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Commentary on Frank Zenker and Shiyang Yu's "A New Typology for Arguments From Authority"

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Zenker and Yu advocate extending the familiar dichotomous epistemic versus deontic division of authorities into a fourfold division, adding attractive and being a majority (group majority) as two further forms of authority. Their proposal immediately raises two critical questions:

1. Why do Zenker and Yu think that these two additional sources should be recognized?
2. Are Zenker and Yu's reasons sufficient to justify their fourfold typology?

In Section 1, the authors refer to a reason why the epistemic/deontic division needs to be extended: It ignores "important insights gleaned from Aristotle, Cicero, Boethius, and Locke" (p. 2). They discuss these sources in the course of their paper.

Zenker and Yu first consider Goodwin's proposal to distinguish epistemic, deontic, and dignity possessing sources. Although they reject dignity as an additional source, their discussion of certain questions which Goodwin raises is germane to their argument. First, Goodwin asks for criteria for distinguishing forms of authority. She sees three possible criteria—activity, capacity, and response. Which of these three properly distinguishes epistemic from deontic authority? Goodwin argues that it cannot be the activity criterion because performing some activities successfully requires both sharing knowledge and giving direction. One teaching some skill already has that skill at least to some degree and is in a position to give instruction, thus requiring both knowledge and direction. One exercise of authority is both epistemic and deontic. But why does a typology need to divide into mutually exclusive classes? Why does an instance which falls under more than one type show the typology to be deficient?

Goodwin also argues that the criterion cannot be based on some capacity which having knowledge or the right to direct involve. Some instances of authority apparently fall under neither criterion. No matter how much knowledge one has acquired in a certain field, one is not an authority if no one else recognizes one's superior knowledge. Likewise, no matter what authority some institution has granted some individual, if no one (other than the individual) recognizes that the institution has bestowed these powers, does the person have deontic authority? Goodwin objects. The criterion implies "*having* epistemic authority is derivative to [*sic*] being recognized as such, which is counterintuitive" (p. 11, italics in original). Again, I am not convinced. Do we rather have evidence that "authority" is ambiguous? In one sense, being an epistemic authority is simply a matter of possessing a superior amount of knowledge in a certain area. Having epistemic authority may be characterized with a subjunctive conditional: If one were to ask the authority a question in the area, the authority would give a competent answer (*ceteris paribus*). But if no one else knows that fact, would anyone turn to that individual for knowledge about that area? Would a person *be* an authority in a second sense indicating capacity to be in and enter into certain relations with others? But in the second sense, being recognized as

an epistemic authority is a necessary condition for having such authority. Is *this* sense counterintuitive?

Finding the capacity criterion deficient, Goodwin turns to the response-based principle to distinguish epistemic from deontic authority. “The response-based principle distinguishes authority types ‘by the reaction to *failure* to follow [an instance of that type] ordinarily evokes’” (J. L. Austin, “A Plea for Excuses,” quoted on p. 11, italics in original). To fail to respect an epistemic authority is imprudent, while failure to follow a deontic authority is disobedient. Is this criterion mutually exclusive as Goodwin requires? If a drill sergeant gives an order to turn right and a soldier turns left, the drill sergeant is not going to be very happy with this disobedience. There will be consequences. However, it is not obvious to me that such behavior is just disobedient. It is also imprudent, given its negative consequences. So it is not obvious to me that the response-based criterion successfully separates exclusively epistemic authority from deontic authority in all cases. But let us move on.

Goodwin argues that the response-based principle allows recognizing a third type of authority—dignity. One who disregards the authority of dignity is impudent. One is reminded here that the *argumentum ad verecundiam* label originally meant not an appeal to an authority outside his or her field of expertise but a charge that not to accept the word of some recognized authority betrays a lack of modesty. How dare one question the word of that authority? I do not see that Zenker and Yu have given any example or other explication of what failure to recognize the authority of dignity amounts to. But if someone questions a senior individual, is that person necessarily being impudent? Does it not depend on how the challenge is phrased, e.g., “with all due respect” or whether the challenger is prepared to justify that challenge with good reasons? Does being asserted by a senior individual endow an assertion with some rationally convincing character, as being asserted by an expert in a field of knowledge may create a presumption for what is asserted? Zenker and Yu point out that the response-based principle does not identify a clean-cut demarcation between responses which are disobedient and those that are impudent. Failure to follow a directive is being disobedient. But, depending on who issued the directive, it may also be impudent. So it seems that Goodwin’s proposal encounters *her* objection to the activity criterion. Hence there are serious problems with Goodwin’s tripartite typology.

By contrast with Goodwin, Zenker and Yu favor the capacity-based principle. A type of authority arises from a type of capacity—epistemic authority from knowledge, deontic authority from socially conferred power deriving, for example, from one’s role in a social unit. One would expect then that a typology of authorities would arise from a survey of types of power. This is exactly how Zenker and Yu proceed, turning to historical accounts of sources of power. They turn first to Locke. It might seem that Locke would regard dignity as a source of authority. If one who for some cause, such as knowledge or power, has a “Reputation in the common esteem with some kind of Authority,” then to question that authority is “thought a breach of Modesty” (Nidditch, 1975 ed., *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 686, quoted on p. 13). Citing the word of approved writers supports one’s point of view. Not to accept their testimony constitutes impudence. *Pace* Goodwin, do these remarks show that the dignity requiring respect constitutes an additional type of authority? Zenker and Yu argue that it does not. “Rather than be *constitutive* of authority, dignity would *mediate* how an authority type plays out socially” (p. 14, italics in original). Agents first possess epistemic or deontic authority, which then confers a derivative dignity on them.

Locke claims that authority belongs to those held in common esteem because of their “Parts (?), Learning, Eminency, Power, or some other Cause” (quoted on p. 13), suggesting four types of authority. Zenker and Yu claim that we can re-interpret the list by reviewing the

typologies of authorities put forward by Aristotle, Cicero, and Boethius. The re-interpretation yields a new typology of authorities, one more fine-grained than the epistemic versus deontic distinction”(p. 18). Aristotle cites all, the majority, the wise or good, actual judges of the present question or those whose authority is accepted by these judges, those whose judgment cannot be rejected because they have complete control over the persons who must accept their judgments, and finally those whom it would be unseemly to contradict, such as the gods. Following Zenker and Yu, we may present this list of sources this way: all/majority, deontic sources including judges of the present question and legal authorities, the wise or epistemic authorities, the good, and those unseemly to oppose. The authors claim that support for their interpretation is found in Cicero’s *Topics*, but I do not find this support in their discussion of Cicero. One point in this connection is important for their typology. Cicero holds that people acknowledge as authorities those they regard “as the kind of men they would like to be” (*Topica*, p. 78, quoted on p. 17). Cicero thus recognizes that authorities enjoy a *natural attractiveness* to audiences” (p. 17). The list should be extended then to include this type of authority. The concept of proportional majority, which Zenker and Yu claim to be found in Boethius, gives explanation of what “parts” can mean. The authority of parts is the authority of group majority (page 18) and is thus folded into the first type. The authors reject sources unseemly to oppose as a separate authority source. Their rationale: “All authority types entail that those who possess them enjoy some dignity” (p.16). Is this last point true? A Nazi officer has authority to give commands, but where is the officer’s dignity? By striking those unseemly to oppose as an authority source, the authors are left with four: all/majority, deontic, wise or epistemic, and the good. I do not see any rationale for their separating the wise from the good. But this may be due to the authors’ wanting to incorporate the good into the attractive following Cicero, who sees virtue or the appearance of virtue, including both moral and non-moral virtue such as “genius, industry and learning” (Cicero, *Topica*, quoted on p. 17) making those with such virtues attractive, people wanting to be like them.

In the last section of the paper, Zenker and Yu first list their four forms of authority—epistemic, deontic, attractive, and majority. They then introduce two further ways to classify authorities—source and mode, indicating that these distinctions are also part of their typology. The source gives an authority its authority—knowledge for epistemic, power for deontic, traits valued by an audience for the attractive form. Regarding majority, Zenker and Yu say it is grounded “only in a larger proportion” (p. 19). To me, this is unclear, but I believe they mean that majority authority is grounded in a majority of the audience favoring some standpoint. The mode concerns whether the authority resides with an individual or a group. The authors conclude presenting their typology by seeking to connect it with argument schemes via a further distinction between assertive and directive speech acts. They introduce this speech act distinction without discussion and claim without any argument that these are the only two speech acts needed. Since the epistemic, deontic, and attractive forms have two modes of being commanded and each of these six form/mode categories can be expressed by two speech acts, we now have twelve subschemas. The majority scheme has only one mode but may be expressed by either type of speech act. We now have fourteen sub-schemes. The authors now make a statement I find obscure: The two modes “apply equally to individuals and collectives” (p. 20). So it seems that in going from authority types to argument schemes, the mode distinction drops out completely. They indicate that the source distinction can introduce further subcategories. Zenker and Yu conclude their paper by “ringing the changes” on forms and speech acts correlating each of the eight types with an argument scheme. However, it seems to me that the generation of these argument schemes has been a combinatorial exercise rather than emerging from an examination

of concrete examples of these schemes. Furthermore, I find some of the types quite puzzling. For example, what does it mean for a deontic or attractive authority to assert P and why should one conclude from that to the correctness of P ? Because of these problems, I fail to see how the typology highlights issues in argument evaluation.

What of our two initial critical questions? Why do we need to recognize attractiveness and group majority as sources of authority besides knowledge and power and are the reasons adequate? Considering group majority first, Zenker and Yu cite a passage from Aristotle's *Rhetoric* for distinguishing all/majority, epistemic, and deontic sources of authority. What is the rationale for recognizing majority as a distinct source of authority? Also, while knowledge gives authority for making assertions and power for issuing directives, what does the majority licence? If a majority accepts a given assertion sufficient for common knowledge, then in this employment is not the majority an epistemic source? A candidate's winning a majority in a given election constrains the election authorities to declare the candidate a winner. This authority is deontic. We need an example of majority authority which is not an instance of either epistemic or deontic authority.

In discussing attractiveness in connection with discussing Cicero, Zenker and Yu claim that since audiences regard as authorities those they regard as models of what they would like to be, attractiveness is a source of authority. But could one object, as Kaszowy and Walton (2019, 289; see p. 14) object to the notion of dignity as a source of authority, that attractiveness fosters recognition and respect of authorities and enhances the persuasive force of their assertives and directives, rather than constituting a *source* in itself? Consequently, I fail to find that the authors have given us a compelling reason for recognizing attractiveness and proportional majority as separate sources of authority. As dignity is not a separate source of authority but rather "functions as a social mechanism of commanding authority" (p. 14), attractiveness functions as a social mechanism to draw attention to authority. Before proceeding with their promised future research as well as addressing the issue of relating their typology to argument schemes, I hope that Zenker and Yu will address these questions.