

University of Windsor

Scholarship at UWindsor

OSSA Conference Archive

OSSA 11

May 18th, 9:00 AM - May 21st, 5:00 PM

Commentary on Douglas N. Walton and Alice Toniolo's "Deliberation, Practical Reasoning and Problem-solving"

Hubert Marraud

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

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



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

Marraud, Hubert, "Commentary on Douglas N. Walton and Alice Toniolo's "Deliberation, Practical Reasoning and Problem-solving"" (2016). *OSSA Conference Archive*. 18.

<https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/ossaarchive/OSSA11/papersandcommentaries/18>

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.

Commentary on Douglas N. Walton and Alice Toniolo's "Deliberation, Practical Reasoning and Problem-solving"

HUBERT MARRAUD

Departamento Lingüística general, Lenguas modernas, Lógica y filosofía de la ciencia, Teoría de la literatura y literatura comparada.

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras. Avenida Tomás y Valiente, 1. Campus de Cantoblanco, UAM, 28049

Madrid (Spain)

e-mail: hubert.marraud@uam.es

In their paper Walton and Toniolo provide many useful suggestions for a typology of deliberation dialogues. They make, first, a distinction between persuasion dialogue and deliberation dialogue in terms of their purpose:

- In a persuasion dialogue the issue to be resolved is whether a designated proposition is true or false.
- In a deliberation dialogue the issue is to decide which is the best available course of action in a particular set of circumstances.

According to the standard models (which probably means pragma-dialectics) there are three successive stages in persuasion dialogue: an opening stage, an argumentation stage, and a closing stage. The issue (or *stasis*) is designed once and for all at the opening stage, during the argumentation stage both sides put forward their arguments and, finally, in the closing stage it is decided which side (if any) has won the discussion.

Walton and Toniolo argue convincingly that the assumption embedded in the description of the opening stage is unrealistic for most deliberation dialogues, in which the issue to be addressed may be subject to changes during the deliberation. Thus a distinction is to be made between two kinds of deliberation dialogues:

- "Closed" deliberation dialogues where alternatives are set in place at the opening stage and remain fixed through the argumentation stage; and
- "Open" deliberation dialogues, where alternatives may (rightfully) be revised during the argumentative exchange.

This sort of "openness" makes a big difference for the very concept of relevance. Both in persuasion dialogues and closed deliberation dialogues, a particular move is relevant if it carries sufficient probative weight to either prove or disprove the proposition at issue. But in an open deliberation dialogue, relevance cannot be defined in this way, since the proposition at issue can also be a matter for argument. This raises the question as to when it is legitimate to propose a revision of the issue.

Although Walton and Toniolo do not give a full answer to this question, they do provide some insights. Revision may be justified when, during the dialogue,

- (a) new information highlights alternatives that were not possible before;

(b) there is no agreement on the options under discussion.

(b) seems to introduce some kind of negotiation of the issue or *status* in the meta-level of a deliberation dialogue, a nesting of dialogues worthy of being explored.

I would suggest that the revision of the issue during the dialogue is a particular case of a more general phenomenon concerning dialectical rules. Dialectical rules and procedures are often implicit in the practice of discussion, they are, so to speak, “taken for granted” by the participants. However when deep disagreements occur, the participants may shift the dialogue to a meta-level, proposing the addition, the deletion or the reinterpretation of rules used to organize the argumentative interaction in order to produce the best possible decision. Here is an example.

Neutrality of procedure consists in a special restraint on reasons that can be invoked to justify public policy. It stands in roughly the same relation to political deliberation as do rules of evidence to trial advocacy. Specifically, an argument is not publicly admissible if it appeals to reasons that have no rightful place in the public sphere, and policies are illegitimate if such reasons form ineliminable elements of their proposed justifications. (Galston 2003, p. 61)

Three different forms of procedural neutrality have been advanced: neutrality of content, consensus and logical neutrality.¹ Thus there is room for disagreement about the rules and norms drawing the line between admissible and inadmissible arguments in public argument.

Walton and Toniolo rely on the analysis of several “realistic examples of deliberation,” more specifically of problem solving deliberation dialogue: “we suggest that the problem-solving type of deliberation is characterised by the revision of the issue made necessary by the arising of new circumstances” (p. 14). Some precisions are in order here.

It should be stressed that problem solving is not a kind of argumentation on its own, as neither is reasoning. Problem solving and reasoning are about how individuals form and change their beliefs (that is, psychological processes), and lack the communicative dimension which characterises argumentation. As Walton puts it:

Reasoning is the making or granting of assumptions called premises (starting points) and the process of moving toward conclusions (end points) from these assumptions by means of warrants. A warrant is a rule or frame that allows the move from one point to the next point in the sequence of reasoning. (1990, p. 403)

Argument is a social and verbal means of trying to resolve, or at least to contend with, a conflict or difference that has arisen or exists between two (or more) parties. An argument necessarily involves a claim that is advanced by at least one of the parties. (1990, p. 411)

Most often, argument occurs in dialogue. When this happens, the reasoning in the argument can be called dialectical reasoning. Some say that all reasoning is dialectical, but it is more widely acceptable to say that some reasoning can be

¹ That is, independence of any particular understanding of the good, avoiding appeals to controversial moral propositions, and willingness to submit reasons to criticism in light of a shared critical rationality and understanding of what counts as evidence.

nondialectical, meaning that it can be a solitary rather than an interactive process. (...) The usual examples of nondialectical reasoning cited are activities like planning or problem solving. (1990, pp. 411-412)

A dialogue is a type of goal-directed conversation in which two participants (in the minimal case) are participating by taking turns. (Walton, 2006 p. 2)

Summing up, to argue is to present to someone something as a reason for something else; i.e. to exhibit, offer for examination or lay before someone's cognizance something as a reason for something else, while problem solving is the mental construction of an action plan to achieve a goal. It follows further that computational models of problem-solving deliberation are not by themselves models of problem-solving deliberation dialogues.

In particular, turning again to the examples in Walton and Toniolo's contribution,

- 1) The printer example is neither a case of dialogue nor even a case of argumentation (that is, an interactive social process involving two or more people, in which the principal goal is to induce belief or agreement through the presentation of arguments).
- 2) The private school, although it is a case of argumentation, is not a case of dialogue, since there is only one agent weighing pro and con arguments.

References

- Galston, W. A. (2003). Value pluralism and political liberalism. In: V. V. Gehring, W. A. Galston (Eds.), *Philosophical Dimensions of Public Policy* (pp. 55-64). New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers.
- Walton, D. N. (1990). What is reasoning? What is an argument? *Journal of Philosophy* 87, 399-419.
- Walton, D. N. (2006). *Fundamentals of Critical Argumentation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.