

Dialogue-in-process. Review of Frans H. van Eemeren and B. Garsen (eds.), *Pondering on Problems of Argumentation. Twenty Essays on Theoretical Issues*. New York: Springer, 2009, XXI + 306pp., ISBN 978-1-4020-9164-3, \$ 199.00 (hc).

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1. Introduction: a fresco of a lively dialogue

When Raffaello Sanzio painted his well-know fresco The School of Athens (Figure 1) in the Stanza della Segnatura (Palazzi pontifici, Vatican), he was certainly unaware that his masterpiece might one day quasi-perfectly rep-



Figure 1: The School of Athens, Raffaello Sanzio, 1509¹

¹ Image reference: <http://commons.wikimedia.org>

resent the volume *Pondering on problems of argumentation*, edited by Frans van Eemeren and Bart Garssen. Raffaello in fact drew a community of scholars at work. Characteristic of this fresco as well as of the volume under review is the *ongoing dialogue* among the members of this community.

The papers collected in *Pondering on Problems of Argumentation* were selected from the Proceedings of the 6th Conference of the International Society for the Study of Argumentation (ISSA), held in Amsterdam in 2006. The ISSA conference may arguably count as a moment of dialogue and scientific exchange particularly precious for scholars of argumentation.

As the editors declare, the selection focuses on various *theoretical* issues which constitute open questions and problems arisen in the current studies of argumentation. If the selected authors are *pondering on these problems*, to stick to the title of the book, they are not doing it individualistically. Rather, they are engaged in a lively debate, which is a sign of a community in development. In this review, I will try to give as much space as possible to this debate.

First, I present the main themes of the volume, then focus on specific aspects that either have been systematically approached by different authors or that, in my opinion, deserve particular reflection. Finally, I shall point to issues on which the debate remains open.

2. Contents of the volume

As the editors explain in their introduction, the twenty contributions to this volume have been grouped into five areas (or conceptual blocks, see Figure 2) which, they believe, correspond to major open issues in contemporary research on argumentation: (I) Argumentative strategies, (II) Norms of reasonableness and fallaciousness, (III) Types of arguments and argument schemes, (IV) Structures of argumentation and (V) Rules for advocacy and discussion. These five areas are interconnected, as I try to show in Figure 2.

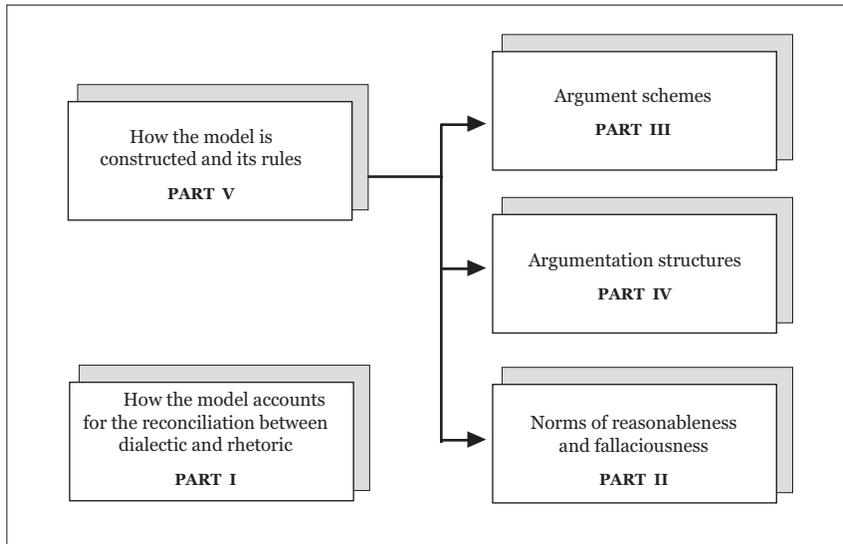


Figure 2: Parts of the volume interpreted as conceptual blocks.

Two of these areas – the first and the last one – concern general problems of argumentation theory. Let me start with the latter.

Area V is a reflection on the model(s) of argumentation that are currently available. For example, the model of a critical discussion proposed in *Pragma-dialectics* is discussed with the goal of refining it: Krabbe (*On how to get beyond the opening stage*, Ch. 17) reflects on the nature of the opening stage, while Goodwin (*Actually existing rules for closing arguments*, Ch. 20) focuses on the concluding stage. Gough (Ch. 18) elaborates on *acceptable premises* in a contribution that could thus be also connected to the opening stage; while Goodnight (Ch. 19) reflects on the specification of a model of argumentation in (rather frequent) cases of disparity, asymmetry or difference between the interlocutors, when an *advocate* is called to the aid of another person (p. 269).

Area I elaborates on current attempts to reconcile rhetoric and dialectic in the analysis of real-life argumentative practices. Two of the contribu-

tions in this area make use of the Pragma-dialectical notion of *strategic manoeuvring* introduced by van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2002): F. Snoeck-Henkemans' *Manoeuvring strategically with rhetorical questions* (Ch. 2) and A. van Rees' analysis of *dissociation* (Ch. 3). Furthermore, van Eemeren's and Houtlosser's *Seizing the occasion: parameters for analysing ways of strategic manoeuvring* (Ch. 1) is a contribution aimed at developing the notion of strategic manoeuvring by introducing the *parameters* that must be considered in each stage of a critical discussion to analyse its strategic function (p. 4). C. Ilie's contribution (Ch. 4) on the *strategies of refutation by definition in public speech*, albeit distinct from the Pragma-dialectical account, is however in line with the effort of evaluating rhetorical strategies in argumentation.

The other three areas (II, III and IV) concern more specific aspects, which are, however, part of a model of an argumentative discussion and which are certainly linked in many respects to the reconciliation of dialectics and rhetoric.

The area addressing the inferential link between a standpoint and a supporting argument, namely *argument schemes* (III), contains very homogeneous and interconnected reflections concerning existing and new typologies of argument schemes as well as the analysis of specific argument schemes. Three of the four authors in this section deal more or less explicitly with argumentation from *comparison* or *analogy*: B. Garssen (*Comparing the incomparable: figurative analogies in a dialectical testing procedure*, Ch. 10) and M. Doury (*Argument schemes typologies in practice: the case of comparative arguments*, Ch. 11) devote their paper to this problem, while an example ascribable to this category is analysed in Rigotti's contribution (Ch. 12, p. 171ff.).

Area IV addresses complex structures of argumentation (IV) from rather different points of view; from the critique to the usefulness of the somehow classical distinction between *linked* and *convergent* arguments made by G. C. Goddu (Ch. 13), to the application of the Toulmin model to study *visual arguments* (L. Groarke, Ch. 16). J. B. Freeman elaborates on the concept of *ampliative probability* of certain types of premises (Ch. 14), while A. Rocci analyses the role of epistemic and non-epistemic *modals in argumentation* (Ch. 15, see section 4, below).

Finally, area II considers the evaluation of argumentation from the per-

spective of norms for reasonableness and fallaciousness. T. Govier (Ch. 7) and D. Jaquette (Ch. 8) analyse specific fallacies in detail: *the fallacy of composition* and *Burleigh's fallacy* (see section 4) respectively. The remaining two contributions exhibit a broader intent; S. Jacobs (Ch. 5) discusses the delicate question whether, for some extreme contexts in which sound argumentation is not facilitated, even *fallacious moves* can equally be read as *rhetorical strategies for promoting more reasoned debate* (p. 72). Drawing on argumentation and persuasion effects research, D. J. O'Keefe's contribution (Ch. 6) deals with some open questions about *normatively responsible advocacy* and the means-end balance in the evaluation of proper advocacy conduct.

3. Beyond the border of the community: synchronous and longitudinal interdisciplinarity

Remarkably, numerous of the advances in argumentation emerging from the various contributions are made possible by an interdisciplinary attitude which allows the community of argumentation scholars to be open to enriching exchanges. The attempt to incorporate rhetoric in the argumentative analysis, characterising the first area of the book, is a classical example in this direction. Classical is also the integration of logical calculus in argumentative analysis in order to verify the logical validity of certain argument schemes; D. Jaquette provides an example of this type of analysis in his chapter *Deductivism and informal fallacies* (Ch. 8); J. Freeman also makes use of formal and informal logic in *Argument strength, the Toulmin model and ampliative probability* (Ch. 14). As I shall more extensively discuss in the next section, various authors refer to linguistic semantics in their analysis.

In *Actually existing rules for closing arguments* (Ch. 20), J. Goodwin reviews rules for the closure of arguments in U.S. trials. She carefully examines legal literature on this issue (see in particular the summarising table on p. 296). D. J. O'Keefe discloses his intention to "provoke" argumentation theorists by highlighting some of the results of persuasion research. His contribution, *Normatively responsible advocacy: some provocations from persuasion effects research* (Ch. 6), concludes with a plea for considering

the means/ends balance in the analysis of normatively desirable argumentative conduct, which “cannot be oriented only to the analysis of argumentative devices themselves, but rather must be situated within a broader understanding of the larger ends sought” (p. 88).

Looking at this volume, interdisciplinarity could be also intended – in a broader sense – in a longitudinal understanding as a dialogue with the past and, in particular, with the tradition of classical rhetoric and the medieval reflection on logic and argumentation. We do not stand on the shoulder of giants inactively; we are also able to pursue a “dialogue” with them, criticize them and inherit what is relevant to current argumentation studies. In particular, D. Jaquette (Ch. 8) analyses and criticizes a provoking but fallacious reasoning, proposed in 1323 by Walter Burleigh in his *De puritate artis logicae tractatus longior* (*Longer Treatise on the Purity of Logic*). M. Kraus (*From figure to argument: contrarium in Roman rhetoric*, Ch. 9) takes us some centuries back to analyse the concept of the “contrarium” argument. Considering different texts – from the *Rhetoric to Herennius* to Cicero’s and Quintilian’s rhetorical works – *contrarium* seems to oscillate between a proper type of argument and a rhetorical figure pertaining to the domain of presentational devices. In *The duties of advocacy: argumentation under conditions of disparity, asymmetry and difference* (Ch. 19), G. T. Goodnight provides a rich overview of the role of *advocacy*, from the classical world (Greece and Rome) to the contemporary one. Thanks to Goodnight’s critical analysis and via the history of a concept like *advocacy*, we are brought to understand contexts and forms of argumentation through time; the result is a vivid picture of the goals and expectations surrounding advocates living in very different historical periods, from Pericles (p. 272) to the American pioneers (pp. 275-276) or Lady Diana (p. 280).

The indirect question that motivates the title to Rigotti’s contribution, *Whether and how classical topics can be revived within the contemporary argumentation theory* (Ch. 12), explicitly refers to the kind of longitudinal interdisciplinarity I have tried to sketch. Rigotti aims at proposing a contemporary model of argument schemes (topics), well grounded in argumentation studies; yet this model stems from consideration of classical and medieval contributions to a model of topics. This is reflected in the typology of *loci* he presents (p. 168) as well as in the analysis of the inferential structure of single argumentations (pp. 170 and 173). In both cases, past ap-

proaches are critically revisited and integrated in an original and consistent analysis.

4. Semantics and the evaluation of argumentative discourse

In my opinion, the role of an accurate semantic analysis in the evaluation of argumentative practices is of particular significance. I am taking up various authors' suggestion in this respect, since many of them are – more or less directly – making use of instruments from linguistic semantics to complete their analyses in different respects.

Following an observation by Aristotle, Rigotti (Ch. 12) remarks that “a fine semantic analysis is in every case useful to apply as a preliminary treatment of the statements that are involved in the argumentative procedures, in order to avoid polysemies and other sources of fallacies”. Jaquette (Ch. 8) is of the same opinion, since he makes uses of semantic analysis to discover a fallacy. The reasoning he examines, which was proposed by Burleigh in the Middle Ages, is the following:

“I say that you are an ass; therefore I say that you are an animal.
I say that you are an animal; therefore, I say the truth.
I say that you are an ass; therefore, I say the truth”.

It is evident that the conclusion does not deductively follow from the premises but, at first sight, it might not be clear why. For this reason, such reasoning claims to threaten logic; yet it is, as the author shows, logically invalid (p. 111) because of the semantics of the terms used here. As the author puts it: “Hypothetical syllogism is deductively valid only insofar as it involves not merely uniform ‘syntactical’ terms loosely adapted from ordinary language, but only referentially univocal terms that designate precisely the same objects or properties” (p. 113). In this case, Jaquette identifies the source of ambiguity in the phrase “to be an animal”. On this point, his analysis could be refined by translating Burleigh's asinine fallacy into an equivalent but different one. Let us imagine we refer to a German citizen and comment: “I say that you are Italian; therefore, I say that you are European. I say that you are European; therefore, I say the truth. I say that you are Ital-

ian; therefore, I say the truth". Perhaps, this equivalent but different formulation makes it clear that the semantic problem rather lies in the relation between the predicates Italian-European ('ass-animal' in the other example), which are not equivalent (so, saying that one is Italian entails that one is European; but saying that one is European does not entail that one is Italian).

The importance of semantic analysis is also highlighted at another level which concerns the exploitation of semantics in argumentative strategies. A. van Rees (Ch. 3) and C. Ilie (Ch. 4) both analyse how "playing" with the meanings of words, through the use of *dissociation* and *definition* respectively (two distinct but interrelated phenomena), can be a purposeful move in a complex argumentative strategy.

Finally, A. Rocci (*Modalities as indicators in argumentative reconstruction*, Ch. 15) presents a fine analysis of the semantics of modality and connects it to argument reconstruction. He proposes a classification of epistemic and non-epistemic modals and their possible argumentative functions (p. 219ff.).

5. Argumentation in context

"I think it is fair to say that if arguers found themselves in ideal circumstances they would have no need to argue", warns Scott Jacobs (p.62). This remark invites the analysis of the actual contexts in which real argumentative practices are embedded. Recent research has shown increased interest in contextualised argumentation; some authors recognize that out-of-context argumentation simply does not exist (van Eemeren et al. 2009). Although *Pondering on problems of argumentation* is not focused on the contexts of argumentation, many of the examples and the analyses still refer to various contexts.

If we look at *which* contexts are tackled in the various chapters, however, an interesting picture emerges. The majority of the contributions refer either to the context of *political debate* (in a broad sense, including various forms of media reports, parliamentary debate, etc.) or of *public discourse*, or *legal argumentation*, particularly in the domain of trials (Table 1)².

² "The majority of the contributions" does not mean all of them. Let me mention in particular the important examples of health communication (O'Keefe, Ch. 6) and Govier's

<i>Political argumentation</i>	<i>Public discourse</i>	<i>Juridical argumentation</i>
Emmeline Pankhurst’s speech “Militant suffragists”, delivered in Harford (Connecticut) on November 13, 1913 (Ilie, Ch. 4).	Satirical open letter, published online, about the Bible as foundational text for social policy (Jacobs, Ch. 5).	(Fictional) trial against the alleged murderer Moosbrugger in Musil’s <i>Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften</i> (van Eemeren and Houtlosser, Ch. 1).
G. Buffi’s discourse at the origin of the political justification of the founding of the University of Lugano (Rigotti, Ch. 12).	The fit-by-nature argument on women (Gough, Ch. 18).	Examples of rules for closing arguments taken from U.S. trials (Goodwin, Ch. 20).
Political cartoons as visual argumentation (Groarke, Ch. 16).	Forms of advocacy – public discourse (Goodnight, Ch. 19).	Forms of advocacy – juridical discourse (Goodnight, Ch. 19).
Political discussion on Kyoto’s protocol (Gough, Ch. 18).		

Table 1: Contexts of application predominantly considered in this volume.

The contributions shown in Table 1 deal with highly institutionalised and rule-based contexts in which argumentative discourses are orations that are accurately prepared and then “performed”, normally by professionals trained for this purpose. Of course, there is nothing wrong with this selection *per se*. On the contrary, we should acknowledge that the selected contexts are highly argumentative. In fact, they are somewhat “traditional” contexts of argumentative analysis. Still, consider the synoptic table I have tried to reconstruct to picture this phenomenon (Table 1). I take this selection (which is not *jointly* intended, since authors did not jointly agree to choose these contexts) to be a symptom for current state of argumentation studies. It may also point to a need for new directions of research. In my opinion,

interesting application of the fallacy of composition to the conflict resolution processes enabled by truth commissions (Ch. 7). I skip a couple of further examples that are mentioned but not extensively discussed in other chapters.

whatever their importance, we should not limit ourselves to traditional contexts of analysis; it would be wise to approach new contexts of analysis, as some authors have started to do (cf. some of the contributions in Rigotti and Greco Morasso 2009). We might also find it interesting to develop more analyses of contexts in which argumentation is not, so to speak, *pre-packaged*, but develops in face-to-face interaction (e.g., in dispute mediation, negotiation, health communication, family interactions, teaching and learning activities...). We might consider contexts in which the dialogue is not a sort of fight on pre-determined standpoints, but in which opinions are created through critical discussion, in interpersonal or intrapersonal settings (Dascal 2005). Other interesting contexts would be those in which argumentation contributes not only to determining one or the other course of action, but also to increase knowledge and cognitive development, scientific debate or learning/teaching being activity types of this kind. In the latter activity types, we could also identify interactions in which the arguers (or *proto-arguers*³) are not adult professionals but young children, for example trying to defend an opinion at school or in their family.

A corollary to my programmatic observation is that including further contexts of analysis would mean to further enlarge the boundaries of interdisciplinary dialogue in order to better understand the considered contexts.

6. “I agree”. But why? The acceptability of premises

Gough’s *Testing for acceptable premises within systems of belief* (Ch. 18) raises the important and delicate issue of the acceptability of premises. As Gough states, his paper represents a comment on Freeman’s *Acceptable Premises: an epistemic approach to an informal logic problem* (2005), highlighting some open questions and problems. In any case, the problem of *acceptability* of premises is a serious one for argumentation theory; it does not merely amount to asking whether certain premises are accepted; and it does not coincide with a reflection on their marketability either (Freeman

³ I am borrowing this term. It was suggested by Anne-Nelly Perret-Clermont in the framework of the doctoral program “Argupolis – Argumentation Practices in Context” funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (PDAMP1-123089/1).

2005: 3). Rather, it concerns the reasonableness of persuasion in general and of personal acceptance of given starting points in particular. As van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004) remind us, there is no point in starting a critical discussion if the participants have no substantial zone of agreement. If we could not reasonably accept premises, we could not argue at all. On the other hand, finding shared premises with our co-arguers is often a delicate task.

Going back to the specific contents of Gough's paper, I would like to quote an example of the type of question he raises vis à vis Freeman's account. He criticizes the idea of a "human constitution" or "moral conscience" grounding our common sense beliefs, proposed by Freeman (see Gough's synthesis on pp. 254-255). More specifically, Gough (p. 255) challenges the idea that we recognize the intrinsic value or dignity of persons; in other words, that human beings must be perceived as ends rather than means (Freeman 2005: 240 and ff.). Now, the problems that Gough identifies are still partially unsolved (as he observes himself). For example, if we were to replace the criterion of a human constitution with the idea that "shared intuitions, common value beliefs, and interpretations [...] need to be negotiated through considered argumentation" (p. 264), then it would still not be clear at what point and why this process of negotiation could reasonably end. When shall we really *accept* the results of our negotiations as satisfying? Gough's contribution and more generally the vein of reflection on acceptability brings out fundamental questions for current argumentation studies.

7. Open issues

Let us look at some of the points on which authors (implicitly or explicitly) disagree, in order to present questions for further discussion.

In the previous section, I have shown that Gough's chapter (18) leaves many open questions about the problem of premise *acceptability*. In section 5, I also highlighted how research on argumentation could arguably benefit from consideration of a broader set of contexts. I would like to make two further points.

First, different authors included in the section on argument structures

(IV) adopt or reinterpret, for various reasons, the Toulmin model of argumentation (in particular Freeman, Ch. 14; Rocci, Ch. 15; and Groarke, Ch. 16). However, sometimes the interpretation of this model seems to oscillate between a tool to study *argument structures* and a sort of representation of an *argument scheme*. See for example Groarke's interesting analysis of the cartoon "Bush sets the economy in motion" (pp. 234-235). This appears as a single argumentation, and Groarke's analysis uses the Toulmin model to show how the *warrant* ("If a government accumulates and services trillions of dollars in debt, it cannot move its economy") is visually represented in the cartoon. Now, such a warrant is clearly a premise of that single argumentation; and maybe eliciting its underlying argument scheme would bring the analysis forward. Then, Groarke interprets another cartoon (pp. 236-237) as the visual representation of a possible *backing* supporting the above-mentioned warrant about governments and economy. In this case, Toulmin's model is used to explain the structure of a complex argumentation (a sort of chain of arguments), where the second cartoon supports the first one. This is a matter of argument structure. Perhaps, the ambiguity between schemes and structures was already present Toulmin's original account. However, this ambiguity must be solved in order to define the possible applications of the model. This reflection could also serve to better highlight the relation between argument schemes and argumentation structures in general.

Second, a particular lively object of debate seems to be constituted by argument schemes. Rigotti (Ch. 12) proposes a general model to study the inferential configuration of single argumentation on the basis of the analysis of argument schemes (pp. 168ff.). In focusing their analysis on specific argument schemes, both Garssen (Ch. 10) and Doury (Ch. 11) seem to suggest that a lot of work must be done to elicit the structure of each single argument scheme. In fact, considering different examples in great detail is a good method to specify the inferential dynamics of argument schemes.

Doury provokingly highlights a further important aspect. She holds that much work must be also devoted to the level of proposing typologies of argument schemes, moreover that modern authors are somewhat too "reverent" towards "untouchable" existing classifications, even if they are too broad or lack coherence in the classification criteria adopted, to propose new and more systematic typologies (p. 142). She tries to counter this reluctance, proposing a classification of comparative arguments (p. 143). Rigotti fur-

ther proposes a typology of argument schemes (p. 168) which is inspired by the tradition. However, he defines it as “a *new building*” (p. 160, my emphasis) in the discussion on his typology. Concerning classifications of argument schemes, what remains an open challenge for all the interested authors is Doury’s claim that academic accounts should not completely neglect the “spontaneous classifications of arguments that can be identified through ordinary argumentative practices” (p. 142).

Overall, the volume provides a very good picture of many contemporary advances in the study of reasoning and argumentation. It provides an interesting account of many relevant notions and methodologies of analysis; it equally focuses on open problems and new directions of research, approaching them from different points of view and disciplinary perspectives.

I wrote my review trying to be as fair and objective as possible in the description of the contents of the volume, but at the same time leaving some space to those problems of argumentation that made *me* start pondering and discussing with my colleagues, evoking my curiosity and interest. I hope this review will be of some use in the “school of Athens” dialogue.

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