Argumentation (2005) 19:159–186
DOI 10.1007/s10503-005-2312-y

Deceptive Arguments Containing Persuasive Language and Persuasive Definitions

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ABSTRACT: Using persuasive definitions and persuasive language generally to put a spin on an argument has often held to be suspicious, if not deceptive or even fallacious. However, if the purpose of a persuasive definition is to persuade, and if rational persuasion can be a legitimate goal, putting forward a persuasive definition can have a legitimate basis in some cases. To clarify this basis, the old subject of definitions is reconfigured into a new dialectical framework in which, it is argued, a definition should be evaluated in light of its purpose as a speech act. But if persuasive definitions are so often thought to be suspect, misleading, or even fallacious, how can individual cases be judged on some objective basis? In this paper, a new dialectical method of evaluating such definitions on a case-by-case basis is proposed, showing how abusive as well as reasonable uses of persuasive language can properly be identified, analyzed and evaluated.

The purpose of this project is to develop a new approach to the study of persuasive definitions in different contexts of argumentation. Two more general other concerns also come centrally into the project: the study of definitions generally in argumentation, and the persuasive use of language in argumentation. The new approach to these subjects will show how the use of persuasive definitions should be evaluated by context-dependent sets of rules for argumentative discourse. Such a method of evaluation shows how such definitions can be used for legitimate purposes of persuasion in some cases, and therefore cannot be dismissed or categorically classified as misleading, deceptive or fallacious. Examples of persuasive definitions are presented from ethical disputation, discussions of social policy issues, scientific argumentation, business communications, and legal arguments. The project begins by reviewing Stevenson's theory of persuasive definition and some real cases that illustrate persuasive definitions at work. The project is interdisciplinary, in that although it has a traditional base in logic, it also draws on recent work in the fields of computing (Reed, 1998; Grasso et al., 2000; Singh, 2000; Bench-Capon, 2002) and communication studies (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969; van

Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1992), and is related to issues in legal (Walton, 2002) and scientific (Brown, 1998) argumentation.

The study of definitions, including persuasive definitions, has been recognized as an important part of philosophy of language and logic since ancient times (Robinson, 1950, 1953). Current textbooks on critical thinking continue to stress the importance of persuasive definitions among other types of definitions (Hurley, 2000; Copi and Cohen, 2001). But serious scholarly investigation of the subject has been neglected in recent times. The old theories of definition that have been in the textbooks for so many years offer some good practical advice, but lack theoretical depth. In the meantime, new interdisciplinary work has moved ahead with the development of new dialectical tools for the analysis and evaluation of argumentation (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1984; Walton, 1998). But so far, little work has been done on the old subject of definitions, and what has been done (Viskil, 1995) has not been widely recognized. One important hurdle is the problem of convincing those who fund research that the study of definitions is not trivial, boring, or even falls outside science altogether.

STEVENSON'S THEORY OF PERSUASIVE DEFINITIONS

The putting forward of a theory of persuasive definitions by Charles L. Stevenson (1938; 1944) was an interesting development on the twentieth-century intellectual scene. This theory had considerable impact on the field of ethics, but it was not developed further. As Aomi (1985) pointed out, Stevenson's work showed the importance of persuasive definitions in disputes about values, but it was not followed up. Some work, like that of Hallden (1960) extended Stevenson's findings by providing interesting and controversial examples where persuasive definitions had been used in literary and philosophical works. These examples showed that the use of a persuasive definition in argumentation is by no means always wrong or fallacious, but left open the problem of how to judge by objective criteria when the use of a persuasive definition should be seen as reasonable or not. There was no major research to show how Stevenson's observations about the uses of persuasive definitions fitted into some more general account of how the putting forward of definitions of contested terms in argumentation should be evaluated. Stevenson's work on persuasive definitions was a big step forward in updating the time-worn treatment of definitions in the textbooks on logic and critical thinking.

Stevenson showed that the notion of persuasive definition plays a special role in all argumentation. His main concern was with ethical disagreements. He was concerned that people often engage in ethical disputes they think are about disagreements of belief, whereas in

reality the disagreement is only about differences of attitude. To explain what he took to be a common kind of illusion of this kind, Stevenson put forward a theory based on a distinction between emotional and descriptive meaning. He first put forward this theory in an essay in the journal *Mind* (1938), and then expounded it in a more detailed form in his well-known book, *Ethics and Language* (1944). The theory is based on the idea that terms used in a natural language have both an emotive and a descriptive meaning. The expression 'emotive meaning' had been used previously in the book, *The Meaning of Meaning*, written by Charles K. Ogden and Ivor Armstrong Richards (1923). Stevenson (1944, p. 70) defined the descriptive meaning of a term as "its disposition to affect cognition", due to a "process of conditioning" in which the disposition is fixed by linguistic rules. He defined emotive meaning (1944, p. 60) as the disposition of a term to evoke attitudes and feelings. He used the terms 'liberty' and 'license' to show how a selection between two terms that have the same descriptive meaning but different emotive meanings can enable a speaker to evoke powerful positive or negative attitudes in an audience (p. 61). The term 'license' has negative emotive meaning, because it evokes negative attitudes, whereas the term 'liberty' has positive emotive meaning, because it evokes positive attitudes. In a political debate, a speaker who is against a proposed bill might argue that it restricts liberty, while the speaker who is for the bill might argue that it restricts license. Since liberty is positive, restricting it is negative. Since license is negative, restricting it is positive. By a careful selection of terms with emotive meanings, a speaker can make an argument more powerfully persuasive by evoking positive or negative attitudes of the audience.

The persuasive power of emotive terms in ethical and political argumentation had already been observed and studied by Jeremy Bentham. In a short work called "The Book of Fallacies", first published in 1824, Bentham (1969, p. 337) drew a careful distinction between terms that have a positive emotive impact and terms that have a negative impact. Eulogistic or laudatory terms are accompanied by a sentiment of approval or approbation. As examples, Bentham cited the terms 'honor' and 'gratitude' (p. 337). Dyslogistic or vituperative terms are accompanied by a sentiment of disapproval or disapprobation. As examples, he cited the terms 'lust' and 'avarice'. As Bentham observed, simply by the tactic of selecting the right eulogistic or dyslogistic terms, you can argue for or against a policy without giving any independent reasons to support the conclusion that the policy is a good one or not. He called such a tactic "the fallacy of question-begging appellatives". Thus Stevenson was not the first to observe and study how selection of terms with emotive meanings can be a persuasive argumentation tactic. But his work advanced the subject by linking the

use of emotive language to persuasive definitions, and by offering a theory that can explain how persuasive definitions work as argumentation tactics that can be used by a speaker to manipulate an audience.

The interesting thing about Stevenson's theory of persuasive definition is that he showed how the typical use of such a definition can be effective as a device of deceptive persuasion. The attitude he recommended towards the use of such definitions was one in which the respondent should be wary and on his guard for possible deception. How the illusion is accomplished, according to Stevenson's theory, is that the persuasive redefinition of a word in current use changes the descriptive meaning, but the old emotive meaning tends to linger on. Hallden (1960, p. 12) called this phenomenon the "inertia" of meaning. Due to the inertia of the old meaning, an ambivalence or ambiguity permeates the viewpoint of the respondent. She may accept the new descriptive meaning proposed by the proponent as a conscious act of agreement. But she will still be pulled unconsciously by the positive or negative attitudes that remain attached to the term. This ambiguity can then be exploited to manipulate the respondent in a dispute, and also, even more significantly, a wider audience. Thus for Stevenson, the notion of a persuasive definition has a negative aspect. It may not be fallacious to use a persuasive definition, but it certainly is, or can be, deceptive. It is a powerful technique of persuasion that may not be rational in certain respects, and therefore it is something to be extremely wary about. Stevenson successfully showed how persuasive definitions are both tricky and powerful in argumentation. But his analysis of how they work was clouded by his emotivist theory of ethics, a kind of logical positivist viewpoint about ethical values that most people are instinctively reluctant to accept.

One problem in seeing how Stevenson's theory could be useful for argumentation theory is to pry it apart from his sharp distinction between disagreements of belief and disagreements of emotive attitude. This distinction could be seen as a false dichotomy or overly sharp bifurcation that polarizes the discussion. Belief is a psychologistic term based on a BDI (belief–desire–intention) approach (Singh, 1998). Many of us would prefer the term 'commitment'. By the same token, to see attitude as purely emotive is a psychologistic way of viewing it. It is perhaps this sharp way of drawing his fundamental distinction that is so closely tied to Stevenson's logical positivism, and that has prevented his theory of persuasive definition from gaining wider acceptance, and from being better developed as a useful tool for the analysis of argumentation.

To get a better idea of how Stevenson's theory works, it is best to begin with an example. Stevenson (1944, p. 211) offered the following example, and it is as good a place to start as any. It is in the form of a dialogue, and we will call it the dialogue on culture.

1.1. *The Dialogue on Culture*

> **A**: He has had but little formal education, as is plainly evident from his conversation. His sentences are often roughly cast, his historical and literary references rather obvious, and his thinking is wanting in that subtlety and sophistication which mark a trained intellect. He is definitely lacking in culture.
>
> **B**: Much of what you say is true, but I should call him a man of culture notwithstanding.
>
> **A**: Aren't the characteristics I mention the antithesis of culture, contrary to the very meaning, of the term?
>
> **B**: By no means. You are stressing the outward forms, simply the empty shell of culture. In the true and full sense of the term, "culture" means imaginative sensitivity and originality. These qualities he has; and so I say, and indeed with no little humility, that he is a man of far deeper culture than many of us who have had superior advantages in education.

According to Stevenson's commentary (1944, p. 211), B's purpose in offering this definition was to try to influence A to begin using the term 'culture' in a new way, different from the conventionally accepted usage. Stevenson wrote that B's purpose (p. 211) is to redirect A's attitudes by appealing to emotive meaning. Once again, on Stevenson's theory, the emotive meaning represents the feelings or attitudes (positive or negative) that the use of the word suggests to respondents. Stevenson (1944, p.214) observed that persuasive definitions are typically prefaced by the word "true" or the word "real". In the dialogue on culture, for example, B might maintain that he is talking about true culture, and not just superficial culture. B's new definition includes actions that most of us might think boorish, but it now labels them with the term 'culture', which still retains its conventional positive emotive connotations. This move puts those of us who might disagree that such actions are acceptable in a bit of a pickle. We may think they ought to be described as boorish, but so long as we accept B's proposed definition, we have to use the positive term 'culture' to talk about them. This seems to commit us to a view that is hard to defend. It even seems contradictory. For how can the same actions be both boorish and cultured? Any opposition to B's view we can now put up seems to be neutralized, or at least weakened. It seems somehow like B has gotten the upper hand purely through stipulation without really having to argue for it properly.

Stevenson's theory seems puzzling in certain respects, and is not wholly convincing. But he was certainly on to something by pointing out that persuasive definitions are powerful and tricky tactics of deceptive argumentation. Logic textbooks often tend to categorize persuasive definitions in highly negative terms. For example, Hurley (2000, p. 96) wrote that a persuasive definition "masquerades as an

honest assignment of meaning to a term''. Although Stevenson would have agreed that persuasive definitions can be deceptive, he added the qualification (1938, p. 331) that he did not mean to imply that they are ''less respectable'' than other definitions. He added (1944, p. 215) that not all persuasion is that of the ''mob orator''. He seemed to be suggesting that persuasion can, in some instances, be rational as a form of argumentation, and not merely a manipulation of attitudes by emotive appeals. Thus Stevenson seemed concerned to leave room for the possibility that persuasive definitions can be rational in some instances, and are not deceptive tactics used only by sophists. One of the main problems with his theory is that it is not clear whether or how it could offer the resources needed to enable one to judge, in a given case, whether a persuasive definition that was offered is reasonable or fallacious.

EXAMPLES OF PERSUASIVE DEFINITIONS AND PERSUASIVE LANGUAGE

Many might be inclined to think that persuasive definitions only represent clever tricks used by sophists, that they are of little practical interest, and that they would be easy to deal with if an arguer is confronted by them. Even a brief consideration of some actual examples quickly dispels these illusions.

The first case is summarized from the account in (Zarefsky et al., 1984). In this case, President Ronald Reagan had proposed tax cuts, but wanted to avoid the perception that he was cutting domestic programs that were regarded as very important by influential interest groups.

2.1. *The Truly Needy Case*

> In a speech given in 1981, Reagan pledged to trim spending in federal domestic assistance programs while maintaining benefits for the ''truly needy''. Under pressure to clarify this key phrase, five days later the Administration presented a specific list of programs that constituted the country's ''social safety net'' and would be exempt from cuts. The implication was that those who were ''truly needy'' would not have their ''safety net'' program cut (p. 115). Later in the year, Reagan cut social security and disability programs, but continued the pledge that the government would respond to the ''truly needy'', thus narrowing the list of ''safety net'' programs. By redefining ''truly needy'' and ''safety net'', he could propose making these reductions without breaking his earlier promise. These redefinitions proceeded gradually, and were not widely recognized by the public (p. 117). But they reassured those dependent on social services, because they could feel that as long as they were ''truly needy'', their programs would not be cut.

Was Reagan just changing the criteria, or was he really altering the definition of the term 'needy' by giving it a persuasive redefinition? His use of the word 'truly' to preface the word 'needy' is an indicator of

the use of a persuasive definition. The use of the expression 'truly needy' is reassuring to voters. It suggests that those who are truly needy will not have their programs cut, and of course, every one benefiting from such a program will feel that he or she is truly needy.

Similar issues are raised by the following case. How to define the term 'wetland' is a scientific issue, but competing definitions have often been advocated in ethical, legal and political argumentation. I summarize some background taken from the much more detailed account given by Schiappa (1996).

2.2. *The Wetland Case*

> The term 'wetland' came to prominence in the environmental debates of the late 1960's and early 1970's. It refers to an area saturated by water to the extent that only specially adapted plants can grow in it. Wetlands are very valuable to the ecology, according to scientists. Environmentalists, concerned about the disappearance of wetlands, especially due to building, have lobbied to protect these areas from development. Large amounts of money are at stake, and developers have engaged in many widely publicized legal actions and debates on the issue with environmentalists. Starting in the 1970's, efforts were made to introduce a standardized ecological definition of the term 'wetland'. A 1979 definition cited features such as the kind of soil, the kind of vegetation, and the way water is present (p. 213). In 1989, a definition of this kind was codified in a federal government manual for identifying wetlands (p. 214).
>
> In the presidential election campaign of 1988, George Bush committed his administration to a policy of "no net loss" of wetlands. By 1990, it became clear that if Bush kept to this commitment, he was in danger of alienating many of his pro-business, pro-development constituents. Accordingly, in August, 1991, a document produced by a Vice-Presidential task force proposed a redefinition of the term 'wetland' (p. 217), making the criteria stricter than those given in the 1989 manual. According to studies by scientists and environmentalists using the new definition, 50 million acres previously designated "wetlands" would now be excluded (p. 218). This so-called "codification" of the definition in the 1989 manual was implemented in federal agencies without approval by the White House or Congress, and without inviting public comment (p. 218), even though it met with intense opposition from environmentalists.

One problem posed by this case is that 'wetlands' is a scientific term that should be properly defined by scientific experts, but there is a shift to advocacy because of the competing interests involved. Competing scientific definitions are advocated by those who have a lot to win or lose, depending on which definition gains legal or political ascendancy. Those who have interests in land development, building, real estate, logging, and associated ventures, advocate the definition that favors their interests. The groups that come under the heading of "environmentalists" advocate definitions that appear to be quite different from those of the other side. The outcome is a battle of competing definitions in which the advocates on each side appeal

to scientific expert opinions to support their favorite definitions. Schiappa (2002) has shown how these lengthy public controversies over the term 'wetlands' have deployed scientific definitions in attempts to achieve political and legal ends.

The next case is even more controversial and difficult to untangle, because it involves an ethical term that became caught up in controversies through changes in legal definitions advocated by a vocal interest group.

2.3. *The Redefinition of Rape Case*

> Burgess-Jackson (1995) has argued for the claim that radical feminists' redefinition of the word 'rape' is a persuasive definition. Burgess-Jackson (1995) cited several definitions of 'rape' put forward by radical feminists (p. 428), including the one by law professor Catharine MacKinnon which says that rape is "sex by compulsion, of which physical force is one form." A notable implication of this definition is that an act of sex in which no physical force is involved could come under the category of rape. Another definition cited by Burgess-Jackson (p. 428), one put forward by the American College Health Association, includes "verbal coercion" as part of the definition of 'rape'. These definitions appear to depart from the lexical meaning of the word 'rape'. The Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (1993, p. 968) defines 'rape' as "sexual intercourse with a woman by a man without her consent, and chiefly by force or deception." The feminist redefinitions, by adding "verbal coercion", take the opening made by the qualifier "chiefly" in the lexical definition further, and extend it to cases that would not have been considered rape in the past. A case of this sort would be one in which, during amatory activities, the woman says 'no', but the man persists, and although no physical coercion (or deception) was involved, the two end up having sex. Under the feminist redefinition, many cases of this sort that were formerly not considered to be rape, would now be judged to be rape.

Schiappa (2003, chapter 4) outlined the legal history of definitions of the term 'rape' in a way that is helpful for understanding this case. A longstanding legal definition based on the assumption that a woman has rights only as the property of a man excluded the possibility that a man could rape his wife. Under marriage vows, on this view, the woman agreed to give her husband conjugal rights, and so the claim that he had later "raped" her made no sense. Feminists, strongly opposed to the notion of woman as property, argued that 'rape' should be redefined so that it was possible for a husband to rape his wife, for one man to rape another man, or even for a woman to rape a man. Slowly the state laws in the U.S. have been following these new ideas by changing the old, narrower definition of 'rape' to more inclusive definitions. Schiappa (2003, p. 68) summed up the trend of these developments by noting that seventeen states have dropped the marital rape exemption, deleting the words "not his wife" from the legal definition.

More generally, attempting to define value terms, many of which are fundamentally important in law and ethics, is a lot more problematic than it is often taken to be. Consider a term like 'bribery'. How should it be defined? Students in classes on business ethics often think that bribery can be justified in certain circumstances, but James (2002), in teaching such a course, thinks it best to define 'bribery' in such a way that it is always wrong. This approach leads to a problem, however. Suppose a husband bribes a police official to get his wife out of a foreign jail, where she is being verbally and physically mistreated or even tortured. In such a case, we can argue that what he did was not wrong, by taking two lines of argumentation. One is to argue that what he did was not really bribery, in the ethical sense of the term. The other is to argue that it was bribery, and that, even though bribery is generally wrong, the ethical rule against bribery is subject to exceptions. According to this argument, bribery is wrong, in principle, but even so there are cases where it can be excused or justified by overriding considerations in extreme cases, like those involving loss of life or torture. The problem is how we should define bribery, in ethics and law, but the problem is especially acute because 'bribery' is a value term that denotes something ethically wrong.

Persuasive definitions are routinely used in mass media rhetoric, especially in political argumentation. They are used in advertisements, as in the case cited by Aberdein (2000, p. 1):

> And the brewers' trade papers: they're full of articles about the beauty of true temperance. Ordinary temperance is just gross refusal to drink; but true temperance is something much more refined. True temperance is a bottle of claret with each meal and three double whiskies after dinner.

Persuasive definitions are also very common in all kinds of intellectual discussions, for example the kind one sees in philosophical argumentation. In such instances, the use of a persuasive definition is typically not only very successful as a rhetorical move, but it is also very hard to impose boundaries that would exclude it from rational argumentation, or enable one to clearly evaluate it as legitimate or illegitimate. But persuasive definitions are harder to condemn, or to dismiss as purely rhetorical tactics, when they are used in philosophical argumentation. A few examples will illustrate these claims.

The dialogue on culture illustrates how typical philosophical discussions involve a participant's advocating a redefinition of a word that is already in common usage and has an existing lexical meaning. Thus once you start to think about it, you easily realize that all kinds of intellectual discussions, and not just those in philosophy, continually make use of persuasive definitions. Of course, a philosopher will try to

defend her definition, claiming it is not a persuasive definition but a theoretical definition. A philosopher may argue, for example, that her definition represents the essential properties of the term being defined, and is more than merely a rhetorical persuasion attempt. Such a claim may not be entirely unreasonable, as philosophers do present theories that lay some claim to seeking the truth of a matter being discussed. If persuasion is merely rhetorical, the philosopher claims to be doing more than just trying to persuade. On the other hand, such definitions are generally meant to persuade, and they do advocate a particular viewpoint. A proponent will advocate such a definition, and anyone who questions or disagrees with the definition will argue against it and try to persuade others not to accept it. So there is a good deal to be said for classifying these kinds of definitions under the category of persuasive definitions.

Hallden (1960) analyzed many examples of persuasive definitions used in literary and academic discussions, where the authors offer definitions of 'true love', 'true religion', 'true democracy', 'true culture', 'true poetry', and so forth. In all cases, the author offers a new definition of a term that already has an established lexical meaning, and then tries to defend the definition as representing the "true" meaning or "real essence" of the term. In all these cases, Hallden showed how the redefinition has an evaluative aspect, meaning that the definer is trying to change our views about what is right or wrong. One example (pp. 75–76) is the redefinition of the term 'pornography' argued for by D. H. Lawrence. In his essay 'Pornography and Obscenity', Lawrence begins by considering a definition that requires that something has to be sexually stimulating before it should be classified under the term 'pornography'. He rejected this definition, because it implies that pornography is something "degrading or unpleasant" (Hallden 1960, p. 74). Instead, 'pornography' should be defined as something that is an "erotic stimulant", because this is something pleasant. You could say that Lawrence was trying to put a positive spin on pornography. He was attempting to redefine it so that it could come out as something good, or something to be promoted. Of course, in this case, it is easy to see how transparent and how questionable is the attempt to manipulate generally accepted moral values. But as Hallden showed in many other cases, when you examine persuasive definitions, there is an evaluative aspect that always seems to be present.

Intellectual discussions about abstract subjects like 'true poetry' may be about values, but they seem harmless enough. It is perhaps easy to think that persuasive definitions are generally harmless, and can easily be ignored or dismissed without serious consequences. But what about philosophical definitions of terms like 'abortion', 'death' or 'true democracy'? These terms are tied to ethical and social practices, and

even to law. In such cases, playing around with definitions cannot so easily be dismissed as harmless. In fact there have been a number of case studies of definitions of key terms that are very important for setting policies and laws that have quite serious social and financial implications. In all three cases above, interests were clearly at stake. The battles over the definition of the key term at issue have been hard fought by their advocates and by their opponents. In all three cases, the rhetorical aspects of the persuasive definition are visible.

From the range of examples considered above one can begin to appreciate that persuasive definitions, and problems arising from the use of persuasive language, are very common in all kinds of discourse, from the more abstractly intellectual to the overtly political. But they are not trivial. The social and financial implications of adopting or rejecting such a definition can be quite serious. The persuasive definition is an important rhetorical tool for those engaged in social advocacy, public relations and politics. What critical thinking tools can the average citizen use to defend herself against such clever uses of persuasive definitions by advocates and rhetorical persuaders? The state of the art offers some resources. Unfortunately, what it offers is not as helpful as it could be.

THE STATE OF THE ART OF RESEARCH ON DEFINITIONS

Very little work has been done on the topic of definitions, in the analytic tradition in the philosophy of language and logic, since Richard Robinson's (1950) ground-breaking monograph. Robinson's book is brilliant, but is now quite dated in light of recent developments, and the scope of its treatment is limited. Yet it is the only modern book that has been written on definitions, in the field of philosophy of language and logic (and probably in any field), aside from one other even older one (Davidson, 1885), not well known, and not widely available until recently reprinted. This obscure book is rarely mentioned, and even though I managed to find a copy, I did not find its treatment of definitions to be all that useful. Another treatise on definitions is the book of D. P. Gorsky (1974). It is mainly on definitions in philosophy of science, but is particularly valuable for its nice summary and overview of work on definition by the leading twentieth-century analytical philosophers. A recent collection of papers on definition (Fetzer et al., 1991) displays the positivistic approach that has been and continues to be dominant in analytical philosophy. This approach has limited its investigations severely by taking scientific definitions, especially in mathematics, as the main object of study and as the paradigm of a good definition. However, the official view, as stated in *Principia Mathematica* (Whitehead and Russell, 1927, p. 11) takes the definition

of a new term in mathematics to arbitrarily designate the term as meaning the same as a combination of symbols already used. So conceived, a definition is only a short form of a longer expression. It is not something true or false, nor is the act of defining a part of mathematics, according to Whitehead and Russell (p. 11). This narrow view of definition makes it seem an unimportant and even boring subject (Brown, 1998, p. 111). I know of only one other major analytical work on definitions that has gone beyond the boundaries of this limited positivistic approach, a thesis in the field of speech communication by Erik Viskil, who wrote a Ph.D. dissertation on definitions at the University of Amsterdam (Viskil, 1994). This thesis, unfortunately only available in Dutch, although there is an English summary at the end, is an extremely valuable piece of work, in that it offers a pragmatic and dialectical analysis of how the speech act of definition functions in argumentative discourse. But little attention is apparently being paid to this thesis by the researchers in logic and philosophy of language who might benefit from it. The approach it opened up, while potentially very liberating and powerful, seems to have had little appeal or influence so far in the mainstream.

Despite the paucity of recent scholarly attention, the subject of definitions is very important. We in western culture seem to unthinkingly accept the view that the collection of data is all that is important in research, and that the study of definitions is a kind of trivial logic-chopping that is of no real scientific or practical importance. However, recent work on legal definitions and on the social, political and economic aspects of definitions (Zarefsky et al., 1984; Schiappa, 1996; Zarefksy, 1997), shows that these assumptions are quite wrong. Both in law and public policy matters, arguments about contested definitions can involve billions of dollars. These recent papers convincingly show the importance of the subject of definitions, indicating that research on the place of definitions in argumentation would be extremely useful. The cases cited above show that persuasive definition, in particular, is a powerful tool of public advocacy.

Definitions are fundamentally important in science, and it can be quite difficult to come up with good ones that support a theory. You would think that this point might be obvious in mathematics, but as noted above, the official view is that the setting of definitions is not only trivial, it is not even properly a part of mathematics. Perhaps it is part of philosophy. Philosophical questions of how to define scientific terms can have practical importance. In connection with research on astrobiology, and especially in the life-detection experiments on extra-terrestrial material to be performed on Europa and Mars, it has become important to try to arrive at a scientific definition of the term 'life'. But there have been counter-examples to the definitions that have been offered so far. Thermodynamic and metabolic definitions

have had difficulty avoiding having defined fire or crystals as alive (Cleland and Chyba, 2002, p. 387). According to a Darwinian definition that has been offered (Joyce, 1994), ''Life is a self-sustained chemical system capable of undergoing Darwinian evolution''. One problem with this definition is that mules cannot reproduce, and so are incapable of Darwinian evolution (Cleland and Chyba, 2002, p. 389). The main problem may be, however, that at present we lack any underlying chemical or biological theory that would enable us to define 'life' in the way that we define 'water', for example, by understanding its molecular composition. Even so, the research on extraterrestrial life forms can scarcely proceed without some tentative definition of 'life', even if that definition is regarded as subject to change in light of new scientific findings and theories.

One problem is that, as indicated above, very little has been written on the subject of definitions recently within philosophy of language and logic. It is a sadly neglected topic. This neglect is curious, because the subject of definitions is important even in introductory courses containing material on critical thinking, informal logic, argumentation, and writing skills. There is almost always a chapter on definitions in current and traditional introductory logic textbooks – see, for example, (Copi and Cohen, 2001, chapter 3) – and the subject of definitions has long been regarded as integral to logic. However, the traditional treatment of the subject has changed little over the years (Shepard, 1973; Viskil, 1994). The same rules for evaluating definitions, classifications of different types of definitions and so forth, are always repeated by the logic textbooks. This traditional treatment has come down to us from Aristotelian roots, and has not changed all that much in basic outline over the years. Typically, the textbook account of definitions contains an outdated and questionable doctrine of essentialism at its core. Modern students must find it antiquated and not very convincing. The examples given often appear trivial, and can hardly convince students of the importance of the subject. All that said, there are some things that have practical value, and need to be retained and adapted to modern argumentation theory. One of them is the traditional classification of types of definitions passed along through the generations of logic textbooks.

Citing the classification of types of definitions in the currently most popular logic textbook conveys a good idea of the standard treatment. Hurley (2000 pp. 93–99) cites five types of definitions: stipulative, lexical, précising, theoretical and persuasive.

1. A stipulative definition ''assigns a meaning to a word for the first time'' (pp. 93–94). For example, when breeding a lion and a tiger for the first time, terms 'tigon' and 'liger' were invented. The word 'tigon' was

taken to mean the animal produced when the father is a tiger and the mother is a lion, while 'liger' was the reverse.

2. A lexical definition "is used to report the meaning that a word already has in a language" (p. 94). According to Hurley (p. 94), all dictionary definitions fall into the category of lexical definitions.
3. A précising definition is used to fix borderline cases where a word is vague, and it is not possible to tell whether a word applies to a specific instance or not (p. 95).
4. A theoretical definition assigns a meaning to a word by placing it within a theory that "gives a certain characterization to the entities that the term denotes" (p. 96). Hurley offers the example of the term 'heat', scientifically defined as random motion of molecules. In this case we can appreciate that the concept of motion and that of a molecule is already well accepted and understood in science. Thus if the concept of heat can be defined in terms of these previously accepted concepts, the definition succeeds by basing itself on concepts that are already understood in scientific theories.
5. A persuasive definition assigns an "emotionally charged" or "value-laden" meaning to a term in order to "engender a favorable or unfavorable attitude" towards what is denoted by that term (p. 97). Like many texts, Hurley shows the reader how opposed pairs of persuasive definitions can be deployed by the two sides in a dispute by using examples, including the following one (p. 97). The pro-life side in the abortion dispute might define 'abortion' as the killing of a baby, or even as "the ruthless murdering of a human being". The pro-choice side might define 'abortion' as "a safe and established surgical procedure whereby a woman is relieved of an unwanted burden".

One might here ask the question of how the word 'definition' itself should be defined. To define something is a kind of speech act. One party in a dialogue puts forward a definition, or an attempt at one, in the hope or expectation of getting the other party to accept it. The goal of such a speech act is evidently to alter or fix the meaning of a word or phrase for use in the subsequent dialogue between the two parties. But beyond this, the five different types of definition listed above show that definitions can be used for very different purposes in conversational contexts. For example, if the definition is stipulative, the first party seeks only the agreement of the other. Or if the definition is lexical, it is an attempt by the first party to explain to the second how the term or phrase in question is used in a language. Because of this variety of different purposes of the speech act of definition it is not possible to define 'definition' for all contexts of use, aside from offering the very general definition proposed above. This general definition needs to be fleshed out, as applied to cases, once the type of definition (from the list of five above) can be identified. There is not

enough space here to fill in more gaps in this proposed definition of 'definition', and each of the five types of definition contains problems and puzzles that need analysis within a pragma-dialectical theory.

The persuasive definition is particularly puzzling, because it seems somehow wrong or deceptive, in the way that fallacies are. It seems to be a tactic of deception that can be used to get the best of a speech partner unfairly. But what is wrong with using value-laden terms? What is wrong with persuasion? Perhaps nothing, if one's argumentation has the purpose of advocacy and if the speaker is trying to support a cause. Yet Copi and Cohen (2001, p. 111) are fairly condemnatory, writing that persuasive definitions may be a form of subtle manipulation "slyly injected into the language of a definition that purports to be accurate and that appears on the surface to be objective". Hurley (2000, p. 97) writes that a persuasive definition "masquerades as an honest assignment of meaning to a term while condemning or blessing with approval the subject matter of the definiendum". Stevenson's analysis explains the deception by his theory that the old meaning carries over in the mind of the audience, thus producing a kind of conflict that clouds the issue. This effect has been what is called dissociation in the argumentation literature, as explained in the next section.

ESSENTIALISM AND DISSOCIATION

Many textbooks on logic and critical thinking draw a distinction between nominal and real definitions. This distinction has long been maintained and supported in philosophy. But more recently it has come under quite strong criticism, especially and most notably by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969). Their criticism is that this distinction has been exploited by the argumentation of the traditional philosopher who maintains that his proposed definition of some philosophical concept or term represents its "true" or "real" meaning, while his opponents' proposed definitions are merely nominal. Argumentation, in the view of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, p. 190), is formed by two processes. In association, common forms of argument bring separate elements together to form a unity. In dissociation, elements regarded as forming a whole are separated. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (pp. 415–418) used the appearance-reality pair as a common example of how a writer might use dissociation as an argumentation strategy. A philosophical writer, for example, may divide up the subject of his discussion using this pair of terms. And since there is a preference for reality, such a writer may promote his view by using the term 'real' to describe it. The most obvious example is the use of the so-called real definition in philosophy. One's own definition of a contested concept or term could be called "real" while

any opposed definition could be described using the language of appearance. Use of the real-nominal pair to occupy the high ground in a philosophical discussion might have once been credible. But increasingly, it doesn't sound very convincing. It seems that every proposed definition or theory in philosophy is arguable, and that there are almost always two sides to a controversial issue of a kind subject to philosophical disputation. Fixing on your own definition or viewpoint as "real" and those of your opponents as merely nominal or "unreal" seems like a dogmatic approach that is contrary to good philosophical method. The distinction between real and nominal definitions is associated with the doctrine called essentialism, the view that a real definition presents the essential attributes of what is to be defined.

According to Schiappa (2003, p. 168), the search for real definitions is "doubly vexed" because we have no access to things in themselves, and "there is no way to escape the historical contingency of any particular definitional proposition". The emphasis on real definition represents a kind of "metaphysical absolutism" that needs to be set aside because it ignores or even covers up the social and historical nature of acts of definition (p. 168). I certainly agree with the thesis that essentialism has historically been a bad influence on the study of definitions. This ancient doctrine, in its stronger forms, as found in Plato for example, does not stand up to critical scrutiny. I agree also that definitions are always inherently persuasive in nature, in ways that have not been fully recognized. On the other hand, I continue to think that there is some place for something like the notion of an essential attribute in a definition. When defining a term by genus and difference (a good method in at least some instances, I would say), one needs to differentiate between the more important or central attributes and those that are less important or less central to the meaning of the term. Some notion of essentiality is useful, I think. But maybe instead of talking about "essential" attributes, we should talk about attributes that are central or important for the purpose supposedly served by the definition. Essentialism holds that there is some fixed property, which is the "essence" that defines the "real" meaning or "whatness" of the term to be defined. The term in Aristotle's writings that we translate as "essence" is *to ti en einai*, translated by Loux (1999, p. 281) as "the what it is to be". But there can be varieties of essentialism of course. According to the Platonic version of this doctrine, the real essence is a fixed, independent reality that never changes. All attempts at definition that fall short of expressing it are merely "nominal" and have no standing as good definitions that command assent. In less extreme forms, the so-called essence could be something less fixed and absolute. But essentialism in its more extreme forms is a bad old doctrine that is no longer useful or plausible. It is obstructive to inquiry and dialogue to postulate that there is an eternally fixed essence that

represents the true or real meaning of a term. All definitions should be seen as artifacts that have been constructed for a communicative purpose and are subject to change and improvement. Within constraints, they should be open to discussion. Often the purpose of a definition is to explain the meaning of a word, but not always. In some cases, for example, a definition is put forward to secure agreement to fix the boundaries of a concept and thereby move a dialogue forward constructively. The purpose in such a case may be to fix stability of usage of a key term to try to secure agreement and settlement of an issue. Because of its incompatibility with this pragmatic or purpose-relative way of defining definition, essentialism is not a useful theory. That said, there remains some role for some doctrine that is like essentialism but much less absolutistic and Platonic. A definition should not be just a listing of all the attributes of the term or concept to be defined. It must focus on a central group of attributes that are useful for the purpose of the definition.

Philosophical definitions can lay some claim to being theoretical definitions, but they still remain debatable in most cases. It would be a mistake to see them as being "real" or essential definitions that are fixed, and not subject to argumentation. For example, in ethics there have recently been disputes about how to define or redefine 'death'. I myself took part in these disputes some years ago, arguing that death should be defined as "brain death" or irreversible cessation of brain functioning. Schiappa (2003, p. 38) commented that I had used "strategic dissociation" in arguing for the acceptance of the brain death definition. According to Schiappa, I had used dissociation by claiming that my definition was the "real" one, and by arguing that my opponent's proposed definitions did not represent the true essence of the death of a person. But on reading Schiappa's analysis, even though I could see the insight in what he was saying, I found myself thinking that there was a reason why I maintained that the definition I was advocating was better than the old one. I had argued that the traditional definition of death as cessation of breathing was an "emotional" rather than an intellectual view, and a "semblance" rather than a view based on scientific reality. I would, of course, think that my view was right, at least arguably, and that the definition I advocated was the best one. When a philosopher argues for a certain viewpoint, naturally he is expected to accept that view as the "right" one, and the opposed view as the "wrong" one. Certainly, he is supposed to be open-minded, and look at the evidence on both sides. But he is also expected to speak or write with some conviction. In line with these reasonable expectations, you would expect him to use dissociation. And indeed, you could say that dissociation is a natural part of advocacy in discourse like philosophical argumentation. Of course, it is a very bad thing if a philosopher goes too far, and sees only his

own view or definition as "real", refusing to consider the opposed view at all because it is "illusory" or whatever. But you expect the philosopher to take the position that his own view is right, or represents reality better than the opposed view. Otherwise, the rational thing for him to do is to change his mind, and embrace the opposed view.

One might question then whether the reaction against essentialism has itself gone a bit too far. Taking the stance of posing your own definition of a key term in a philosophical discussion as "real" or "essential" might be quite normal, expected and even reasonable (to a degree). It might not be quite as bad as the anti-essentialist suggests. Much of the issue turns on what one takes a philosophical discussion to be. Is it an objective investigation into the truth (what I call an inquiry)? Is the objective truth out there somewhere, and should the goal of philosophical discussion be to discover it? Or should a philosophical discussion be seen as a dialogue with two opposed opinions where each side tries to persuade the other that his or her opinion is more justified by rational argumentation? The first view is positivistic, and not very plausible any longer. It is a lot less plausible than it may have once seemed, at any rate. But if the second view is the right one, then it would seem unreasonable to require the participants to only use certifiably "real" definitions. You might even expect them to use persuasive definitions of a kind that advocate their own view, and are contrary to the opposed view. You might expect them to contend that the persuasive definitions they advocated themselves are "right", or represent the real essence of the thing being defined. In short, essentialism in some guise may not be as far out of line with the realities of philosophical argumentation as it may appear to be. The issue turns on one's view of what philosophical discussion is, or should be. It falls into the area nowadays called metaphilosophy. Some like to think of philosophy as a kind of persuasion dialogue, or critical discussion, that has the aim of resolving a conflict of opinions. According to this view, you would expect the proponent of a view to strongly argue for his view, and adopt the stance that it is the "right" view of the matter being discussed. Of course, you should also expect the philosophical discussant to be open to conceding that his view was not the right one, if rational arguments present evidence to justify that conclusion. Thus it seems that the problem with essentialism is that by dissociation, it forces a dichotomy between nominal and real that is too sharp, like the dichotomy between good and evil. The outcome is that the old form of essentialism supports a bad theory of philosophical argument that allows a philosophical arguer to preemptively and dogmatically dismiss all opposed views as "unreal".

MODELING PERSUASION DIALOGUE

A large part of the problem is that any kind of persuasion tends to be seen as rhetorical, or even as subjective, and therefore the notion of the persuasive definition is already seen in a negative light. Persuasion, and perhaps even the whole subject of definition itself, is outside the scope of science, especially mathematics and natural science, we think. Therefore we tend to be suspicious about persuasive definitions, and see them as suspicious, or even inherently illegitimate. But is it possible that rational persuasion is a legitimate aim of argumentation, and can even be carried out and evaluated in some kind of objective framework in which there are rules for proper persuasion? In such a context, persuasion could be an appropriate speech act so that, under the right conditions, a persuasion attempt could be a legitimate goal of rational argumentation. In such a framework, putting forward a persuasive definition could be quite correct and appropriate as a move in argumentation, especially if the argument is about values, or matters pertaining to values.

Just such a framework has been proposed by Bench-Capon (2002). In attempting to resolve disagreements of the kind that arise in ethics and law, according to Bench-Capon, it may be impossible to provide conclusive proof of a claim, but it may be possible to provide persuasion based on the values of the intended audience, after the manner of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969). To model such argumentation, Bench-Capon has introduced value-based argumentation frameworks (VAFs) in which arguments are assessed relative to the relative strengths of the values involved. For example (Bench-Capon, 2002, p. 231), universities may put forward the argument that more money should be spent on universities on the grounds that standards need to be maintained. Government may resist this argument by arguing that increased funding would require raising taxes. Even though both parties to the dispute may agree on the facts, there is a need to try to resolve the disagreement based on rational persuasion rather than coercion. The model for evaluating argumentation in such a case is that of the persuasion dialogue, a formal structure with moves and rules, and in which the aim of each participant is rational persuasion based on the values and other accepted premises of the other party.

Another kind of example would be a philosophical discussion about an ethical subject like the meaning of the term 'virtue' in the *Meno*. Two opposing viewpoints expressing different values are put forward, and even though it ends in a draw, the dialogue is ethically enlightening. It has a maieutic effect of bringing new ideas to birth, by critically examining received opinions and subjecting them to probing scrutiny. Thus it can be described as a successful persuasion dialogue even though the original conflict of opinions was not resolved. In such a

persuasion dialogue the aim of the one party is to persuade the other party by means of premises that reflect commitments and values of that other party. Different formal models of persuasion dialogue have been constructed and studied (Walton and Krabbe, 1995). Some are called rigorous persuasion dialogues (RPD's) because the allowed moves are precisely determined by rigid and exact rules, and the argumentation in such a dialogue is formally rigorous. The problem is that RPD's do not model natural language persuasion dialogue very well because this kind of dialogue needs to be more flexible and open in certain ways. For example, in a realistic persuasion dialogue, one party may have changed her viewpoint if persuaded rationally to do so by the arguments of the other party. Thus a central problem for modeling realistic persuasion dialogue, for example in disagreements about values, is to allow for retraction of commitments in some instances. Different formal persuasion dialogue systems impose rules on retraction of commitments in different ways.

Johnstone (1959) argued for the thesis that philosophical argument is centrally based on what would now be classified as a speech act of rational persuasion. An argument used for the purpose of rational persuasion is a set of propositions made up of premises and a conclusion. The conclusion is a ''claim'' made by one party, and the other party in a dialogue has expressed doubt about that claim. On such a view, rational persuasion takes place when the first party produces a valid (or structurally correct) argument for her conclusion based only on premises that are commitments of the second party. If rational persuasion of this sort is a legitimate goal of argumentative discourse, there can be precise rules governing persuasive moves in a dialogue. Thus, in principle a move can be judged to be appropriate or illegitimate in such a dialogue in relation to the goal of the dialogue, the prior moves of the other party, and the commitments of the other party at a given point in the dialogue. This means that an argument, or for that matter a proposed definition, that has the purpose of rational persuasion, can be a correct move in any discourse that is meant to be persuasive. There need be nothing fallacious or suspicious about it. On this view, a definition is not merely an arbitrary stipulation that takes place outside the argumentation in the dialogue. It is a part of the argumentation as such, and in principle, it can be a legitimate part of it that is needed to help the dialogue fulfill its collective goal. Four requirements have been identified as characteristic of successful argumentation in persuasion dialogue (Walton, 2002, p. 251).

(R1) The respondent accepts the premises as commitments.
(R2) Each inference in the chain of argumentation is structurally correct.
(R3) The chain of argumentation must have the proponent's thesis as its (ultimate) conclusion.

(R4) Arguments meeting (R1), (R2) and (R3) are the only means that count as fulfilling the proponent's goal in the dialogue.

These four requirements define the speech act of persuasion in dialogue, showing how argumentation in a critical discussion takes the form of attempted rational persuasion of one party by the moves of the other. Such an argument is designed to persuade a respondent, by using the respondent's own commitments as premises in a chain of inferences that lead to the proponent's ultimate conclusion to be proved in the dialogue. The four requirements can be taken (by hypothesis) to form the fundamental dialectical characteristics of persuasion as a speech act. If a persuasive definition is meant to persuade, and thus has a function as an argument, it could perform this function quite appropriately, provided there is no deception or confusion about what its real purpose is. This formal dialogue model of persuasion throws a new light on persuasive definitions. Viewed within such a model, a persuasive definition is not just a stipulation or fiat. It has the function of an argument. It can be used as a device to persuade the other party, based on the values and commitments of the other party, but moving toward a conclusion that represents the viewpoint of the first party.

THE NEW APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF DEFINITIONS

What is required to support the theory of persuasive definitions advanced above is a new approach to the ancient subject of definitions. The new approach needs to offer something that can modify or replace the parts of the existing set of guidelines that depend on the old doctrine of essentialism. Essentialism is no longer a credible doctrine, and it is a large part of what makes the whole subject of definitions seem obscure and useless. A new theory needs to fill the place of essentialism in the subject of definitions. It needs to be more up to date, and to recognize the way definitions have come to play an important role in public life. The new approach needs to be much more flexible and pragmatic, and to take into account the social and legal aspects of definitions. It needs to go beyond old narrow views of language, like the view that language has two functions – a descriptive function (to convey facts) and an emotive function (to express emotions). The reality of language does not fit any simplistic bifurcation like this. The new approach needs to do justice to the reality that definitions can be used for different purposes in many different kinds of discourse. A new pragmatic view of how definitions are used in argumentation is needed. On such a view, any attempt to put forward a definition needs to be evaluated in light of the supposed goal of the type of discourse the definition is part of. The new pragmatic

approach needs to evaluate the putting forward of a definition in light of the supposed purpose of doing this. In this respect, it needs to be much broader and more flexible than the traditional approach.

In another respect, the new approach needs to be narrowed, at least to begin with. For the subject of definitions, as a topic for systematic research, is extremely wide. The study of definitions encompasses all language use. It encompasses also various fields of language use, like lexicography and other linguistic disciplines. On the other hand, the topic of this project is that of the logic of definitions, the central core of the subject of definitions that has to do with the putting forward and use of definitions in arguments. The topic of concern is how definitions can be evaluated from a logical point of view when they are put forward in argumentation, or play some role in argumentation. That doesn't exclude all consideration of cases where the purpose of using a definition is other than that of purely making an argument. For in many cases, argument and explanation are mixed in together in the use of a definition. But the restriction of the topic is to cases where argumentation, or the putting forward of an argument, is involved. The standard by which we will measure the use of definition is how it contributes to rational argumentation in a given case. Thus the study of definitions, in the new dialectical approach, should primarily concentrate on the use of definitions in arguments.

Because of this restriction, the project needs to begin with some framework on the evaluation of arguments, when arguments are used for different purposes in different kinds of discourse. Fortunately, a framework of this kind has recently been developed in studies on argumentation. The new dialectic is a theory about the analysis and evaluation of arguments in different types of dialogue, or conversational frameworks of argument use (Walton, 1998). The new dialectical approach to definitions can be based on this general theory of argumentation, and can provide an extension of it to cases in which definitions are used in argumentation. Persuasion is one type of dialogue among other types (Walton and Krabbe, 1995; Bench-Capon, 2002), and when a definition is brought forward, it should be evaluated in light of the type of dialogue it is part of.

A dialectical approach to theory of definition is needed that can account for all the problematic aspects of the various cases, and that fits in with the present state of the art in new dialectical methods of argumentation theory. This theory needs to deal with the following kinds of questions, as they arise in real cases.

1. When definitions are put forward in real cases of argumentation, what sorts of problems and difficulties are most often encountered?
2. What format should the putting forward of a definition take, in different kinds of cases where argumentation is being used?

3. How should a critical questioner react in a dialogue to the putting forward of a definition by the other party?
4. Can any useful classification of the different types of definitions be given that is an improvement on the traditional method of classification?
5. What criteria can be given for the evaluation of persuasive definitions?
6. What should be said about the claim that lexical definitions contain presumptions about values, and advocate values?
7. What role do definitions play in political argumentation, and what if anything, can be said about evaluating or questioning such definitions?
8. What is the role of definitions in polls and surveys, especially in relation to measurable response effects?
9. What seem to be the main uses of legal definitions in legal argumentation, and can these uses tell us anything about definitions generally?
10. How are definitions used in scientific argumentation, and how are such uses comparable to other uses of definitions?

It is evident from these questions that the new theory must be dialectical, in two key respects. First, it must evaluate uses of definitions in different contexts of use. For example, scientific definitions need to be judged differently from legal definitions. Second, it must evaluate how definitions should properly be put forward by one party in a dialogue, and how they should properly be responded to by the other party in the dialogue. What should be important is how the definition was used for some purpose in a goal-directed, collaborative communicative exchange. The dialectical nature of the new approach shows how it is different from the approaches that have been used in the past with respect to the study of definitions.

The new dialectical theory needs to see definition as a complex speech act, or rather a family of speech acts (Singh, 1999). The purpose of a lexical definition, of the kind found in a dictionary, is to explain the meaning of a word, and its usage, to an average person who can be assumed to be familiar with commonly used words. How then can it be that the purpose of a persuasive definition is to persuade? Using argumentation to try to persuade or rationally convince a speech partner to accept your viewpoint is, in principle, a legitimate kind of speech activity, however (Van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1984, 1992; Walton, 1998, chapter 2). If so, using a persuasive definition should not be considered inherently wrong. If a brewer's ad defines 'temperance' as moderation rather than refusal to drink, there is nothing inherently wrong with that. We know it is an ad to sell beer, and advocacy in advertising to sell products is normal and legitimate. Or in the redefinition of rape case, we know the feminists

have an agenda. But they should be free to argue for changing the law on the basis of the view they advocate. Whether the proposed redefinition is based on good arguments, either philosophical or legal, is another question. In both kinds of cases, it helps a critical thinker to understand what a persuasive definition is, and to see what is going on. But if the use of a persuasive definition to advocate a product or cause is not inherently wrong, when then is using one wrong, or at least deceptive and misleading? In the new dialectical approach, there are three answers to this question.

The dialectical theory that persuasion dialogue can be a normative framework in which rational argumentation is supposed to be used to advocate one's viewpoint puts persuasive definition in a new perspective. In a critical discussion (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1992), the purpose of the dialogue is to resolve a conflict of opinions by means of rational argumentation. The two parties in such a dialogue, the proponent and the respondent, are obliged to follow the rules for the conduct of the critical discussion. Each has a thesis to prove, and thus when a participant's argument is challenged, he or she has a burden of proof to fulfill. Indeed, one of the rules for the critical discussion is that a party who advances a standpoint or makes a claim is obliged to give reasons to support it if the other party asks her to do so (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1992, p. 208). But the problem with one party's using a persuasive definition is that the other may not be aware that the emotive or persuasive use of terms put forward is, in effect, the advancing of a standpoint. It makes a claim, and supports the viewpoint of the side putting the definition forward. Thus in philosophical argumentation, for example, to use a persuasive definition is to advocate one's own theory. That is not wrong in a persuasion dialogue, but if the arguer presses forward and refuses to allow challenges to that definition, or questioning of it, that is a problem. It violates the rule of a critical discussion that one should present argument to support a claim if the other party challenges or questions that claim. The problem is a species of failure to fulfill requirements of burden of proof in a persuasion dialogue.

Aberdein (2000, p. 7) has recognized that the failure, in cases where a persuasive definition has been used in an illicit way, is a fault in the dialogue structure in the way an argument has been presented by one party and reacted to by another.

> Persuasive definition amounts to an invitation to one's interlocutor to accept without argument (if only for the purposes of discussion) the definitions of one's own theory. This is something he may understandably be reluctant to do, especially if these definitions conflict with ones offered by a theory of his own. The crucial problem affecting the illegitimate persuasive definition is a failure to engage with one's interlocutor's understanding of the term at issue. Mere insistence on the use of one's own theory, and the definitions that support it, without explanation of why this is superior, cannot hope to be legitimately persuasive.

The failure, as Aberdein diagnoses it, is dialectical. It is the proponent's insistence on her own theory, and the definitions and wording backing it up, while failing to show why this theory is superior to that of the respondent. The failure, as he puts it very well, is that such a move in argumentation cannot hope to be legitimately persuasive. It may be actually persuasive, as the cases above illustrate. It may be rhetorically persuasive in moving the audience to action, or to accept a viewpoint. But from a dialectical point of view it can be diagnosed as a failure, both because of its not fulfilling a proper requirement of burden of proof, and as using a deceptive tactic of dissociation to try to mask this failure.

The second explanation of what is wrong with using a persuasive definition in some cases is that there is a shift from one type of dialogue to another. But the contextual shift may not be apparent to the respondent. Suppose the given context of a case is such that the respondent in a dialogue expects a lexical definition. But suppose the proponent puts forward a persuasive definition, like one of the ones above. This kind of move can be misleading, and the unwary respondent may unthinkingly accept it, assuming it is a lexical or even a stipulative definition. There can then be a problem, because the persuasive definition as a speech act is really an argument. Or at least it has the pragmatic structure of an argument. It is the advancing of a viewpoint. It has a burden of proof. The naïve respondent may fail to demand evidential support, however, thinking that the proposed definition is merely an explanation of usage, or a stipulation recommending a new usage. Thus a persuasive definition can be appropriate if both parties rightly see it for what it is, and the dialogue is a persuasion dialogue. Yet many of us are used to seeing definitions as performing an explanatory role rather than an argumentative one, and hence persuasive definitions can be deceptive.

A comparable kind of dialectical shift can be detected in the wetland case. Part of the problem in this case is the shift from the scientific definition of 'wetland' to a political definition that might or might not be scientifically justified. But the burden of proof aspect also needs to be considered. The new definition was implemented without inviting public comment, or leaving room for further discussion. A similar problem is evident in the truly needy case. The redefinition of the term was gradual, and carried out in such a way that it was not visible to the public. Thus once again, there is nothing wrong with proposing a persuasive redefinition, as long as it is recognized that it is a persuasive move in argumentation that is open to discussion, and to opposing views that might define the term in a different way. The persuasive definition becomes problematic when such avenues for further discussion are blocked off. This brings us to the third explanation of what is wrong with persuasive definitions in some cases. The problem is one

of deception and concealment. As noted above, if the respondent expects a stipulative or a lexical definition, he may not realize that he is getting a persuasive one instead. He may not recognize that he can, and even should, challenge this definition. The problem with dialectical shifts is that they are often deceptive because the shift is contextual.

It has been shown above how a new dialectical approach can provide a useful framework for explaining how persuasive definitions are problematic and deceptive in many cases, without condemning them as inherently illegitimate. In a like manner, the new dialectical approach can be brought to bear on solving the remaining nine problems posed above. But the proof of such a sweeping claim is obviously not possible in a short investigation. The present project has clearly just been a small first step towards carrying out a comprehensive dialectical program of research on definitions.

NOTES

[1] I would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for a grant that supported the work in this paper, and to thank Chris Reed for discussions on argumentation schemes.

[2] Exceptions are the work of Robinson (1950), Viskil (1994, 1995), and the paper by Andrew Aberdein (2000) on persuasive definitions.

[3] In this case, as well others cited above, there is a problem of whether the text of discourse can be clearly interpreted as offering a persuasive definition as opposed to only being a persuasive use of language meant to reinterpret a term. Either way, the cases are of interest from a point of view of argumentation theory. Below, further comments will be made on how to define the speech act of putting forward a definition.

[4] This statement does not imply the reasonableness of the philosopher's definition is guaranteed by her presenting a theory that lays some claim to seeking the truth of the matter being discussed.

[5] According to amazon.com, there is an Elibron Classics reprint available, based on the 1885 edition by Longmans, Green & Co., London.

[6] See (Viskil 1995) for an English outline of the direction of work taken in the thesis

[7] I am not very familiar with work in the social sciences or linguistics where there may be some useful work using different terminology. My searches through databases, although quite extensive, have been based on keywords like 'persuasive definition' that represent the terminology in argumentation, logic and philosophy.

[8] Quine (1971) has been a notable critic of essentialism.

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