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Questioning and its role in argumentation

El preguntar y su papel en la argumentación

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ABSTRACT
As long as arguments-as-products are at the center of attention of argumentation theorists, the role of questions and questioning in argumentation will be largely neglected. But if our starting-point is the process of arguing as something beyond the mere presentation of arguments, then the subject becomes accessible. This paper is a first, tentative attempt at presenting, illustrating and discussing eight propositions about the role of questions and questioning in argumentation. A protagonist's standpoint is here conceived as an answer to a question, itself located within a complex web of questions; and the antagonist is conceived as someone whose main duty is to conduct a kind of careful cross-examination of the protagonist.

KEYWORDS: questions, questioning, standpoint, role of protagonist, role of antagonist, burden of proof, burden of questioning.

RESUMEN
Mientras los argumentos, en tanto productos, permanezcan en el centro de atención de los teóricos de la argumentación, el papel de las preguntas y el preguntar en la argumentación será en gran medida descuidado. Si en cambio partimos de que el proceso de argumentar va más allá de la mera presentación de argumentos, estamos en posición de tratar este tema. Este artículo es un primer intento de presentar, ilustrar y discutir ocho proposiciones relativas al papel de las preguntas y el preguntar en la argumentación. La posición del protagonista será concebida aquí como respuesta a una pregunta, ella misma situada en una compleja red de preguntas; y el antagonista será concebido como alguien que tiene el deber de conducir con esmero una especie de interrogatorio del protagonista.

PALABRAS CLAVE: preguntar, pregunta, punto de vista, papel de protagonista, papel de antagonista, carga de la prueba, carga de la pregunta.

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If an argumentation theorist is only, or mainly, interested in arguments as such, and not so much in the whole communicative process which we call 'arguing', then questions will tend to disappear from view. The reason for this is quite simple: according to the ordinary idea of logic, questions are not part of arguments, because they can be neither premises nor conclusions. I am myself convinced that this ordinary idea is unduly restrictive: various logics, formal or informal, *are* possible in which questions may be both premises and conclusions.[1] If such a heterodox idea should ever become orthodox, then the issue of whether questions have a role in argumentation would become as weird as if somebody would doubt that statements (or propositions or declarative utterances) do; but this day has certainly not yet come.

On the other hand, questions are widely taken to have a role, if not within arguments, then at least in the *evaluation* of arguments, as has been shown by Hastings (1965) and his incredibly successful idea of 'critical questions', adopted by many if not most theorists of argumentation. Again, quite a few of the so-called fallacies, a staple in argument evaluation, are related, one way or another, to questions, as has been shown in detail by Walton (1989).

The thesis of this paper is, however, that questions, and especially the activity of asking and raising questions—questioning for short—plays a role well beyond the evaluation of arguments. I have come to this conclusion by looking carefully at actual examples of argumentative interactions (real or realistic) as well as by reflecting on observations done by people who have a considerable experience in arguing. These have led me to eight propositions (I dare not call them 'theorems') about the role of questioning in argumentation which I here submit for discussion. Taken together, they seem to suggest that questions may be much more important for argumentation theory than one would think at first.

I shall present my eight propositions by loosely following the order of the stages in a critical discussion proposed in pragma-dialectics, because my search drew inspiration from that model. This autobiographical accident, however, should neither be taken as implying that my propositions are only valid within the theoretical framework of pragma-dialectics nor indeed that I am here proposing to reform that framework in some

[1] Wiśniewski's logic of erotetic inference immediately comes to mind (1995, 1996, 2013). In the dialogical logic of the Lorenzen-Lorenz or Hintikka variety, questions do appear in the formalism, albeit not as premises or conclusions (for a review, see Krabbe, 2008). The same can be said of the different versions of formal dialectics (e.g. Hamblin, 1970; Barth & Krabbe, 1982; Hegselmann, 1985; for a review see Krabbe & Walton, 2011). Walton's dialogue profiles (1998: 138), as well as the dialectical profiles in pragma-dialectics (van Eemeren, Houtlosser & Snoeck Henkemans, 2007, *passim*), are informal versions thereof. I come back to this point in my conclusion, *ad* (3).

way. In this paper, I intend neither of these. The propositions should stand or fall by themselves; and the reader will best judge whether they make sense within her framework. If the pragma-dialectical terminology should bother her, I am sure this can be replaced without jeopardizing my position.

About half of my eight propositions are resolutely *normative*, i.e. they suggest norms that arguers should follow, at least if they want to be reasonable (and if they are not just quarrelling or fooling around). The other half are rather *factual* in character, i.e. they pretend to describe how people, as a matter of fact, argue and not so much how they should argue, although normative aspects are often not far from the surface. This seems to me simply unavoidable in this field.

PROPOSITION I
EVERY DISCUSSION IS PRESIDED OVER BY A QUESTION

It is commonly assumed that a disagreement is the starting-point, even the trigger, of every argumentative discussion. This is true as far as it goes; but it does not go very far. A disagreement is only possible if there is a question which has been given an answer which is moot.[2] Such a question I call a *presiding* question in order to distinguish it from what we often call the *underlying* question (also referred to sometimes as the *real* one), thereby indicating that the two are not always the same.

As we shall see, people often have more than one question in mind (see Proposition II). Again, discussion partners may occasionally be confused about *what* is the question that somebody is supposed to have answered in a way that proves not to be quite acceptable to her audience, and so they may be confused as to *what* question's answer they are actually discussing. In other words, several different questions may be conflated in a discussion, and some work of disentanglement should be undertaken in order for the discussion to make progress.

[2] When in pragma-dialectics it is said that a standpoint is an opinion (a factual assertion, a prediction, a judgment or an advice) about a *controversial issue*, it is also presupposed, even if not actually *expressed* in so many words, that a standpoint is the answer to a *question*. In fact, when pragma-dialectics was first conceived, its founders considered for a while making a critical discussion start with a question instead of a standpoint (van Eemeren, personal communication; cf. van Eemeren, Houtlosser & Snoeck Henkemans, 2007: 21-22). Beyond pragma-dialectics, all argumentation theorists, as far as I know, see opinions, or even flat-out assertions, as triggers for argumentation; but their theorizing seems to forget that any opinion, and *a fortiori* any assertion, especially if it leads to an argumentative discussion, must be the answer to a question. Within Walton's theory (1998), this is even clearer in dialogues of inquiry, discovery, negotiation, information seeking, and deliberation than it is in dialogues of persuasion. As for quarrels, I suspect that they are also triggered by a question, although the real or underlying question tends to be different from the presiding question and often completely or almost completely hidden from sight.

Moreover, questions are never isolated. On the contrary, questions are always part of a whole and usually complex 'web of questions', so much so that, when a question presides over a discussion, several other questions also resonate, and are, in one way or another, present in that discussion. (See Proposition III below.)

Finally, presiding questions can be either perfectly explicit or more or less implicit. Let us consider both cases separately.

Sub-proposition Ia

The presiding question can be perfectly explicit in a discussion.

To illustrate this, even a simple textbook example will suffice:

Example 1 or E1 (van Eemeren & Snoeck Henkemans, 2017: 28-29).

> The adult education center in London offers courses in 'conversation and discussion techniques.' In one of these courses, a role play was performed that takes place in the board room of *Harrods* department store. The following […] is an excerpt from this role play.
>
> *Chairman:* If everyone is present then I would like to welcome everyone to the meeting. I believe the problem is clear. We have a shortage of personnel and new workers cannot be found. We have received an offer from an organization for job placement of discharged prisoners that would make ex-prisoners available to us as employees. Mrs. Foster is present as an expert to tell us more about this. I would then like to open up the matter for discussion. I would also like to mention that, if at all possible, this meeting ought to be concluded within twenty minutes.

The discussion starts here with an explicit *question*. By calling it 'explicit', I am not saying that the Chairman has actually used an interrogative sentence. He clearly has not; and yet he is equally clearly asking a specific question, namely *Whether or not it is convenient to employ recently released ex-convicts in order to overcome the current scarcity of potential employees*.[3] The Chairman's audience also understands him as having asked that question. Because it is a *closed* question in the grammatical sense, the Chairman is inviting his audience to give one of only two possible answers, Yes or No, each one constituting a definite claim on which there may be disagreement and so a discussion started.

Many discussions do not have as explicit a presiding question as this one, but the example shows that this can happen. The example is certainly made up, but whoever

[3] From now on, I shall use the devise of highlighting any question to which a controversial claim can be given as an answer by italicizing it. Sometimes the question will be formulated through direct interrogative sentences, sometimes through indirect speech, as here. Numbers will be used whenever convenient. Note that I have included quite a few details in the Chairman's question. In **E1** the question is introduced by saying 'I believe the problem is clear', followed by the details which I incorporated in my formulation. Presiding questions are always *specific* (see Collingwood's quote below, under **O4**).

has participated in organizational meetings will know that their point is to solve specific problems, and that means to give specific answers to specific questions, even though there may also lurk other questions in the background.

Sub-proposition Ib

The presiding question may be, at least to some extent, implicit.

People often, perhaps even usually, engage in argumentation without it being clear to them (at least not in the way they talk) that they are dealing with a question. Witnesses to a given discussion—eavesdroppers, overhearers, intended public, later readers of a transcript, analysts, argumentation theorists—sometimes miss the fact as well. We shall see several examples of the phenomenon as we proceed, but for the time being consider the following vivid case:

E2 (overheard in an airplane by Gilbert, 1999; numbering added).

1. *She*. We never seem to really talk anymore.
2. *He*. Sure we do, we talk all the time.
3. *She*. But I don't feel like we really communicate.
4. *He*. That's because you're always talking about your work.
5. *She*. Not all the time.
6. *He*. Well, a lot of the time—most of it, in fact.
7. *She*. Oh, never mind.
8. *He*. See, when the talk becomes real you stop it.

One has to be bold to claim with any certainty what the question in this exchange is; I certainly shall not try. The presiding, if implicit, question is, of course, *Whether or not we* [sc. these two spouses] *really talk to each other*.

Given that the difference of opinion between husband and wife seems to get curiously reversed by the end of the short exchange (compare Turns 1-2 with Turn 8), it may not be altogether uncharitable to suggest that the underlying question is a completely different one, but we shall come to that later on (see Proposition III). For my present purpose, **E2** should suffice as an example of a discussion in which the question—whichever it is—remains implicit.

We should also remember that explicitness does not always protect discussion partners from forgetting, or mistaking, what the question is (see examples **E4**, **E5** and **E6** below). There are cases in which explicitness is meticulously avoided, and even cases in which the deliberate avoidance of explicitness is indispensable to conducting the business of argumentation. This is quite common, for instance, in diplomacy.

Finally, explicitness is always and everywhere a matter of degree. What is explicit for somebody may be almost impossible to make out for somebody else. And in the end, no message can be fully explicit, as we all know.

PROPOSITION II
A CLAIM MAY CORRESPOND TO MORE THAN ONE PRESIDING QUESTION

Again, a simple textbook example will serve well enough to illustrate this proposition:

E3 (van Eemeren & Snoeck-Henkemans, 2017: 12; numbering added).

1. *Robson:* Research on artificial intelligence ought to be actively stimulated by the U.S. government.
2. *Briggs:* I totally disagree with that.

Anybody who is even moderately acquainted with the basics of economics and political science will know that, no matter what activity or sector of an economy is under discussion, the question always arises, *Whether it is advisable to stimulate that activity or sector—or not*. In the usual context of state intervention, i.e. of economic policy, the question seems to be just one question, so that the difference of opinion in **E3** would be, in pragma-dialectical terminology, a single mixed one.

However, things become more complicated if we assume just a little bit more of knowledge in politico-economic matters, in particular that the state can stimulate a sector of the economy either actively or passively. Active interventionism may go all the way from direct investments to full nationalization of part or even of the whole sector (cf. Lenin's doctrine of the 'commanding heights'). Passive interventionism, on the other hand, consists in the weakening or suppression of obstacles to private initiative, e.g. by partial or total, permanent or temporary, tax exemptions. Under this rather more sophisticated understanding of Robson's sentence, we immediately see that it corresponds to two different propositions. In order to highlight the relevance of questioning to this interpretation, I suggest converting **E3** to a question format, in which, at Turn 1, two different questions are each given its own answer:

(1) Ought research on artificial intelligence to be stimulated by the United States government? — Yes!

(2) Ought such stimulation to be active (and not merely passive)? — Yes!

We thus conclude that the difference of opinion in that text is multiple.[4] This conclusion is confirmed by the use of the adverb 'totally' at Turn 2. That adverb implies that Briggs disagrees with answer (1) as well as with answer (2). In fact, we could even go further and assume a slightly different context, with three ordered questions and their respective answers:

> *(1) Ought research on artificial intelligence to be stimulated (promoted) in the United States? — Yes!*
>
> *(2) Ought such stimulation to be the responsibility of the United States government? — Yes!*
>
> *(3) Ought such governmental stimulation to be active (and not merely passive)? — Yes!*

Here we would have eight (2^3) logically possible answers to these three questions, of which, for economic reasons, only four are possible in practice, as shown in Table 1.[5]

Table 1. Questions and Answers in E3

(1)	*(2)*	*(3)*	*Standpoints*
Yes	Yes	Yes	Robson
Yes	Yes	No	Possible (*a*)
Yes	No	Yes	Impossible
Yes	No	No	Possible (*b*)
No	Yes	Yes	Impossible
No	Yes	No	Impossible
No	No	Yes	Impossible
No	No	No	Briggs

Indeed, the emphatic character of the already mentioned adverb 'totally' in Briggs's reply would even sound more appropriate if the negative answers are three instead of only two. In that case there would actually be two intermediate positions between the poles of Robson and Briggs: (*a*) some people might hold that research on artificial intelligence should be stimulated and that it is the duty of the government to do the stimulation, yet

[4] I would go as far as to suggest that the best way to operationalize the pragma-dialectical distinction between single and multiple differences of opinion might well be to ask ourselves whether we can identify more than one question presiding over the exchange we want to analyze.

[5] In point of fact, the differences of opinion will multiply even more if we look at the negative option in the question of the advisability of AI research stimulation. A pure logician may rest content with saying that a No to stimulation is *contradictory* to a Yes. However, in the same way that stimulation is in **E3** so verbalized as to admit of different ways to do it, non-stimulation admits of a whole gamut of possibilities: from *laissez faire* through high taxation, special permits and quotas to downright legal prohibition. Table 1 would just keep growing; and some of the relevant standpoints may come up in a discussion between Robson and Briggs, or not, depending on how sophisticated, informed, imaginative, and patient they are.

the state should do it passively not actively; (*b*) a different group of people might hold that that research on artificial intelligence should be stimulated, yet the government should abstain from the task. Robson would thus have a threefold difference of opinion with Briggs, a twofold one with (*b*) and a single one with (*a*).

Many a discussion goes awry precisely because the parties engaged are unaware of the fact that they actually are discussing several conflated questions. The same may be true of the audience (if there is one) listening to the exchange—and even of scholars studying it from a safer distance, should their background knowledge be insufficient for the task (see Proposition V).

Notice that some combinations of answers seem to be excluded to avoid contradiction: if you reject the idea of stimulating AI research wholesale, then you must also reject the particular variety of state-sponsored stimulation, and if you reject that, then you must also reject the particular active variety. There are cases, however, where more or even all logical combinations could be consistently taken by participants in a discussion.

PROPOSITION III

A QUESTION IS ALWAYS LINKED TO OTHER QUESTIONS, SO THAT THE UNDERLYING QUESTION IN AN ARGUMENTATIVE DISCUSSION MAY NOT BE THE EXPLICITLY OR IMPLICITLY PRESIDING ONE

The husband-and-wife example at **E2** may illustrate this proposition as well, although it might be rather foolhardy to try and say what the underlying question in that case was. Still, there are less controversial examples, especially from the area of Anglo-Saxon debating practices. Although the lessons to be learned from those practices may have more general application, for clarity's sake I shall restrict my examples to that area.

Sub-proposition IIIa

A discussant who is preparing for a discussion whose presiding question is explicit should find out what the question at issue really is.

It is well known that the practices of parliamentary debate have led to the idea that teenagers may be educated to be good citizens by teaching them how to debate in high school and college. One of the earliest and best manuals written for that purpose gives the following excellent advice:

Observation 1 or O1 (Ketcham, 1914: 23).

The origin and history of the question. The meaning of a question must be

> determined in the light of the conditions which gave rise to its discussion. For this reason it is well to find out just how this question came to be a subject of debate. For example, the people of this country a few years ago were debating the proposition, "Resolved, that the Federal Government should control all life insurance companies operating within the United States." To one unacquainted with the facts of the case at that time the proposition appears at first glance to lack point. Why should anyone want Federal control of insurance companies? What difference does it make as to who controls them or whether they are controlled at all? These questions are answered directly when we come to study the origin of the proposition. Until within a few months of the discussions no one had thought of debating this proposition. The insurance companies had always been under the control of the states in which they operated. Then suddenly it came to light that these companies were grossly mismanaged. Dishonesty had characterized the administration of their affairs. This served to cast grave doubt on the efficiency of state control. Therefore the stronger arm of the Federal government was suggested as a remedy for the evils which the states had been unable to prevent. The real heart of the controversy, which a study of the origin of the question revealed was 'Will the control of insurance companies by the Federal government be more efficient than that exercised by the state governments?' Thus the real point at issue was made clear through the origin of the question.

Readers unfamiliar with Anglo-Saxon debating practice may need to know that the question presiding over a debate in the Anglo-Saxon tradition is referred to as the 'proposition', or even the 'motion', an expression which betrays the origin of college debating contests in parliamentary practice. In fact, when the team that argues for the affirmative wins, it is said that 'the motion is carried', as though an actual political decision had been made. So, the question is commonly phrased as, 'Resolved: That *p*', where *p* is a course of action, as in the example above. In spite of the syntax, what we have before us is just a closed question ('Whether or not *p*') about whose answer two teams are arguing. Like in medieval disputations, it is crucial in a debate that the question is closed ('Yes or No') and not open ('What should we do about so-and-so?'). Thus, **O1** is discussing two different questions: (a) *Whether the Federal Government should control all life insurance companies operating within the United States*. (b) *Whether the control of insurance companies by the Federal government is more efficient than that exercised by the state governments.*

According to Ketcham, although question (a) undoubtedly presides over the debate, it is question (b) that underlies it.

Failing to identify the underlying question (the 'real point at issue') in a debate may easily lead a novel debater to miss completely the point. On the other hand, being aware of this danger will enhance the chances to defeat, or at least to inflict a (dialectical) wound upon, one's adversary in a debate, as emerges from the next point.

Sub-proposition IIIb

Discussants may unconsciously forget, or deliberately avoid, the presiding question; if so, their opponents should bring it back up.

Quite apart from teenagers, even seasoned debaters may fall into the trap, as shown in the recent debate on a motion, aired on 19 August 2015 under the auspices of *Intelligence Squared*.[6] Before we continue, it should be made clear that the question associated with the motion is: *Whether ISIS should be defeated—or just contained*. This kind of question does not, like an ordinary closed question, force a Yes or No answer. However, the way it is phrased, it does force a two-fork choice, for it clearly implies that the two actions, **Contain** or **Defeat**, are the only available ones—*tertium non datur*. Still, there is a palpable difference between this kind of closure and the logical one between Yes and No. According to the rules of debate, the motion as formulated defines the Affirmative side as bound to defend a Yes to **Defeat**, i.e. to argue in favor of a full all-out war with the aim of either destroying ISIS or forcing them to surrender. The Negative side, in its turn, has to argue that the motion to **Contain**, i.e. to stop ISIS from conquering any more territory, is enough for the time being.

In spite of the closed nature of the presiding question, we can observe in the actual debate that the first orator in the debate seems to *change* it:

E4 (a political debate on the internet).

> [*Flournoy, the Affirmative:*] ISIS is more than a terrorist organization. It is a proto-state, an ideological movement that is committed to undertake Jihad against anyone who rejects its abhorrent ideology. Its ultimate aim is to establish a territorial caliphate that stretches across the Muslim world. ISIS is brutal in the extreme. It has beheaded innocent civilians. It has burned a captured Jordanian pilot alive in a cage. It rapes women and girls and sells them into sexual slavery. It crucifies Christians. It desecrates and destroys Holy sites and antiquities […] If ever there was a terrorist group that we must defeat, it is ISIS. Now, defeating ISIS will require an intensive—more intensive and fully resourced campaign on the part of the United States and our international partners. We need to intensify our diplomacy […]
>
> [*Slaughter, the Negative:*] So, I want to see the end of ISIS as much as anyone does. No one can watch the horrible things they do and not think that this is a terrible, terrible scourge and threat. And we have to end it. The question on the table is, 'What is the best strategy to achieve that goal for the United States?' That's what we're debating. What is the best strategy for us? Now, our opponents are already fudging that question. Because the debate here is, do you use military force to drive them out of the territory they hold, or do you contain them where they are? And so, what you're hearing is they can't have sanctuary. Michèle Flournoy said very clearly—they cannot have a sanctuary. Okay? What they have to convince you of is they have a strategy […] for the United States to drive ISIS out of that sanctuary, and somehow magically, without boots on the ground.

[6] Intelligence[2] (2015). A transcript is available on the same website. Of course, things have changed a lot in Syria as well as in the United States since 2015.

Just for the record: both parties in this exchange have headed high offices in powerful and relevant ministries of the United States, so they both possess the experience and the seniority to know what they are talking about.

The first orator (for the affirmative), Ms. Flournoy, starts by deploying a long list of facts showing how horrible the actions of ISIS are (the ellipsis in the first paragraph of **E4** stands for a whole list of horrors that it is not necessary to reproduce here, even though, like all such lists, it was designed to have a strong rhetorical impact on the audience). The facts described are as such uncontroversial and they are, of course, reasons for the US government to do something about the situation. Still, the question under debate was not *whether* the US government should do something about it, but rather *what* it should do, or more precisely: *whether* to pursue containment (make ISIS stay in their 'sanctuary' and not gain any more territory) or to engage in a full-scale war of destruction. That is what the two teams are supposed to debate. Yet, after Flournoy has offered the said horrible facts, she concludes: 'If there ever was a terrorist group that we must defeat, it is ISIS', which of course begs the question at issue. Having begged the question, Flournoy can only shift to another one, *viz* 'What should we do *to defeat* ISIS?' The rest of her speech is all about the kind of actions the US government should engage in order to do what was under debate.

The second orator (first for the negative), Ms. Slaughter, starts by conceding the horrible actions of ISIS and concluding that 'we have to end it'. Having said that, she reformulates what is at issue as the question, 'What is the best strategy to achieve that goal [*viz* 'to end it'] for the United States?', i.e. 'Is a defeat-oriented strategy better than a containment-oriented one?'. Slaughter then claims that Flournoy has 'fudged' the question, for she should have defended a 'strategy' capable of defeating ISIS, i.e. to drive them away from their 'sanctuary'. Given that Flournoy had indeed described the kind of actions that the US government should engage in to defeat ISIS, the charge seems a bit unfair; but it might not be unfair if, all things considered, Flournoy's description does not amount to a 'strategy'. It thus becomes clear that the precise meaning of the question at issue—in other words, the *underlying* question—was, 'Is it feasible to try to defeat ISIS or not?' (the negative implying that containment would be a much more feasible option or indeed the only feasible alternative).

If that is the correct interpretation, then Flournoy had deliberately tried to assume the question at issue as solved in her sense, so that a different question might be answered instead; and Slaughter had highlighted the maneuver and forcibly brought back up the real question behind the debate, as she should.

In any case, the example makes it clear that even an explicit presiding question is always part of a web of questions, in such a way that slippages can occur, even to the extent that the questioning focus changes. When that happens, participants should always make an effort to keep it firmly in mind. If for some reason, the presiding question is better abandoned for a more relevant or pressing one, this decision should be made with full awareness. For a different kind of question web, see below Proposition VI.

PROPOSITION IV
AS THE PROTAGONIST HAS AN *ONUS PROBANDI*, SO HAS THE ANTAGONIST AN *ONUS QUAERENDI*

During one of my courses on argumentation, my students and I were discussing the pragma-dialectical distinction between the role of the protagonist and the role of the antagonist. As I was emphasizing the commitment inherent in the first role (namely, to assume the burden of proof, i.e. the burden of having to argue for her standpoint), one of the students asked me whether the role of the antagonist did not imply any commitment at all. Her specific question was, 'Are not the people who express doubts about the standpoint *also* responsible for those doubts?' At the time my reply was blandly orthodox ('No, they aren't; only the protagonist assumes a burden, and that is what Rule 2 in the model of critical discussion is about'). Yet the more I thought about that student's question, the more I saw that she had a point, in fact a much stronger one than the one she herself was able to articulate.

I am now convinced that the antagonist has indeed a burden of questioning, an *onus quaerendi*, parallel to the protagonist's burden of proof or *onus probandi*.[7] Please note that I am not suggesting in any way that we should take the well-deserved burden of proof *off* the protagonist's back but rather that we ought to put a parallel burden *on* the antagonist's—a party who, both in pragma-dialectics and elsewhere, has hitherto had a somewhat lazy role. The quickest way to clarify what I mean may be a fragment from a recent interview with the French philosopher and literary theorist Jacques Derrida.[8] He

[7] When I mentioned this idea to Professor Marraud (Madrid), he sent me a paper by Douglas Walton in which the existence of such a responsibility is envisaged (1991: 339): «In a simple dispute, one party has the burden of proving his thesis, while the other party has a negative burden of casting doubt on the first party's proof by asking critical questions». Although in this paper the suggestion is not developed, and although it seems that the idea has had no impact in Walton's overall theoretical work, still he points in the right direction in a later paper (2003: 12): «Note that nowhere in the ten rules of the critical discussion does it say that one party has to address an argument just put forward by the other, say, by critically examining it or arguing against it. Is this an oversight, or does it simply reflect the assumption that each party should be free to adopt any strategy that, in his or her opinion, might be most successful as a means of advocating his or her viewpoint? So far, this is an open question». The present essay is an effort to put that question in a broader perspective, so as to be able to answer it systematically.

[8] "Jacques Derrida on American attitude", at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2j578jTBCY> (my

is not in general an author with whom I have much sympathy or indeed one whom I find particularly intelligible. Still, in this case not only is what he says perfectly understandable, but, more to the point, he is also largely right in saying it. Because this is not an example of argumentation as such, but rather an observation done by a seasoned arguer, I use a different letter to mark it:

O2 (from a Derrida interview).

> [*Female Interviewer:*] When we spoke in Paris and you did that improv in the apartment, you said something offhand. You said, 'It's very American of you immediately to sort of give me a topic and ask me to speak.' What did you mean by… Why would I be very American? What struck you about that?
>
> [*Derrida:*] C'est parce que l'expérience… Ce que je veux dire par « américain » ici… Mon usage du mot « américain » est peut-être un peu abusif, bien sûr. Ce que je veux dire par « américain » ici, c'est deux choses. L'une qui est un peu abusive, l'autre qui l'est moins.
>
> Ce qui est un peu abusif, c'est l'attitude utilitaire, manipulatrice: « Voilà, on a besoin de ça, *do it!* » Alors, un certain terme, allez-y, *action!* Alors, évidemment, tous ceux qui font du cinéma font ça. Mais le cinéma, c'est américain, vous savez: le cinéma est plus américain qu'autre chose, hein? Aujourd'hui, l'expérience mondiale du cinéma est largement, comme vous le savez très bien, largement commandée, qu'on s'en réjouisse ou qu'on s'en plaigne, commandée par… quand même… la culture américaine. Bon, ça était la chose, comment dire, abusive, l'usage abusif du mot « américain », l'usage un peu vague du mot « américain ».
>
> L'usage moins vague et moins abusif, c'est que souvent, dans les universités américaines, — et déjà la première année où j'y ai été, en 1956, — j'ai remarqué ces situations à la fois sociales et académiques où quelqu'un demande à quelqu'un d'autre, c'est peut-être un professeur à un étudiant, ou un étudiant à un professeur, ou un étudiant à un étudiant, *Could you elaborate on these things? Could you elaborate?* Voilà, je te donne un mot, et… *go and work, okey?* À partir d'*un* mot, hein? *Elaborate!* Et aujourd'hui encore des étudiants américains, during my office hours, just come and say, ah, *Could you tell me more about this or that? Could you elaborate?* Et ça, ça se ferait pas en France, c'est exclu, quoi, que quelqu'un dise à quelqu'un, « Alors, pouvez-vous… *elaborate?* » Je ne sais pas comment on dirait ça en français. Ce n'est pas que ça n'arrive jamais, mais c'est beaucoup moins fréquent, et beaucoup moins probable. Ça arrive quelquefois, et ça aussi c'est américain, c'est américain au premier sens, abusif, dont je parlais, ça arrive dans les interviews, radio ou télévisés, où des journalistes pressés et utilitaires, des journalistes manipulateurs, pensent que on peut demander a quelqu'un, parce qu'il est philosophe, parce qu'il est professeur de philosophie, de, tout d'un coup, parler de l'Être, hein? Comme si, on appuyait sur un bouton et puis on avait un *ready-made discourse on Being, or Love. No! I've nothing ready-made, okey?*
>
> Donc, il y a un sens plus abusif du terme « américain », qui concerne toutes les attitudes cinématico-journalistico-manipulatrices, et puis il y a un sense plus stricte du mot « américain », qui fait reférence à cet usage, quand on est dans l'université, de demander à quelqu'un, *Elaborate!* Voilà.

What Derrida is here denouncing goes a long way towards expressing what I call the *onus quaerendi*. If Alec disagrees with what Portia has asserted, or at least if Alec is not

transcription; the English subtitles in the video clip are somewhat inaccurate). The curious mix of English and French has a special flavor worth keeping, but the reader can find a full English translation in an Appendix. As all translations, mine is just an approximation, unable to capture all the nuances of the original.

sure whether what Portia has said is acceptable, then he should not rest content with replying: 'Please elaborate.' The impertinence that Derrida attributes to such a reply may of course be softened and, by a suitable turn of phrase, become exceedingly polite, e.g. by sweetly saying, 'How interesting it is, what you just said; but I am not quite sure whether I follow completely. Could you please be more explicit?' Such a way of questioning, never mind if it is insolent or respectful, will always be lazy. If somebody is really interested in having a critical discussion, then he or she should be able to produce something more precise. Suppose Portia has asserted that the first Gulf war was a just war (*bellum iustum*). We can at least imagine two antagonists, Alec and Andy, who both declare not being able to agree with that statement, but with a difference. Alec behaves like one of Derrida's stereotypical Americans and just ask Portia to elaborate, 'to say a little bit more'. Instead, Andy raises a more specific question, e.g. 'What is in your opinion a clear, uncontroversial example of an *unjust* war?', or 'What do you think is the best way to characterize a war as *unjust?'* I hope the reader agrees with me that Andy participates more productively in a critical discussion than Alec does. I would go even further and say that Andy is being more *reasonable* than Alec.[9]

PROPOSITION V
WHEN ARGUMENTATION HAS BEEN ENGAGED, MISUNDERSTANDINGS OFTEN, IF NOT INDEED ALWAYS, STEM FROM MISTAKING ONE QUESTION FOR ANOTHER

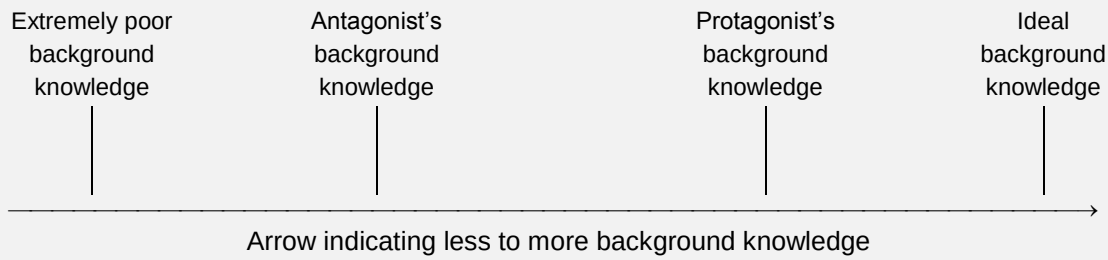
It is very common in the history and philosophy of science to say that controversies often erupt because people understand words in different ways. Although there is considerable merit in that idea, and although I'd be the last to deny that the idea has led to some interesting developments in the philosophy of language, I believe Collingwood has a deeper point when he argues that the real problem behind such controversies has to do with the fact that people are trying to answer different questions.[10] At the very least, I think it can be shown that this is often the case, and that argumentation theory has much to learn from this perspective.

[9] The second commandment of a critical discussion in pragma-dialectics says that «discussants who advance a standpoint may not refuse to defend this standpoint when requested to do so» (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004: 191). We might want to consider postulating a complement to it to the effect that 'discussants who cast doubt on a standpoint may not refuse to raise appropriate questions', i.e. questions that are clear and precise, focused and fruitful, for only that kind of question has a chance to advance the process of resolution of the difference of opinion. Such commitment is what I'd call the *onus quaerendi*.

[10] See Collingwood (1939: 33, 38-39, 40-42, 60-65). Although Collingwood was a philosopher, an archaeologist, and a historian, I want to cast him in the role of a pioneer in argumentation theory. For reasons having to do with the state of discussion in his time, he used to speak of 'logic' and of 'thinking', but it was a theory of argumentation that he really had in mind.

Now mistaking one question for another usually has an origin that is of great interest for the theory of argumentation. I call it 'dialectical distance'. Consider Figure 1, in which I am assuming for the sake of argument that the protagonist (the person who has advanced a standpoint) has considerably more background knowledge than her antagonist (the person or persons who has cast doubts on said standpoint). Examples easily occur to mind: a lawyer confronting an expert witness who has given an undesired testimony, a student confused by something a professor has said, a doctor trying to find out whether the symptoms expressed by a patient are real. In all these cases, the first party (the lawyer, the student, the doctor) knows considerably less about the point at issue than the second party (the expert witness, the professor, the patient). There is a given, larger or smaller, dialectical distance between the two parties. The cases can, of course, be reversed. After all, the lawyer presumably knows more about the law than the expert witness, the student more about student life than the professor, the doctor more about the nature and treatment of diseases than the patient. It all depends on what the point at issue is and who has assumed the role of a protagonist. These two things will determine the nature and extent of the dialectical distance.

Figure 1. Dialectical distance between two discussants



What do we see in the diagram of Figure 1? On the one hand, we see the gap that separates, in this case, the background knowledge of the (less knowledgeable) antagonist from that of the protagonist. On the other hand, the diagram offers two other gaps for our consideration. One is the gap between the background knowledge of the antagonist and the least imaginable amount of relevant information anybody could have on a given subject: the antagonist in the diagram may know little yet she is not a total ignoramus. A second gap opens between the background knowledge the protagonist

has at her command and, so to speak, the total amount of knowledge available.[11] Thus we can say that the closer a given party is to the ideal, the more specific will her questions be; and again, the closer to a complete ignorant a party is, the more vague, muddled and perfunctory will her questions be. In the latter case it will naturally be quite hard for her to bear and discharge the burden of questioning. On the other hand, the protagonist may also fail to understand the antagonist. Let's examine the two cases separately.

Sub-proposition Va

Antagonists will often object to, or ask questions about, an assertion whose presiding (or underlying) question they don't understand.

To understand what anybody claims at a certain point, we need to know what question she is trying to answer. But what happens when we just don't get it? What happens, I think, is something like what Derrida describes. Consider the following case:

> **E5 (from question time during a specialized conference).**
>
> A famous professor of logic once gave a paper at a conference in which he distilled the wisdom acquired by himself and his generation in teaching formal classical logic to students so as to avoid very widespread errors of all kinds—logical, linguistic, philosophical and methodological. At question time, there were various interventions by members of the public—who, quite obviously, were seasoned teachers of logic, and, recognizing the errors described, were in a position to appreciate what the old professor had been saying. But then someone in the public put forward the following question, 'I do not understand why you said that *a numeral cannot be said to name a set*. Could you please explain to me what you mean?'

The very form of the question showed clearly that the speaker had no clue as to what the professor had been talking about, yet somehow assumed that either (1) he had caught the professor in an obvious error, or (2) his doubts, as expressed in the question, could be easily and briefly put to rest. However, anybody who is acquainted with the nontrivial logical, mathematical and linguistic problems implied by the sentence 'a numeral does not name a set' and, within that sentence, by the nouns 'numeral' and 'set' as well as by the verb 'to name'—problems that have a long pedigree from Frege through Russell and Wittgensein down to Carnap, Quine and Kripke—will realize that the question asked by that member of the public was a naive and ignorant one, which was

[11] In the old days we used to think of God's omniscience as the right-hand pole of this diagram. Today it would be probably better to think of the whole knowledge of a given community. It is well known that nobody knows all the words of a language; even the best wordsmiths (say, a Shakespeare) have only a limited amount of the lexical thesaurus at their disposal. The vocabulary of a language in its entirety belongs only to the community of speakers, but to no single individual. The same is true of any other kind of knowledge we may think of (see Hayek, 1945). Somebody may object that there are things in this world about which there is no proper knowledge and still we want to discuss about them. These are deep philosophical waters; but it is not necessary to refute this extremely skeptical position here, for the whole concept of background knowledge would crumble if it were true.

impossible to satisfy in the context of a paper at a specialized meeting. For a proper answer would have been as long, or quite possibly longer than the paper itself, probably unintelligible to the questioner, and certainly unfair to a public largely consisting of logicians or at least logically sophisticated people.

In sum, there was a huge and pretty obvious dialectical distance between the antagonist and the protagonist. In fact, I think that in this example not only did the antagonist miss the complicated question behind the professor's assertion, but he probably did not even understand that there was a question in the first place. In other cases, what happens is that the protagonist puts forward a standpoint that is the answer to one question, whilst the antagonist takes that standpoint as answering a different question. The following example comes from my own experience in teaching argumentation:

> **E6 (from a workshop on argumentation).**
>
> In a discussion among students on the explicit question, 'What sense does the study of philosophy make to me here and now?', one of the participants, let's call him Percy, stated that 'Philosophy is not for me an interesting proposition right now'. Another participant, let's call him Andy, did not find such loss of interest quite intelligible, so he asked Percy, 'Where does your disappointment come from?' Percy immediately replied that he did not say, and would not want to say, that he was *disappointed* with philosophy; on the contrary, he continued to consider the study of philosophy exciting, even exhilarating. Andy was puzzled, and in fact both he and the other participants in the discussion kept talking about Andy's disappointment, even though Andy repeated a few times that he was *not* disappointed with philosophy.

What is going on here? A misunderstanding having to do with the fact that Percy was, and explicitly said he was, preoccupied with the question, 'How can I earn enough money to support my wife and son in my current situation?', let's call it Q1, in the light of which he understood the original question, 'What sense does the study of philosophy make to me here and now?', which we may call Q2. So, it was in the context of Q1 that Andy spoke of being disinterested in philosophy right now. This was clear from the fact that he also said that 'Philosophy is not—now, for me—a good way to earn sufficient money to meet my responsibilities as a father and husband'. Somehow Percy and the other students did not listen to this, perhaps because they lacked any direct experience of such responsibilities, and so they interpreted the original statement in the light of a different question (perhaps Q3, 'What gap is there between what I wanted from the study of philosophy and what I got from this particular program?').

The whole misunderstanding had of course to do with the fact that the original question, Q2, was pretty vague. And so Q2 was interpreted by a student with pressing

family responsibilities in a way that significantly differed from the way students free from such commitments would normally understand it.[12] In other words, **E6** is like **E5** in that both evince a gap in background knowledge that creates a considerable dialectical distance between the two discussants. On the other hand, **E6** is very much unlike **E5** insofar as the misunderstanding does not stem, in the latter case, from the antagonist's missing the question that the protagonist was trying to answer in the first place, but rather from his mistaking it for a different question.[13]

Sub-proposition Vb

Inversely, protagonists may answer questions in a way that completely misses the question asked by the antagonist.

This is quite often the case when questions are raised by novices who are talking to experts, e.g. in exchanges between a young student and a seasoned professor. In the beginning of his popular book on the *Psalms*, the celebrated scholar C. S. Lewis elaborates a particularly vivid observation concerning this sort of thing:

O3 (Lewis, 1958: 1).

> This is not a work of scholarship. I am no Hebraist, no higher critic, no ancient historian. No archaeologist. I write for the unlearned about things in which I am unlearned myself. If an excuse is needed (and perhaps it is) for writing such a book, my excuse would be something like this. It often happens that two schoolboys can solve difficulties in their work for one another better than the master can. When you took the problem to a master, as we all remember, he was very likely to explain what you understood already, to add a great deal of information which you didn't want, and say nothing at all about the thing that was puzzling you. I have watched this from both sides of the net; for when, as a teacher myself, I have tried to answer questions brought me by pupils, I have sometimes, after a minute, seen that expression settle down on their faces which assured me that they were suffering exactly the same

[12] In ordinary academic research this sort of thing is quite frequent, especially when a new hypothesis to explain a phenomenon is introduced. In the audience there may be (1) people who sympathize with the protagonist's approach and so bear in mind the particular question which the new hypothesis is intended to answer; (2) people who favor a completely different explanation, so that their question will often be significantly different from the protagonist; and (3) people who reject the very existence of the phenomenon the protagonist is trying to explain, so that they are interested in questions which are very far from the protagonist's question and even from the questions alive in group 2. In a conference presentation, doubts may be expressed by all three groups of people, so that in trying to defend her standpoint, the protagonist will say things that are bound to be misunderstood in one way or another.

[13] Still a different case seems to be present when discussants are so prejudiced that they replace the question discussed for one closer to their own preoccupations. In the passage that follows **E1**, one of the employees, Mrs. Hans, is adamantly against the proposal of hiring ex-convicts, because she is only thinking of hardy criminals, as is clearly shown by the arguments she offers to support her opposition to the motion. At some point in the discussion, somebody suggests that some ex-convicts may be in prison because they 'committed a traffic offense'. Yet the prejudice in Mrs. Hans's mind is so strong that she ignores the remark and keeps thinking that the question in front of her and her co-workers is not, 'Whether former ex-convicts should be hired at Harrod's,' but rather, 'Whether hardy criminals should be hired at Harrod's.' She does not even think of asking (see Proposition VI) whether there is a choice between possible candidates, so that one may exclude certain unsavory people from the list of candidates for hiring.

> frustration which I had suffered from my own teachers. The fellow-pupil can help more than the master because he knows less. The difficulty we want him to explain is one he has recently met. The expert met it so long ago that he has forgotten. He sees the whole subject, by now, in such a different light that he cannot conceive what is really troubling the pupil; he sees a dozen other difficulties which ought to be troubling him but aren't.

When something like what is here masterfully described takes place, we say that people are talking at cross-purposes. The point is that the discussants, perhaps using similar words and phrases, and even identical sentences, are just not asking, or answering, the same questions.

In fact, there may be no gross exaggeration in saying that, to some extent or other, something like that always happen to human beings, for it is a very rare event to be in perfect harmony with our interlocutors. Our questions are never exactly the same nor do we enjoy the same background knowledge. We can certainly come closer to an ideally harmonic situation, yet we probably are condemned never to attain it in full. Still, the lesser the dialectical distance between two discussants, the more likely the difference of opinion may be resolved through a critical discussion in the sense of pragma-dialectics.

In all the above considerations, I started from the particular situation, depicted in Figure 1, in which the protagonist has considerably wider knowledge than the antagonist. However, it should be understood that there may be a sizable dialectical distance in the opposite sense, where it is the antagonist who knows more about the subject matter than the protagonist. Still, I believe that, whilst the examples may vary, the content of both sub-propositions would be practically the same.

PROPOSITION VI
ANTAGONISTS SHOULD COOPERATE WITH PROTAGONISTS IN EXAMINING THE STANDPOINT BY ASKING WELL-INFORMED QUESTIONS

What in pragma-dialectics is called a critical discussion has the character of an *inquiry* in which protagonist and antagonists are cooperating towards a solution to the puzzle.[14]

[14] In Walton's theory of dialogue, a critical discussion is assigned to the genus 'persuasion' and not to the genus 'inquiry'. In my opinion, there are no such clear boundaries between kinds of dialogue as Walton imagines (cf. Meiland, 1989). Not even the clearest example of an 'inquiry dialogue', namely scientific research, is ever much close to a pure case (cf. Brown, 1994: 32). This has serious consequences for the further theory (Walton, 1998) that fallacies are transgression of boundaries between one genus of dialogue and another, although there is considerable merit in this proposal as far as some cases of argumentation are concerned. Still, the whole idea that, by imagining a rough *a priori* classification of dialogues, we can advance the theory of argumentation seems to me to be a bad bet. The history of scientific theorizing demonstrates that the way to go is by starting with *models*, not with classifications. By the way, a theorist with whose position I sympathize is James Freeman (2011: 53): «Remember that on our view, the challenger is a midwife, seeking to draw from the proponent a sufficiently cogent argument for his initial thesis, if possible. Proponent and challenger are cooperatively testing to see whether this thesis is justified, or at least

A very good example is differential diagnosis in medicine. My next example comes from this domain. The case is fictional yet probably quite faithful to the relevant argumentative reality:

E7 (from the TV show 'House, M.D.', Season 1, Pilot episode; numbering added).

1. *House:* I don't think it's a tumor.
2. *Foreman:* First year of medical school: If you hear hoof beats, you think horses not zebras.
3. *House:* Are you in first year of medical school? No. First of all, there's nothing on the CAT scan. Second of all, if this is a horse, then the kindly family doctor in Trenton makes the obvious diagnosis and it never gets near this office. Differential diagnosis, people: If it's not a tumor, what are the suspects? Why couldn't she talk?
4. *Chase:* Aneurysm, stroke, or some other ischemic syndrome?
5. *House:* Get her a contrast MRI.
6. *Cameron:* Creutzfeld-Jakob disease?
7. *Chase:* Mad cow?
8. *House:* Mad zebra.
9. *Foreman:* Wernicke's encephalopathy?
10. *House:* No, blood thiamine level was normal.
11. *Foreman:* Lab in Trenton could have screwed up the blood test. I assume it's a corollary, if people lie, that people screw up.
12. *House:* Re-draw the blood tests. And get her scheduled for that contrast MRI ASAP. Let's find out what kind of zebra we're dealing with here.

The discussion starts with a definite standpoint, in this case a judgment: 'I don't think it's a tumor'. In the background is the fact that the patient 'cannot talk', i.e. that she is aphasic. So, the question is: *Whether the patient's aphasia is being caused by a tumor or not*. There seem to be an argument in favor of the affirmative answer, explicitly upheld by Dr. Foreman, namely a blood test and a CAT scan. But Dr. House is of the opposite opinion. In pragma-dialectical parlance, they are both protagonists of opposite standpoints (Foreman: Yes; House: No) and they are both antagonists, resisting each other's answers. Foreman's resistance to Dr. House's position is overcome by modifying the question in a way familiar to research, namely by building alternative hypotheses as answers to the question: 'Assume it is not a tumor, then what could be the cause of the patient's symptoms?'

Observe how the discussion makes progress thanks to the cooperative activity of the four physicians. At Turn 2 of **E7**, Dr. Foreman tries to cut the discussion short by suggesting that the standpoint opposed to Dr. House's, and supported by some medical evidence, is the correct one. The metaphor, 'If you hear hoof beats, you think horses not

whether the proponent can justify it.»

zebras', means, 'If it looks like a tumor, the most likely explanation is that it *is* a tumor'. From this arises the implicit meta-question, 'Should we not accept the most likely explanation?'

House's reply: 'It is not the most likely explanation for two reasons: (*a*) the Computer Assisted Tomography or CAT scan is not much to go on, and (*b*) if it was as easy as that, why should the patient be here, i.e. in a posh hospital with highly qualified diagnosticians?' And so, the discussion partners are back to the main question, 'If the cause of the various symptoms of the patient, and in particular the aphasia is not a tumor, what might it then be?'

Notice that the answers to that specific question are themselves phrased as questions: (1) 'Is it aneurysm, stroke, or some other ischemic syndrome?' (2) 'Is it Creutzfeld-Jakob disease?' (3) 'Is it Wernicke's encephalopathy?' These are all specifications of the one question. They mean: 'If the cause is not a tumor, might it be X?' They are in other words, working hypotheses within an ongoing inquiry, which is one of the ways in which a 'polylogue' (Lewiński, 2014) can occur in medicine.

Finally, each one of the proposed answers leads to further questions: (1) 'Will a contrast MRI have features that confirm whether or not the cause is an ischemic syndrome?'; (2) 'Is mad cow disease not too far-fetched?'; (3) 'Will a new test for blood thiamine levels have features that confirm whether it is or isn't encephalopathy?' If neither (1) nor (3) is answered positively, then the discussion, i.e. the inquiry, shall continue, perhaps by taking (2), the least probable hypothesis of the three, seriously, or by reverting to the original hypothesis of a tumor, or by considering more remote possibilities. Fans of Dr. House's TV series will know that this back and forth is what makes the show tick.

PROPOSITION VII
OBJECTIONS ARE QUESTIONS FROM A SPEECH-ACT PERSPECTIVE

In argumentation theory it is usual to describe what the opponent, challenger, questioner or antagonist does *either* as asking questions *or* as putting forward objections. I think that this is a distinction without a difference. Objections *are* questions, at least when we consider them as speech acts, independently of the syntactic form of the sentences through which the antagonist makes those speech acts. One splendid illustration of this point is the following specimen of argumentation in detective work from a novel by Dorothy Sayers. It is, again, a fictional text, but it represents faithfully, albeit in a stylized

and embellished way, the kind of argumentation used by actual detectives. I do apologize for the length of the passage, but that could not be avoided in the nature of things.

E8 (Sayers, 1928, chapter XII; numbering, square brackets and bold lettering added; italics in the original).

1. [*Mr Murbles (attorney)*] But what exactly has Major Fentiman been doing? [...]
2. [*Peter Wimsey (amateur detective)*] Well, I knew *something* odd had happened, you know, as soon as I saw the General's body—when I pulled the *Morning Post* away so easily from his hands. If he had really died clutching it, the *rigor* would have made his clutch so tight that one would have had to pry the fingers open to release it. And then, that knee-joint!
3. [*M*] **I didn't quite follow about that.**
4. [*PW*] Well, you know that when a man dies, *rigor* begins to set in after a period of some hours, varying according to the cause of death, temperature of the room and a lot of other conditions. It starts in the face and jaw and extends gradually over the body. Usually it lasts about twenty-four hours and then passes off again in the same order in which it started. But if, during the period of rigidity, you loosen one of the joints by main force, then it doesn't stiffen again, but remains loose. […] So that, taking the loose knee-joint and the general condition of the body together, it was obvious from the start that somebody had been tampering with the General. […] The next step was to try and find out what had actually happened to the General on the night of the 10th, and morning of the 11th. And the moment I got round to his flat I was faced with two entirely contradictory pieces of evidence. First, there was the story about Oliver, which appeared more or less remarkable upon the face of it. And secondly, there was Woodward's evidence about the clothes.
5. [*M*] **What about them?**
6. [*PW*] I asked him, you remember, whether anything at all had been removed from the clothes after he had fetched them away from the cloak-room at the Bellona, and he said, nothing. His memory as to other points seemed pretty reliable, and I felt sure that he was honest and straightforward. So I was forced to the conclusion that, wherever the General had spent the night, he had certainly never set foot in the street the next morning.
7. [*M*] **Why? What did you expect to find on the clothes?**
8. [*PW*] My dear sir, consider what day it was. November 11th. Is it conceivable that, if the old man had been walking in the streets as a free agent on Armistice Day, he would have gone into the Club without his Flanders poppy? A patriotic, military old bird like that? It was really unthinkable.
9. [*M*] **Then, where was he? And how did he get into the Club? He was there, you know.**
10. [*PW*] True; he *was* there—in a state of advanced *rigor.* In fact, according to Penberthy's account, which, by the way, I had checked by the woman who laid out the body later, the *rigor* was even then beginning to pass off. Making every possible allowance for the warmth of the room and so on, he must have been dead long before ten in the morning, which was his usual time for going to the Club.
11. [*M*] **But, my dear lad, bless my soul, that's impossible. He couldn't have been carried in there dead. Somebody would have noticed it**.
12. [*PW*] So they would. And the odd thing is that nobody ever saw him arrive at all. What is more, nobody saw him leave for the last time on the previous evening. General Fentiman—one of the best-known figures in the Club! And he seems to have become suddenly invisible. That won't do, you know.
13. [*M*] **What is your idea, then? That he slept the night in the Club?**
14. [*PW]* I think he slept a very peaceful and untroubled sleep that night—in the Club.
15. [*M*] You shock me inexpressibly. **I understand you to suggest that he died**—

16. [*PW*] Some time the previous evening. Yes.
17. [*M*] **But he couldn't have sat there all night in the smoking-room. The servants would have been bound to—er—notice him.**
18. [*PW*] Of course. But it was to somebody's interest to see that they didn't notice. Somebody who wanted it thought that he hadn't died till the following day, after the death of Lady Dormer.
19. [*M*] **Robert Fentiman.**
20. [*PW*] Precisely.
21. [*M*] **But how did Robert know about Lady Dormer?**
22. [*PW*] Ah! That is a point I'm not altogether happy about. George had an interview with General Fentiman after the old man's visit to his sister. George denies that the General mentioned anything to him about the will, but then, if George was in the plot he naturally would deny it. I am rather concerned about George.
23. [*M*] **What had he to gain?**
24. [*PW*] Well, if George's information was going to make a difference of half a million to Robert, he would naturally expect to be given a share of the boodle, don't you think? [...]
25. [*Charles Parker, inspector from Scotland Yard*] Look here, **this is a very pretty theory, Peter, but, allowing that the General died, as you say, on the evening of the tenth, where was the body? As Mr Murbles says, it would have been a trifle noticeable if left about.**
26. [*M*] No, no. Repellent as the whole notion is to me, I see no difficulty about that. Robert Fentiman was at that time living in the Club. No doubt the General died in Robert's bedroom and was concealed there till the next morning!
27. [*PW*] **That won't work**. I think the General's hat and coat and things were in Robert's bedroom, but the corpse couldn't have been. Think, sir. Here is a photograph of the entrance-hall, with the big staircase running up in full view of the front door and the desk and the bar-entrance. **Would you risk carrying a corpse downstairs in the middle of the morning, with servants and members passing in and out continually? And the service stairs would be even worse. They are right round the other side of the building, with continual kitchen traffic going on all the time**. No. The body wasn't in Robert's bedroom.
28. [*M*] **Where, then?**
29. [*CP*] **Yes, where? After all, Peter, we've got to make this story hold water**.
30. [*PW (spreading the rest of the photographs out upon the table*] Look for yourselves. Here is the end bay of the library, where the General was sitting making notes about the money he was to inherit. A very nice, retired spot, invisible from the doorway, supplied with ink, blotter, writing-paper and every modern convenience, including the works of Charles Dickens elegantly bound in morocco. Here is a shot of the library taken from the smoking-room, clean through the ante-room and down the gangway—again a tribute to the convenience of the Bellona Club. Observe how handily the telephone cabinet is situated, in case—
31. [*CP*] **The telephone cabinet?**
32. [*PW*] Which, you will remember, was so annoyingly labelled 'Out of Order' when Wetheridge wanted to telephone. I can't find anybody who remembers putting up that notice, by the way.
33. [*CP*] **Good God, Wimsey. Impossible. Think of the risk**.
34. [*PW*] What risk? If anybody opened the door, there was old General Fentiman, who had gone in, not seeing the notice, and died of fury at not being able to get his call. Agitation acting on a weak heart and all that. Not *very* risky, really. Unless somebody was to think to inquire about the notice, and probably it wouldn't occur to anyone in the excitement of the moment.
35. [*CP*] You're an ingenious beast, Wimsey.
36. [*PW*] Aren't I? But we can prove it. We're going down to the Bellona Club to prove it now. Half-past eleven. A nice, quiet time. Shall I tell you what we are going to find inside that cabinet?
37. [*M*] **Finger-prints?**

38. [*PW*] Afraid that's too much to hope for after all this time. What do you say, Charles?
39. [*CP*] I say we shall find a long scratch on the paint, where the foot of the corpse rested and stiffened in that position.
40. [*PW*] Holed it in one, Charles. And that, you see, was when the leg had to be bent with violence in order to drag the corpse out.
41. [*CP*] And as the body was in a sitting position, we shall, of course, find a seat inside the cabinet.
42. [*PW*] Yes, and, with luck, we *may* find a projecting nail or something which caught the General's trouser-leg when the body was removed.
43. [*CP*] And possibly a bit of carpet.
44. [*PW*] To match the fragment of thread I got off the corpse's right boot? I hope so.
45. [*M*] Bless my soul. Let us go at once. Really, this is most exciting. That is, I am profoundly grieved. I hope it is not as you say.

This long text has been very slightly modified for easy reading. In particular, the bold lettering indicates the activity of an opponent. Now for the analysis.

The main character in **E8** is Dorothy Sayers' Lord Peter Wimsey (*PW*), one of the best known and loved sleuths of British detective fiction. He is presenting an argument to the effect that Major Robert Fentiman, the eldest son of the recently deceased Colonel Fentiman, has tampered with his father's body: having found him dead one evening, he hid the corpse in a telephone cabinet at the Bellona Club during the night, and then took it again in the morning and put it back in the very same armchair where his father had actually died the day before. The purpose of this profanation was to gain time: Major Fentiman was heir to his father, and his father was destined to inherit a fortune from Lady Dormer, a distant relative who was herself in her deathbed. The major's gamble was that the moribund lady would pass away during the said night, in which case everybody would believe that the major's father had died *afterwards*, with the very desirable result that the major would have been declared the rightful heir of Lady Dormer's fortune instead of that lady's other choice. Of course, the whole affair, as is usual in whodunnits, is much more entangled. The long passage I have just transcribed is located midway in the thriller and brilliantly deploys Lord Wimsey's skills as a detective.

Notice that the text opens with a question, 'What was Major Fentiman doing [in the relevant evening]?' The question arises because the major had tried to mislead everyone through 'the Oliver story'—Oliver being a fictional person, invented by the major, in order to make believe that the colonel had spent the night not inside the club and dead, but outside of the club, very much alive and in the company of said Oliver, whilst Lady Dormer passed away. The passage excerpted in **E8** begins just after Lord Wimsey's debunking of the Oliver story for the benefit of his friends, Mr. Murbles (the major's attorney, *M*) and Charles Parker (a Scotland Yard inspector, *CP*). As a consequence of

such debunking, it becomes clear that the major had been doing something untoward in relation to his father's death.

Notice an interesting aspect of this argument: Wimsey doesn't directly answer the first question raised by Murbles, so that he does not present a clear standpoint to be questioned, even though he does have one and Murbles and Parker both know that he does—and even though, knowing Wimsey, such a standpoint is bound to be controversial. Wimsey only conveys that 'something odd had happened', something that contradicted everything everyone had been accepting as fact, including Murbles and Parker. And so, Murbles and Parker become the antagonists of what will be slowly revealed as the content of Wimsey's unexpected standpoint, the one I described above: Major Fentiman had been tampering with his father's body—a standpoint which, if expressed bluntly at the beginning would have seemed far-fetched yet becomes more and more plausible as the argument develops. The important thing to note is that the brilliant development of the argument, its reasonableness and effectiveness, is due not only to the skillful thinking of Wimsey but also to the intelligent questions of his discussion partners.

All the bold passages in **E8** represent indeed the questions which Murbles and Parker, in the role of antagonists, raise for the protagonist, Wimsey, to answer. Most of those questions are certainly couched in the syntactic form of interrogative sentences, but not all of them. The explicit interrogatives function as *directive* speech acts, but then so do the non-interrogatives.[15] Table 2 contains both sorts, but in the third column I have replaced the literal objections by the intended questions (the interventions at Turns 25 and 27 are quite long and contain additional argumentative material, so I use bold printing to better highlight the question).

[15] Anscombre and Ducrot (1981: 6) defend the standpoint that all interrogative sentences which express what grammarians call a closed question (in French, an *interrogation totale*) have in discourse an argumentative value in that they are equivalent to negative assertions that express a reason. So, if I tell you something like, 'You should not leave your flat—or do you really dislike the neighborhood so much?', the second sentence means, 'You cannot possibly dislike the neighborhood so much.' I don't know whether this astute linguistic observation is a universal truth, and Anscombre has not proved it is (in fact, I wonder whether something like that could ever be proved). Still, it is quite clear that the questions in **E8** seem to follow that pattern, and not only the closed question but (*pace* Anscombre) also the open ones. Thus, when at turns 25 and 28 the Where question is raised, it seems to carry the implicature that there is no place in the Bellona Club where the corpse could have been put during the night. Be that as it may, it escapes Anscombre that, if *interrogations totales* are equivalent to negative assertions, then the latter are also equivalent to the former, which is another way of expressing my point that objections *are* questions.

Table 2. Intended questions in E8

Turn	Text	Intended question
3	[M] I didn't quite follow about that.	What is odd about the stiff knee-joint?
5	[M] What about them? [i.e. in which way do the clothes contradict the Oliver story?]	
7	[M] Why? What did you expect to find on the clothes?	
9	[M] Then, where was he? And how did he get into the Club? He was there, you know.	
11	[M] But, my dear lad, bless my soul, that's impossible. He couldn't have been carried in there dead. Somebody would have noticed it.	How is it possible for the corpse to be carried without anyone noticing it?
13	[M] What is your idea, then? That he slept the night in the Club?	
14	[M] You shock me inexpressibly. I understand you to suggest that he died—	Are you saying that he died in the evening, not in the morning?
17	[M] But he couldn't have sat there all night in the smoking-room. The servants would have been bound to—er—notice him.	How is it possible for the corpse to have sat in the smoking-room without any of the servants noticing it?
19	[M] Robert Fentiman.	Do you refer to Robert Fentiman?
21	[M] But how did Robert know about Lady Dormer?	
23	[M] What had he to gain?	
25	[CP] Look here, this is a very pretty theory, Peter, but, allowing that the General died, as you say, on the evening of the tenth, **where was the body?** As Mr. Murbles says, it would have been a trifle noticeable if left about.	How is it possible for the corpse to have sat in the smoking-room without any of the servants noticing it? (see Turn 17)
27	[PW] That won't work. I think the General's hat and coat and things were in Robert's bedroom, but the corpse couldn't have been. Think, sir. Here is a photograph of the entrance-hall, with the big staircase running up in full view of the front door and the desk and the bar-entrance. **Would you risk carrying a corpse downstairs in the middle of the morning, with servants and members passing in and out continually?** And the service stairs would be even worse. They are right round the other side of the building, with continual kitchen traffic going on all the time. No. The body wasn't in Robert's bedroom.	
28	[M] Where, then?	
29	[CP] Yes, where? After all, Peter, we've got to make this story hold water.	
31	[CP] The telephone cabinet?	
33	[CP] Good God, Wimsey. Impossible. Think of the risk.	How is it possible for someone to put the corpse in the telephone cabinet without anyone noticing it?
37	[M] Finger-prints?	

The passage in **E8** could be even more thoroughly analyzed than I have done here. For instance, it could be shown how the protagonist himself raises questions and, in a curious inversion of roles, one of the antagonists (Inspector Parker) produces answers. But this should be enough for the purpose at hand.[16]

[16] It would have been even easier to illustrate the point I am laboring here (viz. that objections are questions, from a speech act perspective; and so that what pragma-dialecticians call a critical discussion is actually a reasonable inquiry) by going through a specimen of *academic* argumentation, especially those having to do

One final point. I have expressed this proposition as a purely factual one so far, because I believe it can be argued that objections function pragmatically as questions. But if somebody should object that no proper proof has been offered, then I would like to go further out on a limb and declare that the real message of Proposition VII is that the right attitude of an opponent or antagonist should not be to propose counter-arguments (which is, I guess, what objections are *if* they are not questions), but rather to raise questions in a cooperative fashion of the sort we saw in **E7**. This is what being reasonable would demand in this particular context. In that case, the normative message would be that reasonable opponents should always change their objections into proper questions.

PROPOSITION VIII
QUESTIONS ARE THE TOUCHSTONE FOR THE CONCLUDING STAGE

In the pragma-dialectical ideal model there is a commandment, the ninth one, which says that a critical discussion can be concluded in two ways: either (*a*) protagonists succeed in defending their standpoints, so that antagonists *should* withdraw their doubts; or (*b*) protagonists fail to defend their standpoints, so that they themselves *should* withdraw those standpoints.

I completely agree with (*a*) and I would only add, from the perspective urged in this paper, that succeeding to defend a standpoint means that the protagonist was able satisfactorily to answer all the well-informed questions which the antagonist was able to raise; or alternatively, that the antagonist was not able to raise any well-informed question which the protagonist was not able satisfactorily to answer. In other words, the presiding question has been answered—for *both* discussion partners.

However, I don't think that option (*b*) is as definitive a closure as option (*a*), so that there seems to be a problem with the Ninth Commandment (see van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004: 195). For if protagonists, as in option (*b*), withdraw their standpoints, then, at least in the case where the opponent is a pure antagonist, i.e. a questioner, the fact of the matter is that the presiding question is thereby deprived of the only answer

with *research*. Still, there may be interesting differences in detail. For instance, it has been suggested that, although all researchers tend to be sharp critics of each other, yet in mathematics and natural science the purpose of criticism is to achieve consensus whereas in philosophy it is rather to promote dissensus (Weber, 2011: 198-199). This intriguing suggestion might also be tentatively applied to some social sciences and perhaps the humanities in general (although economics, linguistics and history seem to be more like natural science in this respect). The question why we should want to promote dissensus, not as means but as an end, is particularly relevant to pragma-dialectics, considering its justified emphasis in resolution of disagreements. See Putnam (2015: 679) for a hint towards an answer, which is by the way strongly reminiscent of Oakeshott (1959).

that had been given in that context. So, the question arises, *What is then the right answer to the presiding question, given that, as far as the discussion goes, the protagonist's answer has been shown not to be right?* When we consider a critical discussion as inquiry, it seems that we have certainly concluded a *round* of discussion but there should be other rounds until the discussion partners come to an agreement as to what the correct answer is. The discussion as such cannot be quite said to have come to a close. What happens in such a case? I think there are two further options.

The most common option, let's call it (*c*), is that, as a consequence of questioning, the discussion partners come to agree that a previous question should be answered *before* the partners can tackle the presiding question. A discussion gets then started around a different question, but not any old question but one for which the partners believe (on evidence they can agree on) that, if answered, it will then show them a way to go back to the original question. I think this is a common occurrence when people use argumentation in order to solve a problem. If the problem is not solved by the available means, then the discussants should step back and look for a smaller, easier problem whose solution will help solve the original problem.[17]

Consider a practical problem: how to get out of a room whose door is locked. The first thing is obviously to try to open the door. One general problem (to get out of the room) leads to a more specific one (to open the door). Again, if one wants to open a locked door, one first looks for the keys that would unlock it; if the keys fail to do that, then one may look for a different way to open the door, perhaps by forcing the lock or in some other way. Each one of these putative solutions are still solutions of the narrow problem, namely to open the door in order to get out of the room. If each one of these alternative solutions (alternative, that is, to using a key to unlock the door), then we change track again and look for a way to get out of the room through an opening other than the locked door.

Something very similar happens when we use argumentation to solve a problem. The problem may be an ordinary everyday problem, or it may be a highly technological, philological, mathematical, or macroeconomic one. The procedure is still the same: one does not really stop arguing until one has found a satisfactory solution. And in each one of these cases, discussion partners may say that the original discussion was concluded

[17] Cf. Conway 2004, xx-xxi: «[B]efore trying to solve a problem, the student [of mathematics] should demonstrate his or her understanding of its statement […] Experienced mathematicians know that often the hardest part of researching a problem is understanding precisely what that problem says. They often follow Pólya's wise advice: "If you can't solve a problem, then there is an easier problem you [can] solve: find it."»

when they agreed that the answer could not be given at that time, but that they had to start another discussion on another question on whose agreed answer an acceptable answer to the original question depended. The following observation throws a potent light on this point:

> **O4 (Collingwood, 1939: 31-32).**
>
> It must be understood that question and answer, as I [conceive] them, [are] strictly correlative. A proposition [is] not an answer, or at any rate could not be the right answer, to any question which might have been answered otherwise. A highly detailed and particularized proposition must be the answer, not to a vague and generalized question, but to a question as detailed and particularized as itself. For example, if my car will not go, I may spend an hour searching for the cause of its failure. If, during this hour, I take out number one plug, lay it on the engine, turn the starting-handle, and watch for a spark, my observation 'number one plug is all right' is an answer not to the question, 'Why won't my car go?' but to the question, 'Is it because number one plug is not sparking that my car won't go?' Any one of the various experiments I make during the hour will be the finding of an answer to some such detailed and particularized question. The question, 'Why won't my car go?' is only a kind of summary of all these taken together. It is not a separate question asked at a separate time, nor is it a sustained question which I continue to ask for the whole hour together. Consequently, when I say, 'Number one plug is all right', this observation does not record one more failure to answer the hour-long question, 'What is wrong with my car?' It records a success in answering the three-minutes-long question, 'Is the stoppage due to failure in number one plug?'

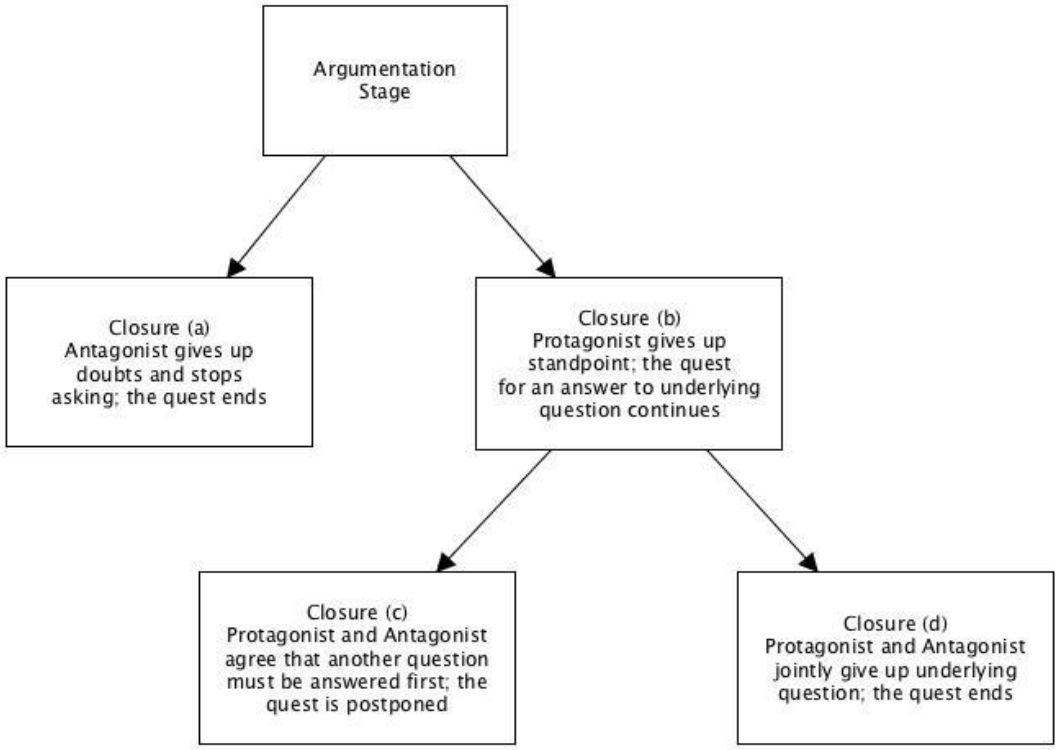
Although this example corresponds to a *dialogue intérieur*, I trust the reader can imagine something very similar going on as an argumentation between two friends who are trying to make the car engine start.[18]

So far option (*c*)—the first and most common way to conclude a discussion when, having reached option (*b*), we come to appreciate that we still have something to do about the presiding question. However, there is a far less common way to conclude, and that is when the discussion partners agree that the presiding question should be dropped as completely and utterly unanswerable. We can call it option (*d*). Remember that option (*c*) only concerns the *relative* unanswerability of the presiding question: the discussion

[18] In Plato's Socratic dialogues the discussion often starts from an open question of the type, 'What is X?' (Robinson, 1941: 51). Then, as soon as Socrates' interlocutor replies saying, 'X is Y' (thus assuming the role of protagonist or answerer), the Socratic questioning transforms the open question into a closed one ('Is X Y or is it not Y?'). We observe the same transition from open to closed questions in Aristotle's *Topics*, in medieval disputation, and in scientific method. Still, there are interesting differences: in the *Topics* the questions allowed must be of one of four types (the so-called *praedicabilia*); in medieval disputation (Lawn, 1993; Weijers, 2013), a finite number of closed questions has to be discovered for each open question through close reading of authoritative texts (a technique especially well represented by the articles of a *quaestio* in Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*); and in scientific method the struggle pits rival hypotheses, an empirical procedure which either eliminates some of them or shows rival hypotheses to be complementary to each other (see Chamberlin, 1890; Platt, 1964). Despite these huge differences, the testing of Yes-No answers takes place in the same logical way, namely by drawing their implications.

is closed when the partners agree that they have to answer a different question before trying to find an answer to the original one. But here, in option (*d*), we have to do with something far more radical. The question cannot be postponed until we find a smaller, easier or otherwise previous question to answer. Rather we come, as a consequence of questioning, to think that there is just no answer to the question, for it is a *bad* question, a question we should not ask. Figure 2 may help visualize all closure options.

Figure 2. Ways to close an argumentation after all arguments in a critical discussion have been given



Some readers may object that option (*d*) is unreasonable. If so, let me remind them that, at some point in the history of Western thinking, a group of influential authors came to argue that the traditional *metaphysical* questions were impossible to answer, so that they concluded that we should just stop asking them altogether. It would be highly interesting to analyze the argumentations which persuaded so many people of the absolute unanswerability of metaphysical questions, to such an extent that, in many intellectual circles today, calling a question 'metaphysical' is equivalent to saying that there is no answer to them. This has started to change lately, of course, but this is no objection to the fact that option (*d*) is not something I am making up. In fact, at some point in the history of Western thinking, some people came to argue that certain questions such as,

'How much does phlogiston weigh?', or even, 'What is the cause of a quantum jump?', should be rejected as *bad* questions. The corresponding argumentations are even more interesting from a theoretical perspective, because *they* have persuaded practically everybody, something that is definitely not the case with metaphysics.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the best way to close the above discussion is by trying to formulate the questions which may have arisen in the minds of my readers. If I am not too far wrong, these questions can be marshalled under three headings:

(1) *Systematicity*. Is the set of propositions I have submitted in this paper minimally consistent and complete? Is there any obvious contradiction between one and the others? Do they constitute some sort of system?

(2) *Generalizability*. Does the fact that I discuss my propositions mainly by means of examples—and very different from each other at that—jeopardize the possibility of generalization? What is the relationship of this paper with the extant literature?

(3) *Relevance*. What is the point of it all? What *is* the role of questions and questioning in argumentation? Do I believe a proper theory of argumentation can be built on such a basis? What is the relevance of my proposal to argumentation itself?

Let me try to answer them, or at least to comment on them, as tersely as I can and in the same order.

Ad (1). The short answer is: I don't know. The only way to decide these questions one way or the other is to develop the eight propositions within a theoretical framework whose consistency and completeness can be taken for granted, at least provisionally.[19] In my case, that framework is pragma-dialectics, both because I know it best and because it is the result of the longest-lived and theoretically most elaborated research program (Leal, 2016). For that reason, the task is complex and will in all likelihood require a whole book for its solution. This is in fact my next project, and I again beg the reader to take this paper as a theoretically still relatively neutral first attempt at gaining a modest place for the future consideration of questions and questioning as relevant to argumentation theory. See *ad* (3) for some further ideas about the internal coherence of

[19] It is pretty obvious that 'consistency' and 'completeness' are here used in a lax (if not indeed a Pickwickian) sense. If we exclude the logical systems mentioned in footnote 1, for which formal proofs of that sort can be attempted, nothing in argumentation theory can be considered in any other sense.

the set.

Ad (2). All theoretical models of argumentation depend on a set of examples. Some sets are quite explicit, others are somewhat implicit; some are quite reduced, others are amazingly rich; but in all cases the same question arises: Can the theoretical proposal be generalized to *all* cases of argumentation? The richer and more explicit the set of examples is, the more assured can we be that the theory is, if not generalizable, at least not unduly narrow. My personal interests in argumentation lean towards the academic disciplines; and because the role of questions and questioning within academic argumentation is much more transparent than outside of it, I might have made my life easier by using only those. Instead, I made a conscious effort in this paper to forego all strictly academic arguments in which I feel much better at home. Some of the arguers whose arguments I used as examples *are* professional academics, but the particular arguments I chose are, even in those cases, as non-academic as possible. They are instead, both in form and content, not far different from the homelier examples in this paper. This is a *prima facie* case in favor of a measure of generalizability which is not at the very least not much worse than elsewhere in the literature.

Ad (3). In my view, nobody puts forward a standpoint (a potentially or actually controversial assertion, prediction, judgment, or request) just out of the blue. For somebody to take a position, there must be something 'in the air' which is in the nature of a question, a problem, a puzzle, an issue. Arguing is (like thinking and reasoning more generally) problem-solving activities. Therefore, a free-floating standpoint should never be taken as an independent starting-point in argumentation. Moreover, any question whatsoever is unavoidably related to other questions, is part of a web of questions, either taken as satisfactorily answered or not when the discussion starts. Propositions I, II, III, V and VIII are focused on these facts and relationships. On the other hand, the interlocutor of whoever has put forward a standpoint (in answer to one question within a whole web of questions) is herself, and cannot but be, a questioner, saddled with a special responsibility or burden. Propositions IV, V, VI and VII focus on this other aspect. It is here that the contributions of formal and informal dialectics (see footnote 1) would have its systematic place. Note that Proposition V belongs to both subsets and so may have a special status.

Michel Meyer (1980, 1982, 1986, 2013) has made a career of insisting on the centrality of questioning in a theory of argumentation; but he has, as far as I can see, no clear list of propositions (or indeed theorems) to offer in support of his view. I agree that questions should have pride of place in argumentation theory; but the proof of the

pudding is in the eating. And the only way to start is by producing at least a tentative list of propositions. This is all I have attempted here.

Appendix: English translation of **O2** (italics refer to English wording in the original)

[*Female Interviewer:*] When we spoke in Paris and you did that improv in the apartment, you said something offhand. You said, 'It's very American of you immediately to sort of give me a topic and ask me to speak.' What did you mean by… Why would I be very American? What struck you about that?

[*Derrida:*] That's because the experience… What I mean by 'American' here … My use of the word 'American' may be a bit unfair, of course. What I mean by 'American' here, it's two things. One which is a bit unfair, the other which is less so.

The unfair bit, that's the utilitarian, manipulative attitude: 'There, we need this job done, *do it!*' There you have, a certain term, go for it, *action!* For those who do movies clearly do that. Yet the movies, that's American, you know: the movies are more American than anything else, right? Today, the global experience of the movies is largely, as you well know, largely driven—whether one rejoices in it or regret it—largely driven by, well, by American culture. Fine, that was it, the unfair use of the word 'American', the vague use of that word.

The less vague and less unfair use is that often, in American universities—and that already in 1956, the first year I was there—I have observed those situations, both social and academic, in which somebody asks somebody else, perhaps it is a professor asking a student, or a student asking a professor, or a student asking another student, '*Could you elaborate on these things? Could you elaborate?*' There, I give you a word and… *go and work, okey?* Starting just from one word, right? *Elaborate!* And still these days American students, *during my office hours, just come and say,* '*Could you tell me more about this or that? Could you elaborate?*' And that, that would not be done in France, that's out of bounds, right, that somebody says to somebody else, 'Could you… *elaborate?*' I don't know how you could say that in French. Not that it never happens, but it is much less frequent, and much less likely to happen. It happens sometimes, and that is also American, it is American in the first sense, the unfair sense, which I was talking about before, that happens in radio or TV interviews, where rushed and utilitarian journalists, manipulative journalists, think that one can ask somebody, just because he is a philosopher, just because he is a professor of philosophy, all of a sudden to speak of Being, right? As if you'd press a button and immediately you'd have a *ready-made discourse on Being, or Love. No! I've nothing ready-made, okey?*

In conclusion, there is a more unfair use of the term 'American', which concerns all the showbiz journalistic manipulative attitude, and then there is a stricter use of the word 'American', which refers to that custom, when you are in college, to ask somebody, *Elaborate!* There you are.

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