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Katharina Stevens

*University of Lethbridge*

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# Principle of Charity as a Moral Requirement in Non-Institutionalized Argumentation

KAT STEVENS

*Department of Philosophy*

*University of Lethbridge*

*4401 University Dr W, Lethbridge, AB T1K 3M4*

*Canada*

*Katharina.stevens@uleth.ca*

**Abstract:** In this paper, I argue for an interpretation of the principle of charity as a moral requirement on arguers. I present two moral reasons for charity, one based on respect for dignity, the other based on the need to avoid harm. I argue, however, that the amount of effort an arguer needs to invest in charity varies with context.

**Keywords:** Principle of charity, ethics of argumentation, strawman, argument roles, dialogue types

## 1. Introduction

Critical thinking textbooks are not usually the kind of places where one might expect lessons in morality. Nonetheless, many of them contain at least one chapter or sub-chapter on a principle that some consider a moral one: The principle of charity. Students are taught that when confronted with an argument that could be understood in a number of ways, they should choose to understand it to be a *strong* argument (see, e.g. Bowell & Kemp, 2005; MacDonald & Vaughn, 2016).

In argumentation theory, the appropriateness of employing a principle of charity has been subject to debate, much of which (but not all) took place in the 80s and 90s (Adler, 1996; Govier, 1981a, 1981b, 1987; Griffin, 1981; Johnson, 1981, 1984; Lewinski, 2012; Manning, 1983). The questions are/were whether charity in argumentation is required, how much of it, and which form it should take. In this paper, I am interested in a narrower version of this question: Should we be charitable when engaging in argument with interlocutors for moral reasons? I will argue that there are indeed *prima facie* moral reasons for one kind of charity in argument, a stronger versions of Govier's (1987) moderate charity, that always apply.

However, I do not think that all arguers in all contexts need to exert the same amount of effort towards charity. Rather, this depends on the kind of argument they are engaged in; whether they are participating, e.g., in a deliberation or a persuasion dialogue. Arguers should be as charitable as the norms of their argument require them to be. In turn, which kind of argument arguers should engage in is determined by the balance of moral reasons applicable to the situation in which the argument arises, the *prima facie* reasons for charity included. This makes the way in which the moral reasons for being charitable in argument take effect less straight forward than one might think: They figure into the determination of the kind of argument structure arguers should adopt, and this structure then determines the degree of effort arguers should employ in order to be charitable.

## 2. What kind of charity?

I am here interested in the principle of charity as it is used in argumentation theory. Further, I want to explore whether moral reasons exist that determine whether and how it should be employed while arguing with others, as opposed to whether and how it should be employed when interpreting

an argument as an artifact without, at the same time, being engaged in an argument with others.<sup>1</sup> To clarify, it is worthwhile to distinguish the principle of charity as I am going to argue for it from two other versions, one outside and one in argumentation theory, and to explain what kind of a principle I want to defend and what role it can play in arguments with others.

### 1.1 Other principles of charity

First, the principle of charity as I want to discuss it is different from the principle as it is discussed in the philosophy of language, often associated with a Quinean/Davidsonian theory of how radical interpretation (i.e. the interpretation of an utterance in a language that we have not mastered *at all*) could be achieved (see, e.g. Davidson, 1973, 1994; Quine, 1960). The problem this theory seeks to solve is, roughly, as follows: If we want to determine what someone's utterances mean even though we do not know their language at all, we first need to know what she believes, otherwise we lack a starting point for our translations. But this we can find out only by understanding what she claims (and we cannot do that because we do not speak her language). The principle of charity is the key to getting out of this conundrum: We need to assume that the person holds largely true beliefs, that is, that her beliefs largely coincide with our own (because we think that what we believe is true).<sup>2</sup> These charitable assumption will then allow us to reconstruct what she *must have meant* by this or that utterance given what we observe about her behavior and the environment. In the end we become able to translate her language into our own.

The principle of charity in argumentation theory has little in common with this version beyond that it also concerns the interpretation of other people's utterances and that it also requires the interpreter to make the presumption that these people are apt epistemic agents. Argumentation theory's principle of charity operates in the context of argument, so a shared language and vast agreement is already assumed; as Fogelin (2005) points out, these two are *preconditions* for argumentation to even happen. In addition, that the principle of charity applies in situations of argumentation brings with it the complication that it requires the interpreting arguer to be charitable while already aware of the otherness of her interlocutor's viewpoint. In fact, the arguer will be prepared to be faced with disagreement,<sup>3</sup> which might in turn might be grounded in or surrounded by further disagreements (presumably more so if the disagreement is about the existence of God, less so if the disagreement is about who ate the last of the ice-cream.) Therefore, charity in argument needs to be charity that does *not* presuppose that the other believes as the interpreter believes when it comes to the subject matter at issue (i.e. that the other holds what the interpreting arguer thinks are true beliefs).

Second, the principle of charity as I want to discuss it can be distinguished from one that would apply to the interpretation of arguments as artifacts only. If I am reading Hume's text on the problem of induction and attempt to determine the argument he actually offered, then I am interpreting an argument as an artifact (in O'Keefe's terminology, trying to determine which argument1 was offered by Hume on the basis of the text he wrote), but I am not *in* an argument with Hume (in O'Keefe's terminology, an argument2) (Hume, Norton, Norton, & Norton, 2007; O'Keefe, 1977).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I think this is what Lewinski (2012) is referring to when he talks about the application of the principle of charity by an argumentation analyst.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., we have to assume that if it rains, she believes it rains and that she believes that if *this* color is called x, then *this* same one on a different object is also called x etc.

<sup>3</sup> Some arguments might go on without a disagreement. However, most will, at some point feature disagreement, whether as the argument's starting point, or at some point down the road.

<sup>4</sup> Though I might be in an argument with a colleague who interprets Hume's argument differently.

It is a worthwhile question to ask whether I should apply a principle of charity when interpreting arguments while not participating in an argument<sup>2</sup> with the authors of those arguments. However, I am here interested in approaching the principle of charity from the perspective of argument ethics. I want to know whether we should be charitable for moral reasons. There might be a sense in which we could imagine that there are moral reasons why I owe it to long-dead Hume or to myself that I interpret his texts in one or another way, but it would be a rather weak sense that I am not interested in here.<sup>5</sup>

## 1.2 What kind of charity?

It might be a plausible position to advocate for interpreters to apply charity when they are dealing with arguments<sup>1</sup> while *not* engaged in an argument<sup>2</sup> with the arguer. After all, in this case it may serve epistemic and even prudential reasons to deal with the argument in its strongest form.<sup>6</sup> But it is not as obvious what charity would contribute when interpreters are engaged in argument<sup>2</sup> with the person whose argument<sup>1</sup> they are interpreting, especially in cases where she is right there, ready to answer them. We might ask: Can't they just ask her what she meant? Why should they invest energy in charitable interpretation if they could just go with what comes to mind first and leave it to her to correct them if necessary?

But the kind of attitude these questions reveal would be based on a mistaken image of the circumstances in which we tend to argue and the degree to which we tend to understand and can formulate our own reasons. For one, interpreting arguers will not be able to ask for clarification in all instances of being engaged in an argument<sup>2</sup>. Arguments<sup>2</sup> are being held in all kinds of ways and through all kinds of media. They might contribute to an argument<sup>2</sup> on twitter, a social-media platform whose 180-word limit and general design precludes or at least discourages careful inquiry into the exact meaning of another's words. They might be in a social situation in which asking for clarification would be embarrassing or rude. The reader will have no difficulty coming up with further scenarios.

Even when they are arguing face-to-face in comfortable social circumstances, their ability to ask for clarification and get it might well be very limited. First, they might need to be charitable in order to even *notice* that more than one possible interpretation of what their interlocutor just said is possible. Jumping to conclusions about an interlocutor's meaning may be an automatic move rather than a conscious choice, made out of the necessity to keep the exchange going instead of sitting there and pondering over every uttered word. Second, the interlocutor might not be able to formulate her thoughts better than she actually and ambiguously did.<sup>7</sup> After all, we should avoid the mistake of assuming that argumentation only ever takes place between, or is important to, people equipped with the necessary rhetorical capabilities to reformulate the way in which they

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<sup>5</sup> I should point out that I will take a rather broad approach to what I will count as "being in an argument<sup>2</sup>". Of course, I am in an argument<sup>2</sup> with you if we are exchanging reasons face to face, whether it is to resolve a disagreement or to solve a problem. However, I think I can also be in an argument<sup>2</sup> if I make a contribution to a debate that has been taking place throughout the political sphere, or in the scientific community etc. I might, for example, participate in the abortion-debate by providing an objection to an argument that I take to be rehearsed often by pro-life-advocates without wanting to attribute it exclusively to any one pro-life advocate. In this case, I think, it still makes sense to say that I am participating in an argument<sup>2</sup> and, what's more, I think it also still makes sense to ask whether and how strongly I owe it to pro-life advocates to employ the principle of charity when I offer my interpretation of the argument I am about to object to.

<sup>6</sup> Though as Lewinski (2012) argues, even this might be hard to put into words. For my thoughts on this, see footnote 12.

<sup>7</sup> I have argued this, e.g. in Stevens (2019). The idea can also be found in, e.g., Gilbert (1994) and Cohen (1995).

attempt to express their reasons over and over until their interlocutors have understood.<sup>8</sup> Third, the interlocutor might not have *meant anything specific*: People sometimes (even often) formulate reasons not after, but while they realize what these reasons are. An arguer's interlocutor might grapple with the question what her argument is *exactly* to some degree too.<sup>9</sup> It is therefore at least unclear whether charitable interpretation can simply be replaced by asking for clarification.

These considerations also open the way to understanding the *kind* of charity that I want to claim we have moral reason to extend to our interlocutors. It is the kind of charity that is aimed at allowing them to give their reasons (the appropriate) effect in the argument<sup>2</sup>, even if they are still in the process of working out what these reasons are, or not rhetorically apt enough to represent them in a way that is easily accessible to the interpreting arguer. Rather than what in argumentation theory has become known as a strong principle of charity that requires interlocutors to add premises and chose less plausible meanings in order to generate the strongest argument possible,<sup>10</sup> I will advocate a somewhat stronger version of what Govier (1987) introduces as “moderate” charity: Govier formulated the principle as that to assume that our interlocutors

are trying to give good reasons for claims they genuinely believe, and they are open to criticism on the merits of their beliefs and their reasoning. ...their purpose [is] to communicate information, acceptable opinions and reasonable beliefs, and to provide good reasons for some of these opinions and beliefs by offering good arguments.

My stronger version of this principle adds that we also assume that our interlocutors *have* reasons to give that, at least from their point of view and in their version of how the world works, actually provide support for their claims. It therefore will require arguers, at least sometimes, to try and ascertain what an arguer's “real position” is, “what “the arguer really just means,” or “what the arguer's argument really is,” even though that is an enterprise that Lewinski (2012) calls “methodologically suspicious”.

I do not think that attempting to understand our interlocutors well enough to determine what they are really trying to say is suspicious as much as very difficult (potentially so difficult that it can only ever remain an ideal goal, always pursued, never fully achieved). As the growing literature on rhetorical listening as well as programs and handbooks on compassionate listening show (Glenn & Ratcliffe, 2011; Lipari, 2014; Ratcliffe, 2005), charitable listening that is aimed at identifying

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<sup>8</sup> Young (1996) criticizes Rawls and Habermas, the fathers of deliberative democracy, for exactly this assumption. She argues that the unforced force of the argument is only unforced for those capable of expressing their reasons (and in the right way) for everyone else things look very different.

<sup>9</sup> I will address this again later, but this is one reason to reject Johnson's (1984) claim that interpreters cannot be required to deal charitably with half-baked arguments formulated in five minutes by people who barely know how argumentation works: Those people, too, might have a great stake in getting their reasons across, and excluding them from charitable interpretation might end up being nothing else but a kind of negligent discrimination against the uneducated, poor, or rhetorically inapt.

<sup>10</sup> Support for such a strong principle is sometimes attributed to Scriven (1976). I take “strong” charity to require that the interpreter attributes to the arguer that argument which, in the interpreters view, is most successful at providing the strongest reasons for the claim. Lewinski (2012) raises interesting worries about what “strongest” might mean – the version that is easiest to defend? That might generate an argument which does not support the conclusion very well. The version that would, if all premises were true, provide the best support for the conclusion? That might generate an argument with implausible or hard-to-defend premises. I do not think that there is a big mystery here: The “strongest” interpretation of an argument is, from the interpreter's point of view, that interpretation which will offer the most convincing reason – that is, the version of the argument that best supports the conclusion with premises the interpreter is willing to accept.

the reasonable core in another's expressions is not only seldom practiced, but can also be energy and time consuming, stressful and even painful.<sup>11</sup> It is therefore worthwhile to ask how it would even be possible to accomplish this kind of charity, whether we owe it, why we owe it, and whether we always owe it to the same degree. These questions are what I turn to now.

### 3. Why be charitable?

I am not the only one to argue that we have *prima facie* moral reasons to extend charity to our interlocutors. Scriven's classical account of the principle of charity introduces the principle as one of fairness or justice:

The Principle of Charity is more than a mere ethical principle, but it is at least that (...) It requires you to be fair or just in your criticisms (...) they shouldn't take advantage of a mere slip of the tongue or make a big point out of some irrelevant point that wasn't put quite right. (Scriven, 1976).

However, in the subsequent discussion, the moral case for the principle of charity has not found much acclaim. For example, both Lewinski (2012) and Govier (1987) criticize the idea that the principle of charity might be a moral principle. And indeed, it does seem natural to assume that a moral requirement not to strawman one's opponent should be strong enough a demand on an arguer.<sup>12</sup> And this would automatically follow from a moral requirement of fairness to abstain from deliberately committing fallacies, such as, e.g., Blair (2011) suggests. What moral reason can there be that requires to help strengthen an argument instead of going with the most natural interpretation? Why should an arguer owe *not* to attack it, using what Lewinski calls the *strategy of the easiest objection*, by honing in on whichever way the author attempted to represent what they think are reasons seems to be easiest refuted (Lewinski, 2012)?

Epistemic and prudential reasons seem to be more plausible: As Scriven mentions in the same passage as the one quoted above, an arguer might be prudent to apply a principle of charity so that she does not go through the work of criticizing the argument in a form so weak that it is easily repaired and needs to be answered again, which can also be very embarrassing. And Adler (1981, 1996) claims that where argumentation aims at the truth or the best decision, epistemic concerns recommend the principle of charity because it will speed up the process of identifying and formulating the strongest possible reasons for each claim in play (see also Aikin & Casey, 2016). However, both of these kinds of reasons only apply sometimes – prudential reasons apply only where it is likely that one's interlocutor has the wit or time necessary to detect where a more charitable interpretation could strengthen her own argument, and epistemic reasons apply only where the interest in getting it right is greater than the interest in appearing to be right.

Govier, too, offers only non-moral reasons for the employment of her principle of charity, of which mine is a somewhat stronger version. Rejecting the idea that charity might be morally required, she points out instead that applying moderate charity as she understands it is a requirement for authentically engaging in the activity of argumentation at all: Arguing is a social

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<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Joy Arbor's impressive description of the attempt to listen charitably to a person who is advocating actions that will almost certainly lead to death and destruction in the Israel/Palestine conflict in her chapter "With Our Ears to the Ground: Compassionate Listening in Israel/Palestine" (in: Glenn & Ratcliffe, 2011, p. 219 ff.).

<sup>12</sup> Aikin and Casey (2016) make the case that some straw-men can be appropriate. They also point out that too much charity might construct "iron men" – arguments that are distorted to be stronger than what the arguer originally offered.

activity in which arguers exchange representations of reasons, objections and claims in order to support their ideas or opinions (or, we might add following Hundleby (2013), in order to solve a problem or answer a question in the absence of any commitment to a conclusion). Therefore, *not* applying the moderate principle of charity, and thereby *not* assuming that one's interlocutor is indeed trying to represent reasons is the same as pretending to argue while not really believing that what one is *in* an actual argument. To Govier, applying the moderate principle of charity is simply a part of arguing in good faith.

I agree with Govier that arguing in good faith often requires that we interpret our interlocutor's utterances under the assumption that she is trying to represent what she takes to be reasons. However, I think that she applies a rather idealized concept of argumentation when she claims that otherwise we are not really arguing at all. At least if we want to stay faithful to what real-life arguers might count as argumentation, there are ways to argue that can do without this version of good faith – for example, some legal ethicists claim that lawyers are required, by role-morality, to offer arguments they know do not really represent reasons if that will help their clients, and consider this a normal part of legal argumentation.<sup>13</sup>

In addition, we might ask whether “good faith” as Govier thinks of it does not require more than most arguers invest in most arguments. Govier seems to have in mind that it requires the interpreter to be sensitive to all empirical evidence of the speaker's meaning, including their personality, the context, hints of irony etc. But that is a rather tall order. Interpreting without any conscious ill-will towards one's interlocutor will often not cut it, especially if the conclusion that the interlocutor supports is not to the interpreters liking. For one, inborn human biases make it much easier to detect flaws in arguments for conclusions we do not like, and harder to appreciate their strengths (see, e.g. Allahverdyan & Galstyan, 2014; Mercier & Sperber, 2011). So an interpreting arguer might make an active effort for charity if she dislikes a conclusion just to reach the kind of interpretation Govier has in mind.<sup>14</sup> It seems then that the claim that an arguer who does not engage in Govier's principle of charity is not arguing in good faith and therefore not arguing at all is a little strong. The reason why we should employ Govier's principle of charity (and my stronger version of it) lies, I think, elsewhere.

## 2.1 Moral reasons

In this section, I want to argue that while prudential and epistemic reasons for being charitable apply only sometimes, there are consistently applicable moral reasons for Govier's brand of charity. In fact, I think, these reasons actually require a little more than Govier recommends. This little more is that we make an effort to interpret under the assumption that our interlocutors do not only try to represent reasons, but that they indeed *have* reasons to represent, at least from their point of view of how the world is, and that that point of view has *some* value, however sloppily formulated or other it might appear.<sup>15</sup>

I will offer two moral arguments for this claim: First, I will offer a deontological argument based on the duty not to humiliate others but instead treat them according to their status as

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<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Schwartz (1983). I think that Govier's point of view might well come from a commitment to the idea that argumentation's goal is to come to the truth or best decision, or at least to make epistemic advances. But as Goodwin (2008) argues, it is not clear that there is *one* goal we can attribute to argumentation where-ever it is engaged in.

<sup>14</sup> This, I think, also answers the worry that adopting a principle of charity might make it impossible to recognize and attribute serious lapses of reasoning (see, e.g. Lewinski, 2012): At least where we do not like a conclusion, the presumption that the principle of charity asks us to make corrects our natural tendencies. I do not think that the danger of over-correction is especially great.

<sup>15</sup> How much effort depends on context - more on this below.

dignified, reasonable beings. Second, I will offer a consequential argument based on the importance of having a voice for the well-being of human persons.

I should point out that both of these arguments are only meant to establish the existence of *prima facie* moral reasons to interpret one's interlocutor's utterances charitably, and that the amount of effort an interpreter might be required to extend to this goal will vary with context. Below, I will discuss in more detail how context influences the strength of the two reasons I offer.

### 2.1.1 The Deontological Argument

The concept of dignity is a controversial one, and no consensus on its definition has so far emerged. However, I take it to be one of the less controversial elements of the concept that respect for a person's dignity is usually taken to go hand in hand with respect for her as a reasonable being, capable of having reasons, acting according to them, and understanding the reasons of others; and that this respect also includes acknowledging her as in this respect equal to other reasonable beings (see, e.g. Kant, Hill, & Zweig, 2002 xzzz).<sup>16</sup>

Given the central place that reason has in the ways in which we respect human dignity, it makes sense that, e.g., proponents of the idea of deliberative democracy have argued that deliberative argumentation should be placed at the heart of the democratic process because this expressly respects the dignity of citizens: Allowing them to influence the democratic process through arguments also means allowing them to realize their capacity as reasonable beings by aiming at appropriately integrating all their reasons into the decision making process (see, e.g. Gutmann & Thompson, 2004; Habermas, 1991).

The idea is easily generalized: Engaging another in argument shows them respect, it expressly acknowledges their standing as reasonable beings.<sup>17</sup> However, this alone is not an argument for charitable argumentation, not even for engaging people in argument whenever possible: The mere fact that something expressly show respect cannot establish a duty to do so – unless imperfect, such a duty would simply be too heavy to carry. Instead, I want to argue that *if* a person engages another in argument (and does so freely), then she owes her interlocutor a context-dependent amount of effort to interpret her utterances charitably because the opposite would be humiliating, that is, it would amount to denying the interlocutor the respect owed to her according to her equal standing as a reasonable being.<sup>18</sup>

To being, I assume that arguments<sub>1</sub> are at least *purported* attempted representations of reasons, and that arguments<sub>2</sub> are at least the *purported* attempts of the involved arguers to resolve an issue/question/disagreement, etc., by determining the balance of available and applicable reasons through the mutual presentation of arguments<sub>1</sub>.<sup>19</sup> Further, I assume that play-arguments (that is, an argument in which all participants know and agree that the argument<sub>2</sub> is only a *purported* argument) are not real arguments – an argument<sub>2</sub> can survive that *some* participants only play at arguing, but it cannot survive that all do without losing its status as an argument<sub>2</sub>. Engaging a person in an argument<sub>2</sub>, therefore, means at least *pretending* to address her in her capacity as an equal, reasonable being and at least *pretending* that at least part of the goal of the

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<sup>16</sup> This aspect of the concept of dignity is, for example, at the basis of the idea that the rule of law protects the dignity of the law's subjects, because it protects their ability to plan their own lives reliably according to their own reasons, for example by forbidding retroactive or secret laws (see, e.g. Waldron, 2012)

<sup>17</sup> For an explicit spelling out of this generalization, see Stevens (Forthcoming)

<sup>18</sup> The argument I present is rather similar to Govier's argument. Like her, my reason involves the importance of good faith argumentation. However, my argument, unlike hers, is a moral one.

<sup>19</sup> This partial definition is very broad – it includes pretend-arguments as well as very bad arguments (both 1 and 2). A more detailed discussion of it can be found in Stevens (Forthcoming).



whole interaction is to determine the balance of available and applicable reasons, *her's included*. If she responds by engaging in argument, then she thereby answers this address by likewise addressing her interlocutors in this manner. The arguers are now in what at least seems like a reciprocally respectful structure that exist on the basis of the mutual agreement to take each other's reasons into account.

Now, of course, arguments are not reasons, but only at least purported attempts at representing reasons. This is why it is necessary to interpret them (charitably or uncharitably) in the first place. And one thing that turns a real attempt at resolving an issue through arguing in order to determine the balance of reasons into a merely purported attempt is if an arguer refuses to invest as much effort into charitable interpretation as the context requires – that is, as much effort as is necessary to give her interlocutor a real opportunity to make her reasons understood.<sup>20</sup> Purporting to do something, however, without really trying to do it, is engaging in deception. And so arguing with someone without investing the appropriate amount of effort in charitable interpretation amounts to a deception. Why is this deception humiliating? Because it expresses the deceiver's refusal to recognize her interlocutor's *equal* standing as a reasonable being: By engaging her interlocutor in argument, the arguer asks to be treated in her capacity as a reasonable being and have her reasons included in what will be understood to be the balance of reasons, but then refuses to reciprocate by treating her interlocutor in the same way, thereby treating her own standing as higher and her own reasons as more important than her interlocutor(s).<sup>21</sup>

Of course, it might require more charitable effort to identify the reasons one arguer tries to express than to identify the reasons another tries to express. There are vast differences between persons when it comes to rhetorical capacity, the ability to concentrate for long times on a difficult task like formulating one's reasons, or even the ability to become aware of one's reasons. However, one's dignity, and the requirement to be treated according to one's standing as dignified, does not vary according to rhetorical prowess, quickness of wit or degree of self-insight. This is why I reject Johnson's claim that an arguer-interpreter cannot be expected to exert much charitable effort into interpreting arguments that "seem to have been sloppily put together" by a "loose reasoner with scant knowledge of the demands of the argumentative process" (Johnson, 1984, p. 8). Sure, if a capable rhetor simply refuses to invest the time necessary to make herself understood, Johnson might have a point. But many sloppy arguments are sloppy because their authors do not have the capacity for more – often due to no fault of their own. Refusing to treat them charitably amounts to a humiliation, the denial of owed respect.

### ***2.1.2 The Consequential Argument***

The argument above was made under the assumption that treating people with respect for their status as reasonable beings is a requirement in itself. If this is so, then it is enough to show that engaging them in argument without affording them the charity needed so that they can give their reasons effect is humiliating – that alone establishes a *prima facie* moral requirement to be charitable. However, not everyone can be convinced by such deontological arguments, and it is

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<sup>20</sup> It is important to note that how much effort this is will necessarily be context-dependent because how easy it is for a person to represent her reasons in a way that will get them understood depends on her, her interlocutors, and the situation in which she argues (see, e.g. Young, 1996 who argues that deliberative democracy cannot enhance respect for dignity unless it creates ways to exchange reasons that are very inclusive.).

<sup>21</sup> Elsewhere I have represented this line of reasoning as a Rawlsian-type argument from fairness: The arguer who does not reciprocate acts unfairly because she takes the good that the arguers produce together (namely the express respect each experiences for her status as a reasonable being) without being willing to do her fair share (Stevens, Forthcoming).

therefore worthwhile to point out that ensuring that arguers who present arguments have a voice (that is, they will be heard and there will be an effort to understand them and take their reasons into account adequately) is required to avoid morally relevant harms.

To me, it is intuitively plausible that taking part in an argument only to realize that the other arguers are not willing to muster the time and energy necessary to understand one's reasons will cause harm – one only needs to remember how it *feels* to be treated in this way. Intuition aside, two consequential arguments can be made for a prima facie moral reason to interpret charitably in argument. First, and most obviously, where consequential reasons require that a person has influence on the process of making a decision or coming to a conclusion, and the chosen process is argumentation, the same consequential reasons will also require that her utterances be interpreted charitably. Otherwise her integration is nothing but a pretense – she does not really have any influence on the outcome. This, as research in psychology has shown (for an overview of the research, see Lind, Kanfer, & Earley, 1990), is one reason why people consider decision-making processes in which they are given a voice to be more procedurally just than those in which they do not think that they have been afforded a voice and why they can react poorly when they realize that the giving of a voice was only apparent (Folger, Rosenfield, Grove, & Corkran, 1979). But the ability to influence a decision or conclusion is only part of why people value being given a voice. In addition, as Lind et al. (1990) argue on the basis of their research, being able to make one's reasons heard and feeling that an honest (and at least somewhat successful) effort has been made to understand those reasons gives people the feeling of being valued members of a community. It should be clear that for an intensely social creature such as the human being, treatment that suggest that they are *not* an important member of the community, or even an outsider is harmful. From there, it is only a small step to accept that taking part in an argument but realizing that no or very little effort is made to understand the reasons one is trying to represent creates this kind of harm through the realization that the “inclusion” in the common reasoning process that is an argument<sup>2</sup> is only apparent. Of course, how great this harm is will depend widely from context to context, but I believe we can say that not being interpreted charitably when having been engaged in argument is prima facie a morally relevant harm, and therefore there is a prima facie moral requirement to interpret one's interlocutors charitably.

## **2.2 A moral argument against charity?**

I have now offered two arguments for my claim that there are prima facie moral reasons for treating our interlocutors charitably: First, that not doing so is humiliating and therefore violates our duty to treat others according to their dignified status of reasonable beings and second, that not doing so will deny others voice in arguments, which will in turn not only deny them the opportunity to influence decisions and conclusions (a harm in all cases in which they have a right to do so), but also communicate to them that they are not valued members of the community. How much charitable effort needs to be invested on the basis of these two reasons varies with context. However, before I discuss how, I need to engage with an argument offered by Govier (1987) to the effect that there are also prima facie moral reasons *against* charitable interpretation:

Govier, following for the moment Davidson's idea that interpreting charitably means assuming that the other broadly shares one's beliefs (because oneself will think that one's beliefs are true), points out that a charitable interpretation might amount to a kind of cultural imperialism that is the more grievous the more different the interlocutor is from the interpreting arguer.<sup>22</sup> This

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<sup>22</sup> It is important to point out that Govier does not make the mistake of assuming that charity *has* to take this form – after all, she later offers her own version of charity, a slightly stronger variant of which I am defending here.

is so because interpreting charitably, if this is supposed to mean interpreting in a way that aims at choosing an interpretation that makes the argument appear in its best, or at least a reasonably good light, means choosing an interpretation that seems convincing to the *interpreter*.<sup>23</sup> This, in turn, will run the risk of transforming what the interlocutor really was trying to express into what the interpreter would like to hear, or would express were they trying to support the interlocutor's conclusion. The act of interpreting then changes the argument and potentially makes it represent a reason different from the one intended by the interlocutor: A reason that the interpreter, but not necessarily the interlocutor would consider a good reason. This kind of charity, to Govier, is toxic charity:

A fundamental problem is that the otherness of other minds and cultures may be lost if charity goes too far. It may be true that without some presumptions of shared beliefs and a shared logic, understanding of language is impossible. ...With too much charity we will seek understanding of others to find only ourselves. (Govier, 1987)

This argument deserves to be taken very seriously, especially in this paper because I rely so heavily on considerations based on the importance of respecting dignity and of expressly treating others as valuable and valued members of the community. Changing the content of another's justifications so that it fits one's own worldview does not express respect for them as reasonable beings. Rather, it expresses the conscious or unconscious prioritization of one's own ideas, beliefs and methods for determining wrong from right and truth from falsehood over those of others *before* they have been subjected to the test of argumentation. Being treated in this way denies the interlocutor's voice just as much as if no effort for understanding had been made at all and is just as humiliating. In addition, it sends the message that the interlocutor's contributions are not valuable to the community and need to be changed to become palatable.

Nonetheless, I want to maintain that charity as I describe it is *prima facie* morally required. This is because the charity I describe asks more of the interpreter than simply finding the version of the offered argument that she would find most convincing from her own point of view. Rather, it requires an attempt at interpreting the argument so that the interpreter gains insight into and attributes some value to the reasons her interlocutor is attempting to offer from the *interlocutor's* point of view. Raz (1979) calls the perspective the interpreter has to take in order to achieve this the *detached point of view*. He argues that we can approach arguments in three different ways: We can ask whether we accept them, whether someone else in fact accepts them (and why), and whether we would accept them if we had someone else's point of view.<sup>24</sup>

The detached point of view is not easy to achieve and requires a considerable amount of emotional and intellectual energy as well as empathy and open-mindedness because it challenges the interpreter to imagine herself different than she really is. The more different the interlocutor is from the interpreter, the harder it will be to take the detached point of view, and the harder it will be to treat the perspective that is so achieved as valuable. At the most extreme, even

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<sup>23</sup> I think that this would amount to a kind of *iron-manning* as Aikin and Casey describe it: The *distortion* of an argument in order to make it better (Aikin & Casey, 2016).

<sup>24</sup> The third option is distinct from the second and may in fact create different results. Raz gives the following example: "Imagine an orthodox, but relatively ill-in formed Jew who asks the advice of his friend who is Catholic but an expert in Rabbinical law. 'What should I do?' he asks, clearly meaning what should I do according to my religion, not yours. The friend tells him that he should do so and so. The point is that both know that this is not what the friend thinks that he really ought to do. The friend is simply stating how things are from the Jewish Orthodox point of view" (Raz, 1979, p. 156).

understanding how what the other says could possibly be a reason for them might become impossible (and then we might have a Fogelian (2005) deep disagreement).

However, differences are not always so great (most arguments presumably take place between people belonging to the same cultural background, social grouping etc.), and often it is quite possible to accomplish an acceptable degree of understanding and appreciation of the other when some effort is made. Nonetheless, this kind of charity is more challenging than the simple transformation of an argument into one the interlocutor would find convincing. However, on the plus side, this kind of charity is also morally much less worrisome. It does not imply the interpreter's superiority, nor does it deny that the interlocutor has something valuable to offer.

However, I would make my own task too easy if I pretended that Govier's worry does not apply at all to the principle of charity as I defend it here. *Completely* taking the perspective of another is impossible, for then the interpreter would have to become the other. And so every interpretation will carry some of the interpreter with it, and any charitable interpretation will, to some degree, influence the argument so that it becomes more palatable to the interpreter.

I think it is only realistic to accept this. But I do not think that this needs to be a problem, at least not when engaged in an argument<sup>2</sup>. After all, it is not just charitable interpretation, but *all* interpretation and indeed all engagement in argument that will lead to mutual influencing of each other's arguments. The reason for this is threefold: First, the dialogic nature of arguments makes it so that the authors of arguments – and through them the contents of their arguments – are likely influenced by the other participants in an argument right from the start. Tindale points out that because arguments are directed at an audience, they are already influenced by that audience through the arguer's wish to be understood and to convince (Tindale, 2004). Where the arguer knows her interpreter, as is the case in many (though not all) arguments<sup>2</sup>, the very first production of the argument is already influenced by the arguer's understanding of what the interpreter will be able to understand and find convincing. It is then a normal aspect of argument-creation that the interpreter's influence begins even before the interpretation does.

Second, I do not think that it is avoidable for an interpreter to let their own worldview exert some level of influence on their interpretation of an argument (or any other interpretable object), whether they are being charitable or otherwise. The way they themselves use language will influence which meanings they are more or less likely to try out for ambiguous terms, which normative connotation they will give certain words (is "bitch" negative or neutral?) and so on. More importantly, interpreting arguers will inevitably find themselves somewhere on the high, low or negative part of the charity-spectrum. *Whether* and *how* charitable they will be depends on their own perspective. For example, they will be influenced by their own stance in the charity-discussion, by whether they hold the arguer in high or low esteem (i.e. the arguer's *ethos*) etc. It would be a mistake to think that interpreters in an argument are going to be either charitable or engaged in interpretation that is not influenced by any degree of charity (or the opposite) at all. Influence through an attitude of lesser or greater willingness to charity (or the very opposite) is hardly avoidable because it would require almost inhuman self-control.

Finally, no arguer will be able to avoid influencing the content of her interlocutor's arguments<sup>1</sup> through the responses she gives, whether she interpreted these arguments charitably or not. Every objection or suggestion for improvement she makes will tell her interlocutor about how she understood their argument. Whether or not she exerted extra energy to interpret the argument charitably, she might have gotten it right, or she might have gotten it wrong *or*, and this is important, she might have given her interlocutor a potential filler where their own understanding of their reasons had a gap. In each case, the interlocutor might react in different ways: If the

interpreting arguer got it right, her interlocutor might simply acknowledge this. If the interpreter got it wrong, her interlocutor might correct her. But there is also the possibility that if the interpreter was correct with her interpretation, her obvious displeasure might lead her interlocutor to change her reasoning (potentially even without noticing it). And if the interpreter was incorrect, the incorrect interpretation might present a stronger argument in the interlocutor's own eyes, prompting her to change her reasoning (again, potentially without noticing). Finally, if the interpreter offered a fill-in, the interlocutor might adopt it, or reject it – and the reasons why she might do either are manifold.<sup>25</sup>

What all this comes down to is that we should not think that arguers develop arguments1 all by themselves. Arguments1 grow as the argument2 progresses, and this growth will be influenced in complex ways by the contributions of all participants.<sup>26</sup> When I argue that there are moral reasons to interpret charitably in argument, I am not arguing for the adopting of an attitude when otherwise there would be none. Rather, I am arguing that there are reasons to adopt one kind of attitude – a charitable one – rather than others. *Some* attitude will inevitably influence argument1 interpretation and through this also the arguments1.

It is, however, important to say that none of this is supposed to make the impression that there is no need for interpreters (charitable and otherwise) to be careful not to distort what they are interpreting. Toxic charity is a serious concern that is the more worrying the less the interlocutor has meaningful opportunity to evaluate and respond to the interpretation.<sup>27</sup> Especially where an interpreter is in an advantaged social position, she can easily and maybe even accidentally bulldoze all over the reasoning of others simply by being careless. Where-ever possible, interpreters should therefore try to create opportunity for her interlocutors to determine whether the shape their argument takes in the interpreter's hands still represents their reasons. They should carefully use the responses they receive in order to adjust the detached point of view they are attempting to cultivate in the direction of greater accuracy.

#### 4. Who has to be charitable and how much?

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<sup>25</sup> Lewinski (2012) offers the following scenario: From the perspective of this task, imagine an arguer A who puts forth an argument x, deemed to be ambiguous by her fellow discussants. One critic of A suggests that under a plausible interpretation x1, A's argument can be easily refuted. A is not sure how to clarify x which she believed to be "well formulated" and "self-understanding", and defends herself with an impromptu and possibly still vague interpretation x2. As she does so, some other discussant volunteers' interpretation x3, which is also plausible, but makes the argument cogent. A replies "Yes, this is what I was trying to say; I simply didn't manage to put it so elegantly..." Lewinski asks: "What is "the arguer's real position" here: x, x1, x2, or x3?". He then argues that an interpreter should not try to determine the arguer's real position – the reason she really had in mind, but rather what her argumentative commitments are given what she has said. However, I think that only in some rare fringe-cases is it actually appropriate to pin an arguer to the commitments she has made through her utterances (e.g. in legal cases). In most cases, doing so would be humiliating. Telling A that the reason she gave was not represented by x3 because that is not what she is committed to given her utterance would be cruel and petty in many circumstances (except, maybe, in the context of an argumentative contest to which A has agreed knowing that she will be treated in this way). Expecting arguers not to change their arguments as they become more clear about the reasons they want to offer as the argument2 progresses would mean either excluding or seriously handicapping everyone but the most self-reflected, rhetorically apt and confident arguers.

<sup>26</sup> See, e.g., Wohlrapp (2014) for a detailed model on how this happens.

<sup>27</sup> Here I do not only mean that they are in contact with the interpreter, or that they are given space and time to speak. I also mean that they have the social standing, the confidence and the rhetorical capacity to express if they feel misunderstood by the interpretation.

Charitable interpretation as I have described it above is obviously a time and energy intensive undertaking, the more so the more different interpreter and interlocutor are from each other. It can be emotionally taxing (imagine having to charitably interpret the argument of someone arguing against your interest or self-image<sup>28</sup>) and intellectually challenging (imagine trying to understand arguments offered in a rhetorical form you are not used to, e.g., by someone from a very different social environment<sup>29</sup>). Sometimes, making an effort to be charitable in this way might come naturally, for example if the interpreter holds her interlocutor in high esteem, or is somehow invested in getting at what the arguer really means (emotionally because she is her friend, strategically because she is her boss etc.). But often, especially where the interlocutor supports a conclusion that the interpreter dislikes, the interpreter will have to overcome her own inclinations and the pull of her inborn biases (like the my-side or confirmation bias) in order to be charitable in this way.

This leads me to the question of whether the burden that is put on the interpreting arguer who has to extend considerable effort on behalf of an interlocutor weighs against the *prima facie* moral reasons for charity. It might seem this way, especially because this effort is directed *against* the interpreter-as-arguer's goal of "winning" the argument.

### 3.1 Charity and the dominant adversarial model of argumentation

Lewinski (2012) argues that the principle of charity creates a paradox of goals in arguments<sup>2</sup> because it works directly against the interpreter-as-arguer's goal of winning. Lewinski characterizes arguments<sup>2</sup> as a "contest of opinions in which...individual victory or loss are at stake" but which is also cooperative because, in the end, aimed at epistemic gains (p. 416). That the arguers follow the goal of winning by vigorously defending their own claim and attacking the arguments of their interlocutors is necessary to realize the epistemic goal of argumentation as Lewinsky understands it, namely creating epistemic gains by separating the chaff from the wheat of claims, arguments and ideas. If charity was used instead, bad arguments, reasons and ideas might not get weeded out as they should. According to this argument, charity only *seems* to be important for prudential and epistemic reasons but actually works against the interpreter/arguer's interests as well as against wider epistemic goals.

It is important to point out that Lewinsky self-consciously and clearly subscribes to a rather narrow understanding of what an argument<sup>2</sup> is. He takes as his model the pragma-dialectical *critical discussion*, a version of what has been coined the *dominant adversarial model of argument* (DAM) (van Eemeren, 2018). DAM was for a long time considered to be the ideal structure for argumentation, but it now has come under strong criticism for some time.

According to DAM, argumentation takes place between a proponent and an opponent. The proponent tries to show that some claim is true by coming up with arguments for it and defending it against objections from the opponent (who might be the proponent of an incompatible claim).<sup>30</sup> The idea is that this procedure will lead to a vigorous testing of the arguments and objections that the arguers offer and, through this, of the claim. DAM sets argumentation up as the cooperative contest Lewinski has in mind. And, as Lewinski suggests for all argumentation, DAM creates its epistemic benefits only if each arguer aims at winning the argument so that both the claim and its denial are given the strongest, most motivated champion.

<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., Joy Arbor's chapter in Glenn and Ratcliffe (2011)

<sup>29</sup> This is part of Young's (1996) point.

<sup>30</sup> For a more detailed description, see, e.g., Stevens (2016)

Where arguers engage in an argument<sup>2</sup> following the structure of the DAM model, Lewinski's arguments against the principle of charity appear to be convincing. Furthermore, in an argument structured according to DAM, the moral reasons described above do not seem to speak against arguers concentrating on finding the weaknesses of their interlocutor's arguments instead of spending energy on unearthing their strengths. After all, it seems that where an arguer plays the proponent role, treating her as such neither denies her standing as a reasonable being nor excludes her from a community. Quite the opposite: She is included in a structure aimed at integrating her reasons appropriately in the final outcome of the argument. Therefore, in an argument<sup>2</sup> structured according to DAM, only so much charitable effort might be required as is necessary to avoid even unintentional straw-manning.<sup>31</sup>

However, that might already be quite a lot of charitable effort, for the DAM model creates conditions under which it is likely that arguers will have to employ what *feels* very much like charity in order to avoid what will look like straw-manning to their interlocutors or even uninterested bystanders. DAM encourages arguers to identify with their pre-chosen conclusion and to concentrate on winning. Under such conditions, losing the argument will easily feel like a personal loss, and may go hand in hand with at least a perceived loss of face. DAM therefore creates exactly those vested interests that enhance the effects of the confirmation bias – the inborn bias that leads the human mind to interpret evidence in ways conducive to their pre-chosen conclusion, even if it is in fact not.<sup>32</sup> As a result, DAM encourages unintentional straw-manning by creating conditions under which the human mind will tend to look for any flaw it can find in the interlocutor's arguments, and concentrate on it instead of their strengths.

As a result, the boundary between avoidance of straw-manning and charitable interpretation that is always a little unclear becomes fluid in arguments<sup>2</sup> structured according to the DAM, especially from the point of view of the arguers. This means that even if the DAM allows only for as much effort towards charity as is required to avoid (even unintentional) straw-manning, it still requires this much and is therefore not excluded from the moral requirement to be charitable.

What is more, all these considerations presuppose that arguing in a structure following DAM is always morally acceptable (and epistemically beneficial) in the first place. But that this is the case in real-life arguments can only seldom be expected. DAM has the weakness that it works only under a set of advantageous but rare conditions: Arguers need to be somewhat more interested in learning the truth than winning the argument so that they will acknowledge when others present good arguments or objections and withstand the temptation of taking argumentative shortcuts. They have to be at least roughly equally matched, so that the contest is won through better reasons, not a quicker wit. Finally, they have to be already well aware of their own reasons, so that they do not require help in working them out.<sup>33</sup>

Such ideal circumstances are rarely realized, and DAM has been criticized because where they are not, it tends to advantage some arguers over others in their ability to give their reasons effect and, as a result, win the argument. For example, arguers may be disadvantaged because they are not able or comfortable to behave in the assertive manner that a proponent or opponent role requires. As feminist argumentation theorists have pointed out, DAM requires arguers to state their

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<sup>31</sup> Straw-manning is here understood as the distortion of an argument into a much weaker version of itself, such that a reasonably neutral observer would recognize the distortion.

<sup>32</sup> See, e.g., <https://www.britannica.com/science/confirmation-bias>

<sup>33</sup> Even Mercier and Sperber, who argue that following the adversarial model can help arguers fight against their in-born my-side/confirmation bias remark that these conditions apply (Landemore & Mercier, 2012; Mercier & Sperber, 2011).

claims clearly and openly, to criticize their opponents explicitly and defend against criticism vigorously. This kind of behavior may well clash with, e.g. politeness-norms that some (but not all) arguers are expected to adhere to, like the politeness-norms of deference that female-gendered arguers are subject to (Burrow, 2010; Hundleby, 2013). Arguing effectively in a proponent or opponent role can then have face- or relationship-costs that arguers may not want to shoulder – or the politeness-norms may be so internalized that arguers find themselves unable to behave like a proponent. In addition, the adversarial structure requires proponents to shoulder the burden of formulating their reasons into arguments all by themselves. They might not be able to do this effectively if they are rhetorically less than apt or simply do not speak the rhetorical “language” of their surroundings (e.g. because they have to argue in a social setting that they are not used to). Alternatively, they might not be entirely clear on their own reasons and need conversation in order to identify them with full clarity.

In all these situations, DAM creates circumstances in which those disadvantaged by its structure but forced to argue in it are denied voice and therefore humiliated and harmed in the ways described above. This means that in circumstances that do not meet the high requirements that the DAM structure needs for functioning, other argumentative structures are required, structures that make neither humiliate nor harm likely and that may require more charitable effort from the arguers.

### **3.2 Charity, argument structures, and the responsibility of the individual arguer**

The adversarial structure of argumentation, in which proponent and opponent face off in a cooperative contest, especially if it is taken to its extreme and arguers fully trust that the argumentative structure will take care of epistemic goals while they concentrate only on winning, is only one way in which argumentation can be structured. Other structures are possible and have been described (see, e.g. Walton, 1998). Examples are the structure often attributed to deliberations, in which arguers try to come to a decision by offering all reasons they can come up with, in all directions. Another alternative would be a structure in which arguers each identify with a conclusion and argue to support it, but will interrupt this structure whenever an interlocutor seems to have trouble making themselves understood. Then they enter a kind of information-gaining dialogue aimed at identifying and formulating their reason together before resuming the ‘cooperative contest’ with all weapons equally sharpened.

Each of these structures requires arguers to invest more effort in charitable interpretation than the DAM does. In a deliberation, more effort is required because here the structure is aimed at making arguers identify and weigh all relevant reasons in a common effort. Refusing to invest in the charitable interpretation of an arguer’s contributions is humiliating and harmful because it signals that the arguer contributions are not worth the effort and that the arguer therefore does not really stand equally or is a valuable member in the community of reasoners set up by the deliberation. Even more effort is required in an argument<sup>2</sup> that includes regular information-seeking dialogues aimed at understanding various arguers’ reasoning. Here, arguers need to be on the look-out for signs that they might not see the full impact of what an interlocutor is trying to communicate. For this, they constantly need to ask themselves whether their initial interpretation is adequate. Not doing so for one arguer while it is done for others means treating them as less than other members of group, resulting in harm and humiliation.

It appears then that how much effort towards charity is required of an arguer depends heavily on the kind of argumentative structure the argument<sup>2</sup> realizes. This structure dictates how much charity is needed to avoid humiliation and harm given what arguers can expect to happen



based on the norms associated with the structure. From here, it seems natural to ask how structures should be chosen: Is there a best structure for all arguments? Is it permissible just to choose any structure randomly? Or are there reasons, potentially moral reasons, connected to this choice? And if there are: Who makes the choice, and who is responsible for it?

That the choice is not random, and that moral reasons apply to it should have become obvious in the above discussion of arguments structured according to DAM. Elsewhere, I have argued that not only adversarial structures, but all argument structures can put arguers in positions that make it forbiddingly hard for them to give their reason effect (Stevens, 2019). Context might create a situation in which an arguer would be harmed should they be forced to argue, for example, according to the norms of a deliberative structure if they are in a situation where doing so would undermine authority they need to preserve.

Which argumentative structure is appropriate for a given argument then depends on the way moral reasons interact with the argumentative context. Above I showed that the requirement to treat arguers with the respect appropriate to their standing as reasonable beings and to avoid harming arguers by depriving them of the opportunity to appropriately influence the outcome of an argument and by signaling that they are not valued members of the argumentative community speak in favor of charity. Behind these reasons stand broad background principles against humiliation and harm. These background principles, together with contextual factors, determine which argumentative structure should be adopted in a broad balance of reasons. How much effort an arguer has to invest in charity, then, depends on the argumentative structure her argument exhibits, and which structure this should be in turn depends on the overall balance of moral reasons that apply to the situation in which the argument arises.<sup>34</sup> These moral reasons include the *prima facie* reasons for the principle of charity, which speak for the adoption of a structure that requires a lot of charitable effort and are weightier the more an arguer needs support in order to give her reasons effect (e.g., because of her socio-economic standing, her educational level, her rhetorical capability, her confidence level, all compared to the other arguers). However, depending on the context, other *prima facie* moral reason might shift the balance in favor of other structures. Both Govier (1987) and Aikin and Casey (2016) point out, for example, that the presence of an easily mislead audience who might come away from the argument with a false impression could be such a reason. Another reason could be the well substantiated suspicion that the interlocutor is a troll, bullshitter<sup>35</sup> or aims to spread propaganda. These kinds of reasons might speak for adopting more adversarial structures that require much less effort towards charity.

It is important to note, however, that none of this takes responsibility off the shoulders of individual arguers. One might think that all arguers have to do in order to fulfill their charity-related moral duties in argument is follow the norms associated with the argumentative structure they find themselves in. But this would be based on an oversight: After all, unless the argumentative structure is authoritatively pre-determined (as, e.g., in legal trials), it is the arguers who determine and are responsible for it.

Following design-theorists in argumentation theory (e.g. Jackson, 2015; Jacobs, 1998; Jacobs, 2017) in the idea that the norms governing an argument are determined during the

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<sup>34</sup> Some of these reasons might even speak against charity or at least certain ways to display charity (e.g. by simply assuming that the argument was strong instead of pointing out that there are several possible interpretations and expressly opting for one). Take for example the circumstances Govier (1987) describes, in which the argument takes place in front of a gullible audience who, if the arguer were too charitable in her interpretation of her interlocutor, would come away with mistaken and potentially harmful impressions.

<sup>35</sup> I am here referring to someone engaged in what Frankfurt (2005) calls bullshit: Claims made by a claimant who does not at all care whether they are true or not.

argument, in real time, through the behavior of the arguers and role-theorists in their ideas about social roles (e.g. J. H. Turner, 2009; R. H. Turner, 2001), I have argued that arguers determine argumentative structure through role-taking (Stevens, 2019). Here is how: Argumentative structures, such as the structure set up by DAM exist through the attribution of argumentative roles – clusters of norms, expectations, typical behaviors etc. that are associated with playing a certain part in such structure.<sup>36</sup> The DAM structure, for example, includes a proponent and an opponent role. The proponent role contains norms that require the arguer to commit to a claim, concentrate on finding reasons to support it and formulate them into arguments, but not to find reasons against it. It also contains certain behavioral expectations for how proponents typically act. For example, they typically speak confidentially, maybe even aggressively and they are expected to appear assertive not tentative etc.

People learn at least the broadest roles – such as proponent or deliberator – through socialization. By seeing others argue and by engaging in argumentative behavior, they learn how to play the proponent- or deliberator-role and also how to recognize when others are taking this role. When entering an argument<sup>2</sup>, arguers are motivated to take a role that corresponds best to the kinds of norms they are familiar and comfortable with and that promises best to help accomplish their individual goal. If an arguer wants to show herself to be correct about something and is very confident, she will behave according to the norms of a proponent role. If an arguer is unsure of her conclusion and wants to determine how it looks from the point of view of others, she might behave according to the norms of a deliberator role. In turn, this is recognized by her interlocutors, who might or might not be happy to play a role that complements the one that the arguer has chosen (e.g., the opponent role). If they are not willing to do so, they have two options: they can either try to change the way the argument is starting to be structured by acting according to norms associated with clashing roles, for example by answering behavior indicative of a proponent role with behavior that fits a deliberator role, hoping that the arguer will shift gears. Alternatively, they might start a meta-dialogue about argument structures, asking, for example, why the arguer is so aggressive, or whether they could work together in their reasoning.

According to this understanding, argumentative structures and with them argumentative norms are established through the behavior of the arguers during the argument, often (but not always) without broaching the issue, simply in the course of the argument: By making arguments<sup>1</sup> in a certain way, they do not only communicate about the issue at hand, but also about the norms that will structure the argument<sup>2</sup>.

It is then through role-taking that arguers become responsible for the structure that their argument<sup>2</sup> takes on, and thereby also for the amount of effort that the norms of the argument<sup>2</sup> require each arguer to extend towards charity. In order to live up to this responsibility, arguers need to be motivated by moral reasons when they take their roles, among them the moral reasons that speak for charity. This means that the moral responsibility to charity that an arguer has comes in a double-layer: First, the arguer has to take the moral reasons for charity into account when playing her part in determining the argumentative structure. Second, the arguer has to act as charitable as this structure requires, given its norms and the kind of treatment her interlocutors can expect because of them.

## Conclusion

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<sup>36</sup> These roles function similarly as other social roles. The role of “teacher” for example, comes with norms, typical behaviors etc. that the reader is probably well acquainted with.

In this paper I have argued that there are prima facie moral reasons for following the principle of charity in argumentation. These reasons are always present because being in argument without being able to give one's reasons effect due to the unwillingness of others to invest time and energy in understanding what one is trying to express is both humiliating and harmful. However, how much effort needs to be invested in charity differs depending on the kind of argumentative structure the arguers have given their argument<sup>2</sup>. Which structure is appropriate, in turn, needs to be determined by the arguers (or by the designers of the argumentative structure where this is institutionally determined) according to the moral reasons that apply in the context in which the argument arose. Among these reasons are the prima facie reasons for charity. Therefore, the principle of charity becomes important when the *kind* of argument<sup>2</sup> arguers will engage in is determined and again through the norms governing this kind of argument.

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