The dialectic of ambiguity
van Laar, Jan

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CHAPTER 5: INFORMAL PROCEDURAL ACCOUNTS

FORMAL VERSUS INFORMAL APPROACHES

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca want to offer a theory of reasonableness that applies to areas that elude calculation, empirical experiment and logical deduction. These areas, such as law or the humanities, are characterised by disagreements, particularly on matters of value, and may fall prey to irrational forces, instincts and violence (1969, 3). Consequently, these disciplines are in need of an alternative theory about premises that are credible or plausible, but not perfectly certain, and about arguments that are reasonable, but not compulsive.

Perelman characterises logic as the discipline in which reasoning in all forms is studied (Perelman 1982, 4). There is a crucial distinction within his philosophy between two logical subdisciplines, formal logic on the one hand and dialectic or rhetoric on the other. Formal logic is concerned with proofs, demonstrations or deductions. It starts from axioms that, being either self-evident or of a hypothetical nature, are not proper topics of debate (Perelman 1982, 9). From these axioms propositions are derived with necessity, leaving no room for doubt. In order to accomplish these derivations, formal logic makes use of an artificial and completely univocal language. Given its subject matter, formal logic is by its nature unsuitable for the study of disagreements about value-laden issues. The old disciplines of rhetoric and dialectic, however, could furnish a theory of argumentation that deals with such matters adequately.97 Whereas proof, demonstration, and deduction are the subject matter of formal logic, they view argumentation as constituting the subject matter of the new rhetoric.98

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca do not deny that we can, for argumentative purposes, avail ourselves of concepts, schemes and ideas that stem from formal logic. Arguers may, for instance, accuse someone of ‘a contradiction’, they may utilise patterns of reasoning that are valid within a system of logic, or they may object to the ambiguous nature of what has been said. But these are techniques that should be qualified as quasi-logical (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 212). Within argumentation, the conditions are lacking that give these concepts a rigid meaning. If one uses, in argumentation, an expression that originates from an artificial language, it becomes associated with mental structures and different persons may associate it with different concepts. Consequently, we can no longer put our trust in a meaning once assigned to it. Notions like ‘contradiction’, ‘validity’ and ‘ambiguity’ (in its pejorative sense) are not inherently argumentational.

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca wrongly suppose that the argumentational importance of ambiguous notions and expressions excludes the option of a formal

97 Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca do not adopt Aristotle’s distinction between dialectic being concerned with a few opponents, and rhetoric being concerned with a larger audience. They envisage one discipline that can both be called dialectic and rhetoric. Because the notion of ‘audience’ is emphasised in their theory, and because dialectic is often associated with logical deduction, they chose the banner the new rhetoric.

98 More recently, an alternative informal logic has been developed (Johnson and Blair [1977] 1994, Johnson 2000). This logic is informal in that the key to understand and evaluate argumentation is not found in the logical form of sentences and arguments (Johnson 2000, 120).
approach. The standard imperative of a logical system is that the expressions with which the system deals are univocal. But this imperative can be loosened, without the theory's ceasing to be a logical system. In this study, this opposition between 'formal logic' and 'argumentation' is not adopted. The issue of the proper procedure for dealing with active ambiguity can be approached from both formal as well as informal perspectives. The presumption will be that notions of formal validity, as well as a formal specification of dialectical norms, have their place in a completely developed theory for critical discussion. This chapter is concerned with several procedural ideas about ambiguity in argumentation that can be characterised as more or less informal. Chapter 6 focuses on more formal approaches. In chapter 7 a procedural account of active ambiguity is presented both in an informal as well as in a more formal fashion.

1. DE GROOT AND MEDENDORP ON SIGNIFIC CONCEPT ANALYSIS

De Groot and Medendorp advocate communication among scholars, and communication between on the one hand scholars, and on the other, the lay public and those who apply scholarly results. Moreover, they argue against fragmentation of the disciplines due to an overly pluralistic and non-committal attitude towards differences of opinions.

De Groot and Medendorp offer a set of heuristic rules and methods that enable scholars to reflect systematically on concepts and concept terms. This procedure is called signific concept analysis. The procedure must result in definitions that are suitable for solving scholarly problems as well as for effective communication. As we have seen (in section 5 of chapter 4), two wrongs must be avoided: definitions should not be undesirably restricted, nor should they be undesirably ambiguous or vague.

Signific concept analysis is meant as a collection of informal, heuristic or soft rules that are to assist us when reasoning about a useful definition (De Groot and Medendorp 1986, 43). Its seven stages constitute an abstract description of what should be done in a completely thorough analysis.

In the first stage of the procedure, the analyst answers preliminary questions. With what concept term is the analyst concerned? What functions does the concept term fulfil in the relevant disciplinary fields? What is the intended scholarly forum and what are the broader audiences that should be persuaded of the acceptability of the definition?

The second stage is aimed at finding out what can, in principle, be meant by the concept term. It includes an examination of several past and present meanings of the term: within colloquial language and within more technical languages. Moreover, it comprises the study of the origin and etymology of the term, and of relevant

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99 De Groot and Medendorp perceive their approach as a continuation of the significs movement that starts with Lady Welby in 1896. She pleaded for a science of meaning that provides the means for countering misunderstanding and distrust between social groups. The basic tenet of the significs movement is that language should be improved in order to make it fulfil its communicative functions better. The most famous protagonist of this movement is the intuitionist mathematician L.E.J. Brouwer, who claimed that mathematical language is inherently liable to error. Most work in significs has been done by G. Mannoury (1867-1956) who introduced the pragmatic notion of taaldaden, taal meaning ‘language’, daden meaning ‘acts’, which bears a strong resemblance to Searle's ‘speech acts’ (Brouwer et al 1922, Walter-Schmitz 1998).
historical developments in the use of the term. The analyst decides what aspects of meaning to take up, and which of the problems in the term's present use to solve.

At this stage, the analyst puts two linguistic methods to use. First, he examines the grammatical roles the concept term can fulfil. For example, if the term is a substantive, he tries to find verbs and adjectives based on the same root. This procedure can uncover relata that may be important to the term's meaning. Thus, the concept term interpretation suggests to be a one place predicate expressing a property. The conversion into the verb to interpret brings to light the option of expressing a binary relation. A second, related method is to create mapping sentences. This method may reveal further aspects of the kind of situations in which the term is properly used. A mapping sentence is obtained by formulating questions like: when, why, for what purpose, by who, for whom, wherein, in comparison to what, measured by what, how? The questions are meant to direct our attention to the kind of domain in which an answer is to be found. For instance, the following questions seem to be relevant to the concept term ‘an interpretation’: what kind of thing is an interpretation? what is it an interpretation of? for whom is it an interpretation? by what criterion is it an interpretation? A resulting mapping sentence could be: W is an interpretation of X, to Y, by criterion Z.\textsuperscript{100} A mapping question directs the attention to the domains that must be specified by the analyst. One possible specification could be: mental object W is an interpretation of linguistic object X, to person Y, by semantic criterion Z. Because there are other ways to specify the domains, this method gives an ordered array of options. One way to profit from mapping sentences is by using them to compare rival definitions.

At the third stage it is decided what the analyst shall mean by the concept term, given what can be meant by it (which was found at stage 2). This meaning is called the concept-as-intended. Because the audience of the analyst will be heterogeneous, this concept-as-intended should be defined in a way that makes the definition acceptable to protagonists of competing schools within the field of discipline as well as to those who are to apply the definition and to the interested lay public. One way to accomplish general acceptance is to construct an umbrella definition.\textsuperscript{101} Given that the term can express different concepts, an umbrella definition is a definition that is general with respect to these different concepts. The following definition of umbrella definition seems to be a reasonable interpretation of the concept:

Definition D, of concept term $T$, is an umbrella definition with respect to definitions $D_1, \ldots, D_n$ of $T$ if and only if for every $D_i$, $1 \leq i \leq n$, all cases said to be $T$ in accordance with $D_i$, are also cases of $T$ in accordance with $D$.

An example of an umbrella definition is the following. The term to specify admits of two definitions: ‘making less general, by making explicit some parts’ (is a man is a specification in this sense of is human) and ‘making explicit all parts’ (is a man or a woman is a specification in this sense of is human).\textsuperscript{102} An umbrella definition would

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\textsuperscript{100} This is a my example of a mapping sentence for interpretation. De Groot and Medendorp propose another and more complicated formulation (De Groot and Medendorp 1986, 149).

\textsuperscript{101} Umbrella definition is my translation of the Dutch neologism manteldefinitie. De Groot uses the English term mantle definition (De Groot 1988).

\textsuperscript{102} The first sense corresponds to the notion of a 'specification' discussed in section 1 of chapter 2.
be to make explicit its parts, whether all parts or some parts (De Groot and Medendorp 1986, 97).

Proposing an umbrella definition seems to be directed at two goals. First, umbrella definitions provide a common conceptual framework for communication and stand a good chance of becoming adopted by one's opponents. Second, if the analyst has formulated an umbrella definition, but nevertheless sees good reasons to choose a more specific definition $D_i$, he can use the umbrella definition to clarify how an alternative definition $D_j$, used by other scholars, is connected with his preferred $D_i$.

At the fourth stage a preliminary proposal for a definition is formulated and argued for. The definition at this stage is called definition-for-agreement. The analyst should offer reasons if the definition-for-agreement diverges from the umbrella definition. De Groot and Medendorp maintain that this definition-for-agreement does not need to be devoid of vagueness: a certain level of vagueness can be appropriate (1986, 146).

At the fifth stage, the analyst inquires into the relations between the definition to be agreed on and other data, especially other proposals for a definition. Is the definition compatible with results from the various disciplines, with the needs from those who are to apply scholarly results, and with social and cultural life in general? If, for instance, the definition is at odds with the linguistic conventions of all parties, save one's direct colleagues, then this tells against adopting the definition. At this stage, possible objections against the adoption of the definition-for-agreement are located.

At the sixth stage it is decided how to respond to incompatible data found at the fifth stage. Two strategies exist to accomplish this. The first is to reject data from other areas and offer reasons for rejecting them. The other is to adapt one's definition in order to make the definition compatible.

Adaptation of one's definition can take two forms. Given that the criticism can be formulated as an alternative definition that accommodates the criticism, one can either propose to solve the issue by adopting the logical sum or the logical product. The logical sum is an umbrella definition with respect to the incompatible definitions, while the logical product of n definitions can be interpreted as follows:

Definition $D$ of the concept term $T$ is the logical product of $n$ definitions $D_1,...,D_n$ of $T$ if and only if for all $D_i$, $1 \leq i \leq n$, all cases said to be $T$ in accordance with $D$ are also cases of $T$ in accordance with $D_i$.

Such a kernel definition $D$ is equally specific as or more specific than every $D_i$. Creating a kernel definition is useful if the rival definitions are comparable and resemble each other strongly, so that the remaining core is still interesting enough. It remains an open issue which of the two strategies should be adopted in what type of situation.

At the seventh and last stage, the adapted proposal for a definition to be agreed on, together with an argumentation for it, is published or made public in another way.

Should we agree on definitions?

As we have seen in section 4 of chapter 1, in a simple, asymmetrical persuasion dialogue, the proponent tries to argue $ex concessis$. The proponent has to show the opponent that a critical attitude towards the proponent's thesis in incoherent with the
other components of the position of the opponent. We may expect that something similar applies to the use of linguistic expressions: the proponent has to tailor the wording of her arguments to the semantic dispositions of the opponent. However, De Groot and Medendorp plead for agreement on the meaning of crucial concepts terms: in the ideal case proponent and opponent are both using the same definitions. Is there a need to agree on definitions in order to resolve our differences?

De Groot and Medendorp's plea for agreement probably stems from their concern with difficult and complex debates and can be seen as a practical recommendation. One of the ways in which their sample discussions are complex is that they are symmetrical, in other words, they are complex in the technical sense given to it by Van Eemeren and Grootendorst.

A symmetric discussion, where both parties have to defend a standpoint must be seen as a collection of simple discussions. In argumentative discourse it may happen that a contribution by party 1 can be interpreted in two distinct ways: as a move in the discussion where party 1 is the opponent, and as a move in the discussion where party 1 is the proponent. Consider, for instance, the following fragment:

White: Jan is probably married.
Black: No, Jan is probably unmarried, for he acts like a real bachelor.
White: Jan is probably married, for Jan does not act like a real bachelor, because he never goes out.

The italic part of White's second move can be seen as having two functions: White argues for her own thesis and White objects to the acceptability of Black's reason.

Suppose that Black and White overtly assign somewhat different meanings to the expression to act like a real bachelor, denoted by ALB Black and ALB White. Suppose further that Black tailors his use of act like a real bachelor to White's usage and expresses ALB White with it. What should White do? She uses the sentence Jan does not act like a real bachelor with two different purposes. First, she uses it to argue for her own thesis and consequently she has to tailor its meaning to Black's dispositions and has to express ALB Black with it. But second, she uses it to object to the acceptability of Black's reason. Now, Black used the expression in White's sense, so White has to object to the sentence in this sense, that is in her own sense. Thus, sticking to the rule of tailoring one's use of language to that of the interlocutor may lead to a dilemma in a complex discussion.

Therefore, in complex discussion, it appears to be prudent to reach agreement on definitions of the central terms. This does not imply that the idea of asymmetry has been abandoned. It just has been made easier to tailor one's use of words to those of one's interlocutor. Constructing a new definition that stands a real chance of becoming adopted by the interlocutor is a very charitable and constructive way to respond to active ambiguity. The emphasis De Groot and Medendorp put on agreement about definitions will not be adopted for simple discussions, but should probably be adopted when constructing theories for complex discussions.

2. NAESS ON MAKING EXPRESSIONS MORE PRECISE

In addition to his interest in the empirical study of meaning (section 1.3 of chapter 3), Naess is also concerned with the normative aspects of communication. He offers various recommendations for effective communication and discussion by which
discussants can avoid and criticise irrelevant contributions. Naess perceives a close connection between the devices for investigating meaning and the rules for reasonable discussion: “misuse of language, especially insufficient use of precization, prepares the way for all the usual aspects of irrelevance noted here. It is precisely in precization that one finds the instrument with which to combat incompetent discussion” (Naess 1966, 135, see for the difference with ‘precisification’ section 1.4 of chapter 3).

That an expression \(a\) is a \textit{precization} of an expression \(b\), means that \(a\) is more precise than \(b\) (Naess 1953, 56). Expression \(b\) is, in such a case, called a \textit{deprecization} of \(a\). The notion of a precization is explicated independently of the use that can be made of it. First the concept of a reasonable interpretation is defined. A sentence \(U\) is a reasonable interpretation of \(T\) in a certain kind of situation \(S\), if and only if, \(T\) commonly or usually means the same as \(U\) in \(S\) (Naess 1966, 31). 103 “That an expression \(U\) is a \textit{precization} of an expression \(T\) means here that all reasonable interpretations of \(U\) are reasonable interpretations of \(T\), and there is at least one reasonable interpretation of \(T\) which is not also a reasonable interpretation of \(U\)” (1966, 39). Because reasonable interpretations are tied to kinds of situations, so are precizations. If an expression \(a\) in \(S\) is neither a precization, nor a deprecization of \(b\), the expressions are \textit{incomparable} with respect to precision in \(S\).

Precizations can be used in order to investigate what the sender or receiver has in mind: in what direction does the sender or receiver interpret the expression and at what depth of intended meaning did he or she understand it? When receiving an ambiguous sentence that has to be evaluated, precizations can be used in combination with an evaluation: \textit{if you mean this, I agree, if you mean that, I don’t} (Naess 1966, 17, 30).

In order to avoid misunderstanding, a sender can attempt to choose an expression that conveys the concept or proposition in a more precise way to the receiver. If precization is employed for this purpose of clarifying an issue it is called a \textit{clarifier} (1953, 129, 135). First, \(T\) can be clarified by a \textit{chain sequence}, that is by clarifying \(T\) as expressing the same as \(T_1\) and not \(T_2\), and \(T_1\) as \(T_{1.2}\) and not \(T_{1.1}\), etc. Second, \(T\) can be clarified by listing interpretations of \(T\) at one and the same level of precision and by making explicit which of them were intended: by \(T\) I meant \(T_1\) and \(T_2\), but not \(T_3\) and \(T_4\). This latter technique is called a \textit{radiation sequence} (1953, 132).

The supposition that precization is helpful for avoiding and clearing up misunderstanding is based on the following consideration: if \(P\) and \(Q\) agree on the choice of a precizations of sentence \(T\) then the hypothesis that \(T\) is interpersonally synonymous is confirmed. Suppose \(P\) asserts \(T\) and \(Q\) assents. Do they agree on the same proposition? If \(P\) clarifies ‘I meant \(T_1\) and not \(T_2\)’, and \(Q\) assents, then the hypothesis is confirmed. If, however, \(Q\) reacts in either of the following ways, the hypothesis is disconfirmed: ‘I think \(T\), \(T_1\) and \(T_2\) mean the same thing’, ‘I meant \(T_2\), not \(T_1\)’, ‘To me, \(T_1\) and \(T_2\) mean the same, but something else than \(T\)’. If \(Q\) assents to \(T_1\) and \(P\) goes on by saying ‘By \(T_1\) I meant \(T_4\), not \(T_5\)’, and if \(Q\) assents again, then the hypothesis is even more strongly confirmed, etc. (1953, 132).

Naess gives some guidelines for successful normative definitions. 104 The same guidelines seem also to be applicable to clarifiers (1966, 57-62). Normative

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103 In 1953, he does not use the term \textit{usual}: a is said to be a precization of \(b\) if and only if “every synonymic alternative to \(<\text{a}>\) is also a synonymic alternative to \(<\text{b}>\), and there is at least one synonymic alternative to \(<\text{a}>\) which is not a synonymic alternative to \(<\text{a}>\) and \(<\text{a}>\) admits of at least one synonymic alternative” (1953, 56).

104 The same functions that a precization \(T\) of \(U\) can fulfil in communication, can be fulfilled by a prescriptive definition. The \textit{definiens} \(T\) of a prescriptive definition of \(U\), employed within
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definitions should not have a definiens that is loaded with an evaluation that favours one party and puts the other party at a disadvantage. The definiens should not evade the issue by using in the definiens what should actually be clarified: ‘Christian ethics are those precepts that are based on Christ’s example’. Third, the definiens should not obfuscate the issue: “ ‘Christian ethics’ means ‘a mode of living that stipulates understanding of, and identification with, the loftiest ideals inherent in the true Christian’s standpoint’ ” (1966, 60). Precization often fails, because it is done in actual debate as fast repair work. “The most important part of open debate takes place behinds the scenes. One’s precizations are best arrived at before or after the event, in an atmosphere more proper to the collecting and sifting of arguments and information” (1966, 63).

Naess observes that in practice, our purpose for using clarifiers is not the highest possible degree of exactness, but the elimination of looming misunderstandings (1966, 34). We do not strive for excessive precision because that would be at the expense of conciseness and ease of understanding. Expressions should be sufficiently precise for the purposes at hand, but no more than that, otherwise making the effort to precizate expressions “will be but a waste of time” (1966, 62). In order to arrive at an appropriate level of preciseness, considerations like the following should be taken into account by a speaker or writer (1966, 55-56). Does my position, with regard to sentence $T$, depend on the distinction between precizations $T_1$ and $T_2$? What is the capacity and stamina of my audience, does further precization demand too much of them? If I do not precize $T$ any further, would that lead to a serious kind of misunderstanding or will it be easy to remedy?

Naess mentions other considerations that tell against pushing precization too far. “Excessive precization at the outset can easily prevent people from independently arriving at an understanding of what is being said” (1966, 56). One advantage of arriving independently at understanding could be that the understanding is more thorough and lasting. Another advantage could be that it provides some room for arriving at slightly different interpretations. Suppose someone wants to offer a reason for her thesis, while she does not have a very definite idea of that reason. Then it might be better to state the reason in an imprecise way matching her level of understanding of it, than not to state it at all. The first option leaves open interesting courses of the discussion, where the receiver gets persuaded by the indefinite reason, or where the receiver is able to precizate the sender’s reason. Moreover, if one precizates beyond one’s capacity, the result looks clumsy.

The next quote suggests that Naess thinks diverging interpretations to be advantageous as well: “Someone who clarifies his expressions simply to guard against their being taken in any sense but his own may betray an unwillingness, perhaps also an inability, to see what anyone else can mean by them” (1966, 56) and “[i]n the extreme case where an expression has become resistant to reinterpretation, it is no longer a vehicle for expression but just a formula” (1966, 56). Successful communication is not the exchange of thoughts that remain the same in the exchange, but a process in which people with different points of view come closer to understanding by means of language. To reinterpret an expression from a different discussion situation $S$, can be one of the interpretations that $U$ usually receives in such a situation. Then $T$ is also a precization of $U$. But it can also be a novel interpretation at the moment $t_0$ that $T$ is presented. In that case, $T$ can hardly be said to be a precization of $U$ before $t_0$. But from $t_0$ onwards, the parties know that $U$ shall mean the same as $T$. Consequently, $T$ has become, in a restricted but relevant way, a usual interpretation of $U$ and $T$ would qualify as a precization of $U$ for these parties in $S$.  

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point of view is essential to communication. If we were to formulate a thought so excessively precisely that it would not allow to be approached from a different point of view then it cannot be interpreted from a different point of view and is of no use in communication. In expressing oneself, one has to leave room for understanding from a different stance. Identity of expressed thoughts is not an instance of what Naess seems to call understanding.\textsuperscript{105}

As previously stated in chapter 2, in this book Naess’s notion of a precization is adopted under the alternative name of a proper disambiguating reformulation. Naess is correct in pointing out restrictions for the employment of disambiguating reformulations. The procedure in chapter 7 will implement the idea that using a disambiguated reformulation is only appropriate if it can be shown that someone’s position depends on choosing one disambiguating reformulation at the expense of others.

3. PERELMAN AND OLBRECHTS-TYTECA

According to the view of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, confused notions and ambiguous expressions may play a legitimate role in argumentation. Obscuration is not a problem that needs a solution, but is part of the solution they offer for the problem of creating an alternative to rationalistic philosophy.

Perelman correctly points out that agreement about the way to formulate ideas is not always a prerequisite of communication. It is neither needed, nor possible to start with a language that is already clear enough. In the procedural account of active ambiguity (see chapter 7) the idea of starting with confused and actively ambiguous expressions will be accepted. That procedure, however, is unequivocally committed to the claim that participants of a critical discussion should improve the clarity of their formulations, if it has been pointed out that they are actively ambiguous.

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca acknowledge that obscure language may need clarification, and spend some remarks on that. “A notion seems clear enough as long as one sees no situation in which it would lend itself to differing interpretations. When such a situation arises, the notion becomes obscure, but after a decision as to its univocal application it will seem clearer than it was, on condition that this decision is unanimously accepted (...)” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 135).

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca give an account of dissociation, a phenomenon closely related to the disambiguation of actively ambiguous formulations. Perelman explains dissociation by reference to the possible 'equivocal' status\textsuperscript{106} of one’s vision of reality: one’s vision can be threatened by accepting seemingly incompatible propositions. Dissociation is prompted by the desire to eliminate such an incoherent vision (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 413, Perelman 1982, 127). The coherence can be re-established by making a distinction between two parts of what has been considered a whole.\textsuperscript{107}

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca offer the following example. Paul Janson was of the view that private interests are the main guides for social policy. However, he came across an appearance with ‘equivocal’ status: children working in mines. This

\textsuperscript{105} It could also be seen as an maximal kind of understanding.

\textsuperscript{106} Equivocal here seems to mean ‘ambivalent’ or ‘incoherent’.

\textsuperscript{107} Thus, a distinction between the two meanings of an homonymous word, such as bank, does not count as a dissociation.
child labour seemed to serve private interests, but it did at the same time not correspond with social and public interests. This apparent incoherence in Janson's position prompts the dissociation between two distinct kinds of private interests: on the one hand, there are *real private interests*, private interests that coincide with social and public interests, on the other hand, there are *only apparent private interests*, private interests that do not correspond with social and public interests. By exploiting this distinction, the coherence of his position is re-established (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 425). A more famous example is provided by Berkeley: “there is no matter, if by that term is meant an unthinking substance existing without the mind: but if by matter is meant some sensible thing, whose existence consists in being perceived, then there is matter” (Perelman 1982, 136).

Not every distinction is a dissociation. Dissociation presupposes the original unity of the dissociated concept, and it brings about a more or less profound conceptual change (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 411-412). Moreover, dissociation is associated with the distinction between the true and the alleged meaning of a concept (444). The Janson example can be seen as presenting a dissociative definition of *private interest*, and thus as a way of stating what private interest really is.

There is a connection with the distinction between several interpretations of a linguistic expression. If the original concept C is designated by expression E, and the speaker dissociates C into concepts C₁ and C₂, then the speaker can plausibly distinguish between two disambiguating reformulations of E, that is between an reformulation E₁, expressing C₁, and reformulation E₂, expressing C₂. Following Janson, we could distinguish between two disambiguating reformulations of the expression *private interest*, namely *real private interest* and *apparent private interest*. Dissociation is the conceptual counterpart of many interesting and novel linguistic distinctions. Disambiguations, however, are not *per se* related to the distinction between a real and true meaning as opposed to a customary and apparent meaning.

4. VAN EEMEREN AND GROOTENDORST ON RULES FOR DISCUSSION

According to Van Eemeren and Grootendorst, the parties in a discussion have a joint responsibility for achieving mutual understanding (1992, 196). A speaker should abstain from unclear and ambiguous language, while a listener should interpret carefully and accurately. As we have seen in section 2 of chapter 4, they propose the following rule for discussion that pertains to the use of language: “A party must not use formulations that are insufficiently clear or confusingly ambiguous and he must interpret the other party’s formulations as carefully as possible” (196).

Besides this norm for language use, Van Eemeren and Grootendorst state a rule for performing *usage declaratives*. Performing this kind of speech act is directed at increasing the interlocutor’s comprehension of a speech act (1984, 109). In addition to

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108 Although dissociative definitions seem to make the meaning of an expression or concept more precise, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca observe that this can be qualified by a speaker by saying that the essential meaning of the concept is "not capable of being grasped directly in its plenitude and confusion" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 450). Relative to the confusion that has resulted from not distinguishing between the "real" versus the "apparent" meaning, the dissociation must be seen as clearing things up. The real meaning of the concept can, however, still be imprecise in other ways.
precization, they give the following examples of usage declaratives: definition, amplification, explication and explicitization.

In order to provide the parties with concrete devices that enable them to formulate clearly and univocally Van Eemeren and Grootendorst assign parties the right to provide a spontaneous usage declarative: “Usage declaratives may be performed at any stage in the discussion by both language user 1 and language user 2 (whether or not requested to do so by the other) in order by means of definitions, precization, amplification, explication or explicitization to further the achievement of the illocutionary effect that the performer’s own speech acts are understood” (1984, 153). In section 7 of chapter 4 we have seen a rationale for a rule like this. Moreover, they add that a party is obligated to perform a usage declarative if he or she is requested to do so: “a language user requested by the other interlocutor to perform a usage declarative has an obligation to perform the usage declarative requested” (1984, 158, cf. 2000, 160). The norm for language use is not a member of the collection of rules for critical discussion as it is formulated in 1984, and in 2000 it is among the rules of conduct. However, these collections of rules do contain the rule for performing usage declaratives. 109

An interlocutor may push her right to request for usage declaratives or her right to perform them too far. It is not needed to have a separate discussion rule that proscribes this misuse, according to Van Eemeren and Grootendorst, because the collection of discussion rules is in force in situations where the interlocutors already obey Grice’s co-operative principle: consequently, they do not perform usage declaratives that are unnecessary, nor do they request for them if there is no problem of comprehension (1984, 157).

Like Naess and Crawshay-Williams, Van Eemeren and Grootendorst emphasise that there are limits to the required degree of precision. Formulations and interpretations should be optimal, meaning that the other party will be able to derive the intended meaning at a level of comprehension that both parties hold to be an acceptable level (1992, 196).

In chapter 7 a reasonable procedure for dealing with confusing ambiguities will be explicated as a set of rules for critical discussion. The issue of misuse with regard to one’s rights to perform and request for usage declaratives will, differently than with Van Eemeren and Grootendorst, be regulated by explicit discussion rules. Both parties have a right to provide spontaneous disambiguating reformulations. However, we will explicitly provide rules against misuse: such a move can be criticised as inadmissible. Therefore, the right to disambiguate is, in a sense, a limited right. The same applies to requesting for usage declaratives: the request for disambiguating an actively ambiguous expression can itself be criticised as an improper request. Consequently, this right is also, in a sense, restricted.

109 Van Eemeren and Grootendorst are not very clear on the relation between the norm for language use and the rule for usage declaratives. From the perspective that I have adopted, both norms and rules are part of a complete specification of the model for critical discussion: the norm for language use must be a regulative rule, while the rule for usage declaratives (in some form or other) should be a constitutive rule.
5. WALTON ON DIALECTICAL RULES

Walton endorses Hamblin’s program of dealing with the fallacy of equivocation from a procedural perspective (Walton 1996b, 271). Moreover, he supports the idea of examining the charge of equivocation. However, he does not offer a detailed procedural account of how interlocutors may employ the charge of equivocation.

Walton proposes a heuristic method for respondents who are faced with expressions that might turn out to be pragmatically ambiguous. Grice’s maxim of clarity, Walton contends, should not be taken to require the total avoidance of ambiguity. It should be formulated in such a way as to urge the respondent to be on his guard for ambiguous expressions (Walton 1996b, 267-8). Walton proposes the following formulation that transforms Grice's maxim into an advice for the respondent: “When asked to make concessions to sentences expressed by a questioner in dialogue, check answers containing the same term or expression pairwise, using the test of contradiction (...) to see if a shift of meaning has occurred” (Walton 1996b, 268). The maxim of clarity has a role to play as an initial probe and indicator and has done its work if it leads to discovery of ambiguities (Walton 1996b, 255).

Walton’s contention that pragmatic ambiguity should not be excluded completely from persuasion dialogue should be subscribed to. However, differently from Walton, it will also be defended that a regulative rule is in force, regulating that active ambiguities are inappropriate and should be corrected if they are pointed out.

Walton states that clear use of language is a shared responsibility: the proponent should be clear, and the opponent should ask for clarification if that is needed, "but neither obligation is absolute or unconditional. It seems better to require that both parties should clarify unclarities whenever they see them, and whenever the unclarity is an obstacle to the dialogue" (1996b, 34-5). Unfortunately, Walton does not deal with the issue of how the request for clarification connects with a charge of equivocation.

At another point Walton states that the respondent even has the obligation to ask for clarification if he detects a pragmatic ambiguity. He ought to ask something like: “which proposition do you intend to be taken as part of your argument, this one or that one?” (Walton 1996b, 267). In ambiguity dialectic, this specific obligation will not be adopted as a rule. If pointing out an active ambiguity is favourable for party 1, we do not need to give party 1 an obligation to point it out. It will suffice to give him a right to do so (although he is obliged to ask for clarification in the sense of being committed to achieve his participant's aim). Section 7 of chapter 4 shows which distribution of rights and obligations with respect to the issue of an active ambiguity is appropriate.

In addition to these remarks on the procedural approach to pragmatic ambiguity and the fallacy of equivocation, Walton recommends a somewhat different collection of procedural rules (Walton 2000). These rules are helpful for interpreting

110 Walton sees the test for ambiguity, proposed by Zwicky and Sadock, as the best test available: “a sentence tests as ambiguous where, for a given state of affairs, the sentence can be truly affirmed and truly denied” (Walton 1996, 258). As it stands, the test leads to the discovery of semantic ambiguity, not just to the discovery of contextual or, what Walton calls, pragmatic ambiguities.
ambiguous expressions within a text and can be applied when the speaker is absent and cannot be asked for clarification.

This collection of rules is presented as an elaboration of Grice's conversational maxims and of Govier’s principle of charity. Walton's set is much more specific and detailed than either of these. It is inspired by Miller's study of the principles used for the interpretation of sacred religious texts and articles of law.

The account starts from the presumption that ambiguity, in and of itself, is not fallacious, but that it may still present a reader with interpretational problems that require a solution (Walton 2000, 265). The rules direct attention to contextual factors that are to be taken into account in order to arrive at a plausible and charitable interpretation and are to give helpful guidance on how to disambiguate. All rules are based on the presumption that the writer follows Grice's Co-operative Principle.

These *New Dialectical Rules for Dealing with Ambiguous Terms* are:

1. Evidence of how the term was used at a previous occurrence in a text of discourse should be relevant to interpreting an ambiguous term one way or another at any given point in the text of discourse.
2. When interpreting an ambiguous term in a text of discourse, the interpretation that makes sense of the discourse should be preferred. A meaning that makes the text absurd or meaningless should be avoided.
3. An interpretation of an ambiguous term should avoid making the text of discourse contradictory, if it is possible to assign meanings that avoid or reconcile the contradiction.
4. Given a choice, an ambiguous term should be interpreted in such a way that it contributes to the goal of the dialogue that the text of discourse is supposedly part of. Or if there is doubt, it should be interpreted in the way that best seems to support the goal of that type of dialogue.
5. If a term occurs twice in the same text of discourse, there should be a presumption that it has the same meaning at both occurrences.
6. If an ambiguous term has been explicitly defined at some prior point in the text of discourse, the meaning that conforms to this definition should be chosen.
7. If the discourse is part of some special context, like that of a scientific discipline or domain of expert knowledge, then the technical meaning appropriate for this discipline or domain should be presumed.
8. If a term first occurs in a non-ambiguous way that makes its meaning evident, then if it occurs later in an ambiguous way, it should be interpreted in line with the first occurrence.
9. If a later clear meaning of a term occurs, then it should be relevant evidence to determining an earlier ambiguous occurrence of the same term.
10. If the author or speaker of the text of discourse makes known a preference on how to interpret an ambiguous term at some occurrence, then some weight should be given to accepting that preference in what the term should be taken to mean, other things being equal." (2000, 267-268).

The process of interpretation along these lines yields a presumption about the line of reasoning to which the proponent has committed herself. If no choice can be

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111 Her moderate principle of charity goes: “We presume, other things being equal, that others are participating in the social practise of rational argumentation” (Govier 1987, 150).

112 Walton gives some relations among the rules: rule 1 subsumes 5 and 8; rule 2 subsumes 3; rules 2, 3 and 4 may override rule 1.
made, the rules nevertheless direct attention to the kind of contextual information that could decide the matter (2000, 270).

Walton does not relate these rules for interpreting potential ambiguities to the definition of pragmatic ambiguity or to the fallacy of equivocation. We may guess that Walton’s concept of pragmatic ambiguity can be explicated with these ten rules in a more precise way in the following manner. Expression $E$, occurring in a text $T$, is pragmatically ambiguous in a certain context $C$, if and only if application of these ten interpretational rules when interpreting $E$, given the place it occupies in $T$, and the context $C$, nevertheless does not lead directly to a choice for one specific interpretation. Suppose there is an argument $A$, if $A$ then $B$, therefore $B$ and $A$’s being ambiguous between $A_1$ and $A_2$ causes the argument to be an instance of the fallacy of equivocation. Then rules 1, 5, 8 and 9 press us to interpret $A$'s occurrences the same way, which leads to attributing the proponent an argument that lacks bearing. However, rule 4, which must be a crucial rule because it resembles the co-operative principle of Grice most closely, presses us to reject an interpretation that makes the combined reasons ineffective for persuading the opponent of the acceptability of the conclusion. This fourth rule incites us to adopt a reading in which both occurrences are interpreted differently and in which the argument lacks bite. Thus, these rules may lead to the kind of interpretation dilemma that was dealt with in section 6 of chapter 4.

These rules are rules for the interpretation of expressions, and consequently they are meant to deal especially with the interpretation of semantic ambiguities. They will not do for dealing with active ambiguities. By definition, active ambiguities, being contextual ambiguities, cannot be resolved by applying interpretational rules. In order to deal with them we are in need of the appropriate points of order.