be a symptom of its being wrong), it shows us ways to continue our discussion, which is one rational thing to do when and if we have room for it.

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