

Challenging “strategic maneuvering” of life scientists in public deliberation

A pragma-dialectic perspective

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Aim of my research

To contribute to the organization and facilitating of quality *upstream* deliberation between publics and life scientists about the (future) social and/or ethical implications and issues of the life sciences (esp. socio-technical imaginaries)

By:

- Organizing and studying discursive practices (rhetorical repertoires) of life scientists participating in face-to-face public dialogue
- Developing an analytic framework to assess the quality of these practices
- Formulating possible interventions to improve public deliberation

Does deliberative democracy work?

NO:

“In small groups, the same process occurs in social interaction. Individuals engage in microrituals of social behavior to avoid conflict, identify points of agreement, and reach consensus.”

DON'T KNOW:

“[T]heorists remain silent about what deliberation looks like on the ground, where real people discuss concrete issues. Perhaps more surprisingly, the empirical literature has not addressed the issue either. Researchers have been less interested in deliberation itself than in measuring its effects.”

(Ryfe, 2005)

Quality criteria of deliberation

TABLE 1

A Framework for Assessing the Quality of Democratic Deliberation.

Process	Facilitation
	Equality of participation
	Participant engagement
	Respect
Information	Use of on-site experts
	Use of incorrect information
	Learning new information
	Understanding and application of information
	Impact of information on opinions
Reasoning	Justification of opinion
	Openness to complexity
	Adoption of a societal perspective

(De Vries et. al. 2011)

Argumentative quality of deliberation: a pragma-dialectical perspective

Pragma-dialectics is an argumentation theory, which in my view is complementary to discourse analysis (esp. Billig)

“Discourse is often functional. It is designed to be persuasive, to win hearts and minds. The study of rhetoric is, in part, the study of persuasive work and the organization of discourse to that end.” (Whetherell, 2001; p. 17)

Focus on both the descriptive and normative aspect of “ordinary argumentative discourse” i.e. describing, and analyzing and evaluating “argumentative discourse in use” (pragmatics: discourse analyse, speech act theory)

It provides “tools” for facilitators: “rules for a reasonable discussion” and “critical questions” for assessing utilized argumentation schemes. Fallacies are seen as violations of these rules.

It pays attention to both the rhetorical and the dialectical aspect of argumentation

Empirically tested

Argumentative quality of deliberation: a pragma-dialectical perspective. Strategic maneuvering

a strategic maneuver can be circumscribed as a way of acting that

1) is aimed at

a) determining the acceptability of the standpoint to which a difference of opinion between two parties pertains and

(b) **promoting the own position of the discussant concerned,**

2) is organized as a systematic exchange of discussion moves for and against this standpoint, and

3) is regulated by means of a set of discussion rules pertaining to the reasonableness of argumentation.

Within the extended version of pragma-dialectics, argumentative texts and discussions are reconstructed as a coherent whole of strategic maneuvers and evaluated by means of the same set of dialectical norms as the one that is used within the standard version of the theory

(Wagemans, 2009; p. 224)

Argumentative quality of deliberation: a pragma-dialectical perspective. Strategic maneuvering

For example in the confrontation stage:

Dialectical aim: To achieve clarity concerning the specific issues at stake and the positions held by the parties in the difference of opinion => what is the issue at stake?

Rhetorical aim: To establish the definition of the difference of opinion that is optimal for the party concerned => framing the issue

So, one of my main research questions reads:

How do life scientists strategically maneuver in public deliberation over (future) social and ethical implications and issues of their scientific activities?

Argumentative quality of deliberation: a pragma-dialectical perspective

Rules for a critical discussion

[edit]

The ideal model stipulates ten rules that apply to an argumentative discussion. Violations of the discussion rules are said to frustrate the reasonable resolution of the difference of opinion and they are therefore considered as [fallacies](#).

The ten rules (see Van Eemeren, Grootendorst & Snoeck Henkemans, 2002, pp.182-183):

1. *Freedom rule*
Parties must not prevent each other from advancing standpoints or from casting doubt on standpoints.
2. *Burden of proof rule*
A party that advances a standpoint is obliged to defend it if asked by the other party to do so.
3. *Standpoint rule*
A party's attack on a standpoint must relate to the standpoint that has indeed been advanced by the other party.
4. *Relevance rule*
A party may defend a standpoint only by advancing argumentation relating to that standpoint.
5. *Unexpressed premise rule*
A party may not deny premise that he or she has left implicit or falsely present something as a premise that has been left unexpressed by the other party.
6. *Starting point rule*
A party may not falsely present a premise as an accepted starting point nor deny a premise representing an accepted starting point.
7. *Argument scheme rule*
A party may not regard a standpoint as conclusively defended if the defense does not take place by means of an appropriate argumentation scheme that is correctly applied.
8. *Validity rule*
A party may only use arguments in its argumentation that are logically valid or capable of being made logically valid by making explicit one or more unexpressed premises.
9. *Closure rule*
A failed defense of a standpoint must result in the party that put forward the standpoint retracting it and a conclusive defense of the standpoint must result in the other party retracting its doubt about the standpoint.
10. *Usage rule*
A party must not use formulations that are insufficiently clear or confusingly ambiguous and a party must interpret the other party's formulations as carefully and accurately as possible.

Strategic maneuvering in the wild: discussing the social benefits of behavioral genomics research of ADHD

GP 1: “I can see the advantages of this [research], [..][b]ut there is a *side effect*, too. [..] I am curious about [..] what consequences we, as physicians, parents, social workers ourselves will attach to this [development].”

Moderator: “Do you think that the expectations are too high?”

GP 1: “Yes. That is part of my concern. To look at the whole social system has, I think, more added value than such a gene determination [alone] [..]. I would not want our broad systems approach to be substituted with this [gene determination].”

[..]

Psychotherapist 1: “I think it is great that science provides us with many new insights. At the same time, there lies the big danger, too. We live in a medical age in which a lot of importance is attached to scientific understanding. [..] When we have a medical view, it does not mean that it is the truth. A critical attitude to this [is needed], what does this genetic knowledge mean exactly? [..] It is a medical business! There is a book that has just been published with the same purport [..]. That woman [the author] talks about a ‘ban on caution’. It would be a pity really if this scientific development would decrease our caution [..]. If we stop looking critically at who a person is in his context and system, just as that man [GP1] said. [..] As a psychotherapist I sometimes end up in a row when I refuse to put a label on [a patient]. [..] This label determines his whole identity and that is the big problem.”

Strategic maneuvering in the wild: discussing the social benefits of behavioral genomics research of ADHD

Moderator: “You have heard many voices, views and opinions. What are your thoughts?”

B: “I think that if you are not involved in the research, it is hard to estimate the value of genetics.”

[..]

Moderator: “To what extent do the questions and remarks of the public [..] ensue from a lack of knowledge?”

B: “That is absolutely so.

B’s expectations:

Firstly, he suggested the possibility of **personalized medicine**: “Eventually, genetics will help us to offer more targeted treatments, to individualize health care.”

Secondly, JB expects genetics will give **new opportunities for medication and even alternative treatment**, such as neurofeedback: “Another goal of genetics is to trace new neurochemical pathways in the brain that provide ideas for new medication but perhaps for a [completely] different kind of treatment as well.”

Strategic maneuvering in the wild: discussing the social benefits of behavioral genomics research of ADHD

Moderator: Mr. B, how would you respond to that? The idea that genetics contributes to the possibility of labeling too much. You are modest. You say, there is not much possible.

B: Of course, I am sensitive to the fact that scientists can collect information and that this knowledge can be used by others differently.

Moderator: Who are these other people?

B: That could be politicians. [...] I can imagine [...] that malicious insurance companies could say: 'Look, if you have ADHD and you have a gene [sic!] that proves you have a bad prognosis [...] then we are going to look differently at [medical] treatment. Perhaps we have to invest more.' But it could also lead to nihilism [...]. I do not say this is [a] legitimate [response], I could, statistically, wipe the floor with it but I think that we as a society – and for a moment I do not speak as a physician – have to face the possible risks that are attached to this knowledge.”

Evaluating recurring argumentative patterns I: expectations and pragmatic argumentation

Standpoint:	Action X should (not) be carried out	
Because:	Action X leads to (un)desirable consequence Y	(MATERIAL PREMISE)
And:	If action X leads to (un)desirable consequence Y, then action X should (not) be carried out	(CONNECTION PREMISE)

(Ihnen-Jory, 2011)

Standpoint: Behavioral genomics research should be carried out
Because: Behavioral genomics research leads to new and better treatment
(personalized medicine and neurofeedback)
(And: If behavioral genomics research leads to new and better
treatment then this research should be carried out)

Evaluating recurring argumentative patterns I: expectations and pragmatic argumentation

Critical questions

Consequentialistic:

Feasibility question

Necessary means question

Best means question

Side effects question => medicalization => how to weigh benefits and side effects?

Deontological:

Principle question

Duty question

Right question

Theories of justice:

Fair distribution question

Good life ethics:

The “good life” question

Other NEST-ethical issues (Swierstra and Rip, 2007)

Evaluating recurring argumentative patterns II: argument from expert opinion

- 1 O is true or acceptable.
 - 1.1 O is asserted by expert E.
 - 1.1.1a E is an expert in the relevant field F.
 - 1.1.1b Source S proves that O is asserted by E.
 - 1.1' Accepting that O is asserted by E renders acceptable that O is true or acceptable.
 - 1.1'.1a E is personally reliable.
 - 1.1'.1b E is able to provide further evidence for O.
 - 1.1'.1c O is consistent with what other (types of) experts on F assert.

“Behavioral genomics research will lead to new and better treatment (technological feasibility)” is acceptable, because it is asserted by expert Mr. B

To conclude

Life scientists strategically maneuver (as any discussant does in any discussion) in public deliberation on NEST-ethical issues.

Pragma-dialectics provide tools (i.e. Critical questions) to challenge the repeatedly utilized argumentation schemes of life scientists and hence, enhance the (argumentative) quality of public deliberation