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# The pragma-dialectical view of comparison argumentation

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The pragma-dialectical typology of argument schemes consists of three main categories: symptomatic argumentation, comparison argumentation and causal argumentation. The subcategories and variants of these main categories have not yet been distinguished systematically. In this contribution the authors start doing so by distinguishing the most important subtypes and variants of comparison argumentation. They argue that two distinct subtypes of comparison argumentation need to be distinguished: descriptive comparison argumentation and normative comparison argumentation.

KEYWORDS: argument scheme, comparison argumentation, descriptive comparison argumentation, normative comparison argumentation pragma-dialectical typology of argument schemes

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Comparison argumentation, also called *argumentation by analogy*, belongs with symptomatic argumentation and causal argumentation to the main categories of the pragma-dialectical typology of argument schemes. In our present research we are out to specify the general category of argumentation by comparison into relevant subcategories. This research is part of a more comprehensive research project aimed at extending the pragma-dialectical theory of argument schemes by specifying the typology that was earlier developed (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1992: 93-102) and relating it to the various macro-contexts in which argumentative discourse takes place.

In the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation the rationale for distinguishing between the various categories of argument schemes has a pragmatic as well as a dialectical dimension (van Eemeren, 2018:

45-39; van Eemeren and Garssen, 2019: Section 3). The pragmatic dimension relates to the kind of justificatory principle that legitimizes the transfer of acceptance from the argumentation that is advanced to the standpoint that is defended. Unlike logical validity, this justificatory principle has a pragmatic instead of a formal basis, because it is grounded in the arguers' practical experiences in justifying standpoints in argumentative discourse. The dialectical dimension relates to the evaluation procedure associated with the argument scheme that is used, i.e. to the critical questions that need to be answered in legitimizing the use of an argument scheme. When taken together, these two dimensions constitute the *principium divisionis* underlying the pragma-dialectical typology of argument schemes. The various types and subtypes of argumentation included in this typology and the critical questions instrumental in their evaluation are presumed to be part of the intersubjectively accepted starting points for conducting a critical discussion.

Since each type or subtype of argumentation characterized by the use of a particular argument scheme included in the typology calls out its own set of critical questions, the three categories of argument schemes that are distinguished are all associated with specific dialectical routes for resolving a difference of opinion on the merits. The differences between the dialectical routes instigated by the use of symptomatic argumentation, comparison argumentation and causal argumentation are in the first place determined by the "basic" critical question relating to the bridging premise (usually implicitly) used in the argument schemes concerned (van Eemeren and Garssen, 2019: Section 3). This basic critical question is in principle the same for all subtypes of a certain type of argumentation, but in the various subtypes may take a more specific shape and it may be accompanied by other (general or specific) critical questions. In addition, the macro-context in which the argumentative discourse takes place may have an influence on the way in which in a particular case the critical questions will be shaped.

In this contribution we aim to provide a characterization of two prominent subtypes of argumentation by comparison based on their pragmatic rationale and the critical questions that need to be answered when they are used. In addition we will indicate some kinds of "variants" of each of the subtypes of comparison argumentation coming about in certain kinds of argumentative practices. These variants consist of different manifestations of the subtype that are as a rule connected with the kind of macro-context in which the argumentation is used. In the empirical component of a fully-fledged research programme for examining argumentative discourse describing such different manifestation of the various subtypes of argumentation in argumentative reality is an important task.

Argumentation by comparison creates a relation of comparability or analogy between something that is already accepted and something still to be accepted. According to van Eemeren and Grootendorst, in analogy argumentation the argumentation is presented “as if there were a resemblance, an agreement, a likeness a parallel, a correspondence or some other kind of similarity between that which is stated in the argument and that which is stated in the standpoint” (1992: 97). The pragmatic principle exploited in argumentation by comparison is that something which is comparable to something else is to be treated or dealt with in the same or a similar way.

In our view, based on pragmatic distinctions between them and differences in the dialectical procedures that are to be followed in their evaluation, two vital subtypes of comparison argumentation are to be distinguished: “descriptive analogy argumentation” and “normative analogy argumentation” (Garssen, 2009: 134). In descriptive analogy argumentation the standpoint defended is descriptive and refers to a certain state of affairs, while in normative analogy argumentation the standpoint is evaluative or prescriptive and involves a value judgment. Because, as a consequence, the evaluation procedure for normative analogy argumentation requires the inclusion of an extra critical question, descriptive analogy argumentation and normative analogy argumentation are in the pragma-dialectical typology seen as two separate subtypes of comparison argumentation. Each of these two subtypes has its own dialectical profile and its own variants.

## 2. DESCRIPTIVE ANALOGY ARGUMENTATION

It is characteristic of descriptive analogy argumentation that the standpoint defended and the argumentation advanced in its support are both descriptive: each of them expresses a certain state of affairs. The standpoint defended is invariably a prediction (“Y will be the case”), a hypothetical prediction (“If X will be the case, then Y will be the case”) or a quasi-prediction claiming something about the past or the present (“At time t, Y was to be expected”).

In descriptive analogy argumentation a comparison is made between the actual characteristics of a thing, person, group, institution, event or situation and the actual characteristics of another thing, person, group, institution, event or situation. This type of argumentation can be characterized in the following way:

Y is true of X  
because: Y is true of Z  
and: Z is comparable to X  
(van Eemeren and Snoeck Henkemans, 2017: 87)

This argument scheme is, for example, displayed in (1):

- (1) Camera surveillance in the Amsterdam metro will be effective, because it is also effective in the London underground [and the situation in Amsterdam is comparable to the situation in London].

In (1) the protagonist argues that something will be the case in Amsterdam because it is already the case in London (and Amsterdam is in the relevant respects comparable to London). In this argumentation a comparison is made in which it is assumed that there are a number of directly relevant similarities between the situation in Amsterdam and that in London. Because of these similarities we may take it that the camera surveillance effectiveness applying to London mentioned in the argument will also apply to Amsterdam. The presence of the property at issue is as it were extrapolated from properties the two cities already share.

It is important to realize that the similarities relied upon in comparison argumentation are in argumentative practice often not mentioned explicitly in the argumentation; the relevant similarities are only tacitly assumed. As we shall see, in the evaluation of the analogy argumentation these similarities play a crucial role.

In descriptive analogy argumentation the justificatory principle of analogy is used in extrapolating a property from a list of commonalities between what is conveyed in the argumentation and what is conveyed in the standpoint. Because the two things, persons, groups, institutions, events or situations that are compared have a series of properties in common, they are assumed to share also another property claimed in the standpoint. In this sense this subtype of analogy argumentation, which is sometimes called *case by case reasoning*, involves an inductive process. A general characterization of this subtype is provided in Figure 1.<sup>1</sup>

<i>Situation (implicitly) referred to in premise</i>	<i>Situation (implicitly) referred to in standpoint</i>
Relevant similarity 1	Relevant similarity 1
Relevant similarity 2	Relevant similarity 2
Similarity 3	Similarity 3 extrapolated

Figure 1. Descriptive analogy argumentation as extrapolation of properties

<sup>1</sup> See Fearnside and Holther (1959: 23) for a similar representation of the internal organization of this subtype of analogy argumentation.

The first step to be taken in the testing procedure for descriptive analogy argumentation is to ask whether the elements that are compared in the argumentation are, in principle, comparable. If asked to answer this question, the protagonist is obliged to show that they do indeed belong to the same category or class. Next the testing procedure can take different routes. Since the extrapolation is based on similarities which remain implicit, the antagonist may ask the protagonist to add the relevant similarities explicitly. The protagonist is then forced to provide additional argumentation in which relevant similarities are mentioned. These similarities are the properties that allow for the extrapolating step to be made. The mentioning of similarities can in its turn lead to further criticism from the antagonist, who may not recognize them as real similarities or see them as not relevant to the issue at hand.

The antagonist may also criticize the argumentation by pointing at differences between the two elements that are compared. The protagonist is then forced to show that the differences mentioned by the antagonist are not relevant or that the existing similarities outweigh the differences. In this way it is established by the testing procedure whether or not the intended extrapolation of characteristics is allowed. The more relevant similarities are mentioned, the more likely it is that an extrapolation is successful. The crucial question in the testing procedure for descriptive analogy argumentation is whether the step of extrapolating properties mentioned in the argumentation in line with the standpoint is indeed justified and acceptable to both parties.

It is important to emphasize that in descriptive analogy argumentation: the similarities and differences pointed at must also be relevant to the standpoint defended. Decisive in this regard is the claim that is made in the standpoint. As we have pointed out, in the case of descriptive analogy argumentation the standpoint is some kind of prediction, but underlying this prediction is always a causal claim. In Example (1), for instance, the (descriptive) standpoint is that in Amsterdam camera surveillance in the metro will lead to greater safety. All conditions that are necessary for being able to uphold this causal claim are in this case relevant factors. The commonality between Amsterdam and London that they are both capitals of a country, for instance, is not relevant here, since it is not directly related to the safety of transport. Instead, it may be an important factor that Amsterdam and London are both rather big cities. It is clear that in cases in which the implicit causal claim cannot be so easily reconstructed it will generally be harder to determine exactly which factors are relevant and which factors are not. This predicament may prompt the antagonist to ask the protagonist for a clarification of the standpoint.

The dialectical profile for the testing procedure of descriptive analogy argumentation is as follows:

- 1 P: Standpoint Y  
|
- 2 A: Doubt Y?  
|
- 3 P: Comparison argumentation X  
|
- 4 A: Basic critical question: is Y comparable with X?  
|
- 5 P: Answer to basic critical question: Y is indeed comparable with X.  
|
- 6 A: Additional critical question 1a: Are there relevant similarities between Y and X?  
|
- 7 P: Answer to additional critical question 1a: There are relevant similarities between Y and X.  
|
- 8 A: Additional critical question 1b: Are there relevant differences between Y and X?  
|
- 9 P: Answer to additional critical question 1b: There are differences between Y and X but they are not relevant in this case.  
|
- 10 A: Additional critical question 1a-b: Do the relevant similarities between Y and X outweigh the relevant differences between Y and X?  
|
- 11 P: Answer to additional critical question 1a-b: Yes, the relevant similarities between Y and X outweigh the relevant differences between Y and X.

### 3. VARIANTS OF DESCRIPTIVE ANALOGY ARGUMENTATION

The different ways in which a certain subtype of argumentation manifests itself in various argumentative practices can be viewed as variants of the subtype concerned. In describing these manifestations of argumentative reality in the empirical component of the research program distinguishing between these different variants is an important task. In this endeavour more precise distinctions can for instance be made between variants that differ primarily in the kind of selection from the topical potential (relating to differences in subject-matter),

variants that differ first of all in the way they appeal to the audience (relating to different ways of associating with the listeners or readers), and variants that differ first of all in the choice of presentational devices (relating to differences in the means of expression) (van Eemeren and Garssen, 2019: Section 5). In descriptive analogy argumentation variants can also be distinguished based on the kind of standpoint that is defended: a straight prediction, a hypothetical predication or a quasi-prediction.

In this contribution we start making an inventory modestly by distinguishing between two variants of descriptive analogy argumentation. The first variant that can be found regularly in political argumentation and is connected with the use of pragmatic argumentation. Pragmatic argumentation is based on the causal claim that following the course of action proposed will lead to desirable (or – in the case of negative pragmatic argumentation – undesirable) consequences. In argumentative practice this causal claim, which can be seen as a hypothetical prediction,<sup>2</sup> is in communicative activity types in the political domain prototypically defended by descriptive analogy argumentation. Although we have not conducted any quantitative research to check this claim, we expect that in the political domain the use of this variant of descriptive analogy argumentation will even be stereotypical.<sup>3</sup>

Take the defence of the prescriptive standpoint that the United States should adopt a policy of gun control by means of pragmatic argumentation involving the causal claim that doing so leads to a safer social environment. This causal claim can be readily defended by means of descriptive analogy argumentation in which the situation in the United States is compared to that in Canada, where the introduction of gun control has indeed led to fewer casualties. Carrying out this particular defence results in the creation of a prototypical argumentative pattern consisting of pragmatic argumentation defended by the use of descriptive analogy argumentation in a subordinative argument structure.<sup>4</sup>

A second context-determined variant of descriptive analogy argumentation prototypically occurs in the academic domain. In evolutionary biology, to take a case that illustrates our point, the standpoint that a certain extinct animal has certain characteristics can be defended by comparing this animal to much better-known animals that lived much later. We quote in (3) an example from a scientific

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<sup>2</sup> If the proposed course of action is chosen, desirable consequences will follow.

<sup>3</sup> For the notion of “stereotypical” argumentative pattern see van Eemeren (2018: 165-167).

<sup>4</sup> For the notions of “argumentative pattern” and “prototypical argumentative pattern” see van Eemeren (2018: 149-154).

discussion about the anatomy of Archaeopteryx (a forerunner of the birds). The palaeontologist Heilmann argues that Archaeopteryx probably had a patagium – a fold of featherless skin – connecting the inner wing to the side of the body, analogous to flying mammals:

- (3) Such a fold of skin is the first to appear when the evolution of a “flying” mammal sets in, and therefore it does not seem unlikely that an incipient patagium was present in some forerunner of birds, in due time giving place to the fully developed wing of feathers (Shelly, 2003: 43).

In other words: since we know that some flying mammals are equipped with a featherless skin connecting their wings to the body it is not unlikely that forerunners of the birds also had such a flying skin.

#### 4. NORMATIVE ANALOGY ARGUMENTATION

In the second subtype, normative analogy, the *principle of consistency* plays a central role. In this kind of analogy argumentation it is claimed that a something mentioned in the standpoint belongs to the same category as something mentioned in the argumentation advanced in its support, and that the former should be treated in the same or a similar way as the latter.

Just like in the descriptive subtype, the arguer claims in this kind of analogy argumentation that what is mentioned in the standpoint is comparable to what is mentioned in the premise. This happens, for instance, in the normative analogy argumentation advanced in Example (4).

- (4) The employees in the administration department should get a salary raise because the salespersons in our firm also get a salary raise.

The argument scheme for normative analogy argumentation is as follows:

	Y is appropriate for X
because:	Y is appropriate for Z
and:	Z is comparable to X

Normative analogy argumentation differs from descriptive analogy argumentation because the use of the principle of consistency does not involve an extrapolation of characteristics. Instead, the central issue is whether the two elements that are compared really belong to the same

category. Another difference is that in normative analogy argumentation the standpoint is by definition normative whereas in descriptive analogy argumentation it is descriptive. Normative analogy argumentation invariably involves a call for consistent behaviour in the sense that the standpoint always claims that for the sake of consistency something should be treated in a certain way.

Just like in descriptive analogy argumentation, it is in normative analogy argumentation always presumed that there are relevant similarities between what is mentioned in the standpoint defended and what is mentioned in the argumentation advanced in its defence. Again, these similarities are not so much mentioned in the premises that make up the analogy argumentation, but come to the fore in the dialectical testing procedure. Although the critical questions going with the two subtypes of analogy argumentation are to a large extent identical, the dialectical testing procedure proceeds in a different manner.

A necessary preliminary step in testing normative analogy argumentation is, again, to establish whether what is mentioned in the standpoint defended is really comparable to what is mentioned in the argumentation. After it has been established that this is indeed the case, the antagonist can ask the protagonist of a normative analogy to mention the similarities that justify the claim that the two elements compared really belong to the same category. The protagonist is then forced to present additional argumentation in response. In case the antagonist has pointed at differences which show that the elements that are compared do not belong to the same category, the protagonist's response has to make clear that the differences are either not relevant or are outweighed by the similarities. Again, like in testing descriptive analogy argumentation, it has to be determined in evaluating normative analogy argumentation whether the similarities and differences that have been observed in the argumentation are relevant to the claim that is made in the standpoint.

An additional critical question to be answered in evaluating normative analogy argumentation relates to the application of the principle of consistency. There are sometimes reasons why this principle is not pertinent in the case at hand so that the arguer may refuse to apply it. This is so when the normative argumentation refers to circumstances where requiring consistency would be unproductive or even absurd. This could, for instance, be the case if it would be argued that the same raise in salary should be given to the people serving in the canteen as was given to the employees that designed the product that determined the company's commercial success. Hence an extra critical question must be added that pertains to the need to apply the principle of consistency: is there in this case a special reason why the principle of consistency should not be applied?

Normative analogy argumentation has some crucial characteristics in common with the form of reasoning that Govier (1987) calls "*a priori* reasoning". In both cases the persons, groups or institutions responsible may, for instance, be prompted to act consistently by being confronted with a critical question based on the following observation: "You should do X, because in a similar situation you would also do X". According to Govier, it is an essential property of *a priori* reasoning that the case advanced in making the comparison can be fictitious in the sense that in reality the similar situation mentioned in the comparison does not necessarily exist.

The consistency issue is crucial to all normative analogy argumentation. The basic idea is that you *should do x now* because you *acted in the same way in a very similar case*. Doing otherwise would make your attitude automatically inconsistent. Of course, in argumentation – and perhaps in human communicative interaction in general – the principle of consistency always plays a role. However, when it comes to normative analogy argumentation this principle is applied in a special way because it is not the consistency of the propositions that are part of the argumentation that is at issue, but the consistency of these propositions with other acts and judgments which are not part of what is mentioned in the argumentation. The decisive role of this specific consistency requirement (and the different kinds of critical questions ensuing from it) constitutes the biggest difference between normative and descriptive analogy argumentation.

In normative analogy argumentation the problem of the relevance of similarities and differences between what is stated in the argumentation and what is stated in the standpoint is more complex than in descriptive analogy argumentation. The standpoint defended by descriptive analogy argumentation always involves some kind of prediction about a certain state of affairs or event. Since the standpoint defended by normative analogy argumentation does not involve any such prediction, there is in normative analogy argumentation, unlike in descriptive analogy argumentation, no assumption of a causal relation. In the case of normative analogy argumentation the question of the relevance of similarities and differences between what is stated in the argumentation and what is stated in the standpoint is directly related to the notion of consistency and the need for being consistent. In order to determine whether certain similarities and differences are relevant, one has to check whether the similarities or differences observed are indeed pertinent to the normative judgment conveyed in the standpoint at issue.

We may take it that in example (4) the fact that both groups of employees work in the same firm constitutes a relevant kind of similarity. Since these differences are directly related to the question

whether a salary raise is appropriate, observations like that the one group of employees is more productive than the other and has, unlike the other group, already for some time not been given a salary raise would refer to relevant differences. A difference however such as that most employees in the administration department are locals whereas those in the sales department are from out of town would probably not be relevant because being a local is not a factor likely to be of any importance in making decisions about salary raises.

The dialectical profile for the testing procedure of normative analogy argumentation is as follows:

- 1 P: Standpoint Y  
|
- 2 A: Doubt Y?  
|
- 3 P: Comparison argumentation X  
|
- 4 A: Basic critical question: is Y comparable with X?  
|
- 5 P: Answer to basic critical question: Y is indeed comparable with X.  
|
- 6 A: Additional critical question 1a: Are there relevant similarities between Y and X?  
|
- 7 P: Answer to additional critical question 1a: There are relevant similarities between Y and X.  
|
- 8 A: Additional critical question 1b: Are there relevant differences between Y and X?  
|
- 9 P: Answer to additional critical question 1b: There are differences between Y and X but they are not relevant in this case.  
|
- 10 A: Additional critical question 1a-b: Do the relevant similarities between Y and X outweigh the relevant differences between Y and X?  
|
- 11 P: Answer to additional critical question 1a-b: Yes, the relevant similarities between Y and X outweigh the relevant differences between Y and X.  
|
- 12 A: Additional critical question 2: Should the principle of consistency be applied in this case?

- 13 P: Answer to additional critical question 2: Yes, the principle of consistency should be applied in this case.

## 5. VARIANTS OF NORMATIVE ANALOGY ARGUMENTATION

Just like in the case of descriptive analogy argumentation, within normative analogy argumentation a distinction of variants can be made that is based on its specific uses, forms and appearances. The variants that can be distinguished depend primarily on the specific way in which the principle of consistency plays a role.

In a well-known variant of normative analogy argumentation the way in which the principle of consistency is used boils down to employing it as “the rule of justice”. According to this rule, persons, groups and institutions which belong to the same category should be treated in the same way or at least similarly. This results in a legal variant of normative analogy argumentation which plays an important role in the macro-context of law when a judicial decision is defended by reference to a precedent that belongs to the same category as the case at issue.

This variant of normative analogy argumentation was for instance used in 2018 when the then 69 years old Dutch celebrity Emil Ratelband asked the court to adjust his date of birth to his emotional age, which he claimed to be 49. Because neither law nor jurisprudence provided any grounds for having this request granted, the counsel for Ratelband supported it by means of analogy argumentation. The lawyer asked the court to apply the existing legal regulations for a name change (Article 1: 4 and 1: 7 BW<sup>5</sup>) and for gender change (Article 1:28 and further BW) analogically to the desired adjustment of the date of birth of his client. The lawyer argued that name, gender and age are all part of a person's identity and if name and gender can be changed, this should also be possible for age. *A fortiori*, because a change of age is less drastic than a change of gender, if the more is permitted, the less is also allowed.

The rule of justice also plays a role in another variant of normative analogy argumentation, which is based on a manifestation of the principle of consistency known as the “principle of reciprocity”, which is prototypically used in the interpersonal domain. See, for instance, Example (6).

- (6) Since I just helped you with your homework, you should now help me doing the dishes.

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<sup>5</sup> BW refers to the *Burgerlijk Wetboek*, the Dutch Civil Code.

We conclude this brief introduction of some variants of normative argumentation by noting that normative analogy argumentation can also be used as a technique of refuting arguments that is sometimes called *parallel reasoning* (Juthe, 2009). Parallel reasoning boils down to refuting in the case of two arguments which are structurally similar one of the arguments by showing that the other one is flawed. This variant of normative analogy argumentation occurs prototypically in discussions about social issues. A clear instance is Example (7), which stems from Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, who reacted to the demand for banning handguns in Great Britain after the shooting of 28 school children in March 1996 in Dunblane, Scotland:

- (7) If a cricketer, for instance, suddenly decided to go into a school and batter a lot of people to death with a cricket bat, which he could do very easily, are you going to ban cricket bats?<sup>6</sup>

## 6. CONCLUSION

In this contribution we have made a distinction between descriptive and normative analogy argumentation and we have also mentioned some variants of each of these two subtypes that are to a large extent context-specific. We do not claim that our description of subtypes of analogy argumentation is exhaustive, but we do believe that they cover most occurrences of analogy argumentation.

A distinctive feature of our overview is that so-called *figurative analogy* has been left out. As we have argued elsewhere (Garssen, 2009; van Eemeren and Garssen, 2014) figurative analogy should not be seen as subtype of comparison argumentation. In a figurative analogy things are compared that stem from completely different spheres of life. In such a case a metaphorical relation is established between what is mentioned in the standpoint and what it is compared with in the argumentation. This is a form of indirectness which calls for a reconstruction in the analysis that makes clear that the relationship between the argumentation and the standpoint is not analogical but either causal or symptomatic.

Although our discussion of variants of the two subtypes has remained limited to a few contextually-determined variants, we think to have indicated what kind of variants may be expected to be found. In extending the overview many more variants should be described, and in much more detail. In this endeavour the institutional constraints are to

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<sup>6</sup> This example is taken from Shelly (2002: 1-2).

be taken into account that go with the specific types of argumentative interaction in particular communicative activity types in the specific domains in which the argumentative discourse takes place.

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