The use of conditionals in argumentation: a proposal for the analysis and evaluation of argumentatively used conditionals

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6. Conditionals functioning as a constituent of an argument scheme

6.1 Introduction

Conditionals can not only fulfil the argumentative function of a connecting premise or standpoint, they also can function as a constituent of an argument scheme. In such cases, one of the direct premises in support of the standpoint put forward is a conditional sentence. A speaker could use a conditional for an argument from example, as in 121:

121 **Forcing someone to do what you want leads you nowhere. If I had forced you to come along to that festival, then the whole day would have been ruined because you would not have enjoyed it.**

In 121 the conditional describes a hypothetical situation, that serving as an example, supports the standpoint under discussion.

For some argument schemes it is obvious that a conditional can be of value. A speaker using pragmatic argumentation – for instance promoting a policy by pointing out the desirable consequences connected to it – might very well bring up a conditional. The antecedent of this conditional depicts the situation where the policy is implemented, and the consequent shows what the outcome will be in that situation. Together with the (implicit) positive evaluation of this outcome, the conditional supports the standpoint that the course of action should be followed. In 90 such a conditional is used:

90 **We should pay off our debts. If we pay off our debts, we don’t have to pay interest anymore.**

In support of his standpoint ‘we should pay off our debts’ the spea-

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The conditional can also be put forward in a condensed form by leaving the antecedent implicit, as in ‘We should pay off our debts because then we don’t have to pay interest anymore’.
ker advances the conditional ‘if we pay off our debts, we don’t have to pay interest anymore’. He defends his proposal by pointing out the favourable consequences that will result as soon as the policy is introduced.95

The argument scheme that Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca call ‘dilemma’ (1969:236) also calls for conditional direct premises. The type of standpoint ‘whatever you do, Y will occur’ is easily supported with argumentation that depicts consequences resulting in different hypothetical situations, as in 122:

122  Whether you exert yourself or not, they will never accept you. If you do the most you can, they will perceive you as a pusher trying to get to the top. If you do not throw yourself into it, they will exclude you because of lack of commitment.

For other argument schemes the use of conditional direct premises is less compelling: the speaker can choose whether he puts forward his argument as an assertion or as a conditional. In 123 the speaker chooses a conditional to support his standpoint with an argument from authority:

123  The performance of King Lear in the municipal theatre is an utter disaster. Had Shakespeare been in the audience, he would have hated it and would have made it impossible for the actors to perform.

The speaker argues that the play is a disaster by pointing out that an expert in the field (the author of the play) would immensely disapprove of it. An appeal to authority can just as easily be brought forward without using a conditional, as in 124:

124  The performance of King Lear in the municipal theatre is an utter disaster. The theatre critic in News of the Day called it ‘the worst thing happening in the way of theatre’.

In his classification of argument schemes, Kienpointner (1992) explicitly says that the speaker has a choice in bringing forward his argument by means of a conditional. He distinguishes – following Quintilianus – between real en fictitious argument schemes:

Although this fragment might suggest that Kienpointner has the view that some argument schemes are fictitious whilst others are not, ultimately, this is not the point he is making. Whether a scheme is fictitious or not depends on the way it is used: whenever the speaker presents the direct premise as true or probable, the argument scheme is real, and whenever he explicitly indicates that the proposition expressed in the direct argument is not in accordance with the facts (kontrafaktisch), the scheme is fictitious.

Neither Perelman and Olbrchts-Tyteca (1969), nor Schellens (1985) distinguishes between real and fictitious argument schemes. However, without reference to the specific nature of the premises used, they discuss various examples where the speaker employs a conditional in support of his point of view.

In this chapter I discuss argument schemes that ‘by nature’ call for a conditional as a premise and argument schemes where use of a conditional is optional. Unfortunately, it is impossible to give an exhaustive overview of conditionals functioning as a constituent of an argument scheme. Primarily, because in the field of argumentation theory there is no consensus about the number of schemes that can be discerned. Furthermore, an exhaustive overview is limited by the fact that there is no consensus on the characteristics the various schemes possess, which makes it difficult to assess what type of conditional can be used. Therefore, I restrict myself to the discussion of four argument schemes: pragmatic argumentation, dilemma, argument from authority and argument from example. These schemes can serve as an illustration of how different argument schemes call for the different characteristics that a conditional must possess in order to function successfully as a constituent of them.
6.2 Conditionals as a constituent of pragmatic argumentation

A speaker using pragmatic argumentation defends a policy by pointing at positive (or negative) consequences. It is based on the principle that one should go after what is desirable and avoid the undesirable. The standpoint is typically a prescriptive proposition: the speaker argues that a certain policy or course of action must or must not be followed (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992: 159). 96, 90, 125 and 126 can be seen as examples of pragmatic argumentation.

90 We should pay off our debts. If we pay off our debts, we don’t have to pay interest anymore.

125 We should not pay off our debts. If we pay off our debts, we lose the possibility of tax deduction on our interest.

126 We should have paid off our debts. Had we paid off our debts, we would not have to pay interest anymore.

In 90, the standpoint ‘We should pay off our debts’ is supported by pointing out the positive effect of taking this course of action. In 125 the speaker advises against paying off the debts on the basis of a negative effect. 126 is much like 90 in that a positive effect is used as an argument. The difference between the two is that the course of action sketched in 126 cannot be realised. The speaker argues that it would have been better if in the past a different decision had been made, since a different course of action would have led to a positive outcome. 97

It is characteristic for pragmatic argumentation that the policy expressed in the standpoint is the means to a certain end, being the

96 Houtlosser (1995: 180) argues that the term ‘prescriptive proposition’ must be restricted to propositions where the speaker obliges the listener to do (or not do) something. Propositions whereby a third party is addressed Houtlosser calls ‘evaluative propositions’, since in a strict sense, the speaker does not summon anyone. (1995: 178). I suggest categorizing all propositions that contain a course of action / policy together (and perhaps avoid using the term ‘prescriptive’) in order to set them off from ‘real’ evaluative propositions like ‘I like this book’. Such evaluative propositions cannot be supported by referring to negative consequences. A statement like ‘I don’t dislike this book, because if I would nobody would buy it’ is not acceptable.
realization or prevention of the consequences sketched. The argumentation structure of pragmatic argumentation consists of at least three elements: the standpoint and two coordinative premises. The first premise depicts the consequences that will result if the policy is implemented. It is this premise that typically takes the shape of a conditional sentence. In the antecedent of this conditional the speaker sketches the situation in which the policy is implemented and in the consequent he indicates what the consequences of this policy will be. The second premise consists of an evaluation of these consequences: are they desirable or not? This second premise sometimes remains implicit, as in 90, where it is assumed that ‘not paying interest anymore’ is a desirable consequence.98 Schematically the argument scheme of pragmatic argumentation can be represented as follows:

1. We should [not] do X

\[\text{If } X, \text{ then } Y \quad \uparrow \quad Y \text{ is [not] desirable}\]

A speaker who wants to criticize a conditional used as a direct premise in pragmatic argumentation can aim his criticism both at the antecedent and at the connection between the antecedent and the consequent. In the antecedent, the situation is sketched in which the proposed policy is implemented. One reason to be unwilling to go

97 All these examples Kienpointer classifies as fictitious pragmatic argumentation because the speaker makes a prognosis (in 90 and 125 or because the course of action proposed cannot be realized any longer (in 126) (1992: 353). Real (non-fictitious) pragmatic argumentation, according to Kienpointner, has the following structure:

\[\text{Wenn die Folgen einer Handlung eine Bewertung } X \text{ rechtfertigen, ist auch die Handlung selbst mit } X \text{ zu bewerten/ (nicht) zu vollziehen.}\]
\[\text{Die Folgen der Handlung sind mit } X \text{ zu bewerten.} \quad \text{Also: Die Handlung ist mit } X \text{ zu bewerten/ (nicht) zu vollziehen (1992: 341).}\]

98 This description of pragmatic argumentation is in keeping with the description Feteris has provided (1997: 122): ‘In its most simple form, (...), the argumentation consists of one normative statement that states that effect } Y \text{ is desirable and one empirical statement that states that action } X \text{ leads to effect } Y.’
along with the hypothetical situation sketched in the antecedent could be that this situation has already been realized. Another reason not to go along with this hypothetical situation might be that the situation described in the antecedent cannot be realized. In response to 90, one could say there is no money to pay off the debts. In that case, the possibility of the proposition expressed in the antecedent is questioned, which amounts to saying that the proposed policy is not feasible. Doubting whether the situation sketched in the antecedent is the case, or denying it is, is pointless. The protagonist cannot be committed to the truth of the situation sketched in the antecedent: his argumentation is aimed at making this situation happen (or preventing it from happening).

If someone criticizes the connection between the antecedent and the consequent, the criticism can be directed at the causal relationship between the policy proposed and the alleged positive or negative results. This causal relationship can be criticized by showing that the action proposed does not lead to the result depicted in the consequent. In the examples given, such an attack does not seem to be possible: paying off debts does indeed lead to not having to pay interest anymore. Similarly, it leads to losing the possibility of tax deduction. In other cases it is exactly the causal relation between antecedent and consequent that is questionable, as in 127:

127 **We should not create a fund to subsidize research on wind energy, since then all research done on solar energy will be abandoned.**

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99 At first glance, this type of attack seems to be irrelevant in the case of counterfactuals such as the one in 126. The policy proposed in those cases is impossible since another course of action has already been executed. Still, in cases like these an attack on the feasibility of the proposed policy is appropriate. There is nothing wrong with a reaction like ‘we could not have paid off our debts, where would we have gotten the money from?’

100 Feasability is one of the stock issues in the academic debate. There are many parallels between criticism of the conditional that forms part of pragmatic argumentation and the stock issues. If one challenges the claim that ‘paying off the debts leads to not having to pay interest anymore’ – a criticism of the causal connection between antecedent and consequent – then one questions the effectiveness of the policy. If one points out that the desired outcomes will come about anyway – also when the policy is not implemented – then the necessity of the policy is questioned.
Here indeed one could question whether subsidies on research in the field of wind energy will result in the abandonment of research done in the field of solar energy. It might just as well be that people doing research on solar energy will continue doing so. It is even conceivable that such subsidies would boost research into all kinds of sustainable energy.

In extreme cases, questioning the causal connection between the antecedent and the consequent can even amount to accusing the other party of the fallacy of the slippery slope. This accusation seems justified in the case of 128:

128  **The pill should not be sold at the chemist’s. If we allow that, in ten years time we will find DIY-packs for IVF in the freezer compartment of the supermarket.**

Of course, it is very doubtful whether taking one step ‘down the hill’ by selling the birth control pill at the chemist’s would result in sliding down to the bottom of the hill altogether.

The connection between the antecedent and the consequent can not only be attacked by questioning the causal relationship between the two. There is also a kind of criticism possible that is related to the relationship of means and ends that pragmatic argumentation typically expresses. The consequences depicted in the consequent represent the reason why the policy proposed should be implemented: by means of this policy, the consequences depicted in the consequent can be realized or avoided.

This means the conditional should have at least two more characteristics. First of all, the consequences described in the consequent should not represent the actual situation. If they were already realized, then there would be no incentive for the policy proposed. The conditional in 129 suffers from this shortcoming:

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101  The causal relation between the antecedent and consequent is not necessarily linked to some ‘law of nature’. Sometimes it is in the hands of the speaker whether the effect depicted in the consequent will take place or not, for example when a father says to his son ‘You should tidy your room, because if you don’t, you can’t go out with your friends tonight.’ In those cases, the consequent contains either a reward or threat. For an evaluation of conditionals used in pragmatic argumentation, it does not matter whether the consequences are in the hands of the speaker or not. If the son has reason to believe (on the basis of experience) that his father’s threats are usually empty, this will cast doubt on the ‘causal’ connection between antecedent and consequent.
We should marry, because then we can combine our tax returns.

Apart from being a rather prosaic reason to get married, unmarried couples can combine their tax returns just as well. The policy proposed is therefore unnecessary.

Secondly, the consequences described in the consequent should not be bound to materialize anyway. If they could even occur in the case that the policy is not realized, the reason for this policy would evaporate. A policy supported by pointing out positive consequences would not be necessary because the end would just as easily be reached without the means. An interlocutor expressing this type of criticism might use what Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca call an argument from redundancy: ‘the argument of redundancy prompts one to abstain from action, since any additional action would be of no avail (1969: 281).’

Even when the speaker is of the opinion that something should not be done, the consequent must meet the last two requirements mentioned above. In those cases it is less clear that pragmatic argumentation expresses a means / ends relationship of, since the speaker argues that one should refrain from action. As an example, in 130, the speaker states that the US should not proceed with military action:

The US should not take their recourse to military action. If their army intervenes, it will destabilise the region.

The aim strived for here is to keep the region from becoming destabilised. According to the speaker, this aim can be reached if the US refrain from military action. The ‘means’ to this end is therefore ‘the US do not take their recourse to military action’.

They are not biconditionals in the truth-functional sense of the word, because contraposition would not hold. Conditionals functioning as a constituent of pragmatic argumentation typically are predictive conditionals, which do not lend themselves to contraposition (see section 4.3).

This is what Comrie refers to when he writes: ‘In terms of the context in which ‘If you do that, I’ll hit you’ is normally uttered, the conversational implicature that ‘if’ is to be interpreted as ‘if and only if’ falls out naturally: the utterance is intended as a prohibition, giving motivation to comply with the prohibition (namely, not getting hit). If the speaker hits the addressee anyway, or rather, if the addressee assumes that the speaker may hit the addressee anyway, then the motivation behind the prohibition is lost, i.e. the utterance becomes incoherent.’ (1986: 78)
Examples like 130, illustrate that conditionals functioning as a constituent of the argument scheme of pragmatic argumentation are in fact kinds of biconditionals. The speaker in 130 could very well believe that the region might become destabilised for other reasons, but he only supports his summons for the US to refrain from military action if he can be committed to the proposition that the region will not be destabilized if military action is withheld. The conditional can only support the standpoint adequately if the antecedent is presented as a sufficient condition for the consequent with the implication that its contradictory would also be a sufficient condition for the contradictory of the consequent. The speaker is therefore committed to ‘if p, then q’ and ‘if not-p, then not-q’.

It is for this reason that Renate Rubinstein finds fault with people who argue that Israel should change its policy because this policy would lead to anti-Semitism.

A selfish but understandable motive, since it takes a very long time – especially when you are born in the Netherlands after World War II – to see that anti-Semitism is not based on any reasonable ground, so that it does not help you to behave properly, not to kill the president, not to let the lion escape from the zoo, because the anti-Semite will hate you no matter what (...). Which does not mean of course that you could not have major objections against the solutions Israel chooses to solve its problems. (Renate Rubinstein (1984) Naar de bliksem? Ik niet. Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, p. 122, my translation – jmg)

The anti-Semite will hate the Israelis, whether they change their policy or not. Therefore pointing out that Israel’s behaviour leads to anti-Semitism is not an adequate ground for the view that Israel should change its policy (although Rubinstein does not exclude the possibility that this standpoint is acceptable – be it on different grounds).

One might be of the opinion that if conditionals that function as a constituent of pragmatic argumentation are interpreted as a kind of biconditional, then one ignores that a discussion on a proposed action often can end up in discussing several alternative ways to reach the same objective, as in the following discussion:

Nick: We should subsidize wind energy, because that would reduce the use of fossil fuels by 15%.
Ann: I agree that we should reduce the use of fossil fuels, but I
don’t think subsidizing wind energy is the way to go about it. If we just encouraged energy saving, we would also reduce the use of fossil fuels by 15% and don’t have the disadvantages of subsidies.

The two conditionals functioning as a premise in pragmatic argumentation are (a) ‘If we subsidized wind energy, we would reduce the use of fossil fuels by 15%’ and (b) ‘If we encouraged energy saving means, we would reduce the use of fossil fuels by 15%’. Since both conditionals have the same consequent, one might argue those conditionals cannot be biconditionals. If wind energy is not subsidized, this doesn’t mean necessarily that the use of fossil fuels will not be reduced by 15%, because this goal could have been reached by the encouragement of energy saving.

However plausible this may sound, I think this view is mistaken. Conditionals like (a) and (b) discuss a scenario in which something is changed with respect to the actual situation: one considers what would happen if ‘wind energy is subsidized’ or ‘energy saving is encouraged’. In evaluating such conditionals, one should judge whether in the scenario sketched in the antecedent, the consequent would be the case. But it is only possible to say something intelligible about that, if it is assumed that ‘other things are equal’, i.e. if the actual situation is only amended by the situation sketched in the antecedent (including perhaps some other changes so that the presuppositions of ‘wind energy is subsidized’ are met, like ‘enough funds’ et cetera). Otherwise one could always think of something that hinders the consequent from being realized, such as ‘we are subsidizing wind energy and all of the sudden a strong cool down of the earth occurs that results in unexpected energy needs and therefore leads to an increase in use of fossil fuels by 50%’. The antecedent of conditional (a) describes the situation in which wind energy is subsidized and ‘other things are equal’ – i.e. there is no encouragement of an energy saving means. In this interpretation, the conditional sentence is indeed a kind of biconditional: if wind energy is subsidized (and other things are equal), the use of fossil fuels will be reduced by 15% percent, and if wind energy is not

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104 This procedure is also known as the Ramsey test.

105 In that respect, conditionals that function as a premise in pragmatic argumentation clearly differ from the ones used as a connecting premise. Whereas strengthening the antecedent is valid for conditionals that function as a connecting premise (as I have argued in section 4.2), it is not valid for conditionals functioning as a premise in pragmatic argumentation.
subsidized (and other things are equal), the use of fossil fuels will not be reduced by 15%.

In sum: a conditional can only function successfully as a constituent of the argument scheme of pragmatic argumentation when the antecedent depicts a situation that is not yet realised and that is in fact realizable. Furthermore, there should exist a causal relation between the antecedent and the consequent: if the situation depicted in the antecedent is realized, the consequences depicted in the consequent should occur as well. Finally, the relation between antecedent and consequent has a sort of biconditional nature: the speaker is not just committed to ‘if p, then q’, he is committed to ‘if not-p, then not-q’ as well. If the consequences described in the consequent already are realized, or if they will take place anyway, the conditional cannot function as a direct premise in support of the standpoint under discussion.

6.3 Conditionals as a constituent of a dilemma

In the argument scheme ‘dilemma’ conditionals are used (just as in pragmatic argumentation) for the purpose of sketching the consequences a particular course of action will have. A dilemma in the colloquial sense of the word is usually seen as a necessary choice between two evils. A speaker facing a dilemma has to choose between two courses of action, but can’t decide because both actions lead to equally grave consequences. In instance, the speaker faces the dilemma whether he should accept the apartment or not.

I don’t know whether we should accept this apartment or

Schellens sees a dilemma as a kind of subtype of pragmatic argumentation. However, the evaluation criteria for the conditionals used in these schemes differ. Therefore, I discuss conditionals used as a constituent in the argument scheme ‘dilemma’ in a separate section.

Although Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca use the term ‘dilemma’ as well for arguments like example 122 ‘Whether you exert yourself or not, they will never accept you. If you do the most you can, they will perceive you as a pusher trying to get to the top. If you do not throw yourself into it, they will exclude you because of lack of commitment’, these arguments are not a dilemma in the colloquial sense of the word. Examples like 122 I will discuss hereafter.
not. If we accept it, we will lose our accumulated rights and will have to wait at least seven years before being eligible for another one. If we don’t accept it, we will have to wait God knows how long before being offered some acceptable place to live.

Although the term ‘dilemma’ is most often used as a choice between two evils, the alternatives that the speaker has to choose from need not necessarily to be negative. A speaker may also be faced with a dilemma when he has to choose between two possibilities that are equally desirable. In 132, the speaker cannot decide how to spend the evening:

I would really like to have dinner at your place tonight. I am just stuck in a dilemma: Christopher invited me over to his cottage and since Jacky will be there as well I think it will be great. On the other hand, I would really enjoy catching up with you after all this time.

When one confronts the problem of ‘dilemma’, it is not the consequences of the alternative courses of action that are undesirable (although that could be the case), rather, it is undesirable that a choice in general has to be made. The speaker cannot make a rational choice, because the consequences of the alternative courses of action are equally (un)desirable.

A dilemma therefore has two characteristics. First of all, the speaker is faced with a necessary choice between possible courses of action, for example, he has to either accept or reject the apartment. Secondly, it is impossible to make a rational choice between the alternatives because both have equally major advantages / disadvantages, for example, either he loses the accumulated rights or there is little chance another apartment will be offered shortly. As a result, in a strict sense, the speaker does not take up a position.

These two characteristics are represented on different levels of the argument structure:

In the description of the term ‘dilemma’ in Merriam Webster, this is pointed out as well: ‘Although some commentators insist that dilemma be restricted to instances in which the alternatives to be chosen are equally unsatisfactory, their concern is misplaced; the unsatisfactoriness of the options is usually a matter of how the author presents them. What is distressing or painful about a dilemma is having to make a choice one does not want to make.’
whether we should do ‘X’ or not cannot be decided

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{1.1a} & \text{1.1b} \\
\text{either we do ‘X’ and ‘Y’ will happen, or} & \text{‘Y’ and ‘Z’ are equally} \\
\text{we don’t do ‘X’ and ‘Z’ will happen.} & \text{undesirable}
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{1.1a.1a} & \text{1.1a.1b} & \text{1.1a.1c} \\
\text{if we do ‘X’,} & \text{if we don’t do ‘X’,} & \text{either we do ‘X’ or} \\
\text{then ‘Y’} & \text{then ‘Z’} & \text{we don’t do ‘X’}
\end{array}
\]

The argumentation consisting of the substandpoint 1.1a and the support thereof, is what logicians call a ‘complex constructive dilemma’. It is called ‘complex’ because the conditionals do not have the same consequent, and it is called ‘constructive’ since in the disjunction in 1.1a, the antecedents of the conditionals are confirmed and not denied (Encyclopedia Brittanica 23: 228). 1.1a.1c expresses the necessity of a choice and 1.1b expresses that the consequences of the alternatives are equally undesirable.

Since the argument scheme of dilemma bears a clear resemblance to the argument scheme of pragmatic argumentation, the criticism of the conditionals used in a dilemma coincides in general with the critical remarks that can be directed at conditionals used in pragmatic argumentation. However, because the conditionals used in a dilemma are interrelated in such a specific way, the consequences of successful criticism will differ.

One could criticize the antecedent of the conditional by pointing out that the situation depicted in the antecedent is already realized, or may never be realized. In the case of 131, the antagonist could say it is impossible to accept the apartment, because the term for reply has already expired. As a result of this criticism, the first alternative – accepting the apartment – is eliminated and the second alternative – not accepting the apartment – is realized. The dilemma is thereby solved: the speaker is no longer faced with a difficult choice.

Not only the antecedent can be criticized, but the antagonist can also criticize the connection between the antecedent and the consequent. First of all, he could argue that the consequences sketched in the
consequent do not necessarily follow. In the case of 131, he could point out that rejecting the apartment does not necessarily lead to a disaster, because an invitation has arrived to view another apartment. Since in that case the negative consequence of rejecting the apartment is removed, the scale can be tipped in favour of this alternative. Secondly, the antagonist could show that the antecedent of the conditional is not a necessary condition for the consequent. If he manages to convince his interlocutor that the consequences in one conditional will occur anyway, i.e. whether one of the alternatives is chosen or not, this (dis)advantage will then drop out of the equation. The outcomes of the alternative courses of action will no longer be equally (un)desirable, so that a rational choice between the two alternatives can be made.

The dilemma’s discussed in 131 en 132 correspond to the meaning of ‘dilemma’ in colloquial speech. In logic, the term ‘dilemma’ is used for other kinds of argument as well – even if a difficult choice does not have to be made. The argumentation in 133 represents what is called a simple constructive dilemma (Encyclopedia Brittanica 23: 228):

133 Whatever the result of the vote will be, our action committee can be disbanded. If the law on referendum is voted through, our committee can happily adjourn – we will have reached our goals. But also if it is voted down we can discontinue. If we don’t reach our goals now, there is no chance we ever will.

The conditionals in 133 do not depict courses of action and the possible consequences that could result from it. The speaker sketches two possible future scenario’s: one in which the law on referendum is voted through and one in which it is voted down. According to the speaker in both cases the action committee can be disbanded.

As can be seen from the argument structure, this second type of dilemma does have something in common with a dilemma in the colloquial sense of the word discussed earlier.
whatever the result of the vote will be, our action committee can be disbanded

It contains two conditionals in which different scenarios are discussed and a premise which states that either of these scenarios will take place. The only difference is that the speaker does not have to make a choice. Therefore, there is no need to consider the pros and cons.

As a result, the conditionals used in this second type of dilemma must be criticized in a different way. For instance, criticism of the antecedent of these conditionals is not relevant. Suppose the antagonist knows on good authority that there will be a majority who vote against the law. This information will not help him in criticizing the protagonist’s argumentation: the protagonist will hold on to his point of view that the action committee can be disbanded. From his perspective, it is irrelevant what the outcome of the vote will be: he states that the committee can be disbanded no matter what.

Moreover, the connection between the antecedent and the consequent of the conditional differs from that of conditionals used in a dilemma in the colloquial sense of the word, because it is not necessarily a causal one. In fact, the consequent must be seen as a kind of conditional standpoint. The speaker is actually stating something to the effect that ‘If the law is voted through, my standpoint is that our action committee can be disbanded.’ To doubt whether this is his standpoint, or to argue that it is not, is pointless. By using the conditional, he has brought forward his standpoint under a condition.

The only relevant criticism is a critique that could be directed to the consequent of the conditional. If the consequent is criticized, within the hypothetical context sketched in the antecedent, a discussion will take place on the acceptability of the proposition expressed in the
consequent. In fact, in 133 the speaker already did foresee that his conditional standpoints would be challenged, since he immediately advances argumentation in support of them.

The conditionals used in the two types of dilemma discussed in this paragraph differ considerably. Conditionals that are a constituent of a dilemma in the usual sense of the word can be seen as expressing a causal relation between the antecedent and the consequent. Conditionals that are a constituent of the second type of dilemma do not so much express a causal relationship, but should be interpreted as a kind of conditional standpoint, the result being that to fulfil their role successfully, conditionals which function as a premise in a dilemma of the first category need to fulfil different requirements than conditionals functioning in a dilemma of the second category.

6.4 Conditionals as a constituent of an argument from authority

A speaker uses an argument from authority when he tries to make a reasonable case for his standpoint by quoting a ‘specialist in the field’. In 124, the speaker supports his opinion on a theatrical performance by citing a theatre critic.

124 The performance of King Lear in the municipal theatre is an utter disaster. The theatre critic in News of the Day called it ‘the worst thing happening in the way of theatre’.

The speaker claims that his standpoint ‘The performance of King Lear in the municipal theatre is an utter disaster’ is true because an expert in the field has claimed that it is so.

In a hypothetical appeal to authority, the speaker does not refer to a statement actually made, but alludes to a statement a particular authority would have made had he been in the position to express his opinion on the matter. The direct premise takes the shape of a conditional, as in 123:

123 The performance of King Lear in the municipal theatre is an utter disaster. Had Shakespeare been in the audience, he would have hated it and would have made it impossible for the actors to perform.
In 123, the speaker supports his standpoint by a hypothetical judgement of Shakespeare’s in *absentia*. The antecedent of the conditional depicts the situation in which Shakespeare would have attended the play and the consequent contains the opinion Shakespeare would have had in that situation (according to the speaker).

In 123, the speaker uses a hypothetical appeal to authority because the authority being referred to is dead and therefore is no longer capable of making a judgement. Another reason to put forward an appeal to authority hypothetically is when a statement could not be expected from the authority referred to, as in 134:

134  *If it were up to the cat, she would buy Whiskas.*

In the hypothetical situation that the cat could speak out on this issue, Whiskas would be the cat food preferred.

When the authority put forward does not exist in real life, an appeal to this authority is not necessarily hypothetical. One could, for instance, refer to a ‘real statement’ by a fictitious person like Sherlock Holmes without using a conditional, as in 135:

135  *We did not need any more information to decide. As Sherlock Holmes says: ‘all good thinking depends on deduction’.*

Alternatively, one could refer to a comment made in the past by someone who is no longer alive. The argument scheme is only hypothetical when the direct argument takes the shape of a conditional where the antecedent depicts the hypothetical situation in which it is possible for an authority to make a comment while the consequent contains the judgment made.

How can a conditional used as a direct premise in an appeal to authority be criticized? An attack on the truth or possibility of the antecedent is pointless: the speaker knows that Shakespeare did not and could not see the play, he also knows that it is not possible for the cat to decide. At first glance, a response like ‘Yes, but Shakespeare is dead, isn’t he?’ might seem to be directed toward the truth of the antecedent.

However, an antagonist reacting in this way does not consider the conditional to be untrue. As can be seen from the ‘yes’, he acknowledges that in the hypothetical context where Shakespeare would attend, he could judge unfavourably. Nevertheless, he rejects the use of this conditional as a premise in support of the standpoint put forward. He
disapproves of the use of fictitious authorities and therefore does not want to enter the hypothetical context sketched.

An antagonist not necessarily unwilling to be persuaded by fictitious authorities could challenge the conditional used in that scheme by arguing that within the context sketched in the antecedent the consequent does not hold. In reaction to 123 an antagonist could say:

136 What nonsense, I think he would have loved it! Don't forget that Shakespeare’s plays were written for the common people. It is only in recent times that his plays are seen as works of art.

As a result, within the hypothetical context in which Shakespeare is able to comment, a discussion could emerge on the question as to whether he would have loved or hated the performance. In a similar fashion, a discussion on the cat’s opinion could start after a contribution like ‘She would not buy Whiskas, she would go to the best butcher to get some fresh heart’.

The antagonist would even have the possibility to conclusively show that the authority quoted does have quite a different opinion on the matter under discussion, as in 137:

137 Mother: ‘Of course you are not going on holiday to France by yourself. If your father heard of this plan, he would think you would be absolutely crazy!’

Daughter: ‘Actually, I have already presented it to dad and he was not unsympathetic towards it.

In short: an argument from authority is put forward hypothetically when the authority quoted is presumed to not have been in a situation to comment on the subject under discussion (since he is dead, unable to speak, did not hear about it, etc.). By means of the conditional, a context is sketched in which the authority is able to comment. The consequent of this conditional contains the speaker’s opinion on the matter. In reaction to a hypothetical argument from authority, the antagonist can do two things: either he refuses to go along with the hypothetical context sketched in the antecedent or he accepts it. After a rejection, the speaker has to retract his hypothetical appeal to authority. In case of acceptance, a discussion could start on the (conditional / hypothetical) standpoint that the consequent correctly reflects the authority’s opinion.
6.5 Conditionals as a constituent of an argument from example

In an argument from example the speaker advances one or more examples in order to support the standpoint under discussion. A well-known form of argument from example is induction, where a speaker presents a large amount of representative examples to infer a general statement. In 138, the speaker infers from a variety of examples that after the cooking of fish, a nasty deposit remains in the pan:

138 Always when fish is cooked, a nasty deposit remains in the pan. Last time, when we had salmon, it took me an hour to scrape it off. And when you cooked pasta with fish sauce, even the cover was completely covered. And look at the pan now: I can hardly remove it.

An indicative argument from example can be seen as demonstration of a general rule. In a discussion, it is not always necessary to demonstrate such a rule; sometimes one can render a general rule acceptable in another way. A speaker could put forward an argument from authority: the fact that an authority in a certain field endorses the general statement, could make this statement acceptable to the interlocutor. Yet another way to support a general statement is to use an illustrative argument from example. In such cases, the speaker does not have to come up with several representative examples but can limit himself to a prototypical one. By means of this example, a general rule that was not acceptable to the antagonist prima facie, is made acceptable. In 139, such an illustration is used:

109 The distinction between illustration and example is discussed extensively by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca. According to them this distinction is important because illustrations do not fulfil the same function as examples: ‘Whereas an example is designed to establish a rule, the role of illustrations is to strengthen adherence to a known and accepted rule, by providing particular instances which clarify the general statement, show the import of this statement by calling attention to its various possible applications, and increase its presence to the consciousness.’ As a result, illustrations and examples cannot be evaluated in the same way: ‘While an example must be beyond question, an illustration need not be, as adherence to the rule does not depend upon it’ (1969: 357). The terms ‘inductive’ and ‘illustrative’ argument from example are introduced by Kienpointner. He designates an argument from example ‘inductive’ when the generalized statement is the main standpoint in the discussion and ‘illustrative’ when the statement functions as a Schlußregel in a larger context (1992: 366).
You never should force a child to do something, it leads you nowhere. For years your mother forced you to eat vegetables and now you dislike them even more.

The single example indicated here is not enough to prove the general statement that a child never should be forced to do something. However, the general rule might now be acceptable for the interlocutor because the abstract principle is developed by means of a concrete interpretation.

That illustrative and inductive arguments from example indeed do differ is also exemplified by a difference in the use of hypotheticals. A speaker using an inductive argument from example cannot replace real observations with hypothetical examples. This would amount to circular reasoning, because the general rule prescribes how the hypothetical examples must be constructed in order to be able to function in support of it. On the other hand, hypothetical examples are extremely useful in an illustrative argument from example. By constructing hypothetical examples one can stress certain characteristics in order to make the most reasonable case, as in 121:

Forcing someone to do what you want leads you nowhere. If I had forced you to come along to that festival, then the whole day would have been ruined because you would not have enjoyed it.

Not all authors consider such ‘illustrations’ to be arguments. Schellens for instance – inspired by the distinction Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca make – states: ‘In some cases, it is questionable whether it is correct to see examples as arguments. Does the speaker put forward an example in defence of the general rule, or does he just want to use it to illustrate this rule? (1985: 192).’ The idea that illustrations are no arguments, could originate from the way Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca describe the function illustrations fulfil – ‘to strengthen adherence to a known and accepted rule.’ With regard to a known and accepted rule, no arguments are needed. However, I think Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca want to draw attention to the difference between inferring (or demonstrating) a general rule not yet formulated (not yet known and accepted) and the support of a general rule already demonstrated.

Kienpointner does discuss fictitious inductive arguments from example: ‘Problematisch sind auch induktive Beispielargumentationen, denen fiktive Beispiele zugrundegelegt werden. Hier steht nämlich zusätzlich zu Fragen der Generalisierbarkeit die Wirklichkeitsnähe der fiktiven Beispielfälle zur Debatte’ (1992: 372). However, the example he uses contains an illustrative and not an inductive argument from example.
To illustrate a general rule, the speaker constructs an hypothetical example that is tailored to his interlocutor, thereby increasing his chances of success.

Conditionals that are used as a constituent of an (illustrative) argument from example can be criticized in more or less the same way as conditionals in a hypothetical appeal to authority. First of all, the question is whether the interlocutor is willing to ‘enter’ the hypothetical situation depicted in the antecedent. A relevant reaction to 121 would be ‘You would never force me to go along, you always efface yourself far too much’. For some reason, the interlocutor finds the example too unrealistic, and therefore rejects it.

If the antagonist is willing to accept the hypothetical context sketched in the antecedent, a second way of criticizing the conditional emerges by starting a discussion within this context regarding the acceptability of the proposition expressed in the consequent. In the case of 121, he could for instance argue that the whole day would not necessarily be ruined, since he might have enjoyed it – although he would not have expected that at all.

6.6 Conclusion

If any chapter in this dissertation illustrates the fact that the interpretation and evaluation of conditionals is dependent on the function they fulfil, it was the current chapter, which was concerned with conditionals functioning as a constituent of an argument scheme. The importance of determining the function a conditional fulfils has been demonstrated, first of all, since it was found that not all argument schemes lend themselves to the use of a direct premise in the form of a conditional. In an ‘inductive argument from example’, one cannot use ‘hypothetical examples’, since that would amount to circularity: the hypothetical examples are in that case constructed in line with the general statement they are meant to prove.

If a conditional can be used as a direct premise, it may depend on the specific subtype of the argument scheme as to how this conditional must be evaluated. Conditionals used in a dilemma in the colloquial sense of the word, depict the consequences that will occur if alternative courses of action are taken. The antecedent represents the situation in which a course of action is implemented and the consequent sketches
what will happen in that situation. These conditionals can be criticized by either attacking the antecedent – indicating that the policy cannot be implemented – or by questioning whether the consequences will indeed result. Conditionals used in a simple constructive dilemma have quite different antecedents and consequents. Here the antecedents depict alternative situations, whereas the consequent expresses what according to the speaker would be the case / should be done in those situations. Here criticism of the antecedent is pointless: such criticism would never lead to the protagonist changing his point of view. Moreover, criticism of the connection between the antecedent and the consequent does not make sense. Conditionals that fulfill this function can be seen as conditional standpoints, and as we saw in section 5.2 in case of a conditional standpoint, criticism of this relationship is pointless.

Whereas the argument scheme of a dilemma has shown that the conditionals used need to be evaluated differently depending on the very subtype of the scheme, in other cases, conditionals can be evaluated in more or less the same way although they function as direct premises in rather different argument schemes. There is for instance only a slight distinction in the interpretation and evaluation of conditionals that function as a direct premise in an appeal to authority and conditionals that function as a direct premise in an illustrative argument from example. In both cases the conditionals can be seen as hypothetical standpoints and the antagonist can respond to them by either rejecting the hypothetical context sketched or by questioning whether in that particular context the consequent (the standpoint) holds true. The two uses of conditionals only differ in the way this criticism is executed.

It is the use of a conditional as a direct premise in pragmatic argumentation that illustrates perhaps most clearly that the argumentative function a conditional fulfills is of influence on its evaluation. It is because of the policy standpoint defended – together with the means / ends relationship that pragmatic argumentation expresses – that conditionals only can function successfully as a direct premise in pragmatic argumentation if certain precise criteria are met. Not only should the antecedent contain a possibility (otherwise the policy defended is not feasible), there must also be a causal relationship between the antecedent and the consequent. Apart from that, this relation must display a kind of biconditional nature (otherwise the policy is unnecessary).

Looking at conditionals from the perspective of argumentation, therefore, not only explains why conditionals can have certain characteristics, but also is useful in explaining why those characteristics must be present.