THE VIRTUE APPROACH TO THE ANALYSIS OF INFORMAL ARGUMENTATION

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Abstract: This article substantiates the relevance of personality qualities, such as epistemic virtues and epistemic vices, for the interpretation of informal argumentation in public discourse. An internalist approach to argumentation is suggested. From this perspective, "good" argumentation is defined as "virtuous" and faulty argumentation as "vicious. The interpretation of some informal fallacies of argumentation in the context of virtue theory is considered: "Ad Hominem", "Straw Man," "Argument to

Authority". It is shown that reference to the conceptual apparatus of virtue theory reveals justified and unjustified uses of these arguments. Some criticisms of the use of the aretaic approach to argumentation in general are also discussed.

Keywords: public discourse, epistemology of virtues, argumentation theory, justification theory, internalism, informal fallacies, intellectual virtues, intellectual vices.

1.   INTRODUCTION

It is known from Hobbes' biography that he did not study geometry until his adulthood and some statements about geometrical figures seemed to him for this reason unbelievable [1, p. 21-39]. But after reading Euclid's "Elements" and assimilating the proofs of the theorems, he realized his wrongness. We can say that Euclid's arguments, studied by Hobbes, substantiated for him statements concerning geometrical figures. In this example, an evaluation of the structure of argumentation is the determining factor in the justification of beliefs. Hobbes did not need to familiarize himself with Euclid's biography and personal qualities in order to accept his beliefs. It could be said that Hobbes, like a computer, tested the validity of Euclid's conclusions and came to the same results.

At the heart of the classical approach to argumentation is the idea that the epistemic value of an argument is determined by how well it can maintain its justifying function for a belief (or set of beliefs). From this perspective, logical validity is the most preferable type of argument because logic deals only with the formal structure of reasoning, ignoring (and labeling as "illegitimate" modes of argumentation) any appeals to the status of the person making the argument. A.Goldman writes the following about this: "...what makes a good argument good is its suitability to produce justified belief in its conclusion by means of justified beliefs in its premises. In other words, a good argument is one that can transmit justification from premises to conclusion (and justification vis-à-vis the premises does not require prior justification of vis-à-vis the conclusion. [2, p.59-60.].

From the quoted definition we see that representatives of the externalist approach to knowledge believe that justification is an epistemic characteristic

exclusively of beliefs. From this point of view, "justifiedness" is virtually identical to "argumentativeness. Argument is what produces justification and transmits it. Realizing this convergence (close to identification), Goldman argues that an argument that is not accessible to intersubjective verification cannot be the subject to rational discussion. Consequently, justification, as a derivative of argumentation, must also be intersubjective. It follows from this thesis that externalism limits justification to only one kind of justification: doxastic justification (from "doxa" – "belief"). But this reduction is not obvious, because there is a conceptual difference between the justification of beliefs (that is, the existence of grounds for the truth of some proposition) and the state of justification (that is, the mental state of the agent). The former is called doxastic justification, whereas the latter can be called personal justification.

Externalists believe that the mental "state of justification" arises as if automatically from the assimilation of arguments concerning p: anyone, like Hobbes, can read "Elements" and come to the same conclusions. In this case, personal justification is a consequence of assimilation of doxastic justification, which is an important thesis of externalism with which we do not intend to argue. The divergence is that externalists deny the possibility of following backwards: from personal to doxastic justification. In turn, virtue epistemology -and this is our central thesis- assumes that doxastic justification without personal justification is of no epistemic value. A virtue theory of argumentation allows us to extend this claim to the evaluation of arguments. From this point of view, the class of admissible modes of argumentation must be extended so that it can include factors not only of doxastic but also of personal justification. Then appeal to the virtue (or viciousness) of the person making the argument would also be a possible mode of argumentation.

2. METHODS

This paper proposes a conceptual analysis. The methodology used in this essay is based on the paradigm of virtue epistemology, which is characterized by a subject-centered approach and focuses on valuable ethical and intellectual properties of the knower (such as intellectual virtues, intellectual vices, cognitive merit, excellent traits

of character, etc). In this theoretical exploration we also draw from a series of considerations made in logic and theory argumentation, especially in theory of informal fallacies.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The reduction of argumentation to doxastic justification that externalism offers inherently narrows the research perspective. By accepting the duality of justification, we also accept the possibility of argumentation not only from "words to words," but also from the evaluation of the person to the words he or she expresses. This is the way in which argumentation theory can get out of the classical circle of self-reference, where good argument is considered to be that which is well-argued. For "doxastic" argumentation, the requirement of intersubjectivity is true; the argument must be accessible to the other. But we cannot agree with saying that the inter-subjectivity requirement is mandatory for being in a state of justification, that is, for personal justification.

Let us clarify this question with the example of knowledge of subjective states. Is a critical argumentative discussion possible between the author of these lines and another agent regarding, say, the author's belief that "my finger itches"? Such a reasoned discussion is impossible, because the other person has no access to the author's feelings, they can only trust the author. This belief is not available for intersubjective verification. But does it follow that the belief "my finger itches" is unfounded? In our opinion, no. Moreover, the message "my finger itches" itself will be reasonable for another agent not because it is logically valid, but because of my personal evaluation as the speaker. The transmission of justification here is not because of the argument per se, but because the author's interlocutor believes that the author is not hallucinating, that they have no reason to lie, and that they have in general an adequate experience of corporeality. Thus, personal knowledge, like knowledge of one's own states, is an example of a situation in which personal justification determines doxastic justification.

By narrowing the perspective of analysis, an externalist approach to argumentation fails to capture important intuitions about everyday communicative

practices and everyday argumentation. In fact, externalism must then replace the epistemology of justification with a formal theory of argumentation, that is, logic. But a problem arises: logic tells us about the clash of different discursive positions, simply put, words, whereas the virtue epistemology analyzes not words, but agents, that is, people. These disciplines have different objects of analysis. For this reason, what might be called an unacceptable mode of argumentation in formal logic, might well be considered an acceptable mode of forming a rationale for virtue epistemology.

For example, one of the most sharply condemned informal fallacies of argumentation is considered to be the appeal to personality. Indeed, it does not matter who makes the argument – this does not increase or decrease the strength of the evidence. But here is what an virtue theorist H.Battaly writes about Ad hominem:

"If virtue theory in epistemology is correct— if the intellectual virtues are required for knowledge—then the speaker's intellectual character is indeed relevant to evaluating her claims and arguments. It is relevant because claims that result from intellectual vices are not likely to be true, and hence are not knowledge. Likewise, arguments that result from intellectual vices are not likely to be valid (if deductive) or strong (if inductive), are not likely to produce true conclusions, and hence are not knowledge-producing. Thus, I will argue that if we discover that Doctor S, in the epigraph above, arrived at her diagnosis dogmatically, then we should not believe her conclusion that 'the patient has a bacterial infection' solely on her say-so. Likewise, if we discover that a speaker has the vice of color-blindness, we should not believe his claim that 'the car leaving the scene was red' solely on his say-so. We should not believe these claims because they issued from intellectual vices (or vicious acts) rather than intellectual virtues, and thus are not likely to be true." [3, p. 362-363].

Despite the fact that scientific theory strives to be as formalized as possible, it is not possible to achieve complete formalization (except, perhaps, in the fields of mathematics and formal logic). And even when we are talking about fully formalized disciplines, the presentation and dissemination of scientific ideas in these fields can be fraught with informal fallacies. For example, there are studies that show that mathematicians tend to regard some proofs as more convincing if they are attributed to

famous and distinguished mathematicians [4]. What can be said about humanities in general, where reasoning is not strictly formalized? The classification of informal fallacies is well-known, but the debate about what exactly makes an argument "good" or "bad" continues.

Recently, a new approach has emerged in the argumentation theory literature (mostly Anglo-American) that proposes to apply a theory of intellectual virtues (or virtue epistemology) to argumentation [5, 6, 7, 8]. Briefly, the essence of virtue epistemology is to redefine all the traditional concepts of epistemology (knowledge, justification, etc.) in terms of virtues and vices. The best-known varieties of virtue epistemology are reliabilism (E. Sosa) and responsibilism (L. Zagzebski). Reliabilism defines intellectual virtues in terms of reliable cognitive abilities [9]. Responsibilism defines intellectual virtues as stable superior traits of intellectual character (intellectual openness, intellectual courage, intellectual modesty, etc.) [10]. Accordingly, intellectual vices are the opposites of virtues. For reliabilists, they are some disorder in our cognitive functions (memory, vision, hearing, etc.). For responsibilists, they are qualities of intellectual character that prevent us from reaching the truth (dogmatism, intellectual laziness, intellectual arrogance, etc.).

Applying a virtuous approach to argumentation, this means, in short, that a "good" argument is defined (at least in part) as "virtuous" and a "bad" argument as "vicious." The virtuous approach to argument reverses the standard definition of what we normally think of as a good argument. We believe that an agent argues well if they have presented a good argument (in the form of related propositions), whereas from the perspective of virtuous argumentation theory, an argument is good if the subject has demonstrated certain properties in the course of the generating an argument, i.e., something that preceded the appearance of an argument in explicit form. In other words, in standard argumentation theory only the outcome (the argument itself in the form of the premises and the conclusion) is important for assessing the validity of an argument, while from the virtue approach the process how one gets to the argument is also important.

In this connection it is interesting to view in parallel the views of the famous Russian argumentation theorist V.N. Brushinkin, who defended the cognitive approach to argumentation in addition to the logical and rhetorical approaches to argumentation that dominate in the literature [11]. The key concept in the theory of argumentation from the perspective of the cognitive approach is persuasion as a subjective category (rather than a judgment or statement as in the logical model of argumentation) and the focus is on the process of generating persuasion itself, rather than persuasive communication, speech acts (as in the rhetorical model).

In this article we are primarily interested in the heuristic potential of interpreting informal fallacies in the context of virtue theory. Namely, the question of whether informal errors can be said to be vicious intellectual practices? That is, to what extent is it legitimate to attribute the "wrongness" of informal fallacies to certain properties of the subject, namely intellectual vices? In particular, we will consider from this point of view several fallacies, such as "Ad Hominem", "Argument to Authority" and "Straw Man". Namely, how productive it is to talk about evaluating the role of the subject as addresser and addressee of an argument [12]. Generally speaking, the term "fallacy" indicates simply some inaccuracy or inconsistency and does not indicate the identity of the one who commits the fallacy. At the same time, if fallacy is a habit, we can already speak of a certain character trait. For example, if the person has not just made a hasty conclusion, which he then admits, but has a strong tendency to often make hasty conclusions, and does not want to recognize or correct this tendency in themselves, then we can already say that it is not just a mistake, but a character trait. In the latter case, the error will simply be a symptom of the presence of such a flawed trait of intellectual character.

Take Ad hominem as an example. Traditionally with this argument there is the problem of how to determine the legitimate and illegitimate cases of its application. Virtue theory in this case suggests that a legitimate application of this argument is possible if it concerns the intellectual (epistemically significant) qualities of the individual. For example, if we take the above quoted passage from Battaly, an appeal to the fact that the agent is dogmatic (in a case where we have no opportunity to double-

check all the evidence ourselves) is justified for a justified distrust of the subject. An appeal to the subject being cruel (or otherwise morally flawed), for example, is not justified. Indeed, one can well imagine a causal connection between dogmatism and false belief, and it is much harder to imagine a causal connection between the falsity of the subject's belief and his cruelty. That said, we emphasize that even in this case one should be careful not to confuse justifiable doubt in argumentation and the assertion of the falsity of a thesis solely on the basis of distrust of the speaker's identity.

The same is true of the Argument to Authority. The question of the legitimacy of an appeal to authority in each specific case (and no academic scholarly work is possible without it), in addition to objective criteria, can be considered in the context of such virtues as intellectual humility, intellectual courage, and, respectively, their opposites – intellectual cowardice and intellectual arrogance. We believe that legitimate appeal to authority implies that it is not enough to assess whether the authority is a true expert on a given issue and whether there is expert agreement, it is also important whether the authority is insincere, biased, or untrustworthy, and this is already a character assessment [8]. If a liquor company owner opposes raising the age of maturity, then we have every reason not to trust him, since he will have a vested interest in advocating a particular point of view. In some cases, the individual is approached directly. For example, during an interview, the job interviewers want to find out not only the job applicant's track record, but also the qualities of his character, both moral and intellectual. This approach will not always be considered virtuous if, for example, the decision is based on racial, gender and other prejudices. A prime example here is Nobel laureate J.Watson, whose certain ideas have been rightly criticized because of his racist prejudices. The authors have also discussed the problem of the influence of intellectual vices in believing fake news elsewhere [13].

Also, the Straw Man argument can be seen as a consequence of a lack of, on the one hand, intellectual openness and, on the other, intellectual generosity (charity). In the literature, this argument is defined as a distortion of a person's real position (a selective or false presentation of his position) on an issue in order to then easily refute it. The general consensus is that "Straw Man" is a bad way to argue. However, as

proponents of the virtue approach suggest, some variations of "Straw Man" would not be an argumentative fallacy. In some cases, the distortion of an opponent's point of view may even be intentional and justified [14]. This argument can sometimes be used for pedagogical purposes, for example, to exaggerate some shortcomings in a student's performance in order to encourage their self-improvement. In this case, the teacher's virtuous motivation justifies a deliberate distortion of the value of the student's work. Sometimes the distortion of argumentation is used as a deliberate device to show the absurdity of the criticism in question. In such a case, the position being defended is deliberately presented in an absurd way, but in such a way that this distortion is noticeable to the listener and a sense of justice prompts a reaction in him to defend a position he may not have originally sympathized with.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In this article the authors suggested that in order to evaluate the positions of the parties in the course of argumentation it is necessary to take into account the internal qualities of the subjects. A person, when entering into a dialogue, first of all seeks to acquaint his interlocutor with his considerations on certain issues and to find out his position. The speaker reveals to the listener not only his view of the world, but also his personal spiritual qualities. Interlocutors' positions may coincide or differ. When the positions coincide, the parties come to an agreement. In Plato's dialogue "Gorgias" Socrates says to Callicles: "If you come to agree with me on anything in these discussions, the point in question will, at that stage, have been adequately tested by you and me, and will not need to be subjected to any other test. For you would never have gone along with it, either from lack of wisdom or excessive shame, and what's more, you would not make the concession to deceive me, for, as you say yourself, you are my friend" (487D) [15]. From Socrates' words we can conclude that the agreement between the participants in a dialogue can be caused by subjective factors concerning the character of the person. This passage indicates at least three types of agreement related in one way or another to the inner character of the disputing parties:

1. If one of the parties is ignorant or ill-informed about the problem under discussion, thinking his interlocutor to be an expert on the problem, he agrees, ashamed or afraid of appearing ignorant.

2. Agreement from excessive bashfulness. In this case, although one party knows the problem and its solution as well as the other (has his own point of view, different from that of the interlocutor), respecting age, position, kinship, etc. he agrees with the interlocutor;

3. Agreement by false concessions. Making concessions:

- To detach themselves from the interlocutor and close an unnecessary argument;

- To hide their true intentions and win time;

- When there are some personal motives and the arguments of the interlocutor does not affect the interests of the consenting.

Finally, let us consider the question of whether it is possible for a virtuous subject to make an argumentative fallacy and, conversely, for an intellectually vivious subject to produce an impeccable argument. In short, the answer, of course, is yes. The connection here is not, in our view, so unambiguous and straightforward, but with the caveat that intellectual depravity in general is not a bad predictor of the presence of fallacies. An interesting empirical study has been published on the latter about the correlation between intellectual vices and wrong beliefs about COVID-19 [16]. Another objection is that fallacies can be seen as somewhat virtuous because they are, in general, necessary for practical rationality. For example, hasty generalization is a standard example of error, but it gives us some additional information resource for decision-making [17, p. 93].

Of course, the virtuous approach to argumentation has its limitations; in particular, we believe that it is unlikely to be relevant for assessing deductively valid argumentation. It would seem that a deductively invalid argument would not benefit from being defended by a virtuous subject, and conversely, a deductively valid argument would lose nothing from being presented by someone out of self-interest or other perverse motives. However, in informal argumentation (and this is most common

in public discourse and in humanities), virtuousness, as we argue in this article, can affect the assessment of the strength of an argument.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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