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Authority arguments in academic contexts in social studies and humanities

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ABSTRACT: In academic contexts the appeal to authority is a quite common but seldom tested argument, either because we accept the authority without questioning it, or because we look for alternative experts or reasons to support a different point of view. But, by putting ourselves side by side an already accepted authority, we often rhetorically manoeuvre to displace the burden of the proof to avoid the fear to present our opinions and to allow face saving.

KEYWORDS: expert, argument from authority, testimony, communication, critical thinking, pedagogy.

1. INTRODUCTION

The amount of information we can find nowadays about almost any matter has increased enormously and the access to it has become easier by means of the new technologies of information and communication. This said it becomes transparent that it is not always a straightforward task to sort through the entire and complex amount of literature to try to find the right information to make a decision about a matter directly and on our own. Moreover, in many cases this information is technical or there are too many options to weigh up and to assess deeply. To deal with this general problem we rely on the opinion of the so called experts. Roughly said, experts are specialists in a particular field or profession and their expertise or knowledge in the field gives them a special status of authority that, when put to work, gives us assurance and help to make many decisions in our everyday life. In many cases, we don't question their expertise; we just rely on them and use their opinions or guidance to go forward and decide among the different possibilities that can be present in many facets of our life, that is, we accept experts as a kind of authority on which we depend.

In this paper I want to analyze a specific use of expertise and authority in academic contexts, that is, the use we, scholars, and also students make of previous works in our fields by citing or quoting them. We will concentrate in the kind of citation used in the social sciences and humanities and, by doing so, we will try to shed some light to the current discussion on the epistemology of testimony, hoping to add some new evidence to support an anti-reductionist approach to it and the need to consider testimony as a social practice subjected, first, to general conditions of communication, second, if used in an argumentative setting, subjected to the special conditions of the "the game of giving and asking for reasons" (Brandon 1994: 15) and, third, subjected to specific conditions defined by the social setting in which this practice is used.

In academics contexts a usual way to present a paper is by making reference to previous works on the matter. This procedure is standard as it can be seen in the numer-

ous manuals at use on this topic. In many books on critical thinking we also can find general and similar advices to write a paper, for example: "Base your paper on research rather than on your own unfounded opinions" or "Don't present other people's ideas as your own" (Ruggiero 2003: 110).

Nevertheless, outside the field of argumentation, if we asked the question about how we would consider an appeal to authority as a mean to support a claim, it is quite possible that the non-reflective answer would be to consider this argument weak or even fallacious. It is also possible that somebody would name this kind of argumentation by its Latin name, *ad verecundiam,* but in many cases there would be no commentaries on reasonable uses of the appeal to authority, no matter how widely we apply it in ordinary life and in our classrooms and academic writings. These typical answers are in part due to the classical treatment of this scheme in some well known logic textbooks and in many other actual resources (i.e. it is interesting to have a look about this question at the Internet).

If we added that the authority is in fact an expert, the answer wouldn't be so categorical; still, there would be some doubts depending on the subject of expertise and in the definition of an expert as such. Now, if we asked how we should define to be an expert, the answers would surely include the knowledge about the issue and, maybe, the recognition as an expert, i.e., as having some type of specific knowledge, by the community. But what is being an expert or, as said so, knowing about an issue in social matters or the humanities?

Another question we will consider is whether citations can be schematized as instances of the usual argumentative scheme "appeal to expert opinion" as presented by Walton (1997) and so, whether we can apply to them the list of critical questions usually presented with this argumentative scheme.

Furthermore, it is only recently that studies in epistemology have begun to explain how testimony can be considered a useful and usual source of knowledge or justified beliefs about an issue by itself, i.e. without having to reduce it to other more reliable sources of knowledge. These studies try to explain how we can acquire knowledge or justified beliefs only on the word of another, without having to check the direct evidence of the information to confirm it. Prior to this interest, there have been lengthy discussions about the appeal to the authority included in all instances of testimony. Traditionalist and individualist approaches to the problem, mainly due to well known cases of faulty application and bad consequences of this appeal, have widely supported, in general, that we should try to find an alternative form to confirm the assertions made by testimony.

Nowadays there is a new and increasing interest in this subject, either to try to find a common definition of the many different practices that fall under the name of testimony, or to try to find ways of explaining when a person is warranted in accepting a testimony. It is important to lay the basis to avoid the possible misuses of the beliefs acquired by testimony by giving a normative approach to the use of it and we believe that current positions that consider testimony as a social communicative practice subjected to special conditions defined by the context in which testimony is given, may enable us to provide a better approach to this phenomenon.

Finally we will try to find an application of the discussion for a better use of citations and for instructional purposes.

2. QUOTATIONS AS INSTANCES OF 'THE APPEAL TO EXPERT OPINION' ARGUMENT IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

As we have already said, the use of the opinions of experts and authorities is almost unavoidable nowadays to go forward in many aspects of our lives. We accept many things on the basis of what experts tell us without even questioning their opinions. It is also well known that this dependency on authority restrings somehow our autonomy to decide and to think for ourselves or our development as critical thinkers. We want to argue that this is what happens in many cases when students write scholar papers because they apply, in an automatic way, a so institutionalized and standard method to write that, in many occasions, it prevents them from thinking about the different options in a case, and makes it possible to avoid the fear to present new and predictably polemic ideas.

When in an argumentative discourse we cite an expert to support our claim, we are doing two acts together, first we are displaying her statement, assertion, utterance or saying or, better said, our interpretation of it and then, we are invoking her authority as a reason to support our claim. According to a classification by Brandom (1994) on forms of supporting the legitimacy of an assertion, when we quote, we are supporting our assertion by means of a "person-based authority", that is, we are "deferring to the claim of another" to support our claim (p. 175). Tindale (2007) distinguishes two sub-classes in person based authority: the authority held because of the social status or the position a person holds in society, and the so called "cognitive authority" of the person, i.e., the authority that has to be with knowledge in a given field of expertise.

It is clear that it is the second class that interests us in relation with the argumentation game. Nevertheless, uses of the social status based authority in scholar contexts are also found in the classrooms in interactions between teachers and students, for instance. Sometimes, due to time pressures to finish the content of a program, for example, this practice undercuts all the possibility of debate and discussion and bases the study of a subject on the reproduction of already explained contents.

Cognitive authority or expertise, if accepted as reliable, represents a way of assuring the support of a point of view and, in consequence, a way of persuading someone about this point.

Experts in a field hold a kind of authority associated to their previous performances and knowledge in their working field, that is, the opinion of an expert is a source that exhibits "authority" on his sayings, not only, but also because of the status the expert has in the field. But, if we want a reasonable use of an expert source, we should not consider an authoritarian status of it:

> 'Authority' of the cognitive type is used here in a fairly weak sense of meaning a challengeable source, open to critical questioning, but one that is given a certain standing or weight of presumption as (fallible) evidence, where direct access to knowledge (or "the facts") is not available within the practical constraints of arriving at a prudent conclusion on how to proceed in argumentation. (Walton 1997: 84)

In spite of the bad reputation the appeal to authority has in the general literature or in logical textbooks, this kind of appeal is difficult to avoid in ordinary and scholar argumentative contexts. The appeal to the authority of experts is usual and has become a standard practice in our writings and papers, mainly, in the fields of the social sciences and hu-

manities. A paper without citations is unusual and difficult to find. In fact, it is associated and rooted into the methodology of writing papers in the above fields as we said before.

If citations are instances of the "appeal to expert opinion" argumentation scheme, in order to assure its proper application and our commitments as critical thinkers, we should be aware of the critical questions associated to it and so, we should check them to assure a good application of the scheme. But can we apply the general form of "appeal to expert" argument to citations in scholar papers in the different fields of the humanities or social sciences? Can we apply the name of "expert" as it is normally used in this scheme, to the authors in our field?

The usual definition of expert as 'a person who has special skill or knowledge in a particular field' seems to apply to the people we cite in scholar writings, but the difference with the application of the definition in ordinary life is that there, when we do appeal to them, it is because their knowledge is necessary to solve a question, due to the fact that we don't know enough to do so by ourselves. We are not sure this is the case in scholar settings.

There are several forms of the general 'appeal to expert' argument in the literature but a general form of it is the following:

An expert E in subject domain D asserts a statement S (in domain D).
Therefore, S is true.

This argument scheme could be deductively closed by assuming an implicit premise that more or less would say *"Everything expert E says about a subject in domain D is true"*. As this premise is usually false, the scheme is more often considered a defeasible argument scheme because the implicit assumption is stated as "*Everything expert E says about a subject in her field of expertise D is presumptively true"*, so the conclusion comes to *"S is presumptively true"*.

Several critical questions are usually associated with this scheme in order to assess critically the validity or cogency of it. Walton (1997) proposes the following six basic questions:

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

(Walton 1997: 223)

If we have a look at these questions we can easily realize than they can serve to analyze and evaluate many usual cases of appeal to expert opinion, for example, cases of testimony in a court of law, or cases in which a doctor gives her diagnosis to a patient, and that they are helpful to discover fallacious instances of the scheme or to repair poor arguments, but in the case of citations in scholar papers those questions are not easy to apply and we don't think that the writer of a paper or any habitual reader of it would even consider them in most cases. All citations are supposed, by default, based mainly in contextual constraints of use, given by standard practice in this particular setting, to meet all the requirements of the basic questions adequately. Even more, consistency with other ex-

perts' assertions is not expected because to have opposite views about a subject is common. In our opinion, those questions represent the minimum required by the conversational and argumentative context in our case, and, so, they are usually not checked when writing or reading a paper.

Walton (1997) allows the possibility of adding other critical sub-questions to the basic ones, but as those he shows are collected in the set of criteria Tindale (2007) proposes, we will comment on them instead. Tindale's criteria as Walton's sub-questions are thought to provide a firmer basis for judging appeals to authority as reasons to support a claim:

(1) The authority or expert (whether a person, institution, or source) must be identified and should have a track record that increases the reliability of the statements over related statements from sources that do not possess the expertise. Appeals to unidentified experts with unknown or weak track records can be judged fallacious.
(2) The authority should be in a field that lends itself to expert knowledge. That is, it should constitute a body of knowledge over which it would be appropriate for someone to have expertise. Failure to meet this condition will result in a fallacious appeal.
(3) The expert's statements must be both related to the field of expertise and relevant to the question at hand. …
(4) Direct knowledge could be acquired by the person making the appeal, at least in principle. That is, there must be some way of testing or verifying the expert's claims.
(5) The expert should not have a vested interest in the claim so as to benefit from the outcome. Where such illegitimate bias is clear or suggested, the appeal is weakened to the point of being fallacious.
(6) We would prefer that there be some consensus in the field –or, where this does not exist, as with conflicting expert witnesses in a trial, that the claims are consistent with other knowledge within the relevant field.
(7) Claims with more serious consequences should be given greater weight than those with less.
(Tindale 2007: 135)

The first criterion talks about the identification of the source as such, and although, in our opinion, it should be related to the cognitive kind of authority associated to the expert, in fact, it appeals to such social questions as track record or credentials earned. This criterion depends on multiple factors not all of them related to the cognitive authority of the expert. To prove so, we only need to have a look to the predominance of American non female authors in citations in many fields[1]. This is not to say that those experts have no well-earned credentials, but we would like to signal that there can be also other social factors to explain their success. Moreover, we wouldn't want to say that all the citations relative to statements made by young or novel researchers are to be put aside as unreliable. The second criterion talks about the field and the constitution of it as a body of knowledge. But there, what are we talking about? The boundaries of our field are not definitively set. In fact, how do we have to consider our field of expertise: in a narrow sense (pragma-dialectics, informal logic, argumentation…), or in a more wide sense as to include substantial parts of the history of philosophy or cognitive psychology for example?

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[1] Willard (1990) remarks the fact that most scholar papers are seldom read and very few of them quoted. After Willard's paper was written several more journals have been created and the marketplace is still more crowded, due to the pressure to publish that Universities put on their faculties. In the *Philosopher's Index* are currently listed around 1150 different journals.

We could go on and comment on any of the other criteria and we would see that all of them are difficult to apply in the case of citations in the social sciences or humanities: consensus is not expected, relevance is a minimum requirement (although not always strictly attained), direct knowledge would take us through a chain of citations that eventually would lead to a circular argumentation, and consequences, if considered, are mostly related to claims of inconsistency with other claims in the field and so, related to the non-expected consensus.

As Walton and Macagno (2011: 39) say it is true that "wrenching a proposition from context is often used to exaggerate a position or draw inferences from the quoted words that do not really represent the arguer's position" and that some uses of quotations can be considered fallacious, but, nevertheless we don't think that none of us would call most of the quotations in scholar contexts fallacies or unreasonable uses of the appeal to the authority of experts, given that all of us continue to use them in all our works.

Willard (1990) and Walton and Macagno (2011) show that quotations can be used to serve various purposes and not only to tell us about a verifiable fact. Talking about quotations in the field of the Social Sciences and the Humanities Willard says:

> Citation, of course, serves many functions—to acknowledge debts, identify allies and opponents, clarify and illustrate claims, display competence, and (especially in journals) to acquiesce to editors. These functions may have unintended side-effects on a par with the most explicit function for citation—as a mode of proof (Willard, 1990: 11).

Leaving aside the numerous cases of misquotations and fallacious argumentative tactics that Walton and Macagno (2011) present as common, quoting well known authors can be also a way to assure the attention we want for our work and to arouse the interest of a possible reader. In the case of students, it can be the only way they have to assure their teachers that they are competent and that they know about the contents taught. By using the already chosen references, extracted for them by the instructor, they show that, in fact, they have studied what is important for her.

To put it in a different light, this appeal to the authority of well situated names in a field can be seen as a rhetorical manoeuvre which aim is to fulfill other different goals besides the main cognitive goal of this type of argumentative acts, among others, to be published or to be enough to get good grades for the coursework. That is, we can have a bias to display a citation, but, in our opinion, this bias needs not to be fallacious.

Alternative lists of questions have been proposed in the literature mainly due to the work of Walton (1996, 1997) and Walton, Reed, & Macagno, (2008) to assure a good evaluation of the scheme and to avoid the use of it in a fallacious way, but similar considerations could be said about them.

To sum up, we think that these critical questions are more suited for a kind of expertise linked with taking a course of action or helping us to draw a practical plan. In the more fallacious cases, they could be loosely applied to our field, but in the usual cases of citations they don't give us a real insight to improve our argumentative writings or papers. Moreover, taking the point of view of the evaluator, we lose the way in which this kind of arguments are dealt with in the real arena, this is, the process of the actual practice and the way we grasp the idea of defeasibility and subsequently respond to it in an active way when we don't agree with the supported claim. That is, the analyst point of

view doesn't tell us how we deal with the arguments that fall in between deductive proofs and fallacies those being the majority of cases in real practice.

Another tentative consequence could be drawn from the above: if citations in the social sciences and the humanities have to be considered, in fact, actual instances of the "appeal to expert" argumentative scheme, their assessment should include different criteria to assess them and also a way to grade those arguments with respect to a more complex scale than that allowing us to say only whether an argument is or not a fallacy. This takes us to the difficult and relatively limited utility of gathering an exhaustive list of argumentation schema with the aim of classifying them, given the fact that the context of utterance imposes different requirements to qualify the arguments.

In the next section we will relate citations with the practice of testimony and communicative practices, because we think that by doing so, we will get some helpful ideas for a more conscious use of citations, at least for instructional purposes.

3. TESTIMONY, AUTHORITY AND COMMUNICATION

Testimony is generally defined as one of the classical sources to acquire knowledge and defined as "to come to know that p on the basis of someone's saying that p" (Steup 2010: 23). Steup tells that "saying that p" should be understood broadly, as to include many ordinary utterances in conversational oral settings and also in most of the ordinary communicative forms of written communication.

Scholar papers are a way of communicating our views on an issue to others and so, they fit nicely the above definition. Thus, another way to look at the quotations and citations in the literature is to consider them as instances of testimony. In fact, they would be second instances of testimony, being the first the proper paper in which they were originally inserted.

Recent and numerous papers on the topic of testimony, coming mainly from the field of epistemology, present the traditional divide on views of the problem of testimony. The discussion roughly circles around whether accepting or believing the assertions told to us by a speaker (or a writer) is or not sufficient for those beliefs to be justified or to constitute knowledge.

To solve this puzzle there are two main proposals, the so called reductionism view and the opposite one or anti-reductionism. For reductionists a testimony should be backed up by a chain of knowledge claims that would eventually end up in a speaker who knows about the issue directly and by a more reliable source, say by perception. On the other side, the anti-reductionists claim that the person that gives testimony is a warrant by herself and that testimony should not be reduced to other sources to assure its reliability as a source of knowledge. Many of those adopting this view favour a view of epistemology as social, as opposed to the individualist view of the reductionists, and many try to explain how we acquire knowledge by testimony by considering the participants in the act as members of an epistemic community (Adler 2006).

Testimony is also a particular form of communication in which someone says something to another, and, as a consequence, as other communicative acts, it is subjected to the general characteristics of human communication. Communication is not always truthful and it shouldn't be analyzed solely on terms of truthfulness as the different theories of pragmatic communication have widely remarked; if we take Grice's cooperation principle and its associated maxims, then, although the quality maxim asks us to be truth-

ful, it is by flouting the maxim that the actual sense of the saying, that is what is communicated, can be conveyed in many cases. If, instead, we adopt Sperber and Wilson's "relevance theory", there the communication is defined in terms of maximizing benefits and minimizing efforts, and although, this commits us to a general view on truthfulness of the communication because otherwise communication would disappear as impractical, this general view doesn't entail that any communicative act has to be truthful. It depends on the balance between benefits and costs of a particular act between two particular actors. In this view, when testimony is given, first we have to interpret the speaker's intended meaning taking into account that her utterance is expected to be beneficial for both parts.

Testimony is widely used in everyday communication, and, in consequence, testimony is unavoidable as a form to acquire new beliefs; if pragmatic principles of communication apply to the uses of testimony, it is not realistic to say that in the flow of communication in a dialogue we will have time or means to check for truthfulness all the utterances we are continuously being said. Communication goes fast and this procedure would be uneconomical and psychologically implausible. But acting in this way are we being epistemically responsible when we accept what we are told as true or at least reliable?

Communication doesn't come out of the blue in what Adler (2006) calls (and proposes to study testimony cases, as ideal) a null setting, communication arises in a definite and particular context in which a lot of background information is assumed. In the null setting almost all the real conditions in which testimony takes place are put aside in order to focus on the so called vulnerability problem, i.e., are we justified to come to those beliefs only on the speaker's word?. But when a sentence is said, this sentence is uttered in a definite context in which two actual actors are communicating. Speaker and hearer are part of this context and adjust dynamically their epistemic standards to the conditions of the ongoing conversation (Origgi 2004). All kind of conditions can influence the outset of the communication and we think that our adaptation to those conditions has to be taken into account to explain how we come to be justified to believe the testimony of a person.

In general, we think that a default rule, as that proposed by Adler (2006), and considered as an explicit norm, applies to the case of testimony and serves to explain in a realistic way how we deal with testimony in many contexts:

> Default Rule (DR):
> If the speaker S asserts that *p* to the hearer H, under normal conditions, then it is proper or correct for H to accept S's assertion, unless H has special reason to object. (Adler 2006: 6)

This rule helps to explain the wide use and unquestioned acceptance of testimony in communication, because adopting this default, and, for example, taking as the mark of reference the theory of relevance, in normal conditions, both speaker and hearer benefit from the exchange: the speaker's expectations of an intended change in the hearer's attitudes or beliefs increase, and the hearer benefits, in normal conditions, of the access to new and presumably reliable information without too much cost.

Adler considers the acceptance of testimony by the default rule "as true issues in full, all-out, or unqualified belief, as contrasted to some degree of belief". Nevertheless, in our view, accepting the speaker's assertion as a default doesn't mean that the assertion can't be cancelled (as in Gricean terms) if the context changes and new information makes us check the previous assertion, because, for example, there is a problem of coher-

ence that has to be solved. Thus, we prefer to consider the acceptance of testimony in terms of justified beliefs or presumptive truths.

Contrary to Adler's views, in out opinion, the context and the social relationships between the agents in the interchange help to define the "normal conditions" appealed to in the default rule and, in consequence, the application of this rule as a basis to be justified to accept what is said by testimony depends on our adjustment to the epistemic standards of the communicational setting. Context can't be avoided when trying to understand how testimony works; for example, for Daukas (2006:109) epistemic authority is granted or withheld in virtue of whether we consider or not an individual part of a socially constructed group; for Vasallo, (2006) the importance of what is said in an actual context seems to be relevant to be justified or not to accept it. In general, we think that a contextual approach to the study of testimony provides a more actual view on how we use it in real practice.

Testimony is always based in some appeal to the "authority" of the source, and so, we could always consider its use as argumentative, because by saying so, we give a reason to the hearer to accept what is said. But this would takes us too far, and we would have to consider almost all discourse uses as argumentative. In this paper, we don't want to go there, so, we will consider a truly argumentative discourse in which testimony is used to support a different claim from this of the utterance said by testimony.

If we consider argumentation on the sense of a disagreement or interchange of reasons about an issue in a social setting, the statements exposed by a testimony have to refer first to a language structure having a particular form (how we assert, say or utter things), and then they have to be considered also as reasons to support a claim. In this sense, they have to be assessed in the actual context they are uttered and so, taken as contributions to an ongoing process that takes part in this setting. Moreover, argumentation is public in the sense that many of our sayings can be and will be used, in some cases, to convey information in a future communicative exchange. The (social and communicative) context of utterance in which they first appeared had already sanctioned them and so, if relevant in the new context, they could be used to support new claims. This is the case of scholar citations that we want to analyze in the remaining of this section.

Following the proposals of Kauffeld and Fields (2003) and Olmos (2007) we would like to consider instances of testimony in a particular formal context hoping that the formal rules governing this context help us to shed some light towards a better explanation of the general issue of testimony.

Scholar papers considered as instances of testimony make use of other instances of testimony as citations to defend a claim. They are, first of all, communicative acts that take place in a definite communicative context and in consequence, as in the general case, communicational rules should be of the application to them. Through communication we look for relevant information given the context in which the communication takes place. Here too, we don't have the means to read and even less to check all the possible positions and information that can be found in the literature in our field.[2] To put it in Willard's words there is a problem of "literary management":

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[2] *The Philosopher's Index* Volume # 43 (2009) contains a record number of 24,000 entries from over 680 journals collected from 50 countries. *The Philosopher's Index Online* has a total of 450,000 entries now: http://philindex.org/

> Exponentially expanding literatures proceeding along multiple paths make for a frustrating indefiniteness. One never knows whether one has fully heard a position out, or seen it in its best form, for there's always more to read. (Willard 1989: 15)

So, when a source is cited, in many cases, we apply the default rule, that is, in normal circumstances, we are justified to rely on a citation, by many reasons that have to do with the communicative and social setting in which the citation is used: the explanation given by the quotation is compatible with our beliefs on what we know about the quoted, we agree with the claim or the position taken in the paper, we think that the fact that the work has been published automatically gives the author the condition of being trustworthy, reliable or at least worth considering, etc.

We can gather those possibilities in two general positions:

(1) We really have no specific thoughts about the matter, but we think that the authority quoted is competent enough and that we are in no position to have a better thought about it. In consequence, we accept (tentatively) the quote (and the appeal to the authority that goes with it) without any further questions, knowing that it has already been contrasted in a previous paper. Instead of looking for or a possible alternative view or explanation we only adopt it.

(2) The claim proposed by the authority is coherent with the beliefs we already have, and, in adopting it, we reinforce our prior beliefs.

But, the assertions we make in papers are not merely expressions about our thoughts, we use them as reasons to support a definite claim, so it is not only the problem of "true beliefs" or of reasonably justified beliefs that is at stake in those instances of testimony, we also have to consider how we use them to support a claim and how they are going to be used by a reader to accept or not it.

We can be contrary to the main claim in the paper but, in many cases, if we have objections they won't be about the falsity or unacceptability of the citations but about the main claim defended, so we will engage on an ongoing argumentative dialog and look for an alternative way to support the contrary view. It could be that citations are not exact or not according to the original idea of the quoted (Walton and Macagno, 2011), for example, because of the ambiguity of natural language or because the interpretation given is loose or even distorted, but quotations in papers are seldom checked given our adjustment to the institutional context in which citations are used.

Some authors (Origgi 2004; Hardin 2002; Daukas 2006) define the acceptation of testimony in terms of social relations as trust. We trust citations because we are part of the scholar context in which they are used. But there are also other social factors that we consider in order to cite or accept citations and that have to do with interpersonal reasons, and that are motivated by the own interest of the parts in the exchange and subjected, in part, to social contextual constraints. In the case of citations, authors' interest is clearly motivated by many factors. For example, by quoting well situated authors we somehow put ourselves at their same level of authority, and by doing so we hope to arouse the interest of the more recognized members of the epistemic community. It can be also a way to push our luck to be published, a way of assurance for our not so original thoughts, a strategy to fill out the required pages.

Many social constraints can be adduced for choosing an actual quotation. For example, we can think of the actual constraints the publishers put on the works they admit for publication based on the well known indexes against which the journal will be evaluated, the success of the author and the amount of publications she has or the maintenance of her ideas over time. If we think of disciplines in social terms we, as parts of these social institutions, know about those requirements and adapt our needs to them in standard practice and, so, in normal conditions, we consider ourselves justified to accept the citations without checking them thoroughly.

(Origgi 2004: 42) says that "there are no purely unbiased informants" and that "there are no naïve receivers of information". The way we adjust our needs to accept or not the authority of a writer is context dependent and this context can be very narrow depending on our interests, or on how we define the disciplinary field. An author's bias can be easily seen by having a look at the list of different references she uses. Even when talking about a same subject those references differ according to the field we put ourselves in. Although the amount of actual information about a subject is enormous and spreads to different fields the fact is that we have limited resources and that, in general, we rely on our own sources and on those of some authors in closer fields of expertise.

We all have our choice of authors to quote, and this selection includes not only epistemological reasons to make our claim stronger, practical reasons related with the particular context we are in influence our views too. For example, if we have a look at the proceedings of any of the ISSA conferences[3] on Argumentation, only with a glimpse to the references on the papers we could situate the paper according to the more narrow field in which the work can be placed, be it from the pragma-dialectical current, be according to the ideas of informal logic, or coming from the historical tradition of rhetoric, etc. It is also possible to notice differences according to the countries of the authors; authors from non English-spoken countries cite and refer more frequently to authors from their countries than authors from English spoken countries. Sociological studies on references or on citations in papers should be done, but we think that the results of those empirical studies would favour the thesis that the testimony should be studied in a socially situated environment.

3. AUTHORITY, CRITICAL THINKING AND INSTRUCTION

Natural language is ambiguous and literature in Philosophy and in the Humanities is in many cases obscure. We all know of examples of different interpretations on the sayings of an author existing at the same time in the literature. In fact, this has been a constant in the History of Philosophy. Reinterpretation of obscure passages of text by recognized authors never end and as Sperber (2005) shows, in some cases even the most obscure, ambiguous or unclear text can put the reader in the mood to interpret it in a way that makes sense for her. Differences can be found even in the interpretations of a text in different papers of a same author. How we understand those passages depend on many factors one of them being the so called "confirmation bias" that is, "under some conditions, confidence in their beliefs causes believers to pay more attention to confirming than disconfirming evidence, thereby increasing their initial confidence" (Wason 1960, quoted in

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[3]   The choice of this conference is due to the huge amount of papers presented there.

Sperber 2005: 2).[4] When in doubt we tend to favour interpretations that confirm our previous beliefs because this serves to increase our confidence in those beliefs. As a consequence, when arguing, students tend to present reasons to support a particular claim they favour and often forget about the possible reasons or evidence contrary to it.

Not all the persons consider valid the same reasons to defend a claim. Time and continuous debate are necessary to reach an agreement about the interpretation of a given passage or a corpus of reasons and acceptable procedures in the Humanities. Each discipline step by step develops successive criteria that help fixing the different or more adequate interpretations of previous ideas. This is also a social process and many factors, as the thoughts of the field's leaders throughout history, influence this development.

A well known example of this social process can be Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, lost or in a secondary role until recently and always behind the more 'useful' and scientific ideas on logic of his works.

Jiménez-Aleixandre, Bugallo and Dusch (2000: 759) say following the work of Giere (1988) that "making choices among competing theories is essential in the building of scientific knowledge", and that can be of application to our fields too. We have to choose to go forward, but in our field the dialectical method is essential and to reach agreement in many cases difficult. Presenting the different views about a question needs time and the choice among different views is not always easy.

The difficulty to present a philosophical question or a theory and the reasoning that leads to it, our own polarization, time constraints and the overwhelming quantity of subjects in the programs force instructors, in many cases, to give simplified versions of a subject in the classroom, leaving aside all the previous discussions and the difficult steps that led to it. It is easier to summarize contents than to teach how to think about them. It saves time and it makes possible to assure that students learn a minimum on the subject, although, in many cases, this minimum is forgotten after the exam. A standard example is the teaching of natural deduction in an introductory course of logic. All the thinking and strategies used to arrive to the neat analytical demonstration are lost, and students with poor interest and worse comprehension of formal languages feel lost and unable to perform the proofs.

In standard classrooms, at least in Spain, even at University level, there are few opportunities for dialectical discussions and the use of argumentation to solve problems, to analyze cases and to plan strategies is, in general, very poor. In the humanities, even if the main method has been and should be argumentative, the situation is not better. The theoretical and somehow authoritarian part of the instruction takes the most part of the time. The dialectical strategies and the main rhetorical devices necessary for a good argumentation are not practiced nor theoretically explained and a large portion of the conversational exchanges in the classrooms seems conducted to preserve the social structure of teacher/student relationship (Lemke, 1990). In Bourdieu and Passeron's words (1970) the teaching model produces a habit that reproduces itself and that puts an emphasis in the repetition of the contents without too much thinking.

The main method is to figure out a set of procedures and activities that assures that the student has a good command of the program. The programs are determined, in part, by the interest of the local epistemic community or the personal interest of the instructors but few reasons are given to the student about the criteria to choose a subject or

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[4]   Kelly (2008) talks about this phenomenon in terms of "belief polarization."

a position or why this choice is preferred to another. Students, in many cases, although able to understand a theory or a new proposal, in many cases, don't understand where this proposal stands with respect to others subjects in the discipline or even how they should use this understanding to gain knowledge in their field. This is, students learn to recognize, give credit and reproduce the works taught by their professors and some of the common opinions of each field, but it is less obvious whether they learn to think critically about them or whether they think about actual cases, using and developing problem solving strategies and argumentative techniques. By doing so, they are practical but not critic.

On the other hand, it is evident that, in general, students lack the necessary skills to compare different proposals or to choose between them, because we don't teach them to do so in the disciplinary subjects. In consequence, they aren't able to figure out analogies, metaphors or examples to illustrate difficult passages. Usually they cite and put together the characteristics of two or more theories that explain a same subject as if putting together one after the other amounted to the same than comparing them. They are not used to discuss a choice and to defend it before their peers. The authority of the teacher and the few time left for discussions by lengthy programs are powerful reasons for their not doing so. Other powerful reasons are more general and can be considered as rhetorical strategies we all occasionally use, when dealing with others, to displace the burden of the proof and to avoid the fear to present our opinions and to allow face saving.

If citations are in general taken by granted, how could students not use them in their reports in automatic way? Moreover, how could they not use them when their instructors do so profusely and one of the main goals of the teaching model is to reproduce what they are being taught? And so how could we combine this standard method with a development of their critical skills? Citing, sometimes, can be a way of covering the lack of creativity or new ideas about a subject and, even, a way to avoid critical thinking. At the same time, it can be an easy way to show a minimum of knowledge on the subject and, so, to meet the expected standards and get good grades.

It is necessary to work harder to design successful strategies that help to balance in an appropriate way the teaching of a minimum of contents and the development of the students' critical skills. Not all can be left on the hands of the students, but some of the filtering we traditionally do for them at the classroom should be left aside in many cases. To do so, students have to read and write more and depend less on the work of their instructors.

The suggestion made by Olmos (2007) can be of use to give an answer to this problem. Students have to learn to write in a standard way according to their field and so, students of humanities and social sciences have to learn to cite and comment on the different authors to write their reports. Those citations were previously sanctioned in the field, so they are public to use. The appeal to the authority of those fonts is unavoidable for them. But, when citing, students also have to learn to be relevant and critic and to use citations as reasons to support their claims, taking into account, at the same time, all the rhetorical requirements the scholar setting imposes on them.

To do so and prior to their presentations, reports should be contrasted and tested in those same social grounds for which they are intended. As instructors we should plan strategies to assure the success of this procedure, that is, to produce good critical debates in which critiques are accepted as a way to go forward and to improve students' dialectical skills and drafts. It is evident that a good procedure has to substitute the static development of part of the program for an active development of it which helps growing the students' skills

to learn. Moreover, evaluation should not depend so much on penalizing errors and much more in capacity of improvement. Debating and asking questions with multiple answers should be a basic activity in classrooms and, afterwards, writing several drafts encouraged.

Paraphrasing Jiménez-Aleixandre et al. (2000), they have to learn 'to do' Philosophy instead of 'doing the lesson', by means of a continuous communicative and argumentative practice in which cooperation is central to go forward. This cooperation is reached through the study of other works and the systematic criticism of them as a way to open new perspectives in the field. To reach this goal, they need to develop good argumentative techniques that include, of course, the use of citations and the appeal to the authority that goes with it, but they also need to learn to take risks to provide new ideas or to open new lines of though. They have to learn to commit to their contributions and to defend them before professors and peers and consider criticisms or controversies as a way to improve their dialectical skills and writings, not as adversarial or personal attacks.

On the other side, faculty has to provide this kind of context in which arguing is considered a way of learning and improving and has to help the students feel comfortable when they expose their views on a subject. Instructors also have to learn to grade student's works taking into account their improvements, although, this will suppose, of course, more drafts to read and, in some cases, a somehow reduced curriculum to teach.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper I suggested that the analysis of citations in philosophical works as instances of the 'appeal to expert opinion' argumentative scheme is better suited to discover fallacious cases of application of the scheme from an evaluator's point of view. It can be seen also as a method of argument repair in poorly expressed or extreme cases. Nevertheless, as this is not the usual case of published works in the humanities, in general, it doesn't give us a real insight of the real ongoing process.

The basic critical questions linked to the scheme correspond to a required minimum in the field and are seldom checked in real academic practice. Other criteria or subquestions proposed in the literature with the goals of a better assurance of the use of the scheme aren't strictly met or even of application in this context. We hinted that instead of taking the point of view of the analyst, it is better to consider the argumentation in those academic contexts as a process in which both parts collaborate by giving reasons or confronting the other part with doubts, questions or counterarguments. In this view, citations and quotes are considered as reasons to support a claim which, if not shared by the other parts in the game, will be completed, contested or clarified.

This point of view illustrates better, in our opinion, the real practice of arguing in academic contexts, and clearly shows that the classification of real arguments is more complex and admits more options than the two extremes cases of sound arguments or fallacies. In the humanities there is almost always a multiplicity of positions about an issue, so real arguments are better considered as presumptive arguments that can be improved by interaction with an audience by means of a collaborative process that aims to advance towards a consensus or to the improvement of our knowledge about the issue.

We analyzed also citations as instances of testimony and by doing so, we tried to show that the particular context or, at least, the cognitive environment of the participants in the process in which the communicative process takes place, has to be taken into account if we want to shed some light into how we come to be justified to accept some be-

liefs on the words of others. If testimony is considered a communicative practice, it has to follow communicative general rules which require interpreting those instances of testimony in the particular context of the utterance in order to look for new available information compatible with our beliefs. We have limited resources and when communicating we can't check out all that is said, so we accept, by default, in normal circumstances determined by the context, most of what is said by others. This is the case of citations used as reasons to support a point of view in an argumentative setting. In normal circumstances, we feel justified by the default rule to accept them, except for very special cases in which we know that the citation is poorly interpreted or badly used. In general, we engage in an ongoing process in which, each part puts forward new plausible reasons (or citations) in order to defeat the former point of view and to support an alternative one. That is, each part manoeuvres to put forward her point, in many cases, without taking into consideration or making an effort to reject the reasons given to support the other's view.

Finally, we tried to find an application of the former points for educational purposes. On this point we think that specific training in critical thinking as an ongoing process, as sketched above, is necessary. This training, at least in Spain is nor promoted nor accepted in the curriculum of Philosophy studies as a real subject aimed at improving the production of good papers in the Humanities. As a consequence, if we have to take this training as a part of the program of other specific subjects, it is evident that we have to reduce the amount of information given in the classroom. This necessary step is not easily accepted in our universities. The current educational reform in which we are now involved in Europe with its motto "learn to learn" could be a way to introduce active ways to study, instead of simply repeating the saying of the instructors.

Students have to learn that different views are not necessarily in opposition, that agreements can be reached, and that discrepancy is not to be taken as a personal attack. Of course, they have to learn to quote and cite from their readings not only as a strategy to show that they have read, but as a way to support their views, to improve their thinking and to answer the doubts and criticisms of peers and instructors. To do so, we have to be ready to promote debates, to present actual philosophical problems which accept multiple answers or views, to push the students to choose among the different options and to ask them to support their choice, but also to accept multiple drafts and to try to find a balance between a minimum command of the curriculum and an adequate improvement of their skills as critical and substantive thinkers.

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Commentary on "AUTHORITY ARGUMENTS IN ACADEMIC CONTEXTS IN SOCIAL STUDIES AND HUMANITIES" by Begona Carrascal

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1. INTRODUCTION

Begoña Carrascal's paper on authority in academic contexts is extremely ambitious, attempting to bring together argumentation theory, especially the schematic analysis of appeals to authority, with the epistemology of testimony. She argues that the schematic analysis cannot account for appeals to authority in the academic practices of citation and quotation, and that students need in-depth education about citation and quotation. Her questions are extremely important, but far beyond what can be adequately addressed in a conference paper. In her rush, Carrascal misrepresents Douglas Walton's schematic approach and fails to recognize how much precedent there is for own arguments, both in informal logic and in feminist epistemology. The expertise of both feminist epistemologists and argumentation theorists could support her proposed reform of critical thinking education by attention to citation practices.

Carrascal rejects the dichotomy between fallacy and sound argument, but that foil is archaic, an artefact of textbooks rather than being current to argumentation scholarship (Hundleby 2010), and it is certainly not accepted by Walton. On Walton's account (1995), failure to address critical questions does not constitute a fallacy unless the questions cannot be answered and the necessary repairs made. Carrascal argues as if Walton ignored the social context and he most definitely does not. He not only borrows dialectical analysis from pragma-dialectics but engages a plurality of purposes for argumentation beyond the pragma-dialectical focus on persuasion. Various other forms of discourse foster these other particular goals (1995; 1998). In this way, the schematic account offers a lot more for argument evaluation than just the fallacies approach, which even in sophisticated forms is too blunt an instrument to account for the specific subtleties of citation.
Still, Carrascal's demand for attention to the subject of *academic* argumentation is distinctive and timely. The concern of informal logicians is typically to evaluate ordinary, every day argumentation, avoiding the important epistemological arena of the academy—the alternative approach, pragma-dialectics, attends to an *artificial* ideal of argumentation. Argumentation theory seems to have become mired, just like philosophy of science was in the mid-20th century, in the assumption that we cannot criticize forms of academic reasoning.

Substantial challenge to the operation of academic authority can be found, however, in feminist epistemology, especially Lorraine Code's *What Can She Know* (1991) and *Rhetorical Spaces* (1995). In ignoring feminist work, Carrascal follows a standard although unjustifiable disciplinary practice in philosophy. Quite recently there has been

some engagement between feminist epistemology and argumentation theory: including Jim Lang (2010) connecting Code's work with Tindale's; and Patrick Bondy (2010) examining the implications for argumentation of Miranda Fricker's (2007) feminist work on the epistemology of testimony.

Carrascal spots in argumentation theory a fruitful unexplored location for addressing the transfer of authority in argumentation: the shifts in burden of proof as evidence is provided through citation. Alleviating burden of proof through citation is subject to the sorts of problems involved in any argumentative appeal to authority. In the social sciences and humanities, both in student and professional scholarship, quotation and citation can replace independent critical thinking. She is correct that Walton does not account for the confusion of social status with expertise that encourages dogmatic citation, but he does make clear that his concern is expertise exclusively (1995). Analysis of different forms of authority can instead be found in Locke and Whately, and recently in Jean Goodwin (2001) and Hans Hansen (2006), sources that receive no attention.

Carrascal treats academic papers as pieces of testimony that draw on other pieces of testimony, their sources. Citation plays many roles in scholarship, including contrast to one's line of reasoning or direct evidence in an historical treatment, but let us accept Carrascal's focus on citation's role as testimonial evidence in favour of the author's or speaker's position. The tendency of such appropriation to be unreflective, a manifestation of the confirmation bias, she treats as "evidence to support the anti-reductionist view [of testimony] and the need to asses[s] [testimony] as a social practice."

Carrascal stresses that automatic acceptance of the view in question should not result—the burden of proof should not lighten so easily. Assessing testimony requires attention to the general social context of argumentation and the specific social contexts in which argumentation operates. Admittedly, following the anti-reductionist view of the epistemic significance of testimony, the evidence provided by sources is the authority of the *person* cited—not his or her track record, or experience, but just *the saying so*. However, this rests on the qualification that the speaker be "a member of the epistemic community." Again, I point out, epistemic communities are a central theme in feminist philosophy, especially in the philosophy of science beginning with Helen Longino (1990) and Lynn Hankinson Nelson (1990), but also in feminist standpoint epistemology.

Carrascal argues that readers running across citations and quotations don't typically raise the critical questions demanded by the Walton/Tindale schematic formulation of the fallacies approach to argument evaluation. Taking questioning as primary for "schemers" or Waltonites fails to recognize the fundamental role they give to shared purposes and discursive standards as the basis for evaluation. Admittedly, what role critical questions play in the schematic account is not made clear by Walton, but Tony Blair (2001) suggests they are part of the normative context in which the discussion occurs. They are not part of the psychology of the listener and they can be compatible with acknowledging that prima facie acceptance of cited testimony is common practice; they simply do not sanction that practice.

For schemers, to appeal to testimony or invoke any other argumentation scheme initiates a shift in the burden of proof. That shift can be strengthened and supported if the speaker addresses the relevant critical questions; or the answers to the questions may have been previously established in the discourse. Especially in the academy, matters of expertise tend to be priorly established by the institutional structure itself, giving rise to a

very specialized high burden of proof. For instance, an instructor gets authority because of an extensive previous examination process specific to the subject matter. Likewise, the evaluation of a paper for publication in anonymous reviewing concerns the content and surrounding discourse, and if not anonymous takes the person's expertise into account. Questioning is heavily built into the background processes of publication.

That acceptance be tentative is part of Carrascal's recommendation for citation as authoritative testimony in the academy. In building an account of authority in an anti-reductionist framework, Carrascal takes on the problem that not all statements from members of our epistemic community are true. If we operate with Adler's default rule and believe what is said "in normal contexts in the absence of countervailing considerations," we still need to know what normal contexts are. That requires attention to the social dimensions in which testimony occurs.

Carrascal wants a solution to how the psychological phenomenon of confirmation bias encourages a dogmatic use of quotation by students. Proper understanding of the complexities of citation would inform students about the structures of academic authority in which they work. Otherwise, a pedagogy of transmitting content from instructor to student, rather than gaining skills, encourages dogmatism. Focus on the disciplinary canons— say in philosophy, what Plato and Descartes *said* rather than their process of reasoning—displaces the burden of proof, she argues.

Carrascal's point that citation practices deserve more attention as part of social sciences and humanities education is valuable. Much can be learned about testimony and authority in the development of good citation practices. The use of sources in writing is a microcosm through which the role of instructor and the epistemic operation of academic institutions can be considered as subject matter for students' critical engagement. So, I agree with the direction she recommends for much the same reasons Carrascal provides. The functioning of epistemic authority is implicit to much of post-secondary education in the social sciences and humanities—I would include the physical and life sciences too. How students engage this authority by citing sources provides a door into philosophical epistemology accessible to every student, and deserving to be explored in our classrooms.

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Reply to Catherine Hundleby

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Catherine Hundleby in her commentary to my paper argues about a supposed misrepresentation, on my part, of Walton's position on schematic approach, claiming also that I did not take into account how much precedent there is in informal logic and in feminist epistemology approaches to the appeal to authority argument.

In the first part of my paper I was simply stressing the fact that the kind of critical questions usually linked to the 'appeal to expert' argumentation scheme are, in general, not adequate to the case of citations in the fields of the social sciences and the humanities and my argumentation was directed to show this point. This point was also defended by J. Goodwin in her proposal in these same proceedings.

I also said that the way in which we react in real practice to the case of citations in the social sciences and the humanities is different to the method of schematic analysis: we usually look for an alternative citation to support a different point of view in and ongoing dialog that in many cases takes time to reach consensus.

As Hundleby says it is not new and I am well aware of the fact that Walton and most of the theorists in the field (as also myself) reject the dichotomy between fallacy and sound argument and that Walton's method of analysis involves much more that the schematic account on the arguments but argumentation schemes are also an important point in his account. What I proposed is to look for a way to grade those intermediate arguments by comparing them, in the same way we do when, while arguing in an active way, we react to the arguments presented by the other party looking for a somehow better way to support the same claim or an alternative one.

Hundleby says that I did not paid attention to several sources about other different forms of authority. My concern was with the epistemic kind of authority found in citations in scholar papers. Other forms of authority as those cited in her commentary were not of application here. Moreover, the only argument scheme proposed in the literature to deal with cognitive appeals to authority except for the 'position to know' or 'witness testimony' is the 'appeal to expert opinion' (Walton 1997: 90; Walton, Reed and Macagno 2008). Furthermore, as Walton (1997: 40) says "the notion of any designated group, such as philosophers, as being 'wise' or sources of wisdom, over and above any expertise based on knowledge of a discipline, is not one that has general acceptance".

I am grateful to Catherine Hundleby for pointing me to recent literature on feminist epistemology. After reading some of those papers, I believe that many of their main claims are quite compatible with my proposal to look at citations in a critical way, considering arguing in our field as a cooperative practice which goal is a better understanding of the different questions and problems at debate.

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