Redelijkheid en overredingskracht van argumentatie: een historisch-filosofische studie over de combinatie van het dialectische en het retorische perspectief op argumentatie in de pragma-dialectische argumentatietheorie

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Summary

In the field of argumentation theory, a sharp distinction can be made between studies in which argumentation is approached from a dialectical perspective and studies in which this is done from a rhetorical perspective. Recently, pragma-dialecticians have proposed to bridge the gap between these perspectives by integrating rhetorical insights into the already existing dialectical framework of pragma-dialectics. Partly on the occasion of this proposal, the debate as to the question of the relationship between the dialectical and the rhetorical perspective has been reopened. In their contributions to this debate, argumentation scholars frequently refer to antique dialectic and rhetoric. Within these disciplines lies the origin of an important part of the terminology and the conceptual apparatus developed within the present-day perspectives.

This dissertation is aimed at making an historical-philosophical contribution to the aforementioned debate by analyzing how the pragma-dialectical proposal to combine the dialectical and the rhetorical perspective can be situated against the background of antique dialectic and rhetoric. In the first part (Chapter 2 and 3) I explicate the dialectical and rhetorical dimensions of pragma-dialectics and in the second part (Chapter 4, 5, 6 and 7) I give a systematical reconstruction of antique dialectic and rhetoric.

In Chapter 2, I give a conceptual analysis of the ‘standard version’ of pragma-dialectics as it has been developed by van Eemeren and Grootendorst. The analysis shows that within pragma-dialectics, the term ‘dialectical’ is used to characterize insights that pertain to various aspects of argumentation, namely the aim, the organization and the regulation of argumentation. On the basis of this analysis, the pragma-dialectical notion ‘critical discussion’ can be circumscribed as a discussion that (I) is aimed at determining the acceptability of the standpoint to which a difference of opinion between two parties pertains, (II) is organized as a systematic exchange of discussion moves for and against this standpoint, and (III) is regulated by means of a set of discussion rules pertaining to the reasonableness of argumentation.
In Chapter 3, I give a conceptual analysis of the ‘extended version’ of pragma-dialectics as it has been developed by van Eemeren and Houtlosser. The analysis shows that the notion ‘strategic maneuvering’ – that plays a pivotal role in this version of the theory – is based on a dialectical and a rhetorical starting point concerning the argumentative ambitions of the discussants. The dialectical starting point implies the dialectical insights that are constitutive of the notion ‘critical discussion’, whereas the rhetorical starting point is embedded in these dialectical insights. On the basis of this analysis, a strategic maneuver can be circumscribed as a way of acting that (I) is aimed at (a) determining the acceptability of the standpoint to which a difference of opinion between two parties pertains and (b) promoting the own position of the discussant concerned, (II) is organized as a systematic exchange of discussion moves for and against this standpoint, and (III) is regulated by means of a set of discussion rules pertaining to the reasonableness of argumentation. Within the extended version of pragma-dialectics, argumentative texts and discussions are reconstructed as a coherent whole of strategic maneuvers and evaluated by means of the same set of dialectical norms as the one that is used within the standard version of the theory.

In Chapter 4, the first chapter of the second part of the dissertation, I give a reconstruction of the aim of argumentation as it is conceived of in antique dialectic – in relevant passages of the work of Zeno of Elea, Plato and Aristotle. The aim of Zeno’s dialectical ‘first paradox of plurality’ is to refute a certain standpoint and – by doing that – to defend the opposite standpoint. In the philosophical discussions in Plato’s dialogues, three forms of dialectic are manifest: the ‘socratic elenchus’, the ‘method of hypothesizing’, and the ‘method of collection and division’. The aim of the socratic elenchus is to determine the tenability of a standpoint somebody has put forward in the light of other opinions of that person. As far as the elenchus is part of a series of thematically coherent elenchi, the elenchus is also aimed at increasing the plausibility of a certain standpoint by refuting an alternative standpoint pertaining to the same issue. The method of hypothesizing can be reconstructed as a method consisting of three components: a ‘critical component’, a ‘deductive component’, and a ‘concluding component’. These components are respectively aimed at critically testing the tenability of the hypothesis, deducing the hypothesis from higher principles, and deducing a conclusion from the hypothesis. The method of collection and division is aimed at defining a certain notion by explicating the relation between that notion and other notions in terms of genus and species. Finally, the aim of a dialectical discussion as it can be reconstructed from Aristotle’s Topica and Sophistici elenchi is to determine the acceptability of the answerer’s standpoint in the light of other opinions that are generally accepted and/or accepted by the answerer during the discussion.

In Chapter 5, I give a reconstruction of the organization of argumentation as it is conceived of in antique dialectic. Zeno’s dialectical ‘first paradox of plurality’
is reconstructed as a discussion between Zeno and another party. Apart from the standpoint that is to be refuted, there are no implicit contributions of the other party. The socratic elenchus is organised as a discussion between a questioner and an answerer. In order to defend his standpoint, the answerer does not put forward arguments, but tries to avoid that his standpoint is refuted on the basis of his concessions. The critical component of the method of hypothesizing is organized in the same way as the socratic elenchus, be it that both parties are committed to the standpoint that is to be tested and that the testing does not take place in the light of the answerer’s concessions but in the light of the consequences that can be derived from the hypothesis. The deductive component is organized as a deduction of the hypothesis from higher principles that takes the form of a discussion in which the higher principles function as arguments. The concluding component of the method is organized in the same way as the deductive component, be it that the hypothesis does not function as a standpoint but as an argument (for the conclusion). The method of collection and division is organized as an exposé of the questioner that takes the form of a discussion. Finally, Aristotle’s dialectical discussion is organized in the same way as the socratic elenchus and the critical component of the method of hypothesizing. Like in the socratic elenchus, the answerer does not defend his standpoint by putting forward arguments, but by trying to avoid his standpoint from being refuted on the basis of his concessions.

In Chapter 6, I give a reconstruction of the regulation of argumentation as it is conceived of in antique dialectic. In Zeno’s work there are no explicit norms. From the reconstruction of his dialectical ‘first paradox of plurality’ it can be concluded that he implicitly makes use of logical rules pertaining to the validity of argumentation and also of a strategy for refuting standpoints that is recommended in present-day handbooks of logic. In Plato’s dialogues there are implicit as well as explicit norms. I make a distinction between ‘conditions’ (norms that pertain to the suitability of the discussants and to the nature of the discussion topic), ‘rules’ (norms that pertain to the validity or reasonableness of the contributions to the discussion), and ‘strategies’ (norms that are related to the specific role of the discussants – defending and attacking a standpoint). Aristotle explicitly formulates much of the norms that remain implicit in Plato’s dialogues. I give a reconstruction of the most important norms, thereby making the same distinction between ‘conditions’, ‘rules’, and ‘strategies’.

In Chapter 7, I give a reconstruction of the aim of argumentation as it is conceived of in antique rhetoric. Within the the so-called ‘system of antique rhetoric’, the aim of argumentation is generally described as persuading an audience. This general description can be further specified by making use of the typology of speeches as it is developed within the system. Finally, other specifications of the aim of the speaker are reconstructed on the basis of Plato’s critique of the sophist’s conception of rhetoric as it has been put forward in the Gorgias
and the *Phaedrus* and Aristotle’s remarks about the use of the means of persuasion in the *Rhetorica*.

In Chapter 8, I give a recapitulation of the results of the conceptual analyses in the first part of the dissertation and the results of the historical survey in the second part. On the basis of this recapitulation I give a differentiated characterization of the relation between the pragma-dialectical and the antique conception of argumentation. Further, I answer the main question of this study by indicating how the pragma-dialectical proposal to combine the dialectical and the rhetorical perspective can be situated against the background of antique dialectic and rhetoric. Finally, I contextualize my findings within the present-day debate amongst argumentation scholars as to the question of the relation between the two perspectives.