

PROLEPTIC ARGUMENTATION

Proleptic argumentation is highly valuable rhetorical tactic of posing of an objection to one's argument before one's opponent has actually put it forward, and posing a rebuttal to the objection within in the same move. The eloquence of the most eminent orators, including Lincoln, as shown in this paper, is based on this skill. Six examples of proleptic argumentation are used to pose the basic problem that needs to be solved to start building methods useful for analyzing cases, and for helping an advocate to employ proleptic argumentation as a rhetorical tool. Four methods helpful for solving this problem are built from current resources already available in argumentation studies.

Proleptic argumentation, as defined in this paper, refers to the anticipation and answering of an objection or opposed argument before one's opponent has actually put it forward. As shown in the paper, proleptic argumentation can be inappropriate, or even illegitimate in some instances, and even associated with some traditional fallacies like poisoning the well, because it is a way of preempting an opponent's move in a reasoned discussion in which participants are supposed to take turns. Despite these dangers, proleptic argumentation is a highly valuable rhetorical tool that can be used to help persuade an audience that you are attempting to be reasonable and trying to take their viewpoint and interests into account. The eloquence of the most eminent orators, such as Demosthenes, Cicero, Burke and Lincoln, is based on a dialectical sensibility marked by a well-developed capacity to recognize and counter argumentative objections (Leff, 1999, 510). If you are writing a proposal, and you have not anticipated plausible objections, your argument is likely to appear shallow and unpersuasive.

Six examples of proleptic argumentation are used to pose the basic problem that needs to be solved in order to build up a clear definition and account of the basic structure of this type of argumentation. The aim is to systematically start towards building tools that will be useful not only for analyzing cases, but also for helping an advocate to employ proleptic argumentation as a rhetorical tool. Automating proleptic argumentation would be an extremely difficult task, as there usually any number of ways a clever opponent could attack your argument, and it does not seem possible that all of the most powerful ways could be anticipated in advance. Still, it is contended that a beginning can be made towards taking steps to address this problem constructively.

The basic problem for proleptic argumentation posed in this paper is how to guess in advance what the most powerful objections of your opponent are likely to be. Four methods for solving this problem are built from the base of current resources already available in argumentation studies. The first method is based on argumentation schemes, standardized forms of argument joining a set of premises to a conclusion. Recent research has formulated and classified sixty such schemes (Walton, Reed and Macagno, 2008). The second is based on the use of rebuttal tactics, many of which have already been studied and categorized in the literature on fallacies. The third method is based on the concept of commitment in different types of dialogs (Walton and Krabbe, 1995) representing types of conversational exchanges in which argumentation takes place. An arguer's commitment set represents the position he has taken in previous moves in the dialog. Knowledge of your opponent's position is a resource for proleptic argumentation against it. The fourth method is to practice your argument on an intellectual opponent who is opposed to your position in order to see what kinds of objections she makes.

The last three methods (especially) are inherently dialogical in nature, in that they need to take into account not only the form of the given argument (its argumentation

scheme) but how that argument was used for some purpose in a communication exchange. It needs to be added as a qualification that the first method is also partly dialogical. Ultimately the conclusion of the paper is that to give a good account of the normative of structure of proleptic argumentation of a kind that in the end will prove to be practically useful, the theory on which the project is to be built will need to be dialogical in nature.

1. Defining Proleptic Argumentation

The word ‘prolepsis’ is descended from the Greek word *prolambanein*, to anticipate, and its five meanings in English share this common root. The first meaning is a figure of speech in which a future event is referred to before it happens. A classic example is the sentence, “If you tell the cops, you’re a dead man”. The second meaning is the use of a word in anticipation of the circumstances that would make it applicable. In the sentence, ‘They drained the lake dry’, the term ‘dry’ only applies after the lake has been drained. The third meaning is a philosophical term used in ancient epistemology by Epicurus and the Stoics to indicate a preconception, a pre-theoretical awareness that can lead to true knowledge of the world. The fourth, and possibly the most general and common meaning, is the technique of anticipating in any type of speech or text of discourse some response, and incorporating in that speech some attempt to reply to the response in advance of its being explicitly made. For example, a story-teller might make a statement at one point in a narrative that refers to some part of the story told at a later point. This fourth meaning is so broad that it includes the fifth more specific meaning: the anticipation and answering of an objection to an argument within the putting forward of the argument itself, before one’s opponent has put the objection forward. This fifth meaning is called ‘proleptic argumentation’ in this paper, and it is the object of study.

‘Proleptic argumentation’ in the sense used in this paper refers to the anticipation and answering of an objection or opposed argument before one’s opponent has put it forward. The temporal word ‘before’ is key in this definition. To be proleptic in this sense, an argument must not only be directed to the commitment (standpoint, position) of the other party. All persuasive arguments (Walton and Krabbe, 1995), it can be argued, are of this sort. It must respond to an objection, criticism or reservation of the other party (the audience) before the point in the sequence of argumentation where that other party has actually voiced the objection. Note also that this definition is narrow in the sense that it refers only to proleptic arguments. It does not include other types of move that can be made in argumentation, like the asking of a question, that contains a reply to the question before the answerer has even had an opportunity to respond to it. A classic example is the ancient question, “Have you stopped beating your grandfather?” This question is proleptic in the fourth meaning of the term above, because it is a form of speech, the asking of a question that anticipates a response, and replies to it. Indeed it anticipates both responses, ‘yes’ and ‘no’, the only two direct responses allowed, and condemns the respondent to being guilty of the offence alleged, before he even gets an opportunity to answer the question.

There appears to be very little written, almost nothing, in modern argumentation studies on proleptic argumentation that is very useful for helping such studies move forward to provide useful tools and a well structured theory that would be of assistance in

helping an advocate to construct proleptic arguments in a systematic manner. It would appear that proleptic argumentation fits, in modern argumentation studies, under the heading of strategic maneuvering in argumentation. Strategic maneuvering is described as a means to reconcile the simultaneous pursuit of dialectical and rhetorical aims in argumentation (van Eemeren and Houtlosser, 2006). Strategic maneuvering is quite legitimate and appropriate in a critical discussion, or in other types of conversational exchange in which argumentation is used, like negotiation and public debate. However, it is also recognized that traditional informal fallacies of the kind studied in logic can be viewed as species of derailment of strategic maneuvering (van Eemeren and Houtlosser, 2006, 381). A case in point that has been studied in the recent literature on argumentation is the use of persuasive definitions, definitions that convey an emotive attitude, positive or negative, merely in the act of naming (Zarefsky, 2006). Like proleptic argumentation in general, the use of persuasive definitions is often an appropriate method of strategic maneuvering in a conversational exchange aimed at persuading an audience. However, as will be shown in this paper, proleptic argumentation, like the use of persuasive definitions, has often been associated with fallacies, and can certainly be a tricky and deceptive tactic of strategic maneuvering.

Proleptic moves in argumentation found in mitigation discourse in law has been studied empirically by Martinofsky (2006). She found that proleptic moves are very common in court discourse of this sort, and often take the form of evasive answers to questions posed in examination. She cites numerous examples in which a defendant uses a proleptic tactic contesting an accusation made in the prosecutor's question. Proleptic argumentation certainly appears to be very common in legal discourse, and is also often very powerful as a strategic rhetorical tool in legal argumentation.

Recent research has explored the rationale of rhetoric in strategic maneuvering in normative models of argumentation of the kind studied in argumentation theory (Tindale, 2006). Theories of argumentation have stressed the underlying reasonableness of moves made in conversational exchanges designed to resolve a conflict of opinions or move toward uncovering the truth of the matter being discussed. However, it has been emphasized by Tindale that participants in such exchanges want to measure success at least partly in terms of attending to their own interests and promoting their own viewpoints, thus maintaining reasonableness on their own terms. Although proleptic argumentation has not yet specifically been studied as one of the central features of such strategic maneuvering in argumentation, it clearly is an important device commonly used for this purpose and of practical importance in rhetoric.

2. Value of Proleptic Argumentation

Proleptic argumentation is the fundamental tool in commercial transactions in business of the most common kind. For example, in a job interview the applicant is well advised to carefully anticipate potential reservations that the employer might have, or objections she might make, and to build in responses to these objections in her speech making a plea to be hired. Similarly, in commercial advertisements of all sorts, a best technique for persuasive argumentation is to anticipate the most powerful and common objections, and to build in replies to these objections during the argumentation itself. It is vital in such undertakings not only to recognize potential objections that your audience is

likely to make, or have reservations about, but also to acknowledge them, and even to respond to them before they are voiced by the audience.

Proleptic techniques are also vitally important in writing a persuasive essay, or in delivering a persuasive speech. Leff (1999, 510) remarked that the eloquence of the most eminent orators such as Demosthenes, Cicero, Burke and Lincoln, is based on the dialectical sensibility that includes a well-developed capacity to recognize and counter argumentative objections. As an example, Leff (1999, 511) cited a speech made by Abraham Lincoln on the theme of the perpetuation of our political institutions. Lincoln argued that the threat to existing institutions comes from within the American community in the form of disregard for law and resort to mob action as a substitute for the courts. Lincoln started with an example of mob action, but then midway during his speech made the remark: “But you are, perhaps, ready to ask, ‘What has this to do with the perpetuation of our political institutions?’”, and then he went on to answer his own question by going on to elaborate the negative consequences of mob action. His argument fits the argumentation scheme for argument from negative consequences, and it could even be possible to classify it also as being a slippery slope argument (Walton, Reed and Macagno, 2008, 339). In any event, the point is that when Lincoln asked the question quoted above, he cited an objection to his own argument, and then put forward a lengthy sequence of argumentation designed to counter this objection.

In The RSCC Online Writing Lab, advice is given to students about writing an argumentative research paper. According to this advice, it is helpful to include the two strategies of anticipating objections and making concessions. The following example of an argument (<http://www.rsc.c.c.tn.us/owl&writingcenter/OWL/Argumentation.html>) that uses these two strategies is offered.

While censorship is dangerous to a free society, some of the concerned citizens who are in favor of censorship may have valid points when they object that children should not be exposed to television violence. Indeed, often there is too much violence on television. Perhaps the answer is for all networks to establish the same guidelines of self-censorship.

In this example, the proponent is arguing against censorship. She begins by giving a reason to support that view, stating that censorship is dangerous to a free society. It is assumed that parties to the discussion will agree that a free society is a good thing, and therefore that anything that is dangerous to a free society is a bad thing. Next, the proponent articulates an objection to her argument, and makes a concession that the objection may be a valid point. The objection is that children should not be exposed to television violence. An even stronger concession to the opponent’s side of the argument is made when the proponent states that often there is too much violence on television. Finally, the proponent follows up these concessions by offering a solution other than censorship to the problem that has been posed. The solution suggested is that all networks should establish the same guidelines of self censorship. Looking over the argument as a whole, the proponent’s strategy is one of articulating and conceding an objection to her argument that poses a problem, but at the same time offering a solution to the problem that could overcome the objection.

3. A Simple Example

The following example is a simple one, made up by the author to show how proleptic argumentation works in its essentials (a toy example). In the next section, we go on to a more realistic example that is also more complex in certain respects. Using real examples is the best way to study proleptic argumentation, and the collection of a corpus of examples is vitally important for further research on the subject. Still, for purposes of explication, it is best to begin with a simple example, as there is not enough space for extended interpretation and analysis of realistic but complex cases of natural language discourse.

The Climate Change Example

Climate scientist Bruce, whose research is not funded by industries that have financial interests at stake, says that it is doubtful that climate change is caused by carbon emissions.

This argument anticipates and counters the objection that Bruce's research is biased, because it is funded by industries that have financial interests at stake. The example is an instance of the argumentation scheme for argument from expert opinion.

The scheme representing argument from expert opinion can be found in the compendium of sixty schemes in (Walton, Reed and Macagno, 2008, 310). In the scheme as shown below, *E* is an agent who can possess knowledge in some subject domain represented by the variable *D*.

Scheme for Argument from Expert Opinion

Major Premise: Source *E* is an expert in domain *D* containing proposition *A*.

Minor Premise: *E* asserts that proposition *A* (in domain *D*) is true (false).

Conclusion: *A* may plausibly be taken to be true (false).

It is possible to see how the climate change example is an instance of the argumentation scheme for argument from expert opinion, by putting it in this form.

- *Premise:* Bruce is an expert on climate science.
- *Premise:* Climate change is in the domain of climate science.
- *Premise:* Bruce says that it is doubtful that climate change is caused by carbon emissions.
- *Conclusion:* It is doubtful that climate change is caused by carbon emissions.

The objection that is anticipated in the example can be formulated as follows.

- Bruce's research may be funded by industries that have financial interests at stake.
- If so, it is appropriate to ask whether Bruce is biased.
- If Bruce is biased, he may not be a trustworthy source.
- If Bruce is not a trustworthy source, the worth of the argument from expert opinion is cast into doubt.

The original argument anticipates and replies to this objection, and hence is proleptic argumentation in the sense of this term defined in section 1.

This is all very well. We can see how the argument fits the scheme for argument from expert opinion, and is proleptic because it responds to a typical question that might raise doubts about the acceptability of an argument fitting the scheme. The problem is to see how we can teach a student of critical thinking to build proleptic arguments of this sort by anticipating objections in advance and incorporating them into the presentation of the argument. How could we give advice to someone in law or public affairs on how to craft an argument directed towards an audience by anticipating the objections that the audience would be likely to have?

According to the requirements set out by Walton, Reed and Macagno (2008), any instance of an argument from expert opinion needs to be evaluated in a framework where a respondent can ask basic critical questions. The six basic critical questions matching the appeal to expert opinion (Walton, Reed and Macagno, 2008, 310) are the following.

1. *Expertise Question*: How knowledgeable is *E* as an expert source?
2. *Field Question*: Is *E* an expert in the field *D* that *A* is in?
3. *Opinion Question*: What did *E* assert that implies *A*?
4. *Trustworthiness Question*: Is *E* personally reliable as a source?
5. *Consistency Question*: Is *A* consistent with what other experts assert?
6. *Backup Evidence Question*: Is *E*'s assertion based on evidence?

When an argument from expert opinion has been put forward by a proponent, if the respondent asks any one of the six critical questions, a burden of proof shifts back to the proponent's side to reply to the question. The failure to answer appropriately defeats the argument from expert opinion temporarily, making it default until the critical question has been answered successfully.

Using these tools a four-step method can be given to help the critical thinking student, or anyone who is crafting a persuasive argument, to anticipate some of the standard objections and reply to them before they are posed using proleptic argumentation.

1. Fill in any ordinary premises that might not be explicitly stated in the given argument.
 2. Scan over the standard critical questions matching that scheme, and judge which one is most powerful as a potential objection, from what is known of the context of the dialog.
 3. Build in an additional premise to the argument that anticipates this objection and rebuts it.
 4. Build in any other premises needed to help provide the new argument for the rebuttal.
- This method is by no means the only tool needed for such a purpose, for it is possible to think of all kinds of objections to any given argument, and crafting a tool to find and anticipate all possible objections, or even all of the most persuasive ones, would be very difficult task. Even so, the method is useful, because sixty distinct argumentation schemes, with matching sets of critical questions for each scheme, are identified in the compendium of schemes in Walton Reed and Macagno (2008). As research continues in the field of argumentation schemes, these resources will grow. Consequently, argumentation schemes can be helpful for the study of proleptic argumentation in many instances.

4. A More Complex Example

To consider a slightly more complex type of example, we examine a simplified and cleaned up argument reconstructed from material (paraphrased, not quoted) found in a debate on the subject of rehabilitation versus retribution found in *Debatepedia* at this site: http://wiki.idebate.org/index.php/Debate:Rehabilitation_vs_Retribution

Crime is not a product of circumstances; punishment fosters accountability. Crime is not pathology, it is not the product of circumstance, and it is certainly not the product of coincidence. It is the result of choices made by the individual, and therefore the justice system must condemn those choices when they violate society's rules. To say otherwise (i.e. to say that criminals are merely the product of their unfortunate circumstances) would be an insult to ideas of free will, human autonomy and individual choice – it would be to deny the possibility of human actors making good decisions in the face of hardship.

To understand this argument, we need to examine each part of it. The first sentence has two parts. The first part is a flat denial of the thesis of the rehabilitation side. This thesis is that crime is a product of circumstances. The opposed thesis of the retribution side is that crime is the result of a choice made by the individual. The second sentence denies other claims of the rehabilitation side connected with its main thesis. The third sentence states the argument of the retribution side, the claim that crime is the result of the choices made by the individual, and that therefore punishment for crime by the justice system is justified. The last sentence is the part of the argument that is proleptic. It provides an argument against the thesis of the rehabilitation side that criminals are merely the product of their unfortunate circumstances. Next, two arguments are presented against this thesis. One is that it is an insult to the ideals of free will, human autonomy and individual choice. The other is that it denies the possibility of human agents making good decisions in the face of hardship. Because it states these arguments in advance of their being brought forward to rebut specific attacks by the other side, the argumentation is proleptic.

The question we pose here is how an advocate for the retribution side would be able to compose a proleptic argument like this one, that anticipates objections of the opposed side, and reply to them in advance with rebuttals. What kind of knowledge does such an advocate need as a database to construct such proleptic arguments? The answer proposed here is that the advocate needs knowledge of the position of the other side, including both knowledge of the commitments of the other side on the issue, and some of the most plausible arguments commonly used, or that might effectively be used, by that side to defend its main thesis.

Some of us might be familiar with the debate between retribution and rehabilitation, and be familiar with some of the most commonly used or plausible arguments because we've heard them before. Others of us might not be so familiar with the debate, and some account of arguments used by the rehabilitation side to support their claim might be helpful. To provide assistance, a brief summary of the main lines of argument used by rehabilitation advocates, as indicated by the account of the debate given in *Debatepedia* are summarized in the precis below.

Rehabilitation acknowledges the reality of social inequity. To say that some offenders need help to be rehabilitated is to accept the idea that circumstances can constrain, if not compel, and lead to criminality; it admits that we can help unfortunate persons who have been overcome by their circumstances.

The main rehabilitation viewpoint can be summarized by saying that it claims that crime is a product of circumstances, and therefore that the best solution to it is to help the unfortunate person who has been overcome by his or her circumstances by rehabilitation.

The two examples we have presented would be interesting to analyze at length using argumentation tools, but there is no space for that project here. The examples are merely presented to give the reader some idea of the kind of data that is needed by an advocate to construct proleptic argumentation. What we see here is that the debate has the form of a dialog in which there are two sides, called the retribution side and the rehabilitation side. What each side needs to construct proleptic argumentation that not only puts forward an argument against the other side but also anticipates some of its most powerful objections and responds before they are made, is some knowledge of the commonly used arguments of the other side. But how would an advocate obtain knowledge of such arguments? One skill needed is empathy – the ability to put oneself into the position of the other side to get an idea of the arguments that seem plausible to that side and that would be most powerful in defending her position. How does one achieve such empathy, especially given that one is committed to the opposed viewpoint? One method might be to play devil’s advocate, by putting yourself in the opponent’s position and trying to see what arguments she might use to support her view or attack yours. Another method might be to actually engage in argumentation with an able opponent who is committed to the opposed viewpoint, and record the most powerful arguments that she uses. These are pretty good methods, but the problem is that they are very vague and sketchy as stated. Is there some way they could be made more precise using tools for argument identification, analysis and evaluation currently being developed in argumentation theory?

5. The Four Methods

The basic problem for proleptic argumentation is to know in advance what the most powerful objections of your opponent are likely to be. There are four methods for solving this problem that can be built from current resources already available in argumentation studies. The first is based on argumentation schemes, standardized forms of argument identified as having certain kinds of premises, a certain conclusion, and a certain kind of warrant or inferential link joining the premises to the conclusion. Once a particular argument can be classified as fitting a given scheme, standard objections to that type of argument can automatically be specified. Recent research has identified sixty of these argumentation schemes (Walton, Reed and Macagno, 2008).

The first method is to fit the argument you are putting forward to a standard argumentation scheme that will identify the premises and conclusion of the argument and categorize it as belonging to a certain type. Once the argumentation scheme has been identified, the basic weak points that an opponent could use to attack the argument are identified by the set of critical questions matching the argumentation scheme. For example, suppose you are arguing that your respondent should take a certain medication to solve a health problem that she has. The argumentation scheme in such a case is that for practical reasoning. When you put forward an argument based on practical reasoning you are arguing to your respondent as follows: you have a goal, or want to solve the problem; this action I am proposing will help you to attain that goal, or will solve the problem; therefore you should carry out this action. This simplest form of practical

reasoning is called practical inference. Below is the scheme for practical inference (Walton, Reed and Macagno, 2008, 323).

Practical Inference

MAJOR PREMISE: I have a goal *G*.
 MINOR PREMISE Carrying out this action *A* is a means to realize *G*.
 CONCLUSION: Therefore, I ought (practically speaking) to carry out this action *A*.

Many arguments for health products fit this scheme. For example, an ad for a medication for diabetes (*Newseek*, Nov. 26, 2007, 25) has the headline: “ACTOS has been shown to lower blood sugar without increasing their risk of having a heart attack or stroke”. The argumentation in this ad presents ACTOS as a way for the reader who has type 2 diabetes to solve the problem of lowering his or her blood sugar. It says: you have the goal of lowering your blood sugar; taking ACTOS is a means to realize this goal; therefore you should take ACTOS”. Hence the argumentation in this ad fits the scheme for practical inference. The ad also responds to critical questions.

Once you’ve identified the scheme, by examining the list of critical questions matching the scheme you can identify which basic objections are likely to be brought forward against your argument. Below is the set of critical questions matching the scheme for practical inference (Walton, Reed and Macagno, 2008, 323).

Critical Questions for Practical Inference

- CQ₁: What other goals do I have that should be considered that might conflict with *G*?
 CQ₂: What alternative actions to my bringing about *A* that would also bring about *G* should be considered?
 CQ₃: Among bringing about *A* and these alternative actions, which is arguably the most efficient?
 CQ₄: What grounds are there for arguing that it is practically possible for me to bring about *A*?
 CQ₅: What consequences of my bringing about *A* should also be taken into account?

CQ₅ very often concerns negative consequences of proposed course of actions called side effects. In this instance one of the side effects of taking this particular medication would be to increase the risk of having a heart attack or stroke. To anticipate the possibility of the reader raising this critical question, the argumentation in the ad states that the medication can lower blood sugar without the risk of either of these possible side effects. Because it anticipates these objections and responds to them during the argument itself, this ad is an excellent example of proleptic argumentation.

The second method is based on research in the literature on argumentation showing that some schemes are opposed to others. As noted in (Walton, Reed and Macagno, 2008, 263), Aristotle in the *Rhetoric* (1397a) postulated a topic he called argument from opposites. He offered this example: self-control is good for lack of self-control is harmful. What is indicated by these observations is that the study of some commonly used argumentation schemes shows that certain that types of tactics or rebuttal arguments

are commonly used to attack a particular scheme. As an example, the six standard tactics to counter a slippery slope argument can be cited (Walton 1992, 259-264). The first is to claim that the negative consequences don't really follow. The second is to cite the uncertainty of the future. The third is to modify the goal to eliminate the negative consequences. The fourth is to stress positive consequences, arguing that these outweigh the negative consequence. The fifth is to choose some alternative means of achieving the goal, one that does not have the negative consequence. The sixth is to argue that not taking the action in question will have even worse negative consequences. Surveying the literature on argumentation schemes and fallacies provides an ample supply of resources for this method. Especially chapter seven of (Walton, Reed and Macagno, 2008) on attack, opposition, rebuttal and refutation are useful, but there is no space in this paper to present these schemes and show how to use them for proleptic argumentation.

The third method is based on the concept of commitment in dialogs, originally due to Hamblin (1970), and further developed by Walton and Krabbe (1995). According to this analysis, argumentation is always seen as having a dialog structure in which two parties take turns making moves, like asking questions or putting forward arguments, or making objections to arguments put forward by the other party. Each party has a thesis, or standpoint to be defended. This proposition is contained in the party's commitment set. As each party makes a move, propositions are inserted into or retracted from his or her commitment set, according to rules governing commitments, called commitment rules. Commitment rules determine whether a statement (proposition) is inserted into or deleted from a party's commitment set when she makes a move of a certain type. For example, when the party asserts a particular proposition, it is inserted into her commitment set. Such a public log of the opponent's commitments is a valuable database that can enable a proleptic arguer to gain data needed to see best how to effectively rebut her counter-arguments, even before she puts them forward in the dialog. Once knowledge of the other party's standpoint has been gained, it can be used to attack that standpoint.

The fourth method is to practice your argument on an intellectual opponent who is supposed to your standpoint in order to see what kinds of objections she makes. This method, like the second one, is dialogical in nature. The fourth method is probably the best one of all, if you have the time and resources to implement it. If you lack the resources to have a debate with a human opponent, there are resources available on the internet, like *Debatepedia*, if you can find a debate on your topic of interest.

6. Dangers of Proleptic Argumentation

Proleptic argumentation has positive value in persuasive communication, and there is nothing inherently wrong with it, in many instances. However, it also has the potential for misuse. There are many examples of loaded language associated with informal fallacies where the proponent of the argument builds in terms with positive or negative emotive meaning so that the argument is expressed in such a way as to anticipate possible objections and to suppress them. Such tactics may be reasonable or not. Each case needs to be judged on its merits. However, there are some extreme cases where the tactic of anticipating objections and forestalling disagreement by responding to them in advance can be an extremely powerful tactic of strategic maneuvering. Here we cite just one instance of such a tactic that is associated with a traditional informal fallacy.

Poisoning the well is often taken in the logic textbooks as a species of *ad hominem* fallacy (Walton, 2006), but some textbooks characterize it in a broader way as a more general method of forestalling disagreement. The following example was presented as an example of the poisoning the well fallacy by Davis (1986, 62), but not under the *ad hominem* fallacy category.

For example, in a debate on how to put the Social Security system on a sound financial basis, a congressman might say, "It would be indecent to even suggest that Social Security payments should be cut." Note that all the congressman has really said is that Social Security payments should not be cut; he has not given so much as a suggestion as to why. Nevertheless, he has made it very difficult to disagree. Anyone doing so faces the charge of being "indecent," which might be embarrassing. Forestalling disagreement by positive characterizing those who would agree with speaker's position or negatively characterizing those who would disagree is called "poisoning the well".

It might be better not to classify this argument as an *ad hominem* argument, but as an instance of argument from a verbal classification. The speaker uses a strategy of argumentative deployment of loaded terms to classify all possible objections in advance as "indecent". Since something indecent is something bad, all argument for cutting Social Security payments are discounted in advance of being made.

The classic case of poisoning the well is the Cardinal Newman Argument, classified by Copi and Cohen (1998, p. 169) as a species of *ad hominem* argument.

One argument of this kind, called "poisoning the well," is particularly perverse. The incident that gave rise to the name illustrates the argument forcefully. The British novelist and clergyman Charles Kingsley, attacking the famous Catholic intellectual John Henry Cardinal Newman, argued thus: Cardinal Newman's claims were not to be trusted because, as a Roman Catholic Priest, (Kingsley alleged) Newman's first loyalty was not to the truth. Newman countered that this *ad hominem* attack made it impossible for him and indeed for all Catholics to advance their arguments, since anything that they might say to defend themselves would then be undermined by others' alleging that, after all, truth was not their first concern. Kingsley, said Cardinal Newman, had poisoned the well of discourse.

Newman wrote a whole book, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864), directed to the task of trying to refute this argument. The reader can examine the original text of the argument (Correspondence, 1864). Newman not only felt that Kingsley's argument unfair, because it was based on a misinterpretation of what he had written, but also felt that Kingsley's argument threw an aura of suspicion onto any argument he might put forward in the future. The well would be poisoned, so to speak, because any political argument he would put forward in the future would be tainted with the suspicion that he put group interest before a concern for the truth. Such an attack would not only make it impossible for Newman to have a voice on political issues, but it suggests even more generally that Roman Catholics have no regard for truth.

There is in principle nothing wrong with arguing that an opponent's argument should be discounted because he has shown disregard for truth, but there is a danger of using strategies of this sort. They can shut down a discussion. Johnstone (1981, p. 310) stated the following principle of rational persuasion dialog: "So act in each instance as to encourage, rather than suppress, the capacity to persuade and to be persuaded, whether the capacity in question is yours or another's." This principle, a predecessor of rules for critical discussion of van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004), formulates a duty of openness in rational argumentation. Poisoning the well arguments are dangerous because

they are tempting to use as powerful strategies by parties engaged in a critical discussion who have an interest in resolving the issue by winning the argument (van Eemeren and Houtlosser, 2002, p. 134).

In this brief section, we have given some indication of the dangers of proleptic argumentation, suggesting that normative guidelines are needed to judge when this kind of argumentation is appropriate or not in a given case. This is a hard problem and we cannot solve it within the scope of the space restraints of this paper. What we can do, in concluding, is to suggest how this normative problem is connected to the practical problem posed above.

7. Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Research

From a dialogical point of view, prolepsis could seem to be inappropriate, for the proponent is in effect switching roles. Or even worse, it could be said that the proponent is usurping the role of his opponent. Such a move could be seen as a violation of dialogical procedure, because the two participants in a dialog response to take turns, each party playing a certain role. It is the opponent's role to present arguments against the viewpoint that the proponent is advocating. It is not the proponent's role to bring forward such arguments. In doing so, in a dialog sequence in which the two parties take turns, the proponent is usurping the turn of the opponent. From a purely dialogical point of view then, it may be unclear what the advantage or purpose of prolepsis is, and it may even seem that prolepsis is an inappropriate type of move that ought to be banned altogether. One might conclude that will prolepsis has rhetorical value for argumentation, it has little or no value in a dialectical perspective on argumentation.

To see the value of prolepsis, we need to look more closely at certain types of dialog. The purpose of the proponent's putting forward an argument in a persuasion dialogue is to utilize the opponent's commitments as premises in arguments that have conclusions favorable to the proponent's side. This task demands a certain amount of empathy. You have to look at the issue from the opponent's point of view, and perhaps even to anticipate objections that he might have to the point of view you are supposed to be advocating. From this perspective, prolepsis has quite a bit of value as a technique of strategic maneuvering.

In a persuasion dialog, there is always a conflict of opinions kind illustrated in the example of debate about crime above between the advocates of retribution and the advocates of rehabilitation. The goal of successful rational persuasion that each side has in such a dialog is to construct a chain of argumentation that has thesis of one's own side as its conclusion and that has as premises only statements that are commitments of the opposed side. According to the formal model of Hamblin (1970), as such a dialogue proceeds, and moves are made by each side, the commitments of each side are collected into its so-called commitment store or commitment set. This set represents the position of the side in the dialog, as it is known to that point in the dialog (Walton and Krabbe, 1995). For the purposes of this paper, the main point is that each side can have knowledge of the commitments of the other side, based on the previous moves made by the other side. It is this database provides the knowledge needed for an advocate to construct proleptic argumentation. This is the basic tool one needs to see the value of prolepsis, and to provide abstract normative models that can help us to judge in a

particular case whether an instance of proleptic argumentation is reasonable or fallacious. As shown above, the other basic tool that is useful is the current research on argumentation schemes.

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