

Book Reviews

Frans H. van Eemeren and Bart Garssen (Eds.). (2008). *Controversy and Confrontation, Relating Controversy Analysis With Argumentation Theory*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. Pp. xii, 1-278. Hardbound. ISSN 1574-1583. €105, US\$158.

Since the first volume appeared in 2005, the collection *Controversies* has brought together pieces of work related to the field of argumentation, giving particular attention to those that are concerned with theoretical and practical problems connected with discursive controversy and confrontation. Authors such as P. Barrotta, M. Dascal, S. Frogel, H. Chang and D. Walton had already either edited or written previous editions to the present volume (volume six) of the collection. F.H. van Eemeren and B. Garssen (the former has already, with P. Houtlosser, edited the second volume of this collection) are responsible for compiling and editing this collection.

In this volume van Eemeren and Garssen edit works they conceive as being akin to those elements which, in argumentation discourse, serve to resolve—or often to present—differences of opinion. However, it should be added that this is not a mere editing job, but rather the result of an intellectual collaboration between two international research groups dedicated to a common field—consisting, on the one hand, of controversies and, on the other, of argumentation.

Readers may well ask themselves frankly what the study of controversies (represented by the research team led by M. Dascal and the *International Association for the Study of Controversies* [IASC]) has to contribute to the field of argumentation (represented by the research team linked to van Eemeren and the *International Society for the Study of Argumentation* [ISSA]), and vice versa. Are the governing communication principles within controversies the same as those that must be present in all consistent argumentation? Do controversies differ according to the area of research or communication in which they are carried on? And in what epoch? Does the last question cast any light on the argumentation processes as such? Is a prior argumentation theory needed to analyse controversies?

In the chapter *Dichotomies and types of debate*, The Leibnizian thinker, Marcelo Dascal, lines up the practical and theoretical con-

sequences of using dichotomies for controversial discourses. Dascal presents this research topic concerning the nature of dichotomies with the aid of an example he offers as paradigmatic: the case of the polemical discourse between Leo Strauss and Alfred Stern about historicism. Taking two quotations from these authors, Dascal presents the Stern-Strauss polemic as a variant of the absolutism *versus* relativism debate. Stern's position consists of considering historicism as an antithesis of the fundamental idea claimed by defenders of the existence of natural right or, ultimately, a universal concept of humanity or a conception of human reason identical with itself and timeless, in spite of any socio-cultural differences. Subsequently, Dascal brings in a quote from Strauss, in which the author states that if human intelligence has been unable to resolve the problem of the principles of justice in a universally valid way, then the idea of natural right as such seems untenable. Both authors present a critique of a thesis with which their own position is antithetical. Considering that their positions are (taken individually) antithetical or incompatible with respect to the opposing thesis put forward by each of them, neither author presents an alternative to the dichotomy, but instead both carry to extremes the image of a historicism that, ultimately, is nothing more than an undoubtedly exaggerated concept and a product of their dichotomic discursive strategy. In discursive strategies that present an unsurmounted dichotomy, we often find a radicalisation of incompatibility presented in the form of a polarity, to which there is no apparent alternative. In this connection, in his contribution to the volume, Dascal delves into the concept of *de-dichotomisation*, and also the so-called *discursive strategies of de-dichotomisation*, in order to present another characteristic mark of controversies: that these extremes appear in them only at first, as they are surmounted at once, or else they simply overflow. The investigation presented by Dascal stems from the familiar Leibnizian distinction between the concepts of discussion, dispute and controversy—a distinction the Argentinean philosopher Ezequiel de Olaso liked to recall in many of his writings.

In the chapter *Charles Darwin versus George Mivart*, Anna Carolina Regner describes a familiar polemic in the light of a conceptual framework and argumentation strategies which, from the point of view of the controversy to which they gave rise, contributed firstly to the shaping and then to the defence of certain scientific theories. Regner's standpoint is interesting in that she highlights the fact that the different theories of argumentation with which one may tackle polemical discursive exchanges are also models that serve to capture, structure and evaluate the arguments considered as cases.

In *Scientific demarcation and metascience*, Thomas M. Lessl calls attention to a matter related to the recognition of science's speculative aspects. When the speculative dimension of science is

played down so as to contrast and distinguish scientific discourse with respect to religious or moral discourse, we immediately run the risk of stripping value from certain public commitments to decision-making which often accompany the discovery and support of the results of research. Lessl mentions, for example, the case of global warming.

In *Reforming the Jews, rejecting marginalization: The 1799 German debate of Jewish emancipation in its controversy context*, Mirela Saim reflects on the controversial polemic between D. Friedländer, W.A. Teller and F. Schleiermacher concerning the baptisms of convenience in the light of the controversial problem of Jewish people's rights in 18th century Europe. The author concentrates on the argument put forward in this respect by Friedländer, and finally maintains that his inclination (somewhat rhetorical) to accept the baptisms of convenience reflects the desperation of the Jewish people about their own condition.

In chapter six, Gerd Fritz proposes an inquiry in *Communication principles for controversies: A historical perspective*. Fritz claims that it is by virtue of certain principles of communication that controversies are presented to us in an ordered or accessible form from the point of view of their configuration or practical deliberation. The author plots a prototypically Leibnizian course in the study of controversy and mentions a very complete line-up of principles relating to the existence of controversies, with the idea that only they can guide polemical discourse. Fritz gives particular attention to the studies undertaken by Goldenbaum and Dieckmann of the 18th and 19th centuries in the light of different controversies that took place in Germany. The principles set out by Fritz are eminently practical in the sense that they would have to guide the conduct of polemicists; and, in fact, they were observed, for better or worse, as maxims or rules applied to discourse in the European university culture of modern times. Therefore, all of them are related to, and, in a way, subject to the principles of courtesy that ensure social order, effectiveness and acceptability of not only controversies themselves, but also of controversial conduct.

On the role of pragmatics, rhetoric and dialectic in scientific controversies, Ademar Ferreira claims that scientific activity has always been immersed in controversies. However, the fact that some discussions come to attain the rank of controversies must be attributed to aspects such as the cognitive goals and assumptions implicit in the inquiry. The article presents an analysis of the scientific production of knowledge in line with a model or, rather, a conception of language according to which a relation exists between the process of generation and that of knowledge justification. Ferreira arrives at the conclusion that language is profoundly bound up with the cognitive processes relating to scientific inquiry, as well as with the supposed increase of knowledge.

In *A “dialectic ladder” of refutation and dissuasion*, Cristina Marras and Enrico Euli present an imaginary scenario relating to the taxonomy of six conflicts of a social and political type. With the aim of changing traditional notions used for dissuasion and refutation, they choose arenas associated with likeness, convergence, analogy and compatibility.

In *Responding to objections*, Ralph H. Johnson underlines the importance of knowing how to respond to objections in order to develop the activity of producing good arguments. In his article he concentrates especially on two questions: what makes an objection a strong one; and what could be the possible responses to a (strong) objection, aside from the factors that determine the strength of a determinate response to an objection. Johnson analyses the three possible scenarios relating to the response to an objection, namely: when the person arguing considers the objection to be lacking in strength and, therefore, maintains her original argument; when the person arguing understands the objection to have a certain strength but of a minor nature; and, lastly, when the objection is a strong one and, therefore, the stated argument must be revised. In the light of this classification, Johnson claims that the identity of an argument is the function relating its propositional content to its subsequent inferential relations. Moreover, he adds that insofar as the said relation does not prevent the said identity from being preserved, to that extent the argument’s identity is in fact preserved. This would indicate that the property to which Johnson alludes may become evident only as a result of criticism, so that the identity and integrity of an argument can manifest themselves only throughout the history of their dialectic relation with objections of a different nature and, especially, with those that turn out to be strong.

In *Pragmatic inconsistency and credibility* Jan Albert van Laar establishes the existence of three types of variants when it comes to assessing pragmatic inconsistency as a strategic manoeuvre. Van Laar asserts that there are dialectic situations in which inconsistency is legitimate, and he examines them in line with the distinction, set out by E.C.W. Krabbe, between the fundamental level of dialogue and metadialogue.

Frans van Eemeren, Bart Garssen and Bert Meuffels are responsible for the chapter entitled *Reasonableness in confrontation: Empirical evidence concerning the assessment of ad hominem fallacies*. In their contribution, the authors examine how far reasons for rejecting *ad hominem* fallacies relate to values derived from the principle of courtesy. In order to maintain their point of view—according to which the rejection of the use of fallacious arguments of the type mentioned is not to be attributed strictly to values of courtesy—they claim up to five sources of empirical evidence for discounting the above explanation. These sources consist of the results of surveys carried out in five countries: Holland, United

Kingdom, Spain and Indonesia and relate to the degree of reasonableness that the respondents were inclined to grant to the *ad hominem* fallacies. This first part of their reflections leads to a second, in which a relation is established between reasonableness and persuasion in discussions. It is claimed that in ordinary discussions we tend to consider as persuasive that which we consider reasonable and that, in its turn, our conception of what is reasonable corresponds with the theoretical-critical rules of the pragma-dialectic theory of argumentation that they (the authors) put forward.

Managing disagreement space in multi-party deliberation deals with the difficult subject of decision-making in deliberative processes. Mark Aakhus and Alena L. Vasilyeva present the problem posed by the potential for disagreement when it is extended and reinforced to the point that decision-making seems impossible. The authors analyse the empirical case of a meeting in a small town in the north-east of the USA between local leaders and the representatives of an urban development company who are discussing a housing plan designed for that community. The authors analyse the notion of disagreement space in this case. To this end they follow the basic principles of the pragma-dialectic theory of van Eemeren and Grootendorst.

In *Predicaments of politicization in the debate over abstinence-only sex education*, Sally Jackson analyses a report written by scientists from different fields, which appeared in 2004 under the George W. Bush administration. *Scientific Integrity in Policy-making: An Investigation into the Bush Administration's Misuse of Science*, was the title of the said manifesto. It set out to denounce the placing of scientific discoveries at the service of political ends, and also the illegitimate practices with which such acts were carried on, salient among which was the selection of politicians to participate as members of scientific groups with consultative functions. With this debate in mind, the author examines the science politics of the said administration in topics relating to sex education. Lastly, Jackson claims that the political debate generally develops on a very different plane to others, ending up by referring to problems concerning some values and goals or others. The limitations implicit in this approach (that used by politics) make it an appropriate place to set out differences of opinion and disagreements, but they disqualify it as a medium for the resolution of those same oppositions.

In *Rhetoric of science, pragma-dialectics, and science studies* Gábor Kutrovátz devotes a chapter to analysing the effects of T. Kuhn's work on scientific practice, with special attention to the fact that the linguistic medium is considered more and more to be a constitutive part of the scientific production of knowledge. The author brings the pragma-dialectic viewpoint closer to certain social studies of science. Also, Gábor A. Zemplén uses the pragma-

dialectic model to study part of the Newton-Lucas correspondence in the last chapter, *Scientific controversies and the pragma-dialectical model*.

From a final reading of the book one appreciates clearly the need to identify the structure and strategic use of arguments so as to integrate even more systematically both schools of thought: the one originating from studies of controversies and the other from the field of argumentation theories.

Van Eemeren and Garssen present this volume as the result of a joint study of convergence and rapprochement. The editors consider—rightly, in my opinion—that the application of the argumentation field to the analysis of argumentational confrontations, and even to controversies, will do well to go beyond and surpass studies centring on the experimental sciences in order to concentrate on political and cultural ambits in a broad sense. Meanwhile, this volume already contributes substantively to the argumentational study of confrontation and to that of controversy.

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