

A New Light on Non-deductive Argumentation Schemes

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ABSTRACT: T. Govier's description of 'conductive argument' and 'A priori analogy' is taken as a start to investigate non-deductive argumentation. It is here argued, that the nature of those types can be better understood when taking up a dynamic view (in addition to the usual structural view). The concepts of 'frame' and 'position' are constructed in order to establish such a twofold approach.

KEY WORDS: A priori analogy, conductive argument, dynamics of argumentation, frame, position

1. PROBLEMS WITH TREATING NON-DEDUCTIVITY

My contribution is concerned with the nature of support in non-deductive arguments (NDA).¹ This is a broad question which cannot be treated sufficiently in a few pages. My aim is rather preliminary. I hold that the dominant approach, conceiving NDA as a derivation viz. a liberalization of deductive argument, is misguided. I will here try to show why and will sketch an alternative approach with the help of 'frame theory'.

The conceptualization of NDA originates from formal deductive inferences, e.g. of the modus ponens scheme with which every normal human being should have a feeling of obviousness. Unfortunately, argumentation theorists have brought out that formal deductive inference schemes do not cover the whole variety of argumentative moves, which are often more open and indefinite. Therefore, they established the inductive inference as being somehow parallel in providing argumentative support of a less strict but more realistic kind. Once this step was taken the temptation was great to look for further parallels. Carl Wellmann's term 'conductive argument' (CA), standing for a pattern of complex and heterogeneous argumentative support for a thesis, is perfectly in keeping with that suggestion.

With Trudy Govier's presentation of 'Two unreceived views about Reasoning and Argument'² a way of view was established in which the PPC structure³ is the basic argument structure, which can be filled by a variety of different inference schemes.

There are at least two reasons to reject this view. First, it contains a misunderstanding of the relationship between deductive schemes and other

possibilities for passing from sentences to other sentences. Deduction is not just one possibility among others but is fundamental in the sense that it is presupposed by all other inference schemes like induction etc., whereas these are not presupposed by deduction. If we take the 'conclusion' of an inductive inference as being not certain but only probable, we presuppose our knowledge about the logical form of general and singular sentences.⁴

The second point is that this view fixes argumentation theory in a quasilogical and nondynamic perspective viz. in an unfruitful dichotomy of structural and procedural perspectives. The process of argumentation seems here to be no more than a sequence of inference steps, where each step can be isolated and analysed for itself. I want to plea for a more differentiated and more realistic view in which procedural and structural elements of argumentative speech are integrated and where premises and conclusion of an argumentation form a 'retroflexive' system of mutual support.⁵

To set the scene, I will first comment on the above-mentioned description of Trudy Govier's two informal argumentation schemes, namely conductive argument (CA) and a priori analogy (APA).⁶ The bulk of my paper is concerned with the discussion of the CA figure. In Govier's texts it is described as a complex step from a group of premises and counterconsiderations to a conclusion. It can be characterized by four items:

- i) Several *distinct* arguments can appear as premises.
- ii) The premise group is *open* i.e. it can be extended when a new argument appears and reduced when an argument fails.
- iii) *Counterconsiderations* can appear.
- iv) The conclusion is not logically entailed by the premises but is reached by an '*outweighing*' of the pros against the cons.

Obviously, this description fits well with common sense. For theory, however, we need an understanding of the parts and elements of which it is constructed. I will examine it by investigating the three components of the CA description: distinction, openness and weighing. In the course of my considerations I will formulate several new concepts and ideas, and I will use three of Govier's examples in order to elucidate the problems and the direction of my resolution. In the final section, I will draw some conclusions regarding the consequences of the developed view for the APA scheme.

2. DISTINCTNESS OF CA PREMISES

The first example for a CA, taken from Govier, is an argument with the conclusion that you should return a borrowed book to the library. The premises mentioned for it are that you contracted to do so that others may need it and that you might avoid paying a fine.

It is obvious that a variety of different aspects are touched upon here. But what is the argumentative status of an 'aspect' or of a 'difference of aspects'?

I think this is a question of surprising complexity: The aspects are somehow separated, but, regarding the same object, they must also be associated with each other. The expose sides of the object and, in their being more or less important for observers, they also express subjective relations. Finally: Aspects can be on different levels – more general, more specific; some aspects might integrate others etc. Thus, in changing our aspects we can change and complete our view of an object (without being able to exhaust its possibilities).

For the sake of an adequate theoretical approach I have to build some special conceptual tools. First I want to use the expression 'matter in question' (MIQ) for the subject of the argument. In the case of the present example the MIQ would be 'the borrowed book to be or not to be returned'. Obviously this is an artificial construction, but I think we need the possibility of speaking on an abstract level 'before' we concern ourselves with specific aspects.

The second term is 'position'. It stands for what a person is engaged with in argumentative speech.⁷ It consists of what he/she believes, expects, wishes, knows about the MIQ. Thus, the position is not dry theory but articulates what counts for life and action. On the other hand, it is not mere self-expression because in argumentative speech we distance ourselves from our respective belief, i.e. we put it under the reservation of its being proven true or plausible. It might be clear now that a position views the MIQ under specific aspects and that positions with respect to a MIQ can be different depending on the persons who hold them. The task of argumentation would then be to somehow integrate the aspects which might require a development of our intellectual, practical, moral etc. states.

Even within a single position there might be parts which are not integrated. Consider e.g. an economist who cannot integrate ecological sides of his/her problem or, in the simple example of the library, a certain user who might not be able (intellectually or morally) to take truly into account the needs of other users – even if they are clearly perceived.

The third term is 'frame'. Frame theory can be found in the analyses of ethnomethodologists and radical constructivists but goes back to Aristotle's theory of abstraction.⁸ Here, the use of the expression 'frame' is coined especially for conceiving the problems with the discrepancy between aspects and (parts of) positions. A frame is a kind of classification, an allocation to a realm. It is more abstract than a predicate, and it is very often implicit in our communication. We can make a frame explicit by asking 'as what' a MIQ is conceived in a certain proposition or argument.

The answer has the structure 'B as A'. In the example of the borrowed book we can expose the following frames as inherent in the premises:

- the book as a subject of a contract,
- the book as a common good needed by a variety of people,
- the book as a possible cost factor.

The formulation of frames, however, is not strictly determined. The point is just to choose a classification which expresses the really effective allocation to a realm; in this example we have a legal, a social and an economic realm. In the case where there is no crossing from one frame to another I will speak of 'divergent' frames.

With these devices,⁹ the question regarding the distinctness of the premises in CAs can be answered: The MIQ is conceived in divergent frames. This is due to our positions being touched by the MIQ in more than one part, while those parts of the positions are not integrated. This may result from the fact that there is not enough understanding developed to recognise the MIQ clearly and distinctively in relation to all the important parts of our positions. In consequence, we are very often not faced with a simple and unified matter as a subject of our argumentation but with an aggregate of different aspects whose articulation might change with every argumentative move.

In the *Manual to Govier's Practical Study*¹⁰ there is a counterconsideration for the borrowed book argument mentioned: the temporary need for the book might be very great. It is interesting to ask how this can be a counterconsideration to the conclusion. Is it not rather an explanation or an excuse for somebody's not having returned the book? I will come back to this later. For the moment my point is that the frame is again different. The borrowed book is now conceived as a wealth of information, needed so urgently that it cannot be given away for the present.

I hope this will do. Premises in a CA can be distinct as the MIQ is divergently framed. Frame divergencies result from the MIQ being taken into account by non-integrated (parts of) positions. This is a symptom for the understanding of the MIQ not being sufficiently developed to integrate our split interests.

3. OPENNESS OF THE CA PREMISE GROUP

If we are to construct a CA we are advised to look for further arguments, especially for possible counterconsiderations. On the other hand, we know that arguments can fail without destroying the justifying quality of the whole CA. In this sense, Govier speaks of the premise group as being 'open'.

In my opinion, there is a procedural element used in this description of the CA, an element which cannot appear on stage because the logical viewpoint hides it behind the scenes. To make it visible we should try a fresh start with a view to the argumentative practice or process. This process has two sides, a dynamic one which I call 'discussion', and a

structural one, called ‘argumentation’ here. I would like to go a little into this distinction.

(a) *Discussion*

In discussion we make ‘discussion contributions’ to formulate, justify or to refute a thesis. A single contribution might not reach a full justification or refutation, but just constitute a step towards it. Very often, such a step is itself objected to by further contributions and thus acquires the quality of a (sub)thesis which is then to be justified or refuted.

In this process, we are not able to definitely anticipate what a good reason or a strict objection is. Rather, this is worked out interactively. This point deserves to be underlined: I am not myself sure about the quality of my arguments as long as I have not seen your objections. The ‘essential’ arguments are not brought in but worked out in discussion. In its course we furnish each other with new information about the MIQ, possibly framing and reframing it as we go along. Discussion is thus ‘interactive’ and ‘dialectic’ in a deeper sense than by just conceiving two adversarial parties.

(b) *Argumentation*

Some discussions produce results. By far not all of them do, but, as theorists, we can at any time ask for the results reached so far. The answer would not just be a conclusion. Rather, it would be a ‘discussion record’ consisting of:

- i) the ‘essential’ arguments of the discussions taken as premises,
- ii) a conclusion.

It is this kind of discussion record which I call an ‘argumentation’.

The crucial question with argumentation in this sense is of course how the premises are related to the conclusion. Govier has emphasized that normally a covering if-then-proposition is neither available nor necessary.¹¹ Instead, she favours ‘relevance’ to determine the premise conclusion relationship and to function as a basis for an outweighing operation. Unfortunately, a theoretically satisfying concept of relevance for this purpose is (still) not at hand, so that, with this outcome we again find ourselves with no more than a common sense description of CA. My suggestion regarding the relationship between premises and conclusion in the CA figure is that it is basically located in the deep structure of the frames brought in by the participants in the discussion. In general, a conclusion of an argumentation is plausible if it contains a unification of the different frames given to the MIQ by the positions. I will come to this in Section 4.

In order to further elucidate the meaning of the discussion argumentation distinction, I refer to a more complex example of Govier’s.¹² A couple is deciding which babysitter to engage. Two girls are at hand, Jane and Sue.

Jane lives 5 minutes closer but has been convicted of theft, whereas Sue has been found reliable so far. Obviously, Sue will be their choice. If I take this CA as representing a discussion result I can ask for the process of its production. In this line I somehow approach reality, because this kind of thought formation does not simply occur to someone out of the blue. In the process, usually a lot of statements and questions and objections concerning the circumstances of the case are gone through, e.g.:

- W: Is it true, darling, that it's only five minutes more? Last time it took me 3/4 of an hour to take Sue back home.
 H: Yes, but that was when the road works were at Kings Cross . . .

Or else:

- H: Yes, Jane stole the ten pound note. But why did you put it right on the sideboard?
 W: I already told you that it was to pay the milkman . . .

My point here is: All this is important for the finding and shaping of ideas, and most of it simply fades away as we reach a conclusion and state the essential arguments as premises. During the discussion process, the theses and arguments normally undergo various modifications, restrictions and extensions. This is how new information is integrated into the theorizing of the MIQ. When studying this process from outside we can identify a thesis on its way to becoming a conclusion via reformulations caused by arguments which themselves become premises only in the light of the achieved conclusion.

In the awareness of these events our common ideas about an argument as being a single and isolatable unit with a linear and onesided support relation from premises to conclusion is undermined. We face the puzzling 'retroflexive argumentation structure' where argumentative moves while developing premises and conclusion mutually support each other.¹³

Most important for my present purpose are those moves in which the frames are touched and which are then followed by a frame shift or a frame modification.

As an illustration I will slightly vary the babysitter case:

- H: I really wouldn't feel comfortable having Jane here again.
 You remember: the theft . . .
 W: I don't think she is bad.
 She is young, and she happened to take that opportunity . . . Why don't you have a serious talk with her and then we'll give her another chance?

Here a considerable frame shift takes place. The babysitter is no longer seen as merely a means to the couple's ends but as a young person for whom they also feel responsible. Seen together with this frame shift the fact of Jane's theft is no longer necessarily an objection. It is almost neutralized. If we assume a true pedagogic interest as part of the couple's positions the theft may be seen as a challenge and can even become a pro-Jane argument.

Frame shifting contributions are crucial situations for a discussion. We

have to reformulate the abstract content of our position in the light of new information received. Of course there is a lot of uncertainty in those moves but it is in them that discussions can correct and complete our views. For these steps we certainly need more than logic: we need an open mind, creativity and mental awareness.

4. WEIGHING IN CA

I can now come to the question of how to evaluate a CA as cogent or acceptable. The answer presented by Govier is that we should care for relevance and judge if the pros outweigh the cons or not. I consider this answer (together with all types of quantitative metaphors like weight, relevance, significance) misleading, because:

- i) It suggests that the conclusion or thesis is a stable thing equipped with positive and negative quantities of a certain secret quality.
- ii) It suggests the existence of a stable 'we-position' which, however, cannot simply be presupposed but has to be worked out.

I will explain this. If we want to produce a reasonable conclusion from a discussion with distinct arguments we certainly face at first the question of how to compare them. Let us name this 'the comparison problem'. In trying to answer it with some kind of measure (in quantities of weight, significance or relevance etc.) we have, however, to make sure that our measure produces the same 'data' on your and on my territory. Thus, a deeper difficulty appears which I call 'the common ground problem'. Unmetaphorically speaking, it is necessary to make sure, for instance, that what counts as a pro for me also counts as a pro for you. Obviously, every concept of a weighing procedure presupposes the common ground problem being resolved. So it seems that we have two problems to treat, one on the subject side and one on the object side. There are, however, indications that a resolution of the common ground problem will make the comparison problem fade away.

My resolution of the common ground problem reads as follows: Distinct arguments represent partial understanding of the MIQ in divergent frames. Theory, on the one hand, and self-comprehension of the speakers, on the other, are split and not integrated. During the discussion process we try to master these discrepancies. Through frame confronting and frame shifting argumentative moves the MIQ is modelled and remodelled until, in the successful case, it is grasped in a frame which integrates all the frames of the essential arguments. In that frame the MIQ then appears in the conclusion. I underlie that this is not the normal case. Usually, we hang around halfway and we comfort ourselves with the quantitative metaphors having produced a reasonable balance of so many arguments. In fact, those results are more or less arbitrary, but we may not realize this because of the verbal veil of objectivity in counting and weighing arguments.

I will try at least to illustrate this last topic with a third example of Govier's. It is the question of legalizing voluntary euthanasia for terminally ill patients.¹⁴ Govier elaborates 4 pros and 2 cons for her example. The pros are that responsible adults should be able to choose whether to live or die, that patients could be saved from unbearable pain, that social costs would be cut, and that relatives would be saved from accompanying unbearable agonies. The cons are that we would risk abuse and that we are never sure that a cure might not be discovered.

Govier is very cautious indeed in judging how strong a conclusion can be drawn. Here, she is very near to a view in which the CA is a procedure only for subjective opinion and without any bearing on other persons. If so, the difference between acceptability and acceptance would vanish, which could be fatal for Govier's position. To keep this difference we have to presuppose that 'any audience relevantly similar' to be judging person would come to the same conclusion,¹⁵ but even this cannot be taken as an empirical fact. So here we meet the relativity question which I will not treat now.

My point was to show what frame unification could mean: I consider the fourth pro about the saving of relatives from accompanying dreadful agonies and confront it with the first con about the risk of misuse. It is obvious that the frames of the two arguments are divergent. And it is quite clear that a resolution cannot consist in weighing the con against the pro but in reformulating the thesis: If we adopt a law to legalize euthanasia it has to contain clauses which exclude misuse as far as possible. With this move we give the MIQ a new frame which is able to integrate the frames of the two considered arguments.

To gain certainty, let's look for cases in which this kind of resolution cannot be achieved and ask for the reason why. E.g. we argue with somebody who has indeed accompanied his/her relative during a painful death and for whom this experience was life-changing.¹⁶ Such a person would certainly refuse to take saving relatives' suffering as a pro. Another speaker might have experienced the legalization of euthanasia in Nazi Germany (where the laws also contained anti-misuse clauses) and would never accede. Here we face cases where a CA cannot take place. Not because the arguments could not be properly 'weighed' but because a common ground is missing.

The problem becomes more acute as we move to antagonistic relationships (where A's desire is B's pain). For a harmless illustration I go back to the borrowed book example. If we here accept the need for the book and thus the divergent framing as a real argument against the conclusion (and not just as an excuse) this means that we have moved over from the party of the future users to the party of the present user. This would be a quite problematic position: The library rule is made precisely to prevent those antagonisms viz. to establish a common ground between the users.

Please don't take this as a plea for normativation. I just want to state

that the secret of a successful argumentative conduction is frame unification. The nature of the inference step is the formulation of the MIQ in a (complex) frame which integrates, on the one hand, our positions and, on the other, the different realms in which we place the MIQ.

5. THE APA SCHEME

To finish my paper I will cast a very brief glance on the second of Govier's NDA schemes, the *a priori* analogy. It shouldn't be difficult to see that here too our main problem is not to formulate an inference scheme, but that the inference scheme does not present the events in the discussion process. It is there that we have to fix what the relevant features for a certain type *T* are. Again, it is a misleading simplification that those features of a concept *T* are simply given. In every important and interesting case the new and problematic matter calls for a new and more developed version of the concept of *T*. It is this version which has to be produced in discussion.

Let us take the example which the Jews being or not being a nation.¹⁷ We have to choose a typical nation first. This choice might already be a case for discussion (and maybe even for a CA). But let's assume we plainly choose France. Then we have to fix what it is that makes France a nation. Here it is important not to choose features which are too specific for France, e.g. having achieved national identity through a great Revolution. We have to choose features of a kind which at least make it possible for the Jews to be a nation. As long as there is more than one nation it is not just case by case that we have to reason: there is also a more general element concerned because what we establish to be an essential feature must fit for a variety of items.

Here too the crucial question is always in which frame the MIQ is conceived and this again depends on the speakers' positions. A rational solution requires the frames viz. the positions and the realms in which they locate the MIQ to be unified.

As long as we discuss our case in a naive mood, frame unification is often quite easily achieved. When frames become subjects of discussion the question of 'frame adequacy' may arise, which needs further treatment. I should concede that I have mostly shown a direction in which an understanding of the support in NDA could be found. Certainly, more work is necessary to embed frame theory into argumentation theory.

NOTES

¹ This article is a rewritten (and hopefully more comprehensible) version of my earlier article (1995b).

² See her book (1987), Chapter IV.

³ I use the abbreviation PPC for the sequence of a premise group followed by a conclusion.

⁴ Wittgenstein has, in order to characterize the ever presupposed status of deductive logic, coined the saying 'Logic is transcendental', see his *Tractatus* (1969), Sentence 6.13.

⁵ I have developed the concept of a 'retroflexive argumentative system' in Wohlrapp (1989). The main idea is that the linear and one-sided transition from premises to conclusion in an isolated argument is to be subverted by an argumentative system of mutual relation and support. I will come to this below.

⁶ Govier (1987), Chapter 4 and Govier (1992), Chapters 9 & 10.

⁷ Virtual synonyms for 'position' and 'standpoint' and 'opinion'. 'Position' is accentuated insofar it has some stability but can also be changed.

⁸ Virtual synonyms of 'frame' are 'frame of reference', 'focus', 'perspective' etc. The idea of frames, framing and reframing is very common at the moment, but note that here a specific theoretical design is given to the everyday language expression.

⁹ I am aware that I am still short here. For more detailed explications about positions and frames I can at the moment only refer to Wohlrapp (1996).

¹⁰ Reed (1992) p. 146.

¹¹ Govier (1987), Chapter 4.

¹² Govier (1992), pp. 312–313.

¹³ Cf. again Wohlrapp (1989) and (1997). I have found some backing for this idea in Wittgenstein's notes, cf. Wittgenstein (1969), nr. 105.

¹⁴ Govier (1992) p. 310.

¹⁵ Govier (1987) p. 285.

¹⁶ For a prominent case see Bertrand Russell's *Autobiography* (Russell, 1967, p. 146), where the author reports that the sharing of Mrs. Whitehead's pain and agony led him into a state of enlightenment which came to change his whole life.

¹⁷ Govier (1987) p. 34.

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