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ENDOXA AND COMMUNITIES: GROUNDING ENTHYMEMATIC ARGUMENTS

Arguments taking place among the members of a community are deeply rooted in the *endoxa* of the community itself, i.e. in the set of values, rules, knowledge and beliefs that are assumed to be shared within its boundaries. Thus, in a community enthymematic arguments assume a very important role, since, according to Aristotle, the *endoxa* are the very core of the enthymemes. The *endoxa* can be considered as the relevant elements of the common ground of a community; they are activated and selected through the reference to specific keywords, which are of particular significance within the community.

The paper analyzes some examples of enthymematic arguments. The former are taken from the Aristotelian *Rhetoric*; they show in particular the role of the *topoi* in the enthymemes. The last is a real interaction that took place inside an online community, and it clearly shows the role of the keywords and of the *endoxa* in enthymematic arguments.

Keywords: common ground, *topos*, keyword, rhetoric, unexpressed premise, implicitness.

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1. Arguments and communities

Between communities and arguments a very strict, two-way relationship can be identified: on the one hand arguments are a constitutive component of communities, on the other the existence of a community is a necessary condition in order for an argument to take place and to be effective.

Communities, in fact, are built and maintained through communicative processes, which can take place both within them and toward the outside. In the former case, communication is needed to increase the common ground among the members of the community; in the latter, communicative processes have the twofold aim of delineating the boundaries of the community and of guaranteeing the communication between the community and the outside world. Among communicative processes argumentation plays a very important role in building communities, in that it is the main tool through which a common ground can be negotiated and established; moreover, argumentation is also a guarantee of democracy, since forms of community excluding or outlawing argument are strictly disqualified (Maier 1995: 369).

On the other hand, an even minimal form of community must exist in order to make communicative events and arguments possible; for a critical discussion to take place, e.g., it is necessary that interlocutors share a more or less extended common ground, at least "in order for participants to judge it reasonable to enter into critical discussion ... and to negotiate a procedural basis for critical engagement" (van Eemeren et al. 1993: 172). As Jacobs and Aakhus observe, "traditional conceptions of argumentation, including pragma-dialectics, have generally presupposed a 'common ground' approach to rational decision-making" (2002: 39). The pragma-dialectical approach, in fact, sets the existence of sufficient common ground – in terms of shared background knowledge, values and rules – as a necessary condition in order to engage in a critical discussion. In the corresponding model for critical discussion the existence of such common ground is to be verified in the opening stage of the dispute (van Eemeren et al. 1996: 282; van Eemeren et al. 1993: 26-27).

Communities play an important role with regard to arguments' evaluation as well. This issue has been brought into focus, among others, by Ray McKerrow (1992: 523-524), who analyzed the use of arguments in three different "argument communities" – the social, the philosophical and the personal communities. His claim is that the community determines what argumentative norms are appropriate and what evaluative

standards should prevail (Zarefsky 1992: 425). This way, McKerrow emphasizes the relationship that exists among shared values, common personal bonds, and argument evaluation; communities are characterized by the specific rules which govern their argumentative behavior, by the social practices which determine their communication rules, and by their own "display" of these rules and social practices in response to challenges from within or outside the community.

McKerrow's notion of "argument community" resembles Stephen Toulmin's "argument fields"[1]. Toulmin exploited this notion in order to set the soundness' conditions for an argumentation: arguments can be field-invariant, when their soundness is independent of the field of argumentation, or field-dependent, when their soundness is limited to a specific field. Due to the vagueness of the notion, "argument fields" have each time been interpreted as "rhetorical communities", "discourse communities", "disciplines", "collective mentalities", and so on (van Eemeren et al. 1996: 204).

So, arguments can be discussed in terms of the community, field or sphere in which they take place. Blair and Johnson (1987) have also stressed the relationship between arguments and communities: they regard argumentation as a particular activity regulated by the community of model interlocutors; acceptability of premises and arguments depends on this community, which is defined in normative terms.

The notions of community and common ground are significant with regard to the structure of arguments as well: they are, in fact, of great interest to all the implicit facets of argumentation, as for instance the unexpressed premises of the enthymemes, the *endoxa*, the *topoi*, and so on.

2. *Endoxa* and enthymemes: the role of implicitness

The main link between communities and arguments can be found in the Aristotelian notion of *endoxon*. *Endoxa* are the remarkable opinions of a community, that is to say the propositions that are in the common opinion (i.e. in the *doxa*), and, as a consequence, are generally accepted, reliable and credited within a community. Aristotle in his *Topics* defines the *endoxa* as those opinions "which commend themselves to all or to the majority or to the wise – that is, to all of the wise or to the majority or to the most famous and distinguished of them" (*Topics* I 100b 21-23).

[1] See Toulmin 1958: 11-43.

Endoxa are the very core of the enthymemes, since enthymemes differ from analytical syllogisms in that their premises are not necessary, but only probable, or rather *endoxa*, i.e. shared and accepted by a community (*Rhetoric* II 1402a).

The enthymeme "is the syllogism of rhetoric, precisely because, as the form of deductive demonstration, it incorporates in its argument all of the elements demanded by language as the vehicle of discourse with another: *reason* [i.e. *logos*], *ethos, pathos*" (Grimaldi 1998: 26). The very core of enthymemes, thus, is the relationship of the discourse's argumentative structure with speakers and hearers – with their common ground as well as with the speaker's attitude (*ethos*) and the audience's mood (*pathos*) –,since this relationship defines the rhetorical nature of enthymemes. In order for an enthymeme to be effective, its premises must be deeply rooted in the beliefs of the involved community. The concept of *endoxon* is pivotal in Aristotelian rhetorical theory, since it has to do with the very nature of enthymeme's premises. This is to be seen as the main characteristic of the enthymeme.

Nevertheless, the rhetorical, logical and philosophical traditions subsequent to Aristotle have usually considered the enthymeme simply as a truncated syllogism, because of the frequent lack of a premise in the expression of the enthymematic argument. As a matter of fact, this is an incidental feature of the enthymeme, since it is a consequence of the nature of its premises. Aristotle explains this point through the well-known example of Dorieus, the winner in an Olympic competition: if one wants to show that Dorieus has won a competition where the prize is a crown, he just needs to say that he won the Olympic games; there is no need to add that the prize of the Olympic games is a crown, since everybody knows it. In this case the hearer is able to add the unexpressed premise himself, since it is *endoxos* (*Rhetoric I* 1357a).

In enthymemes the speaker "leaves unmentioned the taken-for-granted aspects of an assertion or proposal and leaves unsupported those aspects which get immediate assent" (Jackson and Jacobs 1980: 262); and he is allowed to do that, precisely because he assumes that everybody knows and everybody agrees on those aspects. So, as Jackson & Jacobs noted, "enthymemes can be considered a special instance of Grice's Quantity Maxim: Be as informative as necessary for the purposes of agreement, but avoid being more informative than is necessary" (1980: 263).

We can single out three different facets of the role of the implicit in argumentation, i.e. three reasons why in the enthymemes a premise can be left unexpressed:

1. cognitive reasons: they can be led back to the need to proceed in the interaction and not to come back again to what has already been agreed on (Rigotti 1999: 49);
2. psychological reasons: explaining to the interlocutors what they already know well would prejudice the confidence between the speaker and the hearer that is required in any persuasive discourse (Tardini 1997: 440);
3. argumentation reasons: giving too much support for an assertion would be detrimental, in that it would increase the number of places where disagreement may occur, without improving prospects for agreement (Jackson & Jacobs 1980: 264).

According to Lloyd Bitzer, enthymemes are interactive processes, because they occur when speaker and audience jointly produce them; their successful construction is accomplished through the joint efforts of speaker and audience. In fact, "to say that the enthymeme is an 'incomplete syllogism' – that is, a syllogism having one or more suppressed premises – means that the speaker does not *lay down* his premises but lets his audience supply them out of its stock of opinion and knowledge" (Bitzer 1959: 407). In Bitzer's view, enthymemes can be seen as dialogues between the speaker and the audience; in such dialogues the speaker asks for premises and the audience supplies them, since they are notions already possessed by the hearers. Thus, successful building of enthymemes depends on the cooperative interaction between the arguer and his hearers.

3. *Endoxa* and common ground

Endoxa are inserted into the common ground of a community. Herbert Clark has defined two people's common ground as "the sum of their mutual, common or joint knowledge, beliefs and suppositions" (1996: 93). Clark has then distinguished two different kinds of common ground: the communal common ground and the personal one. The communal common ground is the sum of all the knowledge, beliefs and assumptions two or more people take to be universally held in the communities they mutually believe they both belong to; it is the evidence about the cultural communities people belong to, i.e. the encyclopedic knowledge of a cultural community. On the other hand, two people's personal common ground is constituted by all the mutual knowledge, beliefs and assumptions they have inferred from personal experience with

each other. *Endoxa* operate at the level of the communal common ground of a cultural community[2].

In communication, grounding is the process through which common ground, both communal and personal, can be properly updated (Clark and Brennan 1991: 128).

In argumentation, grounding can be seen as the process through which a standpoint is supported. In this sense, for instance, Stephen Toulmin used the term "grounds" as a synonym of the "backings" that support the warrant of a conclusion; grounds (or backings) are dependent on the field of argument (Toulmin 1958: 112).

What is the relationship between the *endoxa* and the process of grounding a standpoint? We have already seen that the *endoxa* are one component of the common ground of a community; but how are they operating in the arguments? *Endoxa* are the parts of the common ground of a community that become relevant in actual arguments; they are the portion of the shared knowledge and of the common beliefs of a community that is activated in the argumentative interaction in order to let the argument proceed and the standpoint be supported. In particular, *endoxa* are selected to be employed as premises – either implicit or explicit – in enthymemes.

4. *Endoxa* and *topoi*

In the ancient and medieval traditions in logic and rhetoric this way of selecting arguments was called the "topic". According to Aristotle, *topoi* (i.e. "places") are nothing but the most important method of selecting arguments for the enthymemes: they are a repository from which arguments can be selected, they are the sources and the seats of the enthymemes. In the Aristotelian theory, *topoi* are never "precooked" arguments ready to be adapted and inserted into argumentative discourses (as the actual meaning of the word "commonplace" could suggest), but a set of knowledge – both specific and general – from which it is possible to methodically produce argumentative discourses (Piazza 2000: 166). Boethius interpreted Aristotelian *topoi* as universal and well-known

[2] A cultural community is defined as "a set of people with a shared expertise that other communities lack"; this shared expertise "consists of facts, beliefs, procedures, norms, and assumptions that members of the community assume they can take for granted in other members" (Clark 1996: 102).

propositions from which the conclusion of syllogisms derives[3]. *Topoi* can be seen as places where the arguer can go in order to find the *endoxa* he will use as major premises in the enthymemes.

Aristotle distinguished two kinds of *topoi*: the common *topoi* (*koinoi topoi*, which he called simply "*topoi*", too) and the particular *topoi* (*idia* or *eide*). The former are general rules which state how to link specific knowledge, and can be applied in many cases. As William Grimaldi observes, they "provide modes of inference, i.e. forms of deductive reasoning which the enthymeme can assume in its effort to speak most convincingly to a particular audience" (1998: 26). In general, we can conceive of the Aristotelian common *topoi* as the plots, the templates, the patterns of enthymematic arguments. The different *topoi*, then, are nothing but different applications of the general rule of the deductive implication to the various fields of human arguing; in the case of the particular *topoi*, these patterns are drawn from the shared experience of the community which uses them (Tardini 1997: 440). The specific *topoi*, in fact, are *endoxa* shared within specific fields/communities[4]; therefore, they are peculiar of a subject (*Rhetoric* II 1396b). Thus, *topoi* have their roots in the *endoxa* of a community.

In the second book of his *Rhetoric* Aristotle illustrates 28 common *topoi* that the arguer can adopt (or where the arguer can go) while reasoning. The first one is the *topos* from the opposites: "Self-control is good, for lack of self-control is harmful". Aristotle explains the *topos* this way: "It must be considered whether the opposite property belongs to the opposite of the subject in question, refuting the argument if it is not, confirming it if it is".

The third *topos* enables the arguer to draw enthymemes from the reciprocal terms. For instance: "If you are not ashamed to sell, then I am not ashamed to buy". Aristotle in this case doesn't offer any explanation; we have to suppose a general rule such as: "Reciprocal terms have the same properties". The same applies, for example, to the *topos* from the analogy, the sixteenth: "If you consider a tall youngster as a man, then you have to consider a short man as a youngster"; the underlying rule

[3] "Universales ac notissimas propositiones, ex quibus syllogismorum conclusio descendit" (In Ciceronis Topica Commentarium 1051 D).

[4] According to Zarefsky, Toulmin's notion of "field" resembles very much the concept of topos (i.e. place, location): "The term 'field', of course, was a metaphor for the location of arguments" (Zarefsky 1996: 49).

should sound like that: "The same relation which exists between two properties also exists between their opposites".

Similar is the case of the fourth *topos*, from the more and less: "If not even the gods know everything, human beings can hardly do so"; but in this case Aristotle offers an explanation: "If a predicate does not belong to a thing to which it is more likely to belong, it clearly does not belong to a thing to which it is less likely to belong".

It is clear that the explanation of this *topos* is different from that of the *topos* from the opposites: in that case the explanation was formulated by Aristotle as guidelines to the arguer, i.e. as "an indication of how a speaker can find a relevant argumentation (in logical terms, the premise of an argument), given the standpoint (in logical terms, the conclusion of an argument) that he is defending or attacking. This is the search function of the topic" (Braet 1999: 113); the *topoi* from the reciprocal terms and from the more and less, on the contrary, are formulated as a general rule which has the function of guaranteeing the argument. This distinction had been acknowledged also in the ancient and medieval rhetoric, which distinguished two components the *topos* was composed of: an instruction (*paraghelma*) and a logic law metalinguistically formulated (the proper *topos*). Thus, the two different ways of formulating a *topos* correspond to the two main features of the topic, which can be considered a method of finding and selecting arguments (search function of the *topos*) as well as the form of deductive reasoning in the various fields of human arguing (guarantee function).

5. An example from the cyberspace

The analysis of a real discussion can help us understand the issue. The discussion we are going to analyze is taken from an Italian on-line community for football supporters, CurvaNet[5]. CurvaNet has the structure of a newsgroup, i.e. it consists in a big archive of messages posted by community's members, subdivided into boards, which in their turn are subdivided into discussions (forums). The messages we are going to take into consideration are taken from a discussion that took place in February 2001 in a board called "Racism"; the discussion was opened by a message of the community's administrator and was entitled: "Mr. John, I have deleted your nonsense"[6].

[5] http://groups.msn.com/CurvaNet.

[6] The original messages are in Italian. For privacy reasons we have changed the nicknames of

This is the message of the community's administrator:

> "Dear Mr. John, I wanted to inform you of a great pleasure: I have deleted your insane messages. (...) Don't insist on your racist messages, for I'll throw you out of this community. Mr. John, you'd better conform to the directive. Understand? Or not?".

The point at issue in this message is the belonging to the community of a member who posted racist messages in a community's forum. The prevailing illocutionary act is clearly a public warning: what the administrator is doing through the message is warning a member of the community not to write racist messages anymore, otherwise he will be thrown out of the community. The warning is accomplished through different speech acts: a prohibition ("don't insist on your racist howlers"), followed by the threat of the expected sanction ("I'll throw you out of this community"); a direct advice ("Mr. John, you'd better conform yourself to the directive") followed by a rhetorical question ("understand?") which has the function of sealing the whole warning.

Although the message is not argumentative in itself, nevertheless it is not difficult to acknowledge that it presents a rigorous logical structure, because the warning is shaped as a conditional proposition: $p \rightarrow q$ (if p, then q: "if you go on writing racist messages, then I'll throw you out of this community"). A warning, in fact, can be led back to a conditional proposition which has some peculiar features that the conditional relation imposes to both the condition (p) and the consequence (q):

1. p must be an action the addressee has in mind to do (or not to do), and must therefore depend on the addressee's will;
2. since q is a threat, it must be something negative for the addressee and it must depend on the sender's will;
3. the sender must be in a hierarchically higher position than the addressee, or anyway he must be in the right condition to make a warning.

The argument that underlies and founds the warning of the community's administrator can be traced back to the following enthymeme: "you posted racist messages; therefore you can be thrown out of the community". The argument, in other words, is constituted by the threat and by the reason for it. We can reconstruct this way the whole argument:

the interlocutors, calling Louis the administrator of the community and John the member.

Tab. 1: The argument of the community's administrator

a) Who writes racist messages, is racist	major premise, *endoxon*
b) John wrote racist messages	minor premise
c) John is racist	from a) and b)
d) Racism is contrary to the nature of communities	*endoxon*
e) Racists are not allowed to belong to the community	from d)
f) John is not allowed to belong to the community	from c) and e)
g) But John is a member of the community	
h) A contradiction occurs	from f) and g)
i) The contradiction implies a choice: either John stops writing racist messages, or he will be thrown out of the community	from h)

The first part of the argument (from a) to c)) is an application of the *modus ponens*; the first premise is a common *topos*, which we have stated as a general rule; the second premise is expressed in the message of the administrator, while the conclusion is left unexpressed. The conclusion of the *modus ponens* acts also as the minor premise in the second part of the argument (from c) to f)), which takes the form of a syllogism where e) is the major premise, c) the minor premise, and f) is the conclusion. The major premise e) is an *endoxon* that is founded on another *endoxon* d), which is in its turn linked to other similar *endoxa* concerning racism, such as "Racism is negative", "Racists are not worth belonging to a community", and so on.

In the last part, this enthymematic argument shows a contradiction between f) and g). It is worth reminding here that ancient rhetoric explicitly linked the enthymeme to the contradiction (*contrarium*); for instance, Anaximenes in his *Rhetoric to Alexander*, which is not much prior than the Aristotelian *Rhetoric*, first defined the enthymeme as being characterized by showing contradictions, oppositions or inconsistencies (*Rhetoric to Alexander* 1430a; see also Bons 2002: 21-22). This way of conceiving of

the enthymeme had particular influence on the most important Latin rhetoricians, such as Cicero, Cornificius, and Quintilian (Tardini 1997: 429-431). In our case, the contradiction arises between the racist behavior of John and his belonging to the community, which is by nature against racism. By showing a contradiction, the argument implies also the necessity of a choice for the member whose behavior is fallen into contradiction.

It is worth noticing that the only propositions expressed in the message are b) and the conclusion i); all the rest of the argument remains implicit, since it can be recovered making reference to the common ground of the community, which supplies the *endoxa* and the *topoi* needed to complete the argument.

Let's now consider the answer of the racist member:

> "I'm sorry you are as intolerant as you censor the opinions that don't agree with yours. (...) You have used such heavy terms as 'stupid', 'ignorant', and so on, but don't you think that, when a behavior involves thousands of people, (...) they can't be anymore branded as exceptions? Are we all stupid? All ignorant? Or rather are we just people who think in a different way? You may believe it or not, but I don't think I'm a racist".

The accused member develops his counter-argument by attacking the truth of the minor premise c) of the administrator's enthymeme ("John is racist"). He accepts the *endoxa* concerning racism that ground the administrator's argument; in fact, he feels himself injured by the word 'racist' (as well as by the words 'stupid' and 'ignorant'), and he replies by denying to be a racist, i.e. by challenging the minor premise of the administrator's argument. John denies being racist by showing that his behavior is shared among many people, and therefore it cannot be branded as negative; the first moves of his argument can be reconstructed in this way:

Tab. 2: The first moves of John's argument

a) If a behavior is shared among many people, it must not be rejected	major premise
b) My behavior is shared among many people	minor premise
c) My behavior must not be rejected	from a) and b)
d) Racism must be rejected	*endoxon*
e) My behavior is not racist	from c) and d)

The first proposition is a *topos* acting as the conditional rule of the *modus ponens*; the *topos* is concerned with the concept of *endoxon* itself. John expresses both the premises of the *modus ponens* as rhetorical questions ("Don't you think that...? Are we all stupid? ..."), and leaves implicit the conclusion, which acts also as the major premise for the following syllogism. The minor premise of the second syllogism is the *endoxon* d), which is linked to all the *endoxa* concerning racism as a negative quality we have seen operating in the administrator's message. The syllogism leads to the conclusion that John's behavior is not racist.

So, if the point at issue is not a matter of racism, it must be just a difference of opinions. John shows this point by shifting the attention on some particular keywords: while the administrator centered his argument on the keyword "racism", which activated the *endoxa* we have seen, John lays out his counter-argument on such keywords as "tolerance" and "difference". These new keywords refer to *endoxa* such as "Different opinions must be accepted (tolerated)", "Who doesn't accept different opinions is intolerant", "Intolerance is a negative quality", "Intolerance is contrary to democratic communities", and so on. John develops his argument in the following way:

Tab. 3: The final moves of John's argument

a) Who doesn't accept different opinions is intolerant	major premise, *endoxon*
b) Louis censored my opinions	minor premise
c) Louis is intolerant	from a) and b)
d) The administrator of a community must not be intolerant	*endoxon*
e) A contradiction occurs	from c) and d)
f) The contradiction implies a choice: either Louis stops censoring my opinions, or he cannot be anymore the administrator of the community	from e)
g) But it cannot be questioned that Louis is the administrator	
h) So Louis must stop censoring my opinions	from f) and g)

John states the minor premise and the conclusion of the *modus ponens* (a)-c)), which presupposes the *endoxon* a) as the major premise. In John's opinion, this *endoxon* is supposed to be shared in every democratic community, where freedom of thought and of speech is guaranteed. As a matter of fact, John ends expressing his argument at this point, but it is not difficult to understand that the argument has further implications, such as those expressed in the propositions d) - h). John, in fact, is trying to defend his behavior and to show that the administrator's public warning is unjustified. Therefore, he argues that the administrator's behavior is fallen into contradiction, because the administrator of a community must be just, democratic, tolerant, and so on, while Louis has been intolerant and censored John's opinions. Also in this case the enthymeme goes so far as to show a contradiction between Louis's behavior and the rules imposed by his role of administrator of a community; and also in this case the contradiction implies the necessity of a choice, or rather the necessity that the administrator changes his behavior and stops censoring John's opinions.

6. Conclusions

The examples clearly show the role of the *endoxa* in enthymematic arguments. Both messages of the administrator and of the member under accuse leave their arguments largely unexpressed, explicating only those parts which are strictly necessary to the development of the whole argument; the expressed parts of the arguments contain the new data introduced in the discussion, such as the keywords employed in order to activate the *endoxa* and the *topoi* suitable for the argument.

The unexpressed parts of the argument are mostly *endoxa* and *topoi*; in the discussion they are easily recoverable, thanks to the keywords, in the common ground of the community. For instance, once the administrator of the community showed that John's messages were racist, he did not need to explain that racism is negative and that racists are not allowed to belong to the community, since everybody in the community knows it and everybody in the community agrees on it; neither he needed to explain that if one writes racist messages, he is to be considered racist. Through the reference to the keyword "racism" the administrator activates the *endoxa* and the *topoi* that allow him to jump directly to the conclusion of the argument and to formulate the public warning to John.

Endoxa are the relevant elements of the common ground of a community; they are activated and selected through the reference to specific key-

words, which are of particular significance within the community. In our example, keywords such as 'racism' – which refers to a problem of great account in the community of football supporters – or 'tolerance' and 'difference of opinions' – which are closely linked to the very nature of democratic communities – are introduced in the arguments in order to activate the appropriate *endoxa* and let the argument proceed.

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