Maneuvering strategically in a political interview: analyzing and evaluating responses to an accusation of inconsistency

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CHAPTER 5

The reasonableness of responses to an accusation of inconsistency in a political interview

5.1 The reasonableness of confrontational strategic maneuvering

In Chapter 4, I have given an analysis of politicians' strategic maneuvering in their responses to an interviewer's accusation that their standpoint is inconsistent with another standpoint advanced before. I have shown that a politician who has to retract one of the inconsistent standpoints more often than not reformulates the standpoint advanced earlier in order to remain engaged in the discussion. If this attempt is successful, then the politician lives up to the institutional requirement of providing an account of his words or actions.

In my analytic account of the politician's maneuvering, I have analyzed the responses concerned as attempts at balancing the dialectical goal of defining the difference of opinion clearly with the rhetorical goal of doing so in his favor. These two goals are inherent in the confrontation stage of a critical discussion in which the politician's responses to an accusation of inconsistency are situated. The pursued balance between satisfying the dialectical goal and at the same time pursuing the rhetorical goal, however, is not in all cases obtained. Sometimes, the desire to be rhetorically effective may override the concern to remain dialectically reasonable. In such cases, the politician's strategic

maneuvering can be said to derail (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2005, 2009, van Eemeren 2010) as it transgresses the bounds of reasonableness and becomes fallacious.

The goal of this chapter is to carry out an evaluation of the politician's strategic maneuvering by establishing under which conditions his retraction of one of the inconsistent standpoints and the subsequent reformulation of this standpoint can be considered dialectically sound. [87] To enable an evaluation of a politician's strategic maneuvering with this type of move, I will first formulate the relevant soundness conditions (5.2). In a pragma-dialectical vein, I will do so by combining dialectical insights with pragmatic insights. Dialectically, the strategic maneuvering can be considered part of a critical testing procedure to resolve a difference of opinion on the merits. Pragmatically, the strategic maneuvering can be viewed as an illocutionary act that comes in response to the illocutionary act of accusation of inconsistency.

The critical testing procedure is constituted by the rules for critical discussion. In the pragma-dialectical approach to argumentative discourse, a move that violates one of the discussion rules is considered fallacious. However, to decide when a rule for critical discussion has been violated, criteria are necessary for judging whether the norms stipulated in the rules for critical discussion have been violated. It is precisely these criteria which my set of soundness conditions will provide for assessing the reasonableness of a politician's strategic maneuvering.

After having specified the soundness conditions, I will apply them to the three cases analyzed in Chapter 4 for their strategic function: the Sopel-Hague exchange, the Sopel-Cooper exchange and the Sopel-Duncan exchange. Thus, my application of the soundness conditions will take place in the context of a political interview from which the examples have been selected.

Van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2009: 14) formulated three general soundness conditions for strategic maneuvering. These conditions make clear what the general requirements are for a move not to violate the rules for critical discussion. Each discussion stage, however, has its specific strategic maneuvers which need to be evaluated differently depending on the outcome pursued at the stage concerned.[88] Therefore, it is first necessary

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[87] Retracting a standpoint is not by definition dialectically unsound. The move is a dialectical requirement for the protagonist of a standpoint to deal with an inconsistency pointed out by the antagonist (Hamblin 1970b, van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992a), which can be perfectly reasonable. I am not concerned with the cases described by Krabbe (2001: 142) as "wanton and irregular retractions" with "detrimental effects on an ordered and efficient course of dialogue." Such behavior makes it impossible to resolve a difference of opinion, because the antagonist cannot continue a discussion with a protagonist that constantly changes his commitments. This is true of most communicative activity types varying from those that are formally institutionalized, such as court proceedings, to those that are not formally institutionalized, such as a chat.

[88] Van Eemeren (2010: 46) distinguishes four broad categories of strategic maneuvering in close connection with the four stages of a critical discussion: confrontational strategic maneuvering, maneuvering that can be reconstructed as part of the opening stage, argumentational strategic maneuvering and concluding strategic maneuvering.

to establish the soundness conditions in accordance with which confrontational strategic maneuvering to which the politician's maneuvering concerned belongs can be evaluated. At this stage, the participants can be seen as pursuing a clear definition of the difference of opinion.

The first condition every strategic maneuver should meet to be considered reasonable pertains to the topical choice (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2009). It requires that every move must be chosen in such a way that "it *enables an analytically relevant continuation* at the juncture concerned in the dialectical route that is taken and can *lead to one of the outcomes* of the discussion stage concerned" (2009: 14, my italics). Taking this condition into account, confrontational strategic maneuvering should further the achievement of any of the possible outcomes of the confrontation stage: creating a non-mixed difference of opinion, creating a mixed difference of opinion or ending the discussion. Although these outcomes are not all favorable to an arguer, a participant who maneuvers strategically should allow for any of them to be reached and should not prevent the other participant from taking a dialectical route that may lead to a different outcome than the favored one. [89] For example, the outcome favored by an antagonist who advances an accusation of inconsistency in the confrontation stage is to bring the process of defining the difference of opinion to an end. This outcome can be achieved by making the protagonist retract his standpoint in response to the accusation. In order for an accusation of inconsistency to be a sound move, however, it should leave open the protagonist's option to maintain his standpoint. Maintaining a standpoint could lead to a non-mixed or a mixed difference of opinion, outcomes which are both unfavorable to an antagonist who is making an accusation of inconsistency (Mohammed 2009).

The second condition which strategic maneuvering should satisfy to be considered sound relates to audience adaptation. Van Eemeren and Houtlosser specify that each move "*needs to respond to the preceding move* in the dialectical route that is taken" (2009: 14, my italics). This condition requires that an arguer should ensure that his move is relevant to the move of the other party in the discussion. For instance, in the confrontation stage, a request for clarification should be responded to by means of a usage declarative that provides the expected clarification (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984).

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[89] The idea that strategic maneuvering should allow for both favorable and unfavorable outcomes to come about is already prescribed in the definition of strategic maneuvering. Van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2009) make clear that every move is by definition an attempt to steer the discussion towards a *favorable* outcome without overruling the commitment to having a reasonable exchange. Having a reasonable exchange of moves involves, among other things, that the parties should not prevent each other from freely expressing (reasonable) moves that might be unfavorable to the other party, such as criticisms. Inspired by this view, Mohammed (2009) discusses what she terms the *freedom requirement* for accusations of inconsistency to refer to the freedom of the antagonist to take preferred as well as non-preferred dialectical routes.

The third soundness condition formulated by van Eemeren and Houtlosser, pertaining to the presentational choice, requires every strategic maneuver to be "*formulated* in such a way that it can be *interpreted* as enabling a relevant continuation and being responsive to the preceding move" (2009: 14, my italics). Starting from this condition, every confrontational move should be performed so clearly that the other party understands that it is relevant to the previous move as well as that it aims to obtain a particular interactional effect. This condition is meant to eliminate any hindrance to achieving one of the possible outcomes of the discussion caused by the use of unclear language. For example, an accusation of inconsistency needs to be performed so clearly that the accused understands that the accuser attributes to him two inconsistent commitments and demands him to retract one of them (Mohammed 2009).

Each argumentative move that is an instantiation of confrontational strategic maneuvering should meet the soundness conditions just outlined. Although each move should meet these conditions, specific soundness conditions need to be developed. Such conditions will provide the specific criteria for deciding when a rule for critical discussion is violated in each particular case. For example, every form of criticism in the confrontation stage needs to meet the three general soundness conditions in order not to hinder the critical testing procedure. However, an accusation of inconsistency (as a form of criticism) needs to be evaluated by taking into account the following: (a) whether the accuser is justified in attributing the two inconsistent commitments (the second soundness condition), (b) whether the move is clear enough for the accused to understand what he should do in response to such a charge (the third soundness condition), and (c) whether the move precludes the accused from accepting or not accepting the accusation (the first soundness condition) (Mohammed 2009).

The evaluation of a politician's strategic maneuvering by means of retracting a standpoint and advancing a modified standpoint should take into account that this maneuvering is an attempt at responding to a charge of inconsistency by which the accused tries to continue the discussion in which he is engaged. As will become clear from the next section, the politician's maneuvering should be such that the interviewer can raise new criticism if he wants to (5.2.1), the politician's moves should resolve the inconsistency with which the protagonist is charged (5.2.2), and they should be formulated as clearly as required for a proper understanding (5.2.3).

5.2 Soundness conditions

The analysis of the three cases in which Sopel accuses various British politicians of being inconsistent revealed that the politicians who respond by retracting a standpoint acknowledge that there is an inconsistency but try to turn the discussion in their favor by reformulating the original standpoint. In the political domain, the politician's role obliges him to avoid simply conceding that he was wrong. Reformulating the original standpoint is an effective way to live up to the institutional expectations while accepting that there is an inconsistency which cannot be maintained.

By reformulating his standpoint, a politician attempts to define the difference of opinion in such a way that the interviewer retracts his doubt concerning the standpoint and ideally he will not make another accusation of inconsistency. After all, a politician who constantly gives room to doubts about the consistency of his words or actions is perceived at least as unclear, indecisive and lacking well-founded principles. The politician's rhetorical attempt to define the difference of opinion in his favor has to be balanced by the dialectical attempt to remain within the boundaries of reasonableness. In order to judge whether the pursued balance is indeed realized I will formulate soundness conditions for the strategic maneuvering concerned.

5.2.1 Soundness condition of openness

The first soundness condition for confrontational strategic maneuvering stipulates that favorable as well as unfavorable outcomes resulting from defining the difference of opinion may both be reached after the move has been made. For the maneuvering that involves retracting a standpoint and reformulating it, this implies that the protagonist should not hinder the antagonist in taking dialectical routes that lead to one of the three possible outcomes of the confrontation stage. In my characterization of the strategic maneuvering concerned I have shown that the favorable outcomes at the juncture at which an accusation of inconsistency is made are: leading the antagonist to retract his doubt (in a non-mixed discussion), and leading the antagonist to retract the opposite standpoint (in a mixed discussion). An unfavorable outcome of the strategic maneuvering concerned is reached when the antagonist maintains his criticism expressed by means of mere doubt or by advancing and/or upholding the opposite standpoint.

The requirement that favorable and unfavorable outcomes should not be precluded means that the protagonist's maneuvering should leave open two options for the

antagonist: (a) accepting the protagonist's strategic maneuvering by retracting his criticism and no longer advancing new criticism, and (b) not accepting the protagonist's strategic maneuvering by upholding the current criticism and/or advancing new criticism.[90] In order for the protagonist's confrontational maneuvering to leave open these two options, the following *condition of openness* needs to be fulfilled:

> (a)   Confrontational strategic maneuvering that involves retracting a standpoint and reformulating it in response to an accusation of inconsistency should leave open all the other party's available options to continue the current discussion, including the option of advancing a new accusation of inconsistency.

The evaluation of the strategic maneuvering takes place in light of the ideal model of a critical discussion by determining whether or not the realization of the move in the confrontation stage contributes to the reasonable resolution of the difference of opinion. The standard used to judge whether a move makes such a contribution is constituted by the procedural rules for critical discussion. The condition mentioned above under (a) provides a criterion for judging whether the norm for critical discussion specified in the *Freedom Rule* has been violated. The Freedom Rule stipulates that "discussants may not prevent each other from advancing standpoints or from calling standpoints into discussion" (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004: 190). The condition of openness is not fulfilled in the case in which the antagonist's freedom to advance moves that realize illocutionary acts consisting of the illocutionary negation of the commissive *accepting* is obstructed. Just as the protagonist has the right to replace his original standpoint by advancing a modified standpoint, the antagonist should also enjoy the right to advance new criticism against the same protagonist. The freedom of advancing new criticism includes advancing another accusation of inconsistency.

The violation of the condition of openness by a protagonist who maneuvers strategically by retracting a standpoint in response to an accusation of inconsistency and advancing a modified standpoint blocks the revision and flux of opinions, because the antagonist is prevented from exercising his rights in the discussion. This blocking may obstruct the process of resolving a difference of opinion in several ways. Two prominent cases of possible violations of the condition of openness are putting pressure on the antagonist by threatening him with sanctions and by attacking him personally. A

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[90] Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984: 102) explain that casting doubt can be defined as the refusal to accept, i.e. as the illocutionary negation of acceptance, and hence as non-acceptance. Upholding doubt is the repetition of the illocutionary negation of acceptance, i.e. non-acceptance.

protagonist who resorts to threats violates the antagonist's freedom by means of an *argumentum ad baculum* aimed at eliminating the antagonist from the discussion. A protagonist launching a personal attack becomes guilty of an *ad hominem* fallacy aimed at silencing the opponent. [91]

In the activity type of a political interview, it seems sensible to assume that politicians will often find subtle ways of violating the condition of openness. This assumption stems from the institutional characteristic that politicians try to give an account of their words or actions while striving at the same time to create a positive image of themselves for the audience at home. The politicians' aspirations to appear as political representatives whose words and actions are up to standard motivate them to design their strategic maneuvering in such a way that the interviewer is prevented from advancing and maintaining impending criticism. Since obviously, by virtue of his role, the interviewer has to criticize the politicians so that they answer for their words and actions, the politicians can as a rule only hope to soften the harshness with which they are questioned.

The politician's attempt at minimizing the critique with which he is confronted in a political interview can sometimes go as far as trying to preclude the interviewer from continuing to pursue a critical line of inquiry. Using very subtle means of attacking the interviewer, the politician tries to prevent his interlocutor from putting forward criticism, especially such fierce criticism as an accusation of inconsistency.

As shown in the analysis of the three exchanges between Sopel and various British politicians in Chapter 4, a charge of inconsistency is often supported by strong evidence, which makes it very hard for the politician to argue that the accusation is not correct. In order to respond for being inconsistent, as he is expected to do in a political interview, the politician will most of the time try to find a way out which is unlikely to involve a direct attack in this context. Should the politician resort to such an attack, this could have devastating consequences for the politician's image going far beyond the discussion in which the participants are involved. One example in which the interviewer is prevented from maintaining his criticism of inconsistency and advancing such impending criticism again is the discussion between Jon Sopel and Alan Duncan. The fragment from the discussion between them is included again below:

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[91] Two variants of the *ad hominem* fallacy may be committed by the protagonist: the abusive variant (the protagonist unjustifiably doubts the other party's expertise, intelligence, good faith) and the circumstantial variant (the protagonist unjustifiably casts suspicion on the other party's motives) (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992a). A third variant of the *ad hominem* fallacy is the *tu quoque* variant in which the other party's statements are wrongly criticized because they are inconsistent. Strictly speaking, since only the antagonist is in a position to cast doubt upon the protagonist's statements, he is the only one who can become guilty of a *tu quoque* attack. In a mixed discussion, both parties can commit all three kinds of *ad hominem* attacks.

Jon Sopel:
And on nuclear, the government says that obviously has to be part of the mix. Are you on that page as well.

Alan Duncan:
Our policy is absolutely clear and it's again, very similar, we want approval for sites and designs. We want a proper carbon price, we want honesty about costs, with no subsidy. Get on with the decision to do something with the waste, again, David Cameron said that this week, and I think the government has been a bit slow on working out what to do with nuclear waste. So then people can invest and I think probably they will.

Jon Sopel:
You were rather more skeptical the last time I spoke to you when you were on this programme – we can just have a listen to what you said last time.

'we think that the nuclear power sector, should be there as a last resort in many respects. We want to explore every conceivable method of generating electricity before we go to nuclear'

Alan Duncan:
so fluent.

Jon Sopel:
Yes. But you were completely different, you were very skeptical there. It has to be the last option, now you're saying, we're on the same page as the government and yes, let's get on with it.

Alan Duncan:
I think what's important with nuclear is to explain the policy. I think it's unhelpful to get hooked on two words and I think the policy as it has always been is exactly as I've just explained.

Jon Sopel:
So you are fine about nuclear.

The reconstruction of this fragment (Figure 4.8 and Figure 4.9) showed that Sopel charges Duncan with being inconsistent on the ground that in this interview he favors the use of nuclear energy, whereas in a previous interview he had taken a negative stance on the use of nuclear energy. In response to the charge of inconsistency, Duncan retracts the standpoint he advanced originally because all other options for responding are closed off. He cannot retract the current standpoint, because it would expose him to another inconsistency. The leader of his party has announced earlier the same week that the Conservatives favor the use of nuclear energy; therefore Duncan cannot hold the opposite. Although retracting his earlier words, for which he was supposed to have good arguments, is perhaps not the most advantageous choice he could make, retracting the current standpoint could expose a problem with the consistency within the party to which Duncan belongs. Internal party inconsistency could have far more negative consequences for his public image.

In order to avoid losing the discussion by simply retracting the original standpoint, Duncan does more than just accepting that there is an inconsistency. As shown in the

analysis, he reformulates the original standpoint in terms of a claim that the original standpoint concerned a different aspect than the current standpoint pertains to. The original standpoint, Duncan seems to suggest, concerned the practice of using nuclear energy, which was problematic, and therefore the Conservatives did not support it. The current standpoint concerns the policy of using nuclear energy, with which, apparently, there is nothing wrong and which therefore can be supported. By arguing in this way, Duncan makes it look as if there is no inconsistency between the two standpoints.

An evaluation of Duncan's response to the accusation of inconsistency reveals that his potentially effective way of maneuvering transgresses the bounds of reasonableness. The way in which his strategic maneuvering is formulated is an attempt at precluding Sopel from maintaining his criticism. Duncan's remark that *it's unhelpful to get hooked on two words* is an indirect attack on Sopel conveying two things: (a) that it is of no use to discuss the issue of being inconsistent (*it's unhelpful*), and (b) that Sopel is obsessed with minor aspects (*it's unhelpful to get hooked on two words* contains the presupposition that Sopel "got hooked on two words"). [92]

By means of this double attack, Duncan tries to put an end to the discussion about the Conservatives' view on the use of nuclear energy. In the first place, his attempt could prevent Sopel from maintaining his criticism because it highlights that his constant questioning on the matter is simply unhelpful: according to Duncan, the Conservatives' position at the moment is obviously related to the policy, which is a different matter than the previous position which had to do with the practice of using nuclear energy. Further discussion on this, Duncan seems to suggest, is not useful because things are clear now. Presenting Sopel's questioning as unhelpful can prevent him from going on with his line of inquiry. Because the interview is directed at an audience, which judges the performance of the politician as well as that of the interviewer, if Sopel were to continue in the same way, it would look as if he was nitpicking. This is obviously an image which Sopel would rather avoid in a political interview. Had the same remark been used in a conversation between friends, the other party would have had more freedom to continue the discussion by maintaining criticism. There would be no concern for an audience that could prevent him from persisting in criticizing his interlocutor. In this context, this possibility is precluded.

The second part of Duncan's attack is equally harsh as the first part in which he highlights the uselessness of the discussion. He points out that Sopel is obsessed with Duncan's words about nuclear energy, which after all, are just "two words." Apart from

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[92] Duncan's maneuvering is moreover an attempt at shifting the focus of the discussion from his inconsistency to Sopel's obsession with his words. Duncan's attack on Sopel is thus combined with an attempt to evade the burden of proof. In a political interview, it is the politician who should justify his words and actions if challenged. In this context, Sopel's accusation of inconsistency is a challenge for justification, which Duncan tries to evade by putting the burden on Sopel to justify his obsessive concern for the use of words. The unreasonableness of Duncan's maneuvering is the result of this combination.

the strong negative qualification that Sopel is hooked, the reference to "two words" is an endeavor to present the disagreement at issue as just a matter of verbal disagreement.[93] Duncan wants to suggest that Sopel is overprecise about his use of words with regard to the use of nuclear energy. In fact, Sopel remarks that Duncan's statements in another interview indicate a change of position with regard to the use of nuclear energy, which needs to be clarified and justified. Sopel's criticism, fully pertinent in a political interview, is presented by Duncan as concentrating on a matter that is irrelevant. He seems to leave the impression that instead of discussing matters of interest and importance for the public, Sopel concentrates in the exchange on a minor issue of language use.

That Duncan's attack on Sopel is an attempt aimed at preventing Sopel from criticizing him on the issue of nuclear energy is supported by Duncan's responses on the same matter in an earlier interview. On July 2, 2006 Sopel questioned Duncan, at the time of the interview Shadow Secretary of State for Trade, Industry and Energy, by asking him repeatedly for his view on nuclear power. Duncan's responses are aggressive attempts at making Sopel stop the questioning. The fragment below is an extract from the earlier interview:

Jon Sopel:
What I want to ask you is are you for or against nuclear power.

Alan Duncan:
The, the government is not looking at that. Tony Blair's saying he is, but if you look at the terms and conditions of the Energy Review, there's no money on offer. Now we've never before seen a nuclear power station built in Britain by the private sector alone.

So the question is what are the terms and conditions and what is the investment climate which we agree with Dieter Helm, should be a long one, in which this might happen and could happen fairly and it would need a number of things. It would need a proper solution to the handling of nuclear waste.

It would need honest economics on the part of any nuclear investing company so they can't just build, generate the income and dump us with future bills and it may also need a price for carbon, so that it can give, so that it can be given a fair crack against all the other competing ways of making electricity - cos by the way, this is not an energy review, at the moment it's just an electricity review.

Jon Sopel:
Okay, but I want to concentrate on what your policies are. I want to know whether you are for or against nuclear power.

Alan Duncan:
I think there is bound to be an element of nuclear power generation in, in the mix. But neither side of the political divide at the moment is saying here's a pot of money, go and do it. The question therefore is how do you design the climate in which a company can fairly invest and might do so.

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[93] The notion of verbal disagreement is introduced by Naess (1966: 83-84) to distinguish it from agreement 'in substance.'

Jon Sopel:
Do you believe our energy needs can be met without keeping nuclear power at roughly 20%, which is what it is at the moment.

Alan Duncan:
Yes, and I think this is the key point; I think that is quite possible, and we'd like to explore every conceivable alternative to do that and to fill the gap and to generate electricity on an industrial scale before we look at nuclear power. For instance, if you look at decentralised energy, where you can have combined heat and power, all sorts of different, smaller, more local ways of making electricity, it's quite possible we can do that in a more efficient, less carbon emitting way, before one needs to turn to nuclear power.

Jon Sopel:
But that's exactly what the government would say that they're seeking to do. They're seeking to maximise all the potential of renewables, of local generation, but they still come - say - the Tories have got to come back to this central question of how much power do you think should be generated by nuclear and you don't quite answer that question when I put it to you of are you for or against nuclear power.

Alan Duncan:
I don't answer it because I think it should be at the back of the queue because the government isn't answering it either. And so you're coming from a false premise. The fact is what is ... (interjection) ...

Jon Sopel:
But we will put these questions to the government as well, I'm just trying to put these questions, trying to get a straight answer from you on where you stand on nuclear power.

Alan Duncan:
Well you, in a way you've had one and you'll get it again. We think that the nuclear power sector should be there as a last resort in many respects. We want to explore every conceivable method of generating electricity, before we go to nuclear because we think that so much of this is on the edge of a scientific generation which can change the pattern and nature of our electricity generation.

This fragment attests that Sopel had to ask Duncan several times about his position on the use of nuclear energy before he gave an answer. After the question has been put twice and Duncan evades an answer, Sopel persists in his questioning by pointing at the evasion (*you don't quite answer that question*). Pressured so many times to respond, Duncan says explicitly that he does not want to answer Sopel's question while at the same time subtly attacking him: *I don't answer it because I think it should be at the back of the queue because the government isn't answering it either. And so you're coming from a false premise.* This attack is countered by Sopel with a repetition of the same question about his view on nuclear energy: *But we will put these questions to the government as well, I'm just trying to put these questions, trying to get a straight answer from you on where you stand on nuclear power.* [94] In response to this, Duncan is making an attempt at precluding Sopel

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[94] Duncan's remark that *the government isn't answering it (the question) either* and Sopel's reply that *we will put these questions to the government as well* are an excellent illustration of 'due impartiality.' Duncan claims that he does not answer the question because he is apparently the only one asked about the sensitive issue of nuclear energy about which the government should also express a view. Sopel defends the implicit

from asking a sensitive question. Duncan claims that he has given an answer and pretends just to repeat that answer, leaving the impression that Sopel is nitpicking on the matter of nuclear energy: *Well you, in a way you've had one and you'll get it again. We think that the nuclear power sector should be there as a last resort in many respects. We want to explore every conceivable method of generating electricity, before we go to nuclear because we think that so much of this is on the edge of a scientific generation which can change the pattern and nature of our electricity generation.* It is precisely Duncan's last reply that Sopel points at on December 9, 2007 in order to hold Duncan to account for an inconsistency. Duncan's response to the inconsistency, evaluated as a fallacious attack on Sopel, is just another attempt at preventing Sopel from criticizing him before the television-watching audience.

5.2.2 Soundness condition of relevance

The second soundness condition for confrontational strategic maneuvering requires that a move be responsive to the move that precedes it. This means that the politician's strategic maneuvering should be a relevant reaction to the expression of criticism advanced by the interviewer in his accusation of inconsistency. When is the politician's retraction of a standpoint and coming up with a reformulation of it a relevant reaction to an interviewer's accusation of inconsistency? To answer this question, I start from the concept of relevance as defined by van Eemeren and Grootendorst: "an element of discourse is relevant to another element of discourse if an interactional relation can be envisaged between these elements that is functional in the light of a certain objective" (1992b: 141).

Starting from this definition, van Eemeren and Grootendorst distinguish three perspectives from which an element of discourse can be considered relevant or irrelevant: an *interpretative* perspective, an *analytic* perspective and an *evaluative* perspective. In an interpretative perspective, language users themselves consider something relevant or irrelevant. In an analytic perspective, the analyst considers an element of discourse relevant or irrelevant depending on the goal for which he analyses a text. In an evaluative perspective, it is judged whether an element of discourse is relevant or irrelevant in light of the norms that the evaluator applies. The question concerning the relevance of the politician's maneuvering can be specified as: when is the maneuvering that involves the retraction of a standpoint and the advancement of a reformulated standpoint from an evaluative perspective a relevant reaction to an accusation of inconsistency?

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attack that he is not impartial by making it explicitly clear that the government will also be asked about their view on nuclear energy.

Whether a move can be considered relevant depends on the goals with which this move is put forward. Since every move constitutes an illocutionary act, it is by definition put forward with a communicative and an interactional goal. The communicative goal concerns obtaining *understanding* of the illocutionary act and the interactional goal concerns obtaining *acceptance* of the illocutionary act (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984). As a reaction to an accusation of inconsistency, the maneuvering at hand is considered relevant when it puts into effect the communicative and the interactional goals associated with an accusation of inconsistency. More precisely, it is relevant when (a) it shows understanding of the accusation of inconsistency, and (b) it indicates acceptance of the accusation of inconsistency.[95] Acceptance implies, among other things, that the protagonist understood the accusation and takes the accusation to be correctly performed. Understanding the accusation means knowing the propositional content and the communicative goal of the accusation of inconsistency. Taking the accusation to be correctly performed means assuming that the speaker has the intentions and preferences specified in the correctness conditions for an accusation of inconsistency. In order to 'fully' accept the antagonist's accusation of inconsistency, the protagonist should not only recognize that the antagonist has certain intentions and preferences – as specified in the correctness conditions for an accusation – but he must also share these intentions and preferences or be ready to share them (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1982). [96]

The protagonist who retracts a standpoint and reformulates it – i.e. accepts the accusation – takes the following correctness conditions for an accusation of inconsistency, formulated in Chapter 2, to be fulfilled and is ready to share the intentions and preferences specified in these conditions:

Preparatory conditions:

(a) The speaker believes that the addressee who is inconsistent will accept that an inconsistency is indeed at issue;

(b) The speaker believes that the addressee will acknowledge that the presence of an inconsistency obstructs the argumentative exchange he and his interlocutor are engaged in;

(c) The speaker believes that the addressee will take on the obligation to provide a response that answers the charge of inconsistency.

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[95] The other relevant reaction to an accusation of inconsistency is the maintenance of the standpoint. In such a case, the politician shows that he understood the accusation but does not accept it.

[96] Recognizing the interviewer's preferences and being ready to share them means that the politician assumes the commitments imposed on him by the advancement of an accusation of inconsistency.

Sincerity conditions:

(a) The speaker believes that the addressee is inconsistent;

(b) The speaker believes that the presence of an inconsistency constitutes an obstruction to the exchange he and his interlocutor are engaged in;

(c) The speaker wants the addressee to respond in such a way that he answers the charge.

In line with the preparatory conditions, a politician who accepts an accusation of inconsistency must assume that the interviewer believes that the politician will accept that he has been inconsistent, that the politician will acknowledge that his inconsistency is an obstruction to the exchange and that the politician will take on the obligation to respond to the charge of inconsistency. In line with the sincerity conditions the politician must assume that the interviewer believes that there has been an inconsistency, that the presence of the inconsistency is an obstruction to the exchange and that a response should be provided. Another requirement of the sincerity condition is that it should be the case that the politician shares or is ready to share the interviewer's intentions and preferences. This means that he agrees that there has been an inconsistency, that the inconsistency is an obstruction to the discussion and that a response that answers the charge is necessary.

Taking into account what a relevant response to an accusation of inconsistency amounts to, the politician who in his response accepts the accusation of inconsistency implicitly agrees that the inconsistency should be resolved so that the discussion is no longer obstructed. His strategic maneuvering should at least convey that a commitment to the current standpoint cannot be held simultaneously with a commitment to another standpoint on the same issue. Unless the maneuvering resolves the inconsistency, it cannot be a relevant response to the accusation to which it reacts. In pragma-dialectical terms, the politician's strategic maneuvering by means of retracting a standpoint and reformulating it is evaluatively relevant to the accusation of inconsistency when an interactional relation is envisaged between the two elements (the politician's maneuvering and the accusation of inconsistency). This relation is functional in light of the goal of defining the difference of opinion clearly (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992a, 1992b). [97] Pragma-dialectically,

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[97] This idea is based on van Eemeren and Grootendorst's view that "relevance (or lack of relevance) does not refer primarily to a formal relation between discourse elements, but to their functionality in view of the interactional intentions that can be ascribed to the speakers or writers." In a discussion viewed as a critical discussion, the ascribed purpose is the resolution of the difference of opinion in which the discussants are involved. (1992b: 142)

defining the difference of opinion that is free of inconsistencies is part of this contribution (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992a).[98]

That the politician's response should resolve the inconsistency of which he is accused does not make it possible to judge fully the evaluative relevance of the maneuvering. It is specific of the move of retraction, as shown in the characterization made in Chapter 4 (4.2), that it involves the illocutionary negation of an earlier illocutionary act. That is to say, a protagonist who retracts a standpoint makes it understood that he is no longer committed to the propositional content of the earlier standpoint (as derived from the essential condition of retraction). For the maneuvering that involves retracting a standpoint and reformulating it to be relevant, it needs to count both as a relevant reaction of acceptance of the accusation of inconsistency and as a relevant reaction of non-acceptance of a previous standpoint (i.e. the retraction should concern the standpoint advanced earlier which is no longer found acceptable). [99] In order for the strategic maneuvering to be evaluatively relevant in these two senses, the following *condition of relevance* needs to be fulfilled:

> (b)   In confrontational strategic maneuvering that involves retracting a standpoint and reformulating it in response to an accusation of inconsistency, the protagonist should give up one of the inconsistent standpoints altogether, thus resolving the inconsistency.

A difficulty with applying the soundness condition of relevance is to decide when an inconsistency is resolved. According to Krabbe (2001: 144) who follows Hamblin (1970b: 265), when an inconsistency is pointed out, the addressee has to retract one of the two inconsistent statements in order to resolve the inconsistency. Of course, this way of responding is expected when the accused believes that the inconsistency attributed to him is justified. The strict view that an inconsistency has to be dealt with by retraction seems to square well with the pragma-dialectical view of resolving a difference of opinion on the merits. According to this view, a difference of opinion is resolved when either the

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[98] In van Eemeren and Grootendorst's view, "in evaluating the various arguments that are put forward in the discourse, it must first be determined whether the argumentative discourse contains any inconsistencies. If something can be both one way and another at the same time, what are we to believe? Logical contradictions, pragmatic and other kinds of inconsistencies weaken the strength of the argumentative discourse more or less seriously." (1992a: 95)

[99] This kind of relevance corresponds to what Sbisà calls locutionary (or propositional) appropriateness (relevance) of a response. Locutionary relevance is a term she uses to indicate that the propositional content of a response to a previous illocutionary act is appropriate to "the (asserted) content of the previous utterance." (1992: 105)

antagonist retracts his doubt or the protagonist retracts his standpoint. However, adopting this view of resolving an inconsistency between standpoints by retracting a standpoint is only a theoretical solution. In actual argumentative practice, the protagonist of a standpoint that is accused of holding inconsistent standpoints will rather "remedy" the inconsistency (Hamblin 1970b: 264). The politicians' responses analyzed in Chapter 4, which amount to partly retracting a previous standpoint, are good illustrations of such remedies. Without the analyst being unrealistic, they cannot be declared as intrinsically fallacious for not being retractions in the strict sense.[100]

The maneuvering that involves retracting a standpoint and reformulating it is a violation of the soundness condition of relevance when the protagonist gives the impression that the original standpoint has been retracted, but in fact maintains some interpretation that is exploited afterwards to defend a standpoint that is easier to justify. This way of maneuvering is fallacious because it prevents the original standpoint from being criticized by conveying the false impression that the original standpoint is given up. The antagonist will no longer challenge the protagonist for the original standpoint because he is led to believe that the protagonist is not committed to it any longer. This view is supported by Kauffeld's observation that commitments are undertaken by speakers in order to generate presumptions which provide addressees with reason to act in ways desired by the speaker (2003). A speaker who retracts a standpoint undertakes a commitment generating the presumption that he can no longer be held committed to the acceptability of an earlier standpoint. That means that an antagonist can no longer challenge the protagonist with respect to the standpoint he gives up.

This immunization strategy may constitute the violation of two pragma-dialectical rules. The derailed maneuvering is a violation of the *Freedom Rule* (mentioned in 5.2.1), because the antagonist is prevented from calling the original standpoint into question. The fallacious maneuvering can also be a violation of the *Obligation-to-defend Rule*, because the protagonist may abusively exploit that he is (supposedly) no longer committed to the original standpoint by refusing to defend the original standpoint if challenged to do so. The Obligation-to-defend Rule stipulates that "discussants who advance a standpoint may not refuse to defend this standpoint when requested to do so" (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004: 191).

In his discussion with Sopel on November 12, 2006, Hague immunizes his original standpoint against criticism by giving the impression that he retracts his original position about the introduction of biometric identity cards, while in fact retracting only a certain

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[100] Harman (1989: 11-16) mentions that when one is confronted with an inconsistency there are practical limits obliging to "a reasoned change in view." This change may involve giving up something previously accepted, but, depending on the circumstances, maintaining some inconsistency while trying to avoid inferences that exploit it.

interpretation of it and exploiting another interpretation of the same standpoint in his favor. The discussion between Sopel and Hague is reproduced below from Chapter 4:

> *Jon Sopel:*
> And Labor say the big thing that you could do to help would be to support identity cards. It's fair to say that this is an issue that your party has rather flip flopped on isn't it.
>
> *William Hague:*
> Well it's… I think it's become clearer over time where we should stand on this, let's put it that way, because we've got the government adopting an identity card scheme, but one that is so bureaucratic and involves a vast data base and this is the government of serial catastrophes when it comes to data bases as we all know, costing now, according to the London School of Economics, up to twenty billion pounds and we said that if some of that money was spent instead on an effective border police and strengthened surveillance of terrorist suspects, and strengthening special branch and things like that, we'd actually get a lot further…. (interjection)….having identity cards.
>
> *Jon Sopel:*
> Isn't that a detail of the legislation. I mean you supported identity cards back in December 2004, less than two years ago.
>
> *William Hague:*
> We supported, I and Michael Howard supported the principle of those. Subject to how the details were worked out. The details are not impressive and the grasp of detail and the ability to control the costs of the current government is so terrible, that it's not a scheme that we can support.

In this fragment, Sopel accuses the Conservatives, represented in the interview by Hague, of holding inconsistent positions with regard to the introduction of biometric identity cards. To support his accusation, Sopel remarks that less than two years before the Conservatives supported the introduction of biometric identity cards, whereas they no longer support them now. In order to counter this charge in his favor, Hague acknowledges that attributing an inconsistency to him is correct. But he argues subsequently that the original standpoint (indicating a supportive attitude) concerned the principle of introducing biometric identity cards, whereas the current standpoint (indicating a non-supportive attitude) concerns the practice of introducing biometric identity cards. By responding like this, Duncan justifies his words, as he is institutionally obliged to do, and can give the impression that the inconsistency has been repaired.

In my analysis of the way in which the three aspects of strategic maneuvering are exploited, I showed that Duncan's response is potentially to his advantage. But here the aiming for rhetorical advantages seems to override the concern for reasonableness. Despite accepting that a commitment to the current standpoint cannot be held simultaneously with a commitment to an earlier standpoint on the same issue because the standpoints are inconsistent, Duncan retracts only 'part' of the original proposition of the standpoint he advanced earlier (concerning the principle of introducing biometric identity cards). In itself, there is nothing wrong with this maneuvering. After all, making a dissociation,

which involves retracting an interpretation while maintaining another, is not by definition fallacious. On the contrary, as van Rees (2009) shows, it can be an excellent way of making a clarification.

What derails in Hague's maneuvering is that he makes it seem as if Sopel can no longer call the original standpoint into question. Duncan claims that the original standpoint concerned the principle of introducing biometric identity cards. However, the original standpoint, as can be inferred from the accusation of inconsistency, concerned the unitary concept of support for the introduction of biometric identity cards. Otherwise, there would not have been an accusation of inconsistency, or the inconsistency could have been easily denied because it is unjustified. This maneuvering of maintaining a certain interpretation of the standpoint and retracting only one interpretation of the original standpoint is a way of immunizing against further criticism the original standpoint that the Conservatives support the introduction of biometric identity cards.[101] In a political interview, claiming that the original standpoint had a different interpretation is easy to get away with. The record of the original interview is not immediately available, which makes it very hard for Sopel to refute Duncan's claim. Because Sopel cannot easily find evidence that would reject Hague's claim (especially since the earlier interview took place around two years before), he cannot uphold a demand for justification.

5.2.3 Soundness condition of clarity

The third soundness condition for confrontational strategic maneuvering requires that a move be formulated in such a way that the antagonist can interpret it as a relevant response to the previous move and that all possible continuations of the discussion (leading to the creation of a non-mixed discussion, the creation of a mixed discussion, or the end of the discussion) are allowed. The first two soundness conditions for strategic maneuvering by means of retracting a standpoint and advancing a reformulated standpoint (5.2.1 and 5.2.2) stipulate that (a) the antagonist should not be prevented from maintaining his criticism or advancing new criticism, and (b) the inconsistency should be resolved. If the antagonist does not accept the politician's maneuvering, he should be allowed to maintain his

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[101] Hague's retraction of an inconsistency by means of dissociation violates the Starting Point Rule. In accordance with the procedural requirements which dissociation should fulfill in order to be dialectically sound as established by van Rees (2009: 99-102), Hague should have put up for discussion the dissociation he makes. From a pragma-dialectical perspective, the fact that a distinction is created within a unitary concept means that one of the starting points is changed and this change should be put for discussion. Instead, Hague introduces the distinction between the practice and the details of introducing biometric identity cards as a matter of fact (the use of the definite article to refer to the principle is an indicator of this) that does not need to be put up for discussion.

criticism or advance new criticism if he finds this necessary. He may express his non-acceptance of the protagonist's maneuvering by denying that it answers the charge of inconsistency, as required by the essential condition of an accusation of inconsistency.

In order for the first two soundness conditions to be fulfilled, the strategic maneuvers should be adequately formulated. That means that the protagonist should be so clear that the antagonist understands what his options are for continuing the discussion and that the protagonist's response resolves the inconsistency as required by the accusation of inconsistency. Otherwise, the antagonist may not understand that the protagonist's maneuvering is an attempt at eliminating the inconsistency. The strategic maneuvering concerned should fulfill the following soundness *condition of clarity*:

(c)   The moves in confrontational strategic maneuvering that involve retracting a standpoint and reformulating it in response to an accusation of inconsistency should be formulated as clearly as required for a proper understanding.

Failure to fulfill soundness condition (c) constitutes a violation of the *Language Use Rule* of a critical discussion. This rule requires that "discussants may not use formulations that are insufficiently clear or confusingly ambiguous" (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004: 195).[102] A formulation that is not clear enough for the purpose of the communicative exchange may amount to the fallacy of misuse of unclearness.[103] An example of fallacious maneuvering that violates the soundness condition of clarity is an obscure wording that gives the false impression of resolving the inconsistency.

In order to show how the soundness condition of clarity can be applied, I will evaluate Cooper's maneuvering in the discussion with Sopel on July 15, 2007 on the issue of housing in Britain. The fragment from the discussion between Sopel and Cooper reads as follows:

> *Jon Sopel:*
> You keep stressing that it's up to local councils, local councils to decide what is the best thing to do. What do you do with the local council who say, well frankly, we don't think we want to build that much.

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[102] The *Language Use Rule* does not impose an obligation on the protagonist to formulate his move explicitly, since it is often perfectly possible for the antagonist, using sentence meaning and contextual information, to recognize what is intended with the move even if it is implicit.

[103] A closely related fallacy amounts to the misuse of ambiguity, as in those cases in which the speaker is lexically ambiguous in such a way that the other party does not understand what to make of his words.

Yvette Cooper:
Well we do have a serious problem with Conservative local councils in particular across the south east region in particular, but not just there, who are opposing increases in housing…the south east Regional Assembly indeed has been arguing for cuts in the level of house building over the next few years, which I just think it's bonkers, given the needs we have. But I think it's, you know, it's not on really for councils to simply turn their backs and say, well we don't want any new houses round here, build them somewhere else. Build them in another community, build them in another town.

Every town, every city, every community has first time buyers who can't get on the ladder, has sons and daughters who are still stuck living at home with their mum and dad because they just can't afford anywhere to live, that is not fair and every community needs to recognize its responsibility to do something about that.

Jon Sopel:
But you just said at the start, it's up to councils to decide. Councils could decide they don't want to build extra houses, then what are you going to do about it.

Yvette Cooper:
No, we're clear that the way that the regional planning process works and the way that local councils have to wait together, they will all have to accept their responsibility to deliver more homes. Where they have the flexibilities around where within their community the homes should be built, you know, what the best location is, whether they've got good brown fields available and what kinds of homes.

You know, they may need more family homes in their area to look at those sorts of issues as well. What they can't do is turn their backs on their responsibility to deliver more homes and interestingly, we had forty towns and cities came forward over the last twelve months to say, well we want to increase the level of homes in our area.

In the exchange, Sopel focuses upon Cooper's view that local councils can decide on the location of houses to be built within their community and on what kinds of houses they will build. According to Sopel, this view is seemingly inconsistent with another view Cooper advanced at the beginning of the interview that local councils have the freedom to make (any) decisions, including the decision whether to build or not. In response to this serious charge, Cooper does not maintain what she said originally, but she does not simply retract it either. As I showed in the analysis of her response in Chapter 4 (4.2.1.2), she goes for a middle solution: she retracts what she said in the beginning, reformulates that in terms of responsibilities and clarifies how these responsibilities are divided. More concretely, Cooper clears herself from an apparent inconsistency by retracting her standpoint advanced in the beginning of the interview that local councils have the freedom to decide what the best location is. Following this retraction, she emphasizes that whether to build or not is not a matter of decision for the local councils. Finally, she outlines what kinds of decisions local councils can take, namely decisions with regard to the location of houses and the kinds of houses that are to be built.

Cooper's strategic maneuvering is a good example of how the soundness condition of clarity is fulfilled. Her response is clear enough for the purpose of the exchange in which she and Sopel are involved. In virtue of her role in a political interview, she clarifies

her view with regard to the matter on which she is interviewed and subsequently justifies it to give the account expected of her. The clarification is sufficiently precise for Sopel, the audience at home and the local councils to understand how responsibilities are divided and where the flexibilities lie. In this way, Sopel is not in any way prevented from continuing the discussion asking for more clarification or justification if he wants to.

5.3 Conclusion

In pragma-dialectics fallacies have traditionally been defined as breaches of the rules for critical discussion constituting the ideal dialectical procedure aimed solely at a resolution of the difference of opinion on the merits. The rules apply to the performance of moves in an argumentative discussion; any violation of these rules amounts to a fallacious argumentative move. The concept of strategic maneuvering has made it possible to explain why in practice sound and fallacious argumentative moves are sometimes hard to distinguish and has provided additional tools for distinguishing them. By regarding every move as an attempt at arguing reasonably and at the same time effectively, a violation of the dialectical rules for critical discussion is said to be committed by an arguer with a view to obtaining rhetorical success. From this perspective, fallacies are cases of 'derailed strategic maneuvering' in which the rhetorical concerns override the dialectical concerns, while fallacies are still seen as rule violations. It is thus taken into account that in argumentative practice arguers are interested in being not only dialectically reasonable but also rhetorically effective. Identifying whether a derailment of strategic maneuvering has indeed occurred requires workable criteria that make it possible to decide whether a certain norm specified in the rules for critical discussion has been violated or not.

In this Chapter, a politician's strategic maneuvering involving the retraction of a standpoint and reformulating it in response to an accusation of inconsistency has been evaluated by applying criteria that relate to the norms of critical discussion. I have derived these criteria from a set of three soundness conditions that I have established in order to assess the reasonableness of the maneuvering at hand. The starting point for formulating the soundness conditions has been that an instance of fallacious strategic maneuvering occurs when a move or a sequence of moves inhibit the realization of the dialectical goal of the stage concerned. In the particular cases evaluated in this study, the dialectical goal of the confrontation stage of defining clearly the difference of opinion has been taken into account.

The first soundness condition (condition of openness) ensures that a protagonist whose standpoint is declared inconsistent with another standpoint he advanced previously

and who responds by retracting a standpoint and reformulating it, leaves open all dialectically possible continuations of the discussion. That is to say that the antagonist should not be prevented from maintaining his criticism and/or advancing new criticism. The violation of this condition gives rise to fallacies in which the antagonist is attacked with the aim of excluding him from the discussion. The second soundness condition (condition of relevance) requires that the protagonist resolve the inconsistency with which he is charged by retracting one of the criticized standpoints altogether. This condition is not fulfilled when the protagonist maintains some interpretation of the original standpoint that is exploited afterwards to defend a standpoint that is easier to justify. Doing so conveys the false impression that the original standpoint is given up so that the antagonist no longer raises criticism about this standpoint. The condition of relevance is also violated when the protagonist abusively exploits that he is supposedly no longer committed to the original standpoint by refusing to defend it if challenged to do so. The third soundness condition (condition of clarity) requires a formulation of the strategic maneuvering concerned that is as clear as necessary for a proper understanding. The violation of this condition takes place when the lack of clarity is exploited in such a way that the other party does not understand what his options are for continuing the discussion and to cover for the inconsistency not being resolved.

In order to illustrate how the three soundness conditions can be applied in cases in which an inconsistency is pointed out between standpoints causing the protagonist to retract one of the standpoints and to reformulate it, I have given an evaluative account of the responses of three politicians interviewed on the BBC. Basically, the cases of derailed strategic maneuvering that I have identified (5.2.1 and 5.2.2) provide proof that fallacies are rhetorically motivated abuses of the dialectical norms for reasonable argumentation. In the context of a political interview, they are designed to be potentially persuasive for the interviewer and especially for the audience at home which is the ultimate judge of a politician's maneuvering. In the activity type of a political interview, a politician is not solely interested in giving the account expected of him, but also wants to appear competent and trustworthy on his views and actions. To avoid being perceived otherwise, a politician strives to be confronted with as little harsh criticism as possible. To achieve this purpose, he will often find subtle ways of preventing the interviewer from advancing and maintaining criticism and he will avoid formulating his maneuvering as clearly as required for a proper understanding. Therefore, the derailment of his strategic maneuvering may easily pass unnoticed. A careful reconstruction of the politician's moves that duly takes into account the verbal and institutional context in which the moves are advanced has provided useful indications that the norms for critical discussion have been violated.