L'ANALISI

LINGUISTICA E LETTERARIA

FACOLTÀ DI SCIENZE LINGUISTICHE E LETTERATURE STRANIERE

UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA DEL SACRO CUORE

2

ANNO XVI   2008

L'ANALISI
LINGUISTICA E LETTERARIA

FACOLTÀ DI SCIENZE LINGUISTICHE
E LETTERATURE STRANIERE

UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA DEL SACRO CUORE

ANNO XVI 2008

SPECIAL ISSUE

Proceedings of the IADA Workshop
Word Meaning in Argumentative Dialogue

Homage to Sorin Stati

Milan 2008, 15-17 May

VOLUME 2

edited by G. Gobber, S. Cantarini, S. Cigada, M.C. Gatti & S. Gilardoni

PLENARY SESSIONS – LINGUISTIC STRUCTURES AND PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS IN ARGUMENTATION

Towards a Dialectic of Tolerance

Marcelo Dascal

Hommage à Sorin Stati

I was in Bucharest for a few days, not long before the fall of Ceaucescu's regime. The fear, both of the authorities and of the people, which reigned in the city was vividly felt everywhere.

To be sure, the communist regime was based on a doctrine that called itself "dialectic". Unfortunately, it was a "dialectic" that had nothing to do with dialogue, with listening to the other, respecting the other, and learning from the other. It assumed that "truth" and "justice" were the absolute monopoly of one side – the side which enforced its monopoly by the sheer force of power. The atmosphere couldn't but be of repression, since there was no room for alternative ideas, which for the dominant "dialectic" were necessarily wrong. There was no room for argument, debate and persuasion other than brainwashing and the passive acceptance of the ideas in power. The reigning doctrine was the nemesis of dialectic, for it denied its *sine qua non*: tolerance.

Sorin grew up in this atmosphere, where in spite of its oppressive character, he developed a concern for truth, a tolerant and gentle character, and a sense for the fundamental value of rational persuasion. No wonder that he was attracted by dialogue and argumentation, and devoted his research to them – not merely as an object of study, but also as a method of research and a form of life.

It is an honor for me, as a member of IADA, the association devoted to the study of dialogue founded by Sorin, of ISSA, the society whose object of study is argumentation, of IASC, the association that recognizes and investigates the essential role of controversy in the growth of knowledge and in the improvement of society, and as a friend, to pay a well deserved tribute to Sorin Stati's memory and to his achievements. He was one of the pioneers in the contemporary study of argumentation. Although his research in this field focused on the linguistic analysis of argumentative discourse, he did not neglect other approaches. His role in leading to the organization, in July 2002 in Lugano, of a memorable conference where the above mentioned three international associations joined forces with the Università della Svizzera Italiana in an interdisciplinary, cooperative as well as contrastive drive for increasing our understanding of the multi-faceted phenomenon of argumentation, was decisive. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that it is thanks to him that we are able to be here in Milano today, discussing together, from each of those perspectives, a topic so close to his work and interest, "Word Meaning in Argumentative Dialogue".

In his lecture on *The argumentative text*, delivered in the Prague IADA conference twelve years ago, Stati addresses certain "critical points and methodical doubts about the linguistic analysis of argumentation as it is conceived recently" (Stati 1998: 3). He undertakes to propose an approach to argumentation viewed as a linguistic, discursive process, a process that "unfolds through a succession of linguistic acts", which he called "argumentative roles" (*ibid.*)[1].

On Stati's view, the argumentative nature of an utterance is defined by its aim, namely, persuading. He stresses that "persuasion" refers to both, the intention of the speaker and the effect it produces in the audience – that is, what other scholars would dub, respectively, the "illocutionary" and "perlocutionary" forces of the utterance. The first point of his critique of current approaches to argumentation targets their attempt to replace persuasion, which he views as "a subjective and uncontrollable notion", by "acceptability", as in the definition of argumentation by van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1991: 154-155):

> Argumentation = a speech act designed to justify or refute a proposition by convincing another person, who acts reasonably, of the acceptability of a position or negative standpoint with respect to this proposition.

Stati points out that "to be persuaded by a thesis is as subjective as accepting the thesis", and reminds us that the same is true of Perelman's expression "adhesion to a thesis". This, for him, is not a flaw, for

> subjectivity, far from being a shortcoming, is the main characteristic of argumentative discourse, since the speaker builds his discourse for a certain hearer (and not for whoever is endowed with reason) (Stati 1998: 4).

In what follows, I will elaborate upon this point. But I will first address a related issue discussed by Stati, namely whether argumentation is inherently connected with conflict, that is, with "resolving a dispute" – a suggestion he also attributes to van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1991: 162).

Against this view, Stati argues that verbal conflict is only one of the types of argumentation, for there are also supportive argumentative dialogues, in which "the interlocutors cooperate in order to jointly solve a problem" (Stati 1998: 5). As an example of collaborative argumentation he mentions Lo Cascio's (1991: 229) observation that we can manifest our "support for an opinion expressed by someone else by justifying it through arguments other than those employed by the person who has initially expressed that opinion". Another example of non-polemic argumentative acts he gives is interpretation in the legal context, when "one argues for a particular understanding of authoritative texts or materials as a special kind of justifying reason for legal decisions" (MacCormick 1993).

I don't quite agree with Stati in considering the examples above, especially the second, as cases of "non-polemic argumentative acts". Whether they are or not depends on the con-

---

[1] Nevertheless, he acknowledges that arguing is also a mental process whose study belongs to logic as well as to psychology.

text in which they are performed. Interpretation, for instance, as practiced in a court, is usually controversial, so that the parts can and often do disagree about it; consequently interpreting in a context of litigation any "authoritative text" – be it a law, a statute, a precedent, or a testimony – in a particular way amounts, in such a context, to providing an argument in favor of one side *and* against the other. Similarly, resorting to a supportive argument which is different from the one originally employed by the holder of a position can be in fact a polemic move if it turns out to be used in the context of defending that position from an objection attacking the original justification – whose repetition would be ineffective for this purpose. In a sense, one could describe the second argument as "repeating" the original one as far as its supportive function is concerned. This is perhaps the reason why Stati views the second too as non-polemic. But, although both indeed support the same position, the interposition of the objection endows the second with an additional, polemic function the first presumably does not have[2].

But I do agree with the spirit of his remark, because argumentation is not necessarily conflictive. In fact, it not only comprises the inherent cooperative element present in every act of communication, but this component may overcome its conflictive counterpart. No doubt, the agreement underlying argumentative cooperation in human affairs usually remains implicit, but it is not as rare as one tends to believe, and certainly not impossible[3]. Furthermore, as I have often argued (e.g., in Dascal 1998a, 1998b), controversies and other forms of polemic exchanges turn out to be, precisely because they are the activity *par excellence* where criticism is exercised, the most valuable – indeed, the essential – tools for the advancement of knowledge and human development. However, as we shall see, in order to achieve this, argumentation and controversy, as well as communication, must involve more than the usual kind of instrumental cooperation we are familiar with through research in pragmatics, dialogue analysis, argumentation theory, and conflict management.

Communication, as we all know, is an exercise in cooperation. As pragmaticists and analysts of dialogue, we have been focusing our attention on the study of the rational tools interlocutors employ in order to achieve success in this extremely complex social enterprise. And we may be proud of how much we learned about its mechanisms, its "logic". We must acknowledge, however, that this is not enough. For communication requires more than instrumental rationality. It implies an ethics, a moral attitude towards the very acts of speak-

---

[2] Stati (1996), in his study of repetition in literary dialogues, observes that even in the case of lexical repetition the change of context within the dialogue usually implies a change in the pragmatic function of a repeated lexeme. *A fortiori*, one should not presume that argumentative moves conserve their "basic" polemic or non-polemic dialectical status if their position in the dialogue changes their function from "justification" to "counter argument".

[3] Leibniz's realistic cum optimistic attitude in this respect is worth recalling. He opens a text about how to develop his project of a "General Science" with the following words: "It is well known that of all visible things man is what can contribute most for human happiness; what is bad is that we do not join forces enough...; were we to work all in cooperation to achieve the common good, each of us would be happier" (*Recommandation pour Instituer la Science Générale*, 1686; in Leibniz 1999: 692).

ing and listening. Without it, no matter how well we master the communicative tools and use them efficiently, doubt always remains about whether we are communicating in the full sense of the term.

The moral attitude I have in mind is, essentially, an attitude of respect for the other. It is not only a matter of granting each other the turns of speech each of us is entitled to, nor of making the necessary effort for understanding the interlocutor and being understood by her, nor even of applying the principle of charity when interpreting the other. The moral respect interlocutors owe each other for communication to succeed implies also their belief that they have something to say to each other, and that this something is valuable: not only instrumentally useful, but intrinsically valuable. The ethics of communication transcends the instrumentality of information. Humans are worth listening to and speaking to not just as sources or users of useful information, but *per se*, *qua* beings intertwined with us in such a way that we belong to a shared communicative network which is a major component of our lives. This moral attitude is inseparable from what dialogue is all about.

It is also an essential ingredient of confrontations of ideas and attitudes which, thanks to the presumption that each of the parties is a valuable contributor to the debate, permit and stimulate the contenders to be at their best in actually making their contributions – be it critical or supportive of their own or of their adversary's position. Confrontations based on this presumption fulfill one of the central requirements of what I mean by "dialectic of tolerance"[4].

You might think that I am referring to the attitude characteristic of that privileged kind of dialogue between persons that reach each other as persons, which Martin Buber calls an "I/Thou" dialogue, in contradistinction to "I/It", in which one of the sides is treated as a mere object. No doubt the person-to-person relation is an important component of the moral attitude I am talking about. But on Buber's view an I/Thou relationship goes beyond that, for it refers to the most genuine and most demanding form of contact between human beings, which requires nothing less than "the perception of one's fellow man as a whole, as a unity, and as unique" (Buber 1965: 80). The privileged character and rareness of this kind of inter-human relation is easily understood once one realizes the enormity of what it demands in order to be achieved. In Buber's words:

> To be aware of a man ... means in particular to perceive his wholeness as a person determined by the spirit; it means to perceive the dynamic centre which stamps his every utterance, action, and attitude with the recognizable sign of uniqueness. Such an awareness is impossible, however, if and so long as the other is the separated object of my contemplation or even observation, for this wholeness and its centre do not let themselves be known to contemplation or observation. It is only possible when I step into an elemental relation with the other, that is, when he becomes present to me (*ibid.*).

---

[4] For further discussion of the relationship between tolerance and mutual respect, in the inter-personal as well as inter-group levels, see Dascal 2003 (Chapters 20 and 21).

Although Buber highlights a set of requirements that might prevent the realization of the kind of relationship he privileges[5], the basic characteristic of the inter-human for him is that it consists in the meeting of *particular* persons:

> The only thing that matters is that for each of the two men the other happens as the particular other, that each becomes aware of the other and is thus related to him in such a way that he does not regard and use him as his object, but as his partner in a living event (Buber 1965: 74).

In this respect he is much closer to the kind of moral attitude to dialogue that I am trying to characterize. For, though relatively common, since it occurs also in simple happenings such as exchanging glances in a crowded streetcar, this attitude manifests the moral respect for the other that consists in accepting him as he actually is:

> The chief presupposition for the rise of genuine dialogue is that each should regard his partner as the very one he is. I become aware of him, aware that he is different, essentially different from myself, in the definite, unique way which is peculiar to him, and I accept whom I thus see, so that in full earnestness I can direct what I say to him as the person he is (Buber 1965: 79).

Still, the properties of "genuine dialogues" that take place in the inter-human sphere are definite enough for Buber to insist in drawing a sharp demarcation between the realms of the "inter-human" and the "social". The former consists in essentially personal relationships and the latter in a set of shared experiences, perhaps most of which – I would add – have to do with instrumental relations. The existence of socially shared experiences, however, "does not mean that between one member and another of the group there exists any kind of personal relation" (Buber 1965: 72). The inter-human is a "separate category of our existence, even a separate dimension... extremely important not only for our thinking, but also for our living" (*ibid.*). Therefore, it is a mistake – which he admits having made when he first introduced the term "das Zwischenmenschliche" – to indiscriminately "ascribe what takes place between men to the social realm, thereby blurring a basically important line of division between two essentially different areas of human life" (*ibid.*).

Leibniz, in contrast to Buber, and in accordance with his own principle of continuity, establishes a common ground for the moral and the instrumental uses of the Golden Rule, which may help us to further understand the nature and role of the moral attitude I have suggested to be a constitutive component of communication, argumentation, and dialectics. In a short but important text, significantly titled *The Other's Place*, he argues that this metaphor, which turns our attention to our fellow humans, captures not only an essential aspect of morality, but also conceptualizes a fundamental cognitive tool of our theoretical and practical activity in other fields.

---

[5] Part of these requirements may originate in the influence of his work on mysticism on his conception of dialogue. See Mendes-Flohr (1989).

The paper begins with the blunt, surprising statement that "The *other's place* is the true point of view both in politics and in morals" (Leibniz 2006: 164). Since the Golden Rule is well known as a basic principle of Christian morality[6], in the remaining paragraphs Leibniz is concerned with explaining, justifying, and applying its counterparts in politics and other domains. The moral tenor of this extension of scope of the "other's place principle", sometimes discussed in terms of juridical considerations, remains present throughout the argument.

The first example is politics, where putting oneself in the place of the other is presented as a mental device capable of revealing the "designs our neighbor may harbor against us" (*ibid.*), just as in morals it reveals our duty towards our neighbor. By pretending, for instance, to be counselor or State minister of an enemy or suspect prince[7], Leibniz testifies, he himself often managed to "guess with utmost precision what is concocted elsewhere" (*ibid.*). Even though the knowledge it affords is not certain, this intelligence tactics is morally justified and can be used in self-protective measures, Leibniz argues, provided the harm caused by these measures is less than the harm that would be caused otherwise.

The grounds for resorting to this mental device, says Leibniz, is that "the place of the other is an appropriate place, both in morals and in politics, to make us discover thoughts that would otherwise not occur to us" (Leibniz 2006: 165). Among these, Leibniz mentions the thoughts that "everything we would consider unjust, if we were in the other's place, must seem to us suspect of injustice" and that "everything we would not desire if we were in that place must make us hold on and examine it more maturely" (*ibid.*). Thus, the other's place principle, though eventually yielding moral attitudes, seems to be basically an epistemological principle, which allows us to overcome our epistemic limitations by resorting to other perspectives or points of view (see Dascal 2000). Its application results not necessarily in abandoning one's beliefs or even in modifying them, but in leading us to reflect more carefully about their justification and their consequences and thus moderating one's natural impetuosity to act on the basis of first impressions or thoughts.

Leibniz's analysis thus grants the other's place principle a surprisingly broad and innovative meaning, combining epistemological and prudential considerations, which ultimately fit its moral origin as well its juridical overtones:

> Thus, the sense of the principle is: do not do or refuse with ease what you would not like to be done or refused to you[8]. Think more maturely about it, after having put yourself in the other's place, as that will provide you with the appropriate considerations for better knowing the consequences of your acts (*ibid.*).

---

[6] Matth. 7,12 "So, whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them, for this is the law of the prophets"; Luc. 6, 31 "And, as you wish that men would do to you, do so to them".

[7] He actually occupied these positions in the Hanover court.

[8] It is worth noticing that the key expression in this sentence is "with ease" (*aisément*).

Although not directly mentioned by Leibniz in "The Other's Place" as one of the domains of application of the principle, it is evident that communication fits the bill. From the point of view of pragmatics, for instance, the quoted recommendations and their corollaries are invaluable guidelines for using the pragmatic maxims of the "logic of conversation". The place of the other principle offers a set of concrete suggestions for implementing the two basic duties of communication, namely making the efforts necessary for being, *qua* speaker, understood by the other and, *qua* addressee, for understanding the other[9]. Given the general asymmetry and the dynamic character of any conversation, these are far from trivial tasks. The interlocutors must make sure that they are relating, at each stage of the conversation, to the same "conversational demand" (cf. Dascal 2003: 37-41), that various kinds of potential misunderstandings are prevented and actually avoided, that directly as well as indirectly conveyed meanings – be it through the so-called "implicatures" or otherwise – are understandable to the other and correctly interpreted by her, and so on. The ongoing mental visualization as well as the actual perception of "the other's place" is an essential tool for performing these tasks. That this is the case is demonstrated by the fact that conversation is punctuated by linguistic and paralinguistic signs through which, throughout the conversation, the interlocutors indicate to each other "where" they are, "wherefrom" they come and "towards" what they move. Without such constant monitoring of the place of the other the conversational machine would hardly work.

    That the other's place is not static is of course a consequence of, among other things, the fact that one of the main purposes of conversation and other forms of communication is to provoke changes in the other's place, be they mental changes, behavioral changes, or both. From this point of view, the communicator acts as a causal agent *vis-à-vis* the addressee, rather than merely as an observer of her "place", and the relation thus established between the former and the latter is primarily instrumental, an "I/It" rather than an "I/Thou" relation. If in this relation, however, one keeps as the focus of attention the other's place, a place that is occupied by a specific particular person who is a wholesome wholeness, rather than by a fragment thereof, as pointed out by Stati and stressed by Buber, the instrumentality of the relation neither excludes nor overrides the moral attitude necessarily involved in a true communicative exchange. In other words, the ever present importance of the place of the other is the unmistaken reminder – for interlocutors as well as for analysts – of the dialogical character of a communicative interaction.

    The moral attitude I have been describing up to this point is hardly acknowledged as part and parcel of true communicative interaction because in every such interaction the moral and the instrumental relations between the communication partners are inextricably intertwined, rather than neatly separated. These relations are, in fact, in a dialectical interplay: the cooperation inherent to a non-coercive instrumental interaction cannot be in place without the moral acknowledgment of the other's place and rights; but such an acknowl-

---

[9] On the use of the term "duty" regarding the task of understanding, see Dascal 2003 (Chapter 4).

edgment cannot, in its turn, rule out the very possibility of that cooperation and its effective implementation.

In an attempt to disentangle these two components of "genuine dialogue", Martin Buber distinguishes, in a passage already partially quoted in this paper, between accepting the other as *the person* he is and accepting *the ideas* or positions that person holds. The former, he believes, is a condition for the latter, but not *vice-versa*: whereas disagreement at the level of ideas can give rise to controversy without thereby suppressing the moral recognition of the other as a potential partner of dialogue, no controversy is possible without such recognition.

> Perhaps from time to time I must offer strict opposition to his view about the subject of our conversation. But I accept this person, the personal bearer of a conviction, and his definite being out of which his conviction has grown – even though I must try to show, bit by bit, the wrongness of this very conviction. I affirm the person I struggle with: I struggle with him as his partner, I confirm him as creature and as creation, I confirm him who is opposed to me as him who is over against me. It is true that it now depends on the other whether genuine dialogue, mutuality in speech arises between us. But if I thus give to the other who confronts me his legitimate standing as a man with whom I am ready to enter into dialogue, then I may trust him and suppose him to be also ready to deal with me as his partner (Buber 1965: 79-80).

This quote introduces us directly into the topic announced in the title of this paper. In fact, it defines one of the levels of what I am calling "dialectic of tolerance". This is the level in which dialectic confrontation can be tolerant because the condition of mutuality is satisfied. That is to say, the partners' reciprocal acceptance as persons is sufficiently solid to permit large divergences in their opinions and free discussion of these divergences without harm to their basic mutual respect.

Consider now a situation in which there is no mutual personal acceptance between opponents A and B. In this case, the mutuality condition is not satisfied and therefore genuine dialogue cannot evolve between A and B. In particular, there is no room for a sharp dialectic confrontation on issues that are significant for both, for such dialectical clashes would risk to eradicate whatever traces of mutual personal acceptance might still exist between the opponents. Were such confrontation to arise, far from being tolerant, in all likelihood it would belong to the type of polemical exchanges I have dubbed "dispute", in which all that matters is victory over the adversary (see Dascal 1998a).

Notice that, having denied the possibility of a tolerant dialectic in situations of mutual non-acceptance, Buber does not further consider what should be done in such cases. In the end of the above quoted passage he considers the case in which one of the contenders, by accepting the other as an opponent, demonstrates thereby his personal acceptance toward him. This, Buber presumes, allows him to trust the adversary will reciprocate his gesture, thus reducing this asymmetric situation to the symmetric case of mutual acceptance. But the same logic or psychology should lead to the presumption that if one side demonstrates non-

acceptance toward the other (e.g., by refusing to discuss or negotiate with him), the other will reciprocate with non-acceptance too, and the situation would then be reduced to non-mutuality, i.e., to the impossibility of tolerant dialectics.

Ultimately, therefore, Buber's framework offers only two alternatives. That is, it sets up a classical dichotomy that permits tolerant dialectics only at one of its poles, the one in which both sides fulfill the condition of fully accepting the opponent as a person. Obviously, the existence of this single possibility of tolerant debate, which can materialize only under very stringent conditions, implies that this option is not a real alternative to violence in the large number of conflicts in which the contenders do not recognize the moral legitimacy of each other *qua* persons, viz. *qua* dialogue partners.

Does this mean that in such cases we should condone war and admit the "dialectic of force and victory", entirely subservient to the sheer instrumentality of exercising power to achieve one's aims, as the only way of handling such conflicts? The prospect of a positive answer to this question mandates further reflection about the framework that yields it. More generally, it mandates inquiring whether the scope and varieties of tolerant debate can be extended beyond the limits set up for it by the dichotomy underlying Buber's well-intentioned analysis, as well as other, less well-intentioned dichotomies that also justify war in desired cases, thus leading to a similar conclusion. Such an endeavor amounts to no less than developing a more comprehensive and subtle "dialectic of tolerance". This is a task which cannot be undertaken in the present context. Nevertheless, I will briefly present some lines of argumentation along which a more optimistic – yet not naïve – picture can be sketched, defended, and further elaborated.

The first point concerns the nature of the key concepts in the issues under discussion, e.g., acceptance, moral attitude, person, tolerance. We have been using these concepts as if they have a generally accepted standard definition that can be spelled out in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. This is not the case. These, and other central concepts in the discussed issues, comport a significant margin of flexibility, which we must not only be aware of in order to avoid falling prey to it, but also for being able to take advantage of it for making progress in the solution of the problems we are trying to solve. Their flexibility (which some would see as vagueness) is due to the fact that, denoting complex, multi-faceted phenomena or entities, their characterization comprises a set of heterogeneous properties. Sometimes this causes ambiguity, and can be overcome by dividing the concept into two or more related (or unrelated) different concepts, as in the pair "accepting someone as a person" and "accepting someone's opinions".

When no clearly identifiable ambiguity is discerned, another way of characterizing the concept's meaning without forcing upon it an arbitrary definition is to view it as a "cluster concept". By this I mean singling out a set of properties or parameters that are "semantically relevant" for describing the concept[10]. These properties are semantically relevant for the concept because they apply to most of the entities or phenomena denoted by the concept (i.e.,

---

[10] The term "semantically relevant" in the sense here used was introduced by Achinstein (1968).

comprised in its extension), but no subset of them applies to all the extension, hence none of them is strictly necessary for identifying something as falling under the concept. Furthermore, the semantically relevant properties may have different centrality or importance in the application of the concept, depending on the context, purpose, domain, and user of the concept. Therefore, the cluster they form has a flexible structure, which may account not only for its different uses but also for its historical evolution.

The concept of "accepting someone as a person", for example, includes in its cluster, among others, properties such as "welcoming his marriage with my daughter", "leaving part of my heritage to him", "respecting his political views", "defending his rights", as well as "perceiving his wholeness as a person determined by the spirit", "perceiving his uniqueness which stamps his every utterance, action, and attitude", "being aware that he is essentially different from myself", and "a man with whom I am ready to enter into dialogue". Clearly for someone concerned with the welfare of his family the first property in the list would carry more weight than the others, for the purposes of explaining the importance of dialogue in interpersonal relations, the last one would be privileged, and in a discussion of the role of spirituality in human life, the fifth. These choices reflect not only the subjective perspectives of the concept's users, but also the multiple ways in which the objective phenomena it covers can be structured. Conceived as a cluster, therefore, a complex concept's composition can be better represented and understood than by reducing it to a standard definition, which suggests a monolithic homogeneity.

A debate, a polemical exchange, a violent conflict are agonistic confrontations that necessarily involve, as a whole, some sort of opposition between the contenders. They usually comprise different stages or cycles, which may contain their appropriate modalities of opposition. My second point addresses the interpretation and status of the oppositions underlying conflicts or debates and different phases thereof.

On Buber's analysis, as we observed, the stage of "genuine dialogue" can only be reached if at a prior stage the contenders accept each other as persons. The latter, therefore, has a more basic status than the former, for it conditions the former's very possibility. Furthermore, according to Buber at that prior stage there are in fact only two mutually exclusive alternatives: either mutual acceptance or mutual non-acceptance. This is a classical dichotomy, which permits advancing to the second stage only in case a determinate pole of the dichotomy materializes. This means a severe limitation of the number of paths towards a possible solution of the conflict. Clearly, it is the result of an interpretation of the opposition between the contenders at the first, basic level, as a logical contradiction. To be sure, from a logical point of view such an interpretation simplifies the problem. Yet, it renders the prospects of solving and of not solving it equally probable. If instead of a dichotomy, a larger number of options were available, additional paths (e.g., selective partial mutual acceptance) for reaching the second stage, and thereby broadening the possibilities of solution, might be opened. This suggests that the strategy of dichotomization of an issue, although useful for the simplification and sharpness it provides, should be replaced by the strategy of

de-dichotomization when the target is not to simplify but to resolve a problem or at least to reduce the brutality of a conflict, especially when it is a complex one[11].

The next point is a simple reminder. It aims to call the attention of the reader to the fact that human conflicts are as old as humankind and have been a constant challenge for humans to cope with. This led to the evolution and accumulation through history, in many cultures, of a large and diversified body of wisdom concerning the management and resolution of conflicts of all kinds. This wisdom comprises an enlightening repertoire of variations on our theme, which are useful to this day. It includes practical recommendations as well as theoretical analyses and principles that together constitute a family of related "arts" – from the art of warfare to the art of avoiding and terminating warfare, through the arts of debating, of arguing, of conducting a controversy, of being always right, of persuading, of seducing, of cunning, of criticizing, of deliberating, of converting, of negotiating, of mediating, etc.[12]. This ancient and ever growing treasury contains much material relevant for the theme of this paper in general, and particularly for the development of a dialectic of tolerance.

The fourth and final point I want to mention is essential for justifying the belief that developing a dialectic of tolerance capable to help resolving apparently unsolvable conflicts is not an ungrounded, utopian dream. Recent advances in the study of rationality and its evolution have, slowly but steadily, led to models of cognition and action other than the traditional logic-based paragon of rationality. Of particular significance for the venture this paper urges us to engage in is the progressive recognition of the role of "soft rationality" in our thought and lives. By this expression, I mean roughly forms of rational reasoning and behavior that, though not relying on the capacity to make inferences with deductive or quasi-deductive certainty and act upon their conclusions, are not condemned, for this reason, to be demoted to the realm of the irrational. "Soft rationality" refers in fact to the immense domain of the "reasonable", which covers the vast areas, most of which are still unexplored, lying between the small peaks of certainty and the abysses of irrationality[13].

It is clear to me that the notion that emerges from the combination of the concepts "tolerance" and "dialectic" cannot but be one of the districts of reasonableness[14], where, like in its neighboring districts, order and peace are achieved and maintained thanks to the kind of agreement and moral acceptance based on the exercise of soft, rather than to the impositions of rigid rationality. Nowhere the need of acknowledging this truth and of further developing the dialectic of tolerance needed to implement it is more evident than in those

---

[11] On these two pragmatic strategies, their uses and their consequences, see Dascal (2008b).

[12] As a small sample of the literature representing or referring to classical examples of some of these arts, see Berti (1987), Corns (1987), Fumaroli (1994), Gracián (2000), Graham (1989), Hettema and van der Kooij (2004), Leibniz (2006), Lloyd (1992, 1999), Schopenhauer (1942), Stump (1989), Sun Tzu (1972).

[13] For further details on my conception of "soft rationality", a concept I consider fundamental not only for the proper understanding of Leibniz's rationalism, see, for example Dascal (2001 and 2008a).

[14] Unlike Rawls (1993) and Thiebaut (1999), who argue that reasonableness is *the* form of rationality that should predominate in the *public sphere*, I defend a broader scope for reasonableness, which includes also the inter-

inhospitable places in the world which its prolonged absence may render place-of-the-other-free, mutual-acceptance-free, genuine-dialogue-free, reasonableness-free, and perhaps ultimately life-free.

References

Achinstein, Peter (1968). Concepts of Science: A Philosophical Analysis. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press.

Berti, Enrico (1987). Contraddizione e dialettica negli antichi e nei moderni. Palermo: L'EPPOS società editrice.

Buber, Martin (1965). The Knowledge of Man. Edited with an Introductory Essay by M. Friedman. Translated by R.G. Smith. New York: Harper & Row.

Corns, Thomas N. (ed.) (1987). The Literature of Controversy: Polemical Strategy from Milton to Junius. London: Frank Cass.

Dascal, Marcelo (1998a). Types of polemics and types of polemical moves. In: Čmejrková, S., J. Hoffmannová, O. Müllerová & J. Světlá (eds.). Dialogue Analysis VI (Proceedings of the 6th Conference, Prague 1996), vol. 1. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 15-33.

Dascal, Marcelo (1998b). The study of controversies and the theory and history of science. *Science in Context* 11(2): 147-154.

Dascal, Marcelo (2000). Leibniz and epistemological diversity. In: Lamarra, A. & R. Palaia (eds.). Unità e Molteplicità nel Pensiero Filosofico e Scientifico di Leibniz. Roma: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 15-37.

Dascal, Marcelo (2001). Nihil sine ratione à Blandior ratio. In: Poser, H. (ed.). Nihil sine ratione (Proceedings of the VII. Internationaler Leibniz Kongress). Berlin: Leibniz Gesellschaft, 276-280.

Dascal, Marcelo (2003). Interpretation and Understanding. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Dascal, Marcelo (2008a). Leibniz's two-pronged dialectic. In: Dascal, M. (ed.). Leibniz: What Kind of Rationalist?. Dordrecht: Springer, 37-72.

Dascal, Marcelo (2008b). Dichotomies and types of debates. In: Eemeren, F. van & B. Garssen (eds.). Controversy and Confrontation: Relating Controversy Analysis with Argumentation Theory. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 27-49.

---

human, i.e., the domain of inter-personal relations, which – as we have seen – Buber rightly distinguishes from the public or social domain. It is in this domain that "genuine dialogue" is possible, provided the interlocutors satisfy the condition of mutual acceptance. If they do, they are in a sufficiently open relationship *vis-à-vis* each other that, contrary to what happens according to Rawls and Thiebaut in the public sphere, they can tolerate rather deep divergences in their philosophical or cultural presuppositions for they accept each other *as the persons they are*. This means that the exclusion of their differences in philosophical and/or cultural background from their public arguments, as proposed by Rawls as a means to avoid the breakdown of public debate, is not needed in the case of the inter-human domain, which is not endangered by the discovery of differences that are assumed anyhow to exist at this level. Once expanded to the inter-human, reasonableness is the rationality that governs "genuine debate", as I would put it, which thus becomes ruled by a dialectic of tolerance that does not require the imposition of arbitrary restrictions upon its argumentative moves.

Eemeren, Frans van & Rob Grootendorst (1991). The study of argumentation from a speech act perspective. In: Verschueren, J. (ed.). Pragmatics at Issue. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 151-170.

Fumaroli, Marc (1994). L'âge de l'éloquence: Rhétorique et 'res literaria' de la Renaissance au seuil de l'époque classique. Paris: Albin Michel.

Gracián, Baltasar (2000 [1663]). El Criticón. Santos Alonso (ed.). Madrid: Catedra.

Graham, Angus C. (1989). Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Arguments in Ancient China. La Salle, IL: Open Court.

Hettema, Theo L. & Arie van der Kooij (2004). Religious Polemics in Context. Assen: Van Gorcum.

Leibniz, Gottfried W. (1999 [1677-1690]). Philosophische Schriften, Reihe VI, Band 4. Herausgegeben von Leibniz-Vorschungsstelle der Universität Münster. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.

Leibniz, Gottfried W. (2006 [1646-1716]). The Art of Controversies. Edited with an Introductory Essay and translated by M. Dascal. Dordrecht: Springer.

Lloyd, Geoffry E.R. (1992). Polarity and Analogy: Two Types of Argumentation in Early Greek Thought. Indianapolis, IN: Hacket Publishing Company.

Lloyd, Geoffry E.R. (1999). Adversaries and Authorities: Investigations into Ancient Greek and Chinese Science. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lo Cascio, Vincenzo (1991). La grammatica dell'argomentare. Firenze: La Nuova Italia.

MacCormick, Neil (1993). Argumentation and interpretation in law. *Argumentation* 9: 467-480.

Mendes-Flohr, Paul (1989). From Mysticism to Dialogue: Martin Buber's Transformation of German Social Thought. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Rawls, John (1993). Political Liberalism. New York: Columbia University Press.

Schopenhauer, Arthur (1942 [1864]). Eristische Dialektik oder Die Kunst, Recht zu behalten. Leipzig: Brockhaus. English transl. by T.C. Saunders (1942). The Art of Controversy. In: Complete Essays of Schopenhauer. New York: Wiley.

Stati, Sorin (1996). Repetition in literary dialogues. In: Bazzanella, C. (ed.). Repetition in Dialogue. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 167-173.

Stati, Sorin (1998). Le texte argumentatif. In: Čmejrková, S., J. Hoffmannová, O. Müllerová & J. Světlá (eds.). Dialogue Analysis VI (Proceedings of the 6th Conference, Prague 1996), vol. 1. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 3-14.

Stump, Eleonore (1989). Dialectic and its Place in the Development of Medieval Logic. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Sun Tzu (1972 [4th century BC]). L'art de la guerre. Transl. by F. Wang, from S.L. Griffith's English edition. Paris: Flammarion.

Thiebaut, Carlos (1999). De la tolerancia. Madrid: Visor.