Pragmatic analyses of argumentation: Pragma-dialectics

**Argumentation** is a verbal, social and rational activity aimed at convincing a reasonable critic of a standpoint by putting forward a constellation of propositions justifying or refuting the proposition expressed in the standpoint.

PD aims to provide a general code of conduct for argumentative discussions:
- Argues that such a code needs to be based on a philosophical ideal of rationality and an empirical study of the argumentative practice.
- This general code of conduct is termed *critical discussion*.
- Integrates speech act theory of Grice and Searle.

Four metapremises of the approach:

*Externalization*: system of public commitment and accountability: beliefs etc. are expressed in a public system. We can only examine what has been expressed, i.e. externalized commitments.

*Socialization*: argumentation (as a process) does not consist of an individual privately drawing a conclusion but of a procedure of individuals in various roles trying to achieve rational agreement.
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*Functionalization*: mere structural description of an argument (though important) does not capture how the argumentation must be described through its purpose. The function is the verbal management of disagreement.

*Dialectification*: A dialectical procedure is valid depending on how efficient it is in furthering the resolution of disagreement.

**A model for critical discussion:**

*The aim* of critical discussion is to examine the acceptability of a given standpoint and it is resolved only if the parties involved reach an agreement on whether or not the standpoint is acceptable.

*The stages* of critical discussion are:

*Confrontation* stage: a difference of opinion presents itself through an opposition between a standpoint and nonacceptance of it.

*Opening* stage: the roles and the initial commitments are identified. A critical discussion can occur only if there is some agreement on the common starting point of the discussion.
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*Argumentation* stage: the party that acts as a proponent methodically defends the standpoint against the opponent’s challenges.

*Concluding* stage: the parties determine whether the proponent’s standpoint has been successfully defended. Depending on the decision, the parties have different obligations.

*Rules* for critical discussion:

1. *Freedom rule*: Parties must not prevent each other from putting forward standpoints or casting doubt on standpoints.
2. *Burden-of-proof rule*: A party who puts forward a standpoint is obliged to defend it if asked to do so.
3. *Standpoint rule*: A party’s attack on a standpoint must relate to the standpoint that has indeed been advanced by the other party.
4. *Relevance rule*: A party may defend his or her standpoint only by advancing argumentation related to that standpoint.
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5. Unexpressed premise rule: A party may not falsely present something as a premise that has been left unexpressed by the other party or deny a premise that he or she has left implicit.

6. Starting point rule: No party may falsely present a premise as accepted starting point, or deny a premise representing an accepted starting point.

7. Argument scheme rule: A standpoint may not be regarded as conclusively defended if the defense does not take place by means of an appropriate argument scheme that is correctly applied.

8. Validity rule: The reasoning in the argumentation must be logically valid or capable of being made valid by making explicit one or more unexpressed premises.

9. Closure rule: A failed defense of a standpoint must result in the protagonist retracting the standpoint, and a successful defense of a standpoint must result in the antagonist retracting his or her doubts.

10. Usage rule: Parties must not use any formulations that are insufficiently clear or confusingly ambiguous, and they must interpret the formulations as carefully and accurately as possible.
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Rules and fallacies

The rules constitute a standard or norm for critical discussion: a violation of any of the rules, when considered as substantial, is a fallacy.
- Fallacy is then a speech act which frustrates efforts to resolve a difference of opinion reasonably.
- Even though no discussion actually fulfills all the characteristics of a critical discussion, which is an ideal model, the rules are important in so far as the discussion is considered as an attempt at a resolution of a difference.

Examples:
1. Freedom rule: Parties must not prevent each other from putting forward standpoints or casting doubt on standpoints.
   - Any move that restricts or makes it more difficult to examine the standpoints, e.g. declaring a point sacrosanct, or reducing the credibility of the other party, e.g. ad baculum, ad hominem, ad misericordiam.
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3. **Standpoint rule**: A party’s attack on a standpoint must relate to the standpoint that has indeed been advanced by the other party.
   - This rule is typically violated by straw man attacks.

6. **Starting point rule**: No party may falsely present a premise as accepted starting point, or deny a premise representing an accepted starting point.
   - This rule is violated by denying premises that clearly belong to the common starting point and thereby denying the opponent *ex concessis* argumentation, or by presenting a premise as belonging to the common starting point, i.e. by begging the question.

7. **Argument scheme rule**: A standpoint may not be regarded as conclusively defended if the defense does not take place by means of an appropriate argument scheme that is correctly applied.
   - This rule is typically violated by relying on an inappropriate argument scheme, or by using the correct scheme incorrectly.
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PD acknowledges three main argument schemes:

A) symptomatic:
- Y is true of X,
- because: Z is true of X,
- and: Z is symptomatic of Y

“Jack is an experienced lecturer, because he uses little time in preparing lectures.”
- being experienced lecturer is true of Jack
- because: using little time in preparing is true of Jack
- and: using little time in preparing is symptomatic of experience

Critical questions:
- Is Y necessary of Z?
- Is Y sufficient for Z?

Violations: *argumentum ad populum* (something is true because it is generally believed) and hasty generalization.
B) Comparison scheme (analogy):

Y is true of X,
because: Y is true of Z
and: Z is comparable to X.

“Leo should be given five euros weekly allowance, because that is what Lydia got.”

Being given five euros is true of Leo
because: Being given 5 euros was true of Lydia
and: Leo and Lydia are comparable.

Critical question:

Are there any significant differences between Z and X?

Violations: false analogy
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C) Causal scheme (analogy):

Y is true of X,
because: Z is true of X
and: Z leads to X.

“Lydia must have read a lot in poor light, because she has weak eyes.”

Having weak eyes is true of Lydia
because: Having read a lot in poor light is true of Lydia
and: Reading in poor light leads to weak eyes.

Critical question:

Does Z always lead to Y?

Violations: *argumentum ad consequentiam*, *post hoc ergo propter hoc*.

Pragmatic argumentation: Doctors should stop/start wearing white jackets, because this will create a distance between the doctor and the patient.
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Structure of argumentation

Single: Petrevsky has earned a gift, because she has worked hard for it.

Multiple: You cannot have met my mother at Marks&Spencer’s in Sheringham last week, because there is no M&S in Sheringham and my mother died two years ago.

Coordinative: We had to go out and eat, because we had nothing to eat at home and all the shops were closed.

Subordinative: I can’t help you paint your room next week, because I have no time, because I have to study for an exam, or I’ll lose my scholarship, because I am not making good progress with my studies, since I’ve been at it more than five years.
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Further notes

- The model is an ideal model: any argument can be analyzed with it to the extent that the argument can be taken as an attempt at justifying the conclusion. This does not mean that every discussion is or should be a critical discussion.

- Has later been complemented by the concept of “Strategic Maneuvering”: the use of presentational devices etc. to include rhetorical aspects.

- Many formulations of the approach use the term ‘validity’, but it does not subscribe to the view that this is semantic validity, or that they thereby would mean the logical consequence relation.

- Aims to provide a normative code of conduct: PD is committed to rationality and reasonableness: argumentation is supposed to convince rationally. An argument does this if it is acceptable to a reasonable critic: it proceeds from acceptable starting points by acceptable rules.

- Philosophical background in Popper’s critical rationalism, sees the value of discussion in the systematic critical testing of viewpoints but explicitly disavows connections to justification(ism).
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A language user taking part in an argumentative discussion is a rational language user if in the course of the discussion he performs only speech acts which accord with a system of rules acceptable to all the discussants which furthers the creation of a dialectic which can lead to a resolution of the dispute at the center of discussion. (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, *Speech Acts in Argumentative Discussions*, 1984: p. 18)

But why these rules? Or, why is one reasonable if one follows these rules?

Van Eemeren and Grootendorst argue that in order to be rational, the process of argumentation must fulfill two different senses of validity: *problem-solving validity* and *conventional validity*. A rule has problem-solving validity if the rule is adequate in resolving a difference of opinion; it has conventional validity if it is accepted as valid by the discussants. (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1988, “Rationale for a pragma-dialectical perspective”).

- The case of two racists.
- The case of gambler’s fallacy.
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Why avoid reference to justification?

The reason van Eemeren and Grootendorst give in the original formulation of the PDA (1984: 16) is that they want to avoid any commitment to *a priori* axioms. They argue that argumentation should avoid regarding argumentation theory purely as an attempt at justification, because they fear this might create harmful links between argumentation and justificationism (or *letzt Begründung* philosophy). Van Eemeren and Grootendorst argue that such justificationism can never escape the *Münchhausen trilemma* (MT).

This MT comes from H. Albert. It consist of the claim that ultimately every justificationist faces a choice between (1) an infinite regression, (2) a logical circle, or (3) the breakdown of the justificatory attempt at an arbitrary point (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1984: endnote 9) Therefore, van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984: 16) argue that

“[i]n our view, the danger of that can best be avoided by adopting a Popperian critical-rationalist standpoint and assuming the *inherent fallibility* of human reason while elevating the notion of *critical testing* to the status of a guiding principle for the solution of problems.”
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- So, PD argues that the relativism is not a problem, because by Münchausen Trilemma, we have no secure basis anyway.
  

- If PD, by its rejection of justificationism, means that justification is infallible, they are right to reject it.

- If they mean that there is no positive justification (as Popper originally claimed, but later accepted “a whiff of inductivism”), then justificationism is avoided at the cost of absurdity.

Consider the argument:

Q: Cheney lobbied Senators to defeat the McCain amendment prohibiting torture by all US agencies and personnel.
Therefore, P: Cheney approved of and encouraged the torture of suspected ‘terrorists’ by U.S. agencies and personnel.

Does Q’s justificatory power in respect to P really come down to acceptability?

On counterexamples:
- The choice of premises must be left to different disciplines, a theory of argument can only tell what can be done with the premises.

But this misses the point: reasonability is not the same as acceptability.

- Schemes need to be problem-valid, i.e. to further the resolution of the critical discussion.

But the resolution of a critical discussion is not the same as a reasonable resolution.

Furthermore, problem validity is not defined independently of the model and its motivation in earlier articles is ambivalent between naturalism and normative epistemology.
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Van Eemeren and Grootendorst hold that scientific methodology derives its reasonableness from the critical discussion, making use of argumentation and aiming at a consensus of opinion, which takes place in what is called the Science Forum. This forum acts as a monitor of argumentation (1988).

Van Eemeren and Grootendorst note two difficulties with this:

- First, the Science Forum cannot be identified with any specific group of people. They also suggest that the Science Forum could be defined by first deciding which rules are important, and then seeing which scientists apply them. The soundness criterion would play the decisive role.
- The second problem is that some philosophers of science have suggested that a set of methodological rules could be compiled, which would represent reasonability in an absolute sense. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst seem to reject this idea, and note that the problems of argumentation theory show that the transposition of the problem of methodological rules and criteria to rules and criteria of argumentation and discussion cannot solve the problem. (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1988: 273-274)
However, later they note:

In fact, it appears that the Science Forum could better be characterized by approaching it the other way around: by first establishing which rules of discussion are taken into account, and then which scientists apply them. (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1988: 273)

Garssen and van Laar, as a response to criticism by Siegel and Biro, opt for critical discussion without any justificatory potential; only critical testing.

But why would we be interested in such a thing, if we have no reason to believe that the received results are justified? Does the criticism not improve the epistemic worth of the standpoint examined?

They must either withdraw their claim to substantial normativity or be reduced to epistemological approach.
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- The fact that PD gives us no account of ‘validity’ is a serious drawback. We want a theory that would tell us something about when the argument is actually good.
- PD gives us a account of one type of argumentative discussion, but is it enough? Are there many discussions like it? PD claims comprehensiveness...

General question to dialectical approaches:
Just how do the dialectical factors affect ‘the workings’ of an argument? Could we not just as well speak of complex arguments, instead of argumentation?
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The ‘dialectical’ requirement:
- The empirical evidence shows that we are often poor reasoners. Not only do we often endorse invalid arguments and reject valid ones, we also fall victim to several other informal problems, such as myside-bias, and use unreliable heuristics in reaching conclusions.
- Nevertheless, we are able, if we concentrate on arguments, to weed out bad arguments, spot weaknesses, and overcome biases etc.
- This duality is an empirical reason to think that we should be reflective about our own reasoning, and be prepared to meet the challenges from other reasoners.
- Therefore, it seems legitimate to hold that knowledge is in this sense dialectically conditioned: we are often not entitled to our beliefs if we are not able to meet challenges.
- But this does not in itself mean that the dialectical conditions are independent of epistemic conditions, only that the dialectical level is important, because it serves epistemological purposes.
- For example, how do we decide when a challenge is legitimate, if we do not refer to epistemic (personal and evidential) reasons?
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J. Turri (“Propositional and Doxastic Justification”, Phil. and Phen. R., vol. 80, 2, 2010): The following claim is false:

(Basis) IF (i) \( p \) is propositionally justified for \( S \) in virtue of \( S \)’s having reason(s) \( R \), and (ii) \( S \) believes \( p \) on the basis of \( R \), THEN \( S \)’s belief that \( p \) is doxastically justified.

(P1) Mansour had a motive to kill the victim.
(P2) Mansour had previously threatened to kill the victim.
(P3) Multiple eyewitnesses place Mansour at the crime scene.
(P4) Mansour’s fingerprints were all over the murder weapon.

(Proper Reasoning) (P1 – P4) make it overwhelmingly likely that Mansour is guilty. (P1 – P4) are true. Therefore, Mansour is guilty.
(Improper Reasoning) The tea leaves say that (P1 – P4) make it overwhelmingly likely that Mansour is guilty. (P1 – P4) are true. Therefore, Mansour is guilty.
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Turri holds that:

(PJ) Necessarily, for all S, p, and t, if p is propositionally justified for S at t, then p is propositionally justified for S at t BECAUSE S currently possesses at least one means of coming to believe p such that, were S to believe p in one of those ways, S’s belief would thereby be doxastically justified.

But, if we need to use DJ in the definition of PJ, can we hold that A1 and A2 are independent?

- No, Turri is defining PJ for someone, not PJ as such.

Regardless, if Turri establishes the need to use the correct inference relation, but the empirical evidence shows that we often do not use the correct inference relation, is there not good reason to check whether the proponent of the argument has used the correct relation if we are to believe him? This checking can only be done dialectically?