Informal Logic

A Reaction to Critique from the Epistemological Sidelines
Une réaction à la critique depuis les marges épistémologiques

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Résumé de l'article

Dans cet article, on répond à l'affirmation de Siegel selon laquelle la théorie pragma-dialectique de l'argumentation ignore ou néglige les points de vue épistémologiques qu'il considère comme essentiels à toute théorie normative de l'argumentation. L'accent est mis sur les problèmes les plus importants de l'argumentation de Siegel : 1) l'ambiguïté du terme « argument » et la prétendue négligence de cette ambiguïté dans la dialectique pragmatique ; 2) la perspective rationnelle critique du récit pragma-dialectique ; et 3) la prétendue négligence du « sens propositionnel abstrait » de l'argumentation dans la pragma-dialectique.

A Reaction to Critique from the Epistemological Sidelines

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Abstract: In this paper, a reaction is presented to Siegel's claim that the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation ignores or neglects epistemological viewpoints that he finds vital to any normative theory of argumentation. The focus is on the most important problems in Siegel's argument: 1) the ambiguity of the term 'argument' and the alleged negligence of this ambiguity in pragma-dialectics; 2) the critical rational perspective of the pragma-dialectical account; and 3) the alleged negligence of the "abstract propositional sense" of argument in pragma-dialectics.

Résumé: Dans cet article, on répond à l'affirmation de Siegel selon laquelle la théorie pragma-dialectique de l'argumentation ignore ou néglige les points de vue épistémologiques qu'il considère comme essentiels à toute théorie normative de l'argumentation. L'accent est mis sur les problèmes les plus importants de l'argumentation de Siegel : 1) l'ambiguïté du terme « argument » et la prétendue négligence de cette ambiguïté dans la dialectique pragmatique ; 2) la perspective rationnelle critique du récit pragma-dialectique ; et 3) la prétendue négligence du « sens propositionnel abstrait » de l'argumentation dans la pragma-dialectique.

Keywords: conventional validity, critical discussion, epistemology, pragma-dialectics, problem validity

1. Introduction

In his provocative paper, Siegel (2023) criticises three approaches to argumentation. In his eyes, each of these approaches ignores or neglects epistemological viewpoints which he finds vital to any

normative theory of argumentation. He tries to show "that some highly visible theories are largely correct about some senses of the term but not others" (2023, p. 465). His final aim is to show that epistemic norms enjoy conceptual priority. One of the approaches under attack is the pragma-dialectical argumentation theory. As a proponent of the Amsterdam School, I will focus on Siegel's criticism of this approach.

The criticism voiced in Siegel's paper is not new. Since the early 1990s, Siegel (sometimes together with Biro) has been criticising the pragma-dialectical approach for not honouring the epistemological norm of justified belief. In a number of publications, the pragma-dialecticians already reacted to the critique by addressing the key issues raised. What is new in Siegel's paper is the wording: The alleged deficit of pragma-dialectics is now that it is mistreating, displaying ignorance, or neglecting the "abstract propositional sense of argument."

I will focus on what I see as the most important problems in Siegel's argument: 1) the ambiguity of the term 'argument' and the alleged negligence of this ambiguity in pragma-dialectics; 2) the critical rational perspective of the pragma-dialectical account; and 3) the alleged negligence of the "abstract propositional sense" of argument in pragma-dialectics.

2 The senses of argument and methodological starting points

Siegel's attack is based on a distinction that he makes at the very beginning of his paper between three 'senses of argument.'[1] He maintains that these senses coincide with different meanings of the term 'argument' used in the literature. The distinctions made should shed light on problems that are caused by the ambiguity of the term 'argument.' Siegel maintains that "explicit recognition of the ambiguity of 'argument' in the literature, and a delineation of the domains in which the different senses of 'argument' rightly play a role, will help us both resolve such disagreements and avoid

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[1] Although Siegel's paper is about argumentation theory, he fully concentrates on the term 'argument' rather than 'argumentation.' It is even more remarkable that he ignores the fact that since the 1970s, the latter notion has been continually discussed in handbooks of argumentation theory.

them in the future" (2023, p. 469). According to Siegel, the pragma-dialectical theory and the other two approaches fail to honour the distinctions he makes "or insightfully treat one sense of the term but illicitly extend their analyses to other senses of it, and, as a result, err in important but remediable ways" (*ibid.,* p. 474).

Siegel's distinctions are based on a series of examples of 'arguments.' Without any further ado, he groups the series into three categories representing different senses of argument. There are arguments representing 'the abstract propositional sense' of argument, there are arguments exemplifying the 'speech act' sense of argument, and there are arguments exemplifying the social/dialogical/communicative sense of argument. Although some of these senses go together, Siegel points out that for analytical purposes, it is useful to distinguish them.

An initial problem that does not go away is that it is not clear what is meant by these 'senses.' Does each sense refer to a different meaning of the English term 'argument,' are they to be taken as aspects of argument or perhaps both? A further explanation or definition of the different senses is not really provided, so the question remains as to what exactly makes Siegel distinguish these different senses. For this reason, the distinction between the three senses does not lead to an enlightening conceptual analysis of the term 'argument.' What is more, in no way does Siegel explain what the relation is between his attempt at disambiguation of the term 'argument' and the key term of our field: 'argumentation.'

Another important complicating factor is that the exact meaning of the different senses in Siegel's distinctions remains in the dark since the different 'senses' are mostly introduced by way of examples. In his paper, the 'abstract propositional sense' of argument is a central notion. But even for this notion much remains unclear. What is abstract about this sense? Is the speech act sense not abstract? And do speech acts not also involve propositions? In short, the different senses are underdefined.

What does it mean if, according to Siegel, a certain theory of argumentation neglects the abstract propositional sense of argument or does not prioritize it? Siegel presents three examples of argument in the 'abstract propositional sense.' Example A about the mortality of Socrates is a quasi-syllogism often used to explain

classical Aristotelian syllogistic logic. In the second example, another syllogism is presented in which the conclusion that God exists is derived from a series of premises. The third example is not a reasoning form but just mentions a famous mathematical proof. A rather charitable interpretation of the 'abstract propositional sense' is that this expression refers to reasoning: deriving a conclusion from a set of premises. Later on, the article suggests that the term also refers to rules of inference. It is regrettable that the exact meaning of 'abstract propositional sense' remains unclear because it is vital to getting to an understanding of Siegel's objection to the pragma-dialectical approach (and the other approaches).

Siegel's main problem with pragma-dialectics is that it

> takes arguments to be fundamentally dialogical or dialectical exchanges, and although it incorporates epistemic-evaluative terms like 'validity,' 'rational,' 'fallacy,' and the like, it reconceives these terms so that they apply to dialectical 'moves' that do/do not conform to the theory's rules for conducting critical discussions, rather than to arguments in the abstract propositional sense" (2023, p. 474-475).

In fact, as far as I understand what he means, all senses of argument mentioned by Siegel (including the abstract propositional sense) are taken into account in the pragma-dialectical argumentation theory in systematic way. The different senses he mentions seem to coincide very well with the pragma-dialectical meta-theoretical principles for theorizing about argumentation. These principles, which determine the methodological starting points of pragma-dialectics, are 'functionalization,' 'socialization,' 'externalization,' and 'dialectification.'

Argument in the speech act sense clearly comes about in the meta-theoretical starting point of functionalization:

> Argumentation arises in response to, or in anticipation of, a difference of opinion, and the lines of justification that are chosen are contrived to realize the purpose of resolving this difference of opinion in the case concerned. The need for argumentation, the requirements the justification by means of argumentation has to

fulfil, and the structure of the argumentation are in principle all adapted to the doubts, objections, and counterclaims that have to be dealt with, and this is reflected in the speech acts that are advanced. The theorizing about argumentation should therefore concentrate in the first place on the specific functions that the speech acts put forward in argumentative discourse fulfil in managing disagreement. This is why, according to pragma-dialecticians, in dealing with the subject matter of argumentation theory, "functionalization" is required (van Eemeren et al., 2014, p. 524).

As van Eemeren recapitulates:

> Functionalization in argumentation theory should concentrate on determining how linguistic, visual and other semiotic means are used in communication aimed at resolving a difference of opinion by means of argumentation. When it comes to verbal argumentation, the argumentative functions of the use of the communicative tools can be determined by making use of the amended version of speech act theory developed by van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2018, pp. 20-21).

'Argument in the social/dialogical sense' clearly comes about in the meta-theoretical starting point of socialization. According to this principle, argumentation fundamentally involves an explicit or implicit dialogue between two or more people who have a difference of opinion and make a joint effort to resolve the difference:

> As a consequence, argumentation always presupposes not only two different positions in a difference of opinion but also two different discussion roles in a dialogical argumentative exchange. The dialogical character of the way in which the disagreeing parties attempt to resolve their difference of opinion should be reflected in the theorizing about argumentation. This is why, according to pragma-dialecticians, in dealing with the subject matter of argumentation 'socialization' is required (van Eemeren et al. 2014, p. 525).

This was later recapitulated by van Eemeren as follows:

> Socialization involves taking due account of the fact that argu-
> mentation is always part of a discourse in which a party responds
> methodically to the questions, doubts, objections, and counter-
> claims of another party, which are in their turn instigated by the
> standpoints and arguments put forward by the first party (van
> Eemeren 2018, p. 24)

The third meta-theoretical starting point of externalization does
not seem to be immediately related to any of Siegel's 'senses of
argument' but is nonetheless a vital principle that has important
consequences for a 'communicative' approach of argumentation:

> Instead of starting from presumed motives and attitudes of the par-
> ties taking part in the discourse, the theorizing about argumenta-
> tion should […] be directed at explicating what these parties can
> be held accountable for due to the things they have said in a par-
> ticular context and against a certain informational background in
> the discourse. This is why, according to pragma-dialecticians, in
> dealing with the subject matter of argumentation theory "external-
> ization" is required" (*ibid.,* 2018, p. 26).

Earlier on, it had already been explained that

> Externalization boils down to determining the commitments of the
> parties based on the way in which they have expressed themselves
> in the discourse and the accountabilities ensuing from the starting
> points of the communicative activity type in which they take part.
> The commitments that are ascribed to the parties must be (1) ex-
> ternalized by the parties themselves in the discourse, (2) external-
> izable from what has been said in the discourse, or (3) on other
> grounds regarded as understood in the discourse (van Eemeren et
> al. 2014, p. 526).

Because the 'argument in the abstract propositional sense' seems
to be related to the evaluation of underlying reasoning, this sense
of argument can, without any problem, be positioned within the
principle of dialectification of argumentation. Dialectification
involves, among others, specific rules and criteria for underlying
reasoning in argumentation. Although the argument in the abstract
propositional sense is thus taken into account in the meta-

theoretical principle of dialectification, it is important to note that dialectical regulation involves much more than criteria for inferential steps. Because argumentation theory is to be envisioned

> as a discipline that should enable us to judge argumentative discourse critically for its contribution to resolving a difference of opinion on the merits, a normative approach is required that starts from a theoretically motivated external ("etic") perspective. Like other normative argumentation theorists, pragma-dialecticians are out to promote a reasonable exchange of argumentative moves that leads to an outcome based on the quality of the argumentation that is advanced and do not content themselves indifferently with whatever outcome puts the difference of opinion to an end. They consider argumentation to be part of a critical testing process aimed at determining the tenability of the standpoints at issue in a difference of opinion. Because this testing process is to be carried out in a constructive and well-regulated way to ensure a reasonable exchange, the theorizing about argumentation should in their view be aimed at developing a critical discussion procedure that does not allow argumentative moves to go astray. This is why, according to pragma-dialecticians, in dealing with the subject matter of argumentation theory, 'dialectification is required' (van Eemeren et al. 2014, p. 527).

As far as I can understand the different senses of argument mentioned by Siegel, they are fully recognized in the pragma-dialectical research program. They are even considered to be fundamental starting points for theorizing about argumentation. It is important to realize that in pragma-dialectical theorizing, one fundamental starting point is not more or less important than another.

3 Pragma-dialectics and the critical rational perspective

Another point of criticism raised by Siegel is the fact that pragma-dialecticians embrace the critical rational perspective but at the same time allow for pro-argumentation in their theory. According to Siegel, you cannot have it both ways. In reality, the model for critical discussion deals in all stages with both pro and contra argumentation: from the types of differences of opinion that come

about in the confrontation stage to the critical testing procedures in the argumentation stage and the final considerations in the concluding stage. But more important to this connection is the fact that a theory that includes pro-argumentation is not at all contrary to the critical rationalist philosophical ideals. It is crucial that

> Critical rationalists place great emphasis on the consequence of the fact that a statement and its negation cannot both be true at the same time: one of these statements must be withdrawn. They equate a dialectical testing of statements with the detection of contradictions. This is a very basic rule that underlies the pragmadialectical theory (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1988, p. 282).

What does the choice for a critical rationalist perspective mean?

> If one adopts the viewpoint of a Popperian critical rationalist, one pursues the development of a reasonableness model that takes the fallibility of human reason explicitly into account and elevates the concept of systematic critical testing in all areas of human thought and action to the guiding principle of problem solving (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1988, p. 279).

A critical regimentation based on a critical rationalist philosophy of reasonableness involves critical testing aimed at checking whether the standpoint at issue should be rejected. This testing may pertain to differences of opinion about descriptive standpoints but also to differences of opinion about evaluative or prescriptive standpoints. When taken together, the rules constitute a critical regimentation of argumentative discourse that provides a dialectical procedure for resolving a difference of opinion on the merits. The model for a critical discussion endorses a procedure in which both the protagonist and the antagonist of a particular viewpoint try to establish jointly whether this viewpoint is tenable to critical responses. The protagonist advances pro-argumentation or contra-argumentation to defend their positive or negative viewpoint, respectively. In the former, they attempt justification and in the latter, they attempt falsification. In both cases, the antagonist can respond critically to the argumentation of the protagonist. This may result in the protagonist continuing their justification or falsi-

fication attempt with fresh pro- or contra-argumentation. Then again, the antagonist can respond critically, and so on. In this way, an interaction takes place between the speech acts performed by the protagonist and those performed by the antagonist in the discussion:

> This interaction is characteristic of a dialectical process of convincing. It can, however, lead to the resolution of the dispute which forms the main issue of the discussion only if the discussion is adequately regulated. This means that a dialectical argumentation theory should provide rules for the conduct of an argumentative discussion, and these rules should together constitute a problem-valid and convention-valid discussion procedure, thus guaranteeing the degree of considerateness required for a critical discussion to be carried out (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, p. 281).

A difference of opinion has only been resolved "on the merits" when the resolution is achieved in a reasonable way by means of argumentative discourse. This means that the argumentative discourse conducted to reach a resolution should be in complete agreement with the standards of reasonableness applying to a full-fledged 'critical discussion.' Resolving a difference of opinion on the merits is not identical with 'settling' a dispute about the acceptability of the standpoint at issue (van Eemeren 2018, p. 34). The model is neither designed to create a procedure that leads to consensus about the truth or even acceptability of a standpoint nor to result in the final justification of a standpoint.

The ideal model of a critical discussion represents a theoretically motivated idealization. This means that it is designed to provide a clear and complete overview of all argumentative moves that are vital to resolving a difference of opinion on the merits by means of argumentative discourse. The model must be suitable to serve as a point of reference in analysing and evaluating oral and written argumentative discourse and in acting out its production. It is designed to make possible a critical assessment of the tenability of a standpoint against criticism. The outcome of a critical discussion is agreement on the critical process: Does the criticism raised

allow for maintaining or rejecting the standpoint? The whole procedure is aimed at testing the tenability of a standpoint.

The design of the model of a critical discussion involves three indispensable steps: 1) four discussion stages 2) a distribution of speech acts over these stages, and 3) a dialectical regulation of the speech acts performed in each of the stages. The four discussion stages are all indispensable parts of the critical procedure that is to be followed when two parties set out to put a standpoint to the test. The confrontation is a necessary point of departure because for the testing procedure to work well the full difference of opinion should come to light. The opening stage is necessary because the testing procedure cannot be followed without establishing common ground concerning the discussion format, relevant background knowledge, values, etc. (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004 p. 60). In the argumentation stage "protagonists advance their arguments for their standpoints that are intended to systematically overcome the antagonist's doubts or to refute the critical reactions given by the antagonist" (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, p. 61). In the concluding stage, the parties establish the result of the attempt to resolve the difference. This means that consequences of the critical procedure are drawn. Has the criticism led to a rejection of the standpoint or can the standpoint be maintained because of adequate responses to the criticism?

The next step is to see what kind of argumentative moves are to be made in each of the four stages to realize a critical discussion. This leads to an overview of the distribution of types of speech acts over the four stages. Some types of speech acts are relevant to a critical discussion, while others are not. (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, p. 62). The third and final step in the construction of the model of a critical is a dialectical regulation of the speech acts that are to be performed in each discussion stage. The dialectical regulation comes about in a series of rules for a critical discussion (*ibid.* 2004, p. 135). The regulation of a speech act in the confrontation stage is a case in point. As said above, the purpose of the confrontation stage is to externalize the difference of opinion. A difference of opinion that is only partly externalized, or not externalized, makes having a critical discussion difficult if not impossible. This means that the discussants must be able to put

forward every standpoint and call every standpoint into question. This has as a consequence that no special conditions apply to the propositional content of the assertives that are put forward in the standpoints expressed. "The same is true of the propositional content of the negation of the commissive with which a standpoint is called into questions" (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, p. 136). This regulation of speech acts in the confrontation stage is expressed in Rule 1 of a critical discussion.

In short, the model for critical discussion is aimed at putting standpoints to a critical test. It describes in detail the procedure that enables such a critical process. In constructing this ideal model of a critical discussion, the pragma-dialectical argumentation theory is following the critical rational ideal of critical testing of expressed opinions instead of looking for the justification of claims.

4 The pragma-dialectical testing procedure and arguments in the abstract propositional sense

A central part of Siegel's criticism is that pragma-dialectics "does not capture the epistemic normativity of arguments (in the abstract propositional sense), and so of argumentation, which does its business by way of such arguments" (p. 486). Mostly due to the aforementioned obscurity of 'argument in the abstract propositional sense,' it is extremely difficult to understand what Siegel is claiming here. What complicates matters even more is that Siegel does not present in his paper the epistemological theory that shows how we evaluate arguments in the 'abstract propositional sense.' Which criteria are to be used in doing, and why would they be better suited to do justice to what Siegel views as the "very essence of argumentation"? If we take 'argument in the abstract propositional sense' to refer to a reasoning complex consisting of premises that support a conclusion, as seems likely to me, we can easily show that this notion is part of the dialectification of argumentation and can explain why this dialectification in itself does not lead to evaluative results other than other solid theories of reasoning.

According to Siegel,

> Justification in the sense of evidential or reasoned support for the standpoint at issue plays no role—for PD, if a resolution is achieved in accordance with such rules, the standpoint is 'reasonable' or 'justified.' This is manifestly not what 'justified' means, epistemically speaking (2023, p. 478).

As far as I understand what this exposé means, it involves a basic misunderstanding. When a resolution is reached in accordance with the pragma-dialectical rules, by no means does this mean that the standpoint is 'justified.' It simply means that the standpoint at issue and the argumentation put forward in its defence are critically tested and have "survived" this test. As pointed out *ad nauseam*, Siegel would say, since the pragma-dialectical approach is aimed at critically testing the tenability of standpoints, it should be obvious that this approach is by no means preoccupied with the justification of standpoints. The suggestion that pragma-dialectics has nothing to say about the quality of argumentation as an inference process is entirely wrong: To put it in Siegel's terms, the evaluation criteria of 'argument in the abstract propositional sense' are all there. The reason for this is that a resolution of a difference of opinion in the pragma-dialectical sense should be a "real" resolution—that is, a resolution that is based on the merits of the argumentative moves that have been made.

Siegel asserts that in 'resolving a difference of opinion on the merits,' 'the merits' involve

> the efficacy of dispute resolution (problem validity) in accordance with rules governing procedures the parties accept (conventional validity). They are not *epistemic* merits, such that the strong support offered to them by their premises, reasons, or evidence renders their standpoints, opinions, or conclusions better justified, epistemically speaking. In this respect, the addition of 'on the merits' to PD's account of the resolution of differences of opinion does little to defend PD from the criticisms that Biro and I, along with other defenders of the epistemic view, have leveled against its account of reasonableness (2023, p. 477).

I believe that this simplification is based on two misunderstandings: (1) Siegel's misunderstanding of the terms *problem validity* and *conventional validity* and (2) his misunderstanding of the way in which the pragma-dialectical rules for dealing with the argumentation stage of a critical discussion work. With regard to the first problem, I explained above when discussing the ideal model of a critical discussion that each of the rules is a necessary dialectical regulation of the speech acts that are relevant for resolving a difference of opinion. In most cases, this regulation is directly related to the discussion stage to which the rule pertains. It is their indispensable function in preserving the quality of the argumentative process in reaching an outcome that is based on the merits of the argumentative moves that have been made that determines their problem validity.[2] For making it possible to apply the rules effectively in actual argumentative practices, they need to be acceptable to the participants in a resolution process. This means that they need to have, or acquire, conventional validity. In that sense, the requirement of conventional validity is a practical addition to the theoretically motivated problem validity of the rules. The problem validity of the rules is a necessary precondition for any procedure that aims for a resolution of a difference of opinion on the merits.

The second misunderstanding belies the central rule for the pragma-dialectical evaluation procedure of the argumentation stage. In the argumentation stage, the protagonist and the antagonist have to reach a decision as to whether the arguments put forward in defence of the standpoint have indeed the justificatory power they are supposed to have according to the argumentation. This means that they have to judge whether the inferential step from argument to standpoint is fully adequate. The question of the justificatory power of the argumentation put forward in defence of a standpoint is dealt with in pragma-dialectics using the procedures laid down in Rule 8:

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[2] What this means in actual argumentative practices for the participants in the argumentative process is laid down in a code of conduct for reasonable argumentative discourse.

    a. The protagonist has defended the justificatory force of a complex speech act of argumentation successfully if application of the inference procedure or (after application of the explicitization procedure) the testing procedure yields a positive result.

    b. The antagonist has attacked the justificatory force of the argumentation successfully if application of the inference procedure or (after application of the explicitization procedure) the testing procedure yields a negative result.
    (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2003, p. 378-379)

According to the model of a critical discussion, the protagonist and the antagonist follow the intersubjective inference procedure to check whether the arguments of the protagonist are all logically valid. Only if the protagonist's reasoning is logically complete can the acceptability of the inferences in question be determined. In actual argumentative practices, however, the reasoning in the argumentation is in most cases not completely externalized and for that reason not valid as it stands. The question then is whether the argument schemes used in the argumentation are admissible in the context concerned and have been applied correctly (which means that the relevant critical questions can be answered satisfactorily). The arguments involved need to be logically and pragmatically reconstructed: "To this end, the antagonist and the protagonist should jointly carry out an intersubjective *explicitization procedure*" (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2003, p. 377). After the reconstruction of the argument scheme, it must be determined whether this argument scheme can be considered admissible and whether it has been applied correctly. This happens in the intersubjective *testing procedure*.[3] The admissibility of an argument scheme in a certain communicative activity type depends, for instance, on the (combination of) types of propositions advanced in the standpoint and in the supporting premise. A descriptive standpoint, for instance, cannot be defended by a normative premise. Using such a combination of propositions in the argumentation

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[3] The intersubjectivity of these procedures refers to the fact that, ideally, both parties need to be in agreement with the use of these procedures and with their practical application. In actual argumentative practices, this agreement tends to come about in their interaction in the argumentative discourse.

amounts to committing an *argumentum ad consequentiam*. The acceptability of the way in which argument schemes are applied is established by asking the relevant critical questions.

In case the testing procedure has not been followed correctly, for instance because the antagonist fails to detect that an inadmissible argument scheme has been used, the difference of opinion is not resolved on the merits. The dialectification of the rules of inference in the ideal model of a critical discussion involves the (idealized) joint activity by the protagonist and the antagonist of checking whether the inference is acceptable. When the protagonist and antagonist make a mistake and overlook a flaw in the reasoning underlying the argumentation, a flaw in the application of argument schemes, or another flaw in the application of the dialectical procedure, the difference of opinion is not really resolved. If, for instance, an inappropriate argument scheme has been used and the antagonist fails to observe this, there is no sound resolution of the difference. In cases like this, we speak of 'quasi-resolutions.' Discovering that a quasi-resolution has been reached happens virtually always in hindsight or by a party external to the discussion.

A criticism of pragma-dialectics by Biro and Siegel that reoccurs in Siegel's paper is that the participants might stick to the rules for critical discussion and resolve the difference of opinion but in a way that renders that resolution unjustified or irrational. According to Biro and Siegel, "There are two relevant sorts of cases here: one in which the participants share, and utilize false or unjustified beliefs, and one in which they share, and utilize problematic rules of reasoning or inference" (1992, p. 90). As I have shown, an outcome of the second type of case, involving problematic rules, would in pragma-dialectics be seen as a quasi-resolution. Participants, for example, who agree on the outcome of the exchange while overlooking an affirmation of the consequence, reached a quasi-resolution and did not really resolve the difference. In dealing with the first type of case, when the participants share and utilize false or unjustified beliefs, the problem is that, so far, no argumentation theory has put together the criteria for infallibly identifying true or justified beliefs. As Garssen and van Laar (2010) have already pointed out, the question of which

particular starting points should be seen as acceptable or true is a matter that lies outside the scope of argumentation theory. The book of universal and eternal truths has not yet been published. Also, the methods to be employed for checking the acceptability of starting points are quite diverse and not always easy to apply. In a great many cases we will unavoidably need to appeal to experts from the various disciplines.[4] This is perhaps a sad fact of life.

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[4] Of course, the moment an arguer refers in their argumentation to an expert, the rule for the use of argument schemes applies. Then the appeal to authority becomes a matter that is within the field of argumentation theory.