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Commentary on Haavard Koppang's "Broadening "in situ" for Improving Argument Evaluation?"

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In his wide-scoped paper "Broadening 'in situ' for improving argument evaluation?," Prof. Koppang seeks to find a way to coordinate accounts for argument evaluation from both psychology of argumentation (PSA) and philosophy of argumentation (PHA).

Prof. Koppang presents PSA as a rather new discipline based on *in vitro* procedures, and focused on the analysis of small groups of individuals under controlled circumstances. The hold paradigm of argumentation, in relation to the objective that arguers are considered to pursue in PSA experiments, is persuasion. On the other hand, he presents PHA as a normative and theoretical discipline. Its characteristic methods are based on *in vivo* analysis (outside a lab).

I sympathize with Prof. Koppang's contentions about integrating such a different disciplines in order to achieve an integrated way for assessing arguments. I really believe this is a good direction for opening a line of study, which I believe is likely become rather fruitful. Besides, I find the procedure he follows in his paper appropriate. It is based on the separation of features from both fields of study, which can exhibit points in common (like some insights about the treatment of fallacies, or the types of debates that lead to the justification of a conclusion), in a way that the integration of both disciplines is shown as quite direct. Also, he does not let unmentioned some other features (for instance, the relation with the lab) that without any doubt make both disciplines seem rather distant. Despite that deepening into this last part makes it harder to prove his thesis, Prof. Koppang shows it, and then integrates it into his whole setting. I think this is an honest and right way to proceed.

Although, I have some doubts about the theoretical background Prof. Koppang is using in relation with the concepts of 'argumentation' and 'argument.' His paper is presented as dealing with argument evaluation. But when quoting Walton, Prof. Koppang states:

Walton (2001) takes this even further, according to Schiappa, when he argues that as long as definitions are lodged into place in government regulations and law, they serve particular interests and are even coercive (ibid. p. 169). Hence, attempts to define reality should be treated as an argument open to critical questioning and counter-definitions. Here "argument" has a double meaning – both claim *qua product* and *qua process* (Schiappa & Nordin, 2014, p. 9). Moreover, the process of argumentation evaluation is essential if you want to know what works and not only consider what is right and are satisfied with what occurs. (p. 151).

The last part of the paragraph leaves me doubtful about which meaning of argument is being used along the paper. I am not sure if the considerations Prof. Koppang presents in his paper about evaluation are applied to the product of an argumentation or to the argumentation process itself. When Section 3 (PSA and argumentation evaluation) is presented in p. 2, Prof. Koppang states "I introduce the PSA and argument evaluation with brief reference to argument

production in groups”: Does he mean argumentation (a communicative process) when he refers to “argument production?” And why is the section labeled as dealing with “argumentation evaluation” if it is described as dealing with “argument evaluation” and “argument production?”

There are some accounts of argumentation (PHA theories) that mark this difference, as Bermejo-Luque’s (2011). According to her, argumentations are second order speech-act complex composed of the constative speech-act of adducing (i.e., the reason) and the constative speech-act of concluding (i.e., the conclusion) (Bermejo-Luque, 2011, pp. 60-62). The acceptance of the conclusion on the basis of the reasons adduced is grounded on an inference. Thus, arguments are representations of the syntactic and semantic properties of the inferences underlying argumentations (which are communicative processes). I think that using a theoretical account of argumentation like the one proposed would give more precision and internal coherence to Prof. Koppang’s work.

I understand that the actual objective of the paper could be put forward as “integrating PSA and PHA features in order to build a coordinated approach for argument evaluation”. I think that a necessary condition for achieving it should be a deep analysis of PSA and PHA settings for argument evaluation. But I believe that the PHA state-of-the-art about argument evaluation has not been fully described.

In Section 2, Prof. Koppang analyses the relation between logic and argumentative schemes *versus* the capability of several PHA accounts (Toulmin, Schiappa, Walton) for evaluating *in situ* arguments. Accordingly, a PHA notion for evaluating arguments emerges: good arguments seem to be those in which good coherence is exhibited within the context in which they are uttered: “argument evaluation is dependent on definitions, context, needs and interest” (p. 4).

But there are more notions of PHA about argument evaluation, and some of them might accommodate better with the PSA setting that Prof. Koppang presents. Several PHA scholars define argumentation goodness with respect to several standards: persuasion to a universal audience, rational persuasion, etc. As Bermejo-Luque (2011, p. 14) summarizes:

In order to promote a characterization of argumentation goodness [...] Perelman proposed a definition of good argumentation as argumentation able to persuade a universal audience. For its part, Pragma-dialectics characterized good argumentation as “argumentation able to resolve a difference of opinion”; and Johnson suggested that good argumentation is argumentation achieving the rational persuasion of its addressee. The linguistic-pragmatic approach that I endorse can be said to be epistemological in characterizing good argumentation as argumentation able to justify its target-claim.

Maybe taking into account some of these standards would allow a better connection with the PSA account for evaluating arguments: persuasion. As Prof. Koppang states in p. 5: “M&S place the function of reasoning as argumentative, to devise and evaluate arguments *intended to persuade*” and in p. 1, “[...] the successful outcome of reasoning is the ability to persuade for action to adapt to specific situations”.

Nonetheless, Prof. Koppang has cleverly drawn a connection between PHA and PSA accounts of argument evaluation: fallacies. These are a fundamental feature of every PHA argument evaluation account. As van Eemeren, F. H. Garssen, B., Krabbe, E. C. W., Snoeck Henkemans, F., Verheij & Wagemans (2014, p. 25) state,

Virtually every normative theory of argumentation ...includes a treatment of the fallacies. The degree to which a theory of argumentation makes it possible to give

an adequate treatment of the fallacies can even be considered as a litmus test of the quality of the theory.

Prof. Koppang points out how can PSA and PHA complement each other in order to achieve a coordinated approach to the study of fallacies and, consequently, to the study of argument evaluation. Despite the lack of interest he assures PSA gives to the analysis of fallacies, it is interesting how the study of confirmation bias can contribute to show that people are prone to argue fallaciously. Prof. Koppang illustrates this (p. 11):

When the empirical research on the PSA shows that people are prone to fallacies as to production and evaluation of arguments (Wolfe, p. 92), it seems odd that it does not show interest in fallacies while aware of poor decisions.

And in p. 6 he deepens into this aspect, as well as he outlines PSA procedures for argument evaluation:

When people are asked to check out reasoning, they have a tendency to produce arguments depending on the conclusion. Thus, they are supporting or rebutting the argument and thereby engaged in a biased search for arguments. Yet, when people are supporting, they need less time compared to rebutting, which needs justification and more time. By looking for arguments contrary to their own conclusions people may find many weaknesses, and might function as procedure for circumventing confirmation bias under certain conditions, such as in the evaluation of arguments where this social mechanism and bias seems inactive.

Prof. Koppang also studies the relations between the objective of the arguer (truth *versus* persuasion) and the quality of the resulting argument (p. 9). I find it rather interesting and likely to relate with the concept of argumentation goodness (PHA). The consideration of the type of groups in which an argumentation takes place in relation with the quality of the argumentation is also pertinent and appropriate to connect with PHA:

When people are organized in small groups primed for genuine debates while evaluating arguments in a lab they are after the truth. However, when people placed outside a lab are swayed by a skilled flimflammer playing on prejudices and mass communication, the mind seems reduced to a social instrument wherein critical thinking and evidence are circumvented.

To sum up, I think the paper Prof. Koppang has written broadens the scope of argument evaluation, a typical PHA field that can be fruitfully complemented with PSA results about confirmation bias and fallacies. Maybe a deeper description of PHA theoretical approaches to the concepts of 'argumentation,' 'argument,' 'inference,' and 'reasoning' would increase the internal coherence of the text, as well as a deeper treatment of different PHA argument evaluation accounts. Despite of these criticisms, I am very sympathetic to Prof. Koppang's idea of coordinating the best features of PHA and PSA in order to fulfill an integrated assessment of *in situ* arguments.

References

- Bermejo-Luque, L. (2011). *Giving reasons: A linguistic-pragmatic approach to argumentation theory*. Dordrecht: Springer.
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