HUMAN RATIONALITY

Festschrift for Nenad Smokrović

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CONTENT

Paolo Labinaz

Argumentation, Knowledge and Reasoning

Abstract: This paper deals with Nenad Smokrović's account of argumentation as a curiosity-driven, cooperative effort. More specifically, I focus on one of the two assumptions on which his account is based: that reasoning is argumentative in nature. Since Smokrović assumes Mercier and Sperber's argumentative theory as the starting point for developing this account, I point out the difficulties in combining their conception of reasoning as a persuasive device with the picture of the argumentation process he provides. I then suggest that one can assume the argumentative nature of reasoning while dismissing their conception of reasoning. In particular, I propose an alternative way to elaborate the idea that reasoning is argumentative by highlighting its reason-giving function. I argue that this function appears to be better suited to the argumentation process described by Smokrović than the persuasive one suggested by the argumentative theory. As I will try to show, only if we consider reasoning in its basic form, that is as a reason-giving device, can we understand why two or more people driven by their curiosity can get together in a collaborative effort to safely establish whether a certain proposition is true, without manipulating each other.

Key words: argumentation, reasoning, reason-giving function, persuasion, cooperation.

1 Introduction

Over the last decade, Nenad Smokrović (2011, 2015, 2017, 2018) has written an illuminating series of papers on reasoning and argumentation and how they relate to each other. From among the many suggestions he put forward in these papers, I have chosen to focus here on his claim that argumentation is a particularly effective means for extending knowledge (Smokrović 2015). While the claim in itself is nothing new, having been made by other scholars who have developed epistemological approaches to argumentation (e.g., Biro, Siegel 1992, 1997, 2006; Goldman 1994, 1999, 2003; Lumer 2005), what is original in Smokrović's work is how he argues for it. In fact, his argument rests on two assumptions that, to my mind, have never been combined before: (i) that reasoning is designed for argumentation (Mercier, Sperber 2009, 2011a, b, 2017), and (ii) that knowledge requires avoidance of error (the so-called "safety" condition; see Williamson 2000). In Smokrović's view, since people involved in argumentative exchanges are prompted to use the most reliable methods to

establish whether the proposition under discussion is true, in such circumstances it becomes more likely that they will acquire safe knowledge about it. Here, safety is to be understood as a modal condition, on the basis of which someone obtains (safe) knowledge in a given case insofar as they could not easily have been mistaken in similar situations. This paper sets out to develop the implications of this connection between argumentation and knowledge which Smokrović has made evident, outlining a way of conceiving the function of reasoning as reason-giving (rather than persuasive, as Mercier and Sperber have suggested) which in my opinion offers a better fit with his project.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 introduces the epistemic approach to argumentation, focusing in particular on the perspective developed by Goldman. Section 3 presents Smokrović's account of argumentation, and also describes how it differs from Goldman's. Section 4 points out the difficulties in combining Mercier and Sperber's conception of reasoning as a persuasive device with Smokrović's curiosity-driven, cooperative picture of the argumentation process. In conclusion, section 5 suggests a different way of elaborating the idea that reasoning is argumentative by highlighting its reason-giving function. I will argue that the conception of the argumentative nature of reasoning that results fits better with the argumentation process as described by Smokrović than the one to be found in the writings of Mercier and Sperber.

2 Argumentation as an epistemic practice

That argumentation plays a particularly significant role in our epistemic lives is widely accepted by philosophers, particularly those working within the analytic tradition. However, not all of them agree that its primary purpose is precisely to pursue valuable epistemic goals, such as maximizing true beliefs (while minimizing false ones) or extending knowledge. Indeed, some argumentation theorists maintain that argumentation has a purely persuasive function, that is, its primary goal is to persuade someone of something (e.g., Perelman, Olbrechts-Tyteca 1958; Hamblin 1970), while others hold that argumentation is designed to produce consensus or agreement among interlocutors supporting conflicting claims (e.g., Habermas 1984; van Eemeren, Grootendorst 2004). In contrast, those supporting epistemological approaches to argumentation claim it to be one of the most powerful epistemic practices at our disposal. So, for them, the expected outcome of argumentation is justified belief or knowledge. On this view, a good argument should provide epistemic justification for its conclusion, thereby making it epistemically rational for the audience to believe the content of that conclusion (Biro, Siegel 1992). And, since an

epistemically justified belief is one that is epistemically likely to be true, argumentation should lead people to acquire more accurate beliefs, thereby improving their epistemic position.

The most prominent epistemological account of argumentation has been proposed by Alvin Goldman (1994, 1999, 2003). In his view, argumentation is a social epistemic practice promoting "[…] the exchange of truths through sincere, non-negligent, and mutually corrective speech" (Goldman 1994: 30). Argumentative discourse is expected to occur when, in order to appraise or convince her audience of the truth of a proposition *p*, a speaker asserts not only *p*,[108] but presents reasons or evidence in support of it, because simply asserting *p* might not suffice to achieve that goal. Goldman points out that argumentative discourse guarantees the truth of its conclusion only when arguers adhere to certain basic norms. These norms specify that they must believe both the premises and the conclusion(s), that they must be justified in believing that the premises support the conclusion(s), and that the premises must jointly provide strong support for the conclusion(s) (Goldman 1994: 34; see also 1999: 134). While these conditions apply solely to the arguer, norms for good argumentation also involve reference to the audience. Accordingly, Goldman outlines also a series of norms that relates argumentative discourse to its intended audience. These norms include, among others, the requirements that all the premises of the argument are believable to at least some members of the intended audience and that the premises–conclusion(s) relationship is presented in ways that promote its understanding by the audience (Goldman 1999: 135-139). It is to be noted that conformity to them does not guarantee the truth of the conclusion, but only helps convince the audience to accept it.

According to Goldman (1994: 27-29), when all these norms guide an argumentative discussion, participants would be better able to critically examine reasons and evidence presented in support of a certain claim and their relationship with it, thus ending up with more accurate beliefs. This makes it clear that in analyzing argumentative discourse he is not interested in describing how argumentation actually works, but in specifying what an ideal arguer is expected to do in order to appraise or convince her audience of the truth of a proposition (Goldman 1994: 44-45).

3 Smokrović on argumentation and its expected outcome

Like Goldman, Smokrović intends to show that argumentation is a social practice having significant epistemic import. In particular, as said before,

[108] A situation in which it is sufficient to assert *p* to appraise or convince a hearer of its truth is labelled "informative discourse" by Goldman (1994: 30-31).

he focuses on its capacity to extend knowledge. Where they diverge is on how the argumentation process and its expected outcome are characterized. This becomes clear when considering the two assumptions on which Smokrović's account is based: (i) reasoning is for argumentation, and (ii) knowledge requires safety. Let's consider them in more detail.

3.1 Reasoning is for argumentation

The first assumption made by Smokrović concerns the nature of reasoning and its relationship with argumentation, issues about which there has been much debate in the last decade. In particular, he takes side with those scholars claiming that reasoning is argumentative in nature. According to them, reasoning is not geared to solitary use, but adapted to be done interpersonally, since it typically occurs in "broader argumentative" contexts where people interact with each other (Hornikx, Hahn 2012). In developing his account, Smokrović explicitly refers to Hugo Mercier and Dan Sperber's naturalistic, evolutionary-oriented argumentative theory of reasoning (2009, 2011a, b, 2017). Within their evolutionary framework, reasoning is a function (and probably the primary one) of an evolved, cognitive module that deals with reasons and their relationship with the claims they purportedly support. Specifically, Smokrović is interested in the two following theses put forward by Sperber and Mercier:

(i) reasoning is "an aspect of social, and more specifically communicative competence" (Mercier, Sperber 2009: 165). Indeed, as observed by Sperber (2001), we cannot understand the emergence of reasoning without considering its role in the evolution of human communication. He points out that communication may have evolved only if it would have been advantageous to both speakers and their audiences. The problem is that the interests of speakers and their audiences usually diverge. Speakers typically communicate to influence their audience, prompting them to believe, feel and act in specific ways. On the other hand, communication is advantageous to audiences because it provides them with reliable information that they could not have obtained independently. The reason why communication has evolved and stabilized is precisely that it can serve both of these purposes. In particular, Mercier and Sperber (2011a: 57) hold that reasoning makes human communication effective and advantageous for both speakers and their audiences because it enables them "to devise and evaluate arguments intended to persuade". So, reasoning as a socio-cognitive tool has evolved to support people in their attempts to convince a cautious audience and to evaluate possibly valuable information that could not be accepted on trust (Mercier, Sperber 2017: 194);

(ii) people reason better in argumentative contexts. According to Mercier and Sperber (2011a: 61-63, 2017: 263-267), reasoning works better when used in dialogical situations, particularly in group discussions, where participants offer each other arguments in support of their viewpoints to convince one another, compared to when one is thinking on one's own. In support of this claim, they have presented a large amount of evidence collected in psychological experiments based on reasoning tasks. This evidence shows that reasoning tasks in which isolated subjects tend to give wrong answers are more frequently solved correctly when they are approached in groups and discussed collectively. For example, while only few subjects gave the right answer in the standard version of the selection task, more than half responded correctly if asked to discuss its solution in a group (see Moshman, Geil 1998). Similarly, as highlighted by Mercier and Sperber (2011a: 61), although it is empirically demonstrated that people find it very difficult to recognize the *modus tollens* (if *p* then *q*, not-*q*, so not-*p*), when engaged in argumentative dialogues, in order to criticize the claims of their opponents, they recognize and easily apply this argumentative schema (Thompson, Evans, Handley 2005).

3.2 The "safety" condition for knowledge

As for the second assumption, Smokrović relies on Williamson's safety requirement on knowledge (see Williamson 2000, 2009a, b).[109] According to this requirement, a subject *s* knows a proposition *p* only if she is safe from error. And *s* is safe from error when there must be no risk or danger that *she* falsely believes in similar cases. On this view, safe belief can be understood as a kind of reliable belief. Accordingly, if *s* truly knows the proposition *p* in a given case, then that proposition must be true in every similar case she believes that proposition. In Williamson's words, "[i]f one knows, one could not easily have been wrong in a similar case" (Williamson 2000: 147). It is probably clear from what I have said so far that safety is to be viewed as a modal state, namely a state that concerns what could have happened (Williamson 2000: 123).[110]

Williamson (2009b: 14) characterizes the modal notion of safety in terms of possible worlds. According to this characterization, *s* is safe from error in believing the proposition *p* on a basis *b* (or via a method *m*) in the

[109] Two other prominent epistemologists proposing a safety requirement for knowledge are Duncan Pritchard (2007, 2009) and Ernest Sosa (1999). However, there are substantial differences in how Sosa, Pritchard and Williamson formulate the notion of safe belief. Here I will consider only the account proposed by Williamson.

[110] More generally, Williamson (2000: 123) claims that not only safety but also similar notions such as those of stability and robustness are to be conceived as modal states.

actual world if and only if there is no suitably close world in which one believes *p* on *b* (or via *m*) and *p* is false (Williamson 2000: 126-127; see also Williamson 2009a: 325). Simplifying a bit, if *s* safely believes that *p* on a basis *b* (or via a method *m*), then *p* cannot be false in all suitably close worlds in which she believes it on *b* (or via *m*). By referring to the possible worlds in which *s* truly believes *p,* Williamson claims his theory to be able to exclude the kind of epistemic luck we can observe in Gettier cases.

It is to be pointed out that Williamson does not consider safety as a necessary and sufficient condition on knowledge, otherwise it would require omniscience on the part of a knower. At most, since he introduces the safety condition with a conditional using the expression "only if", it can be conceived as a necessary condition. If so, Smokrović (2015: 230) notes, Williamson's safety requirement is clearly consistent with a counterfactual such as "if the proposition *p* had been false, one would (or might) still have believed *p*". In other words, safety does not preclude the possibility that one might be wrong in believing that *p*.

3.3 From curiosity to safe knowledge through the argumentation process

Smokrović (2015) develops his account by integrating the two theses presented above with Williamson's safety principle. In doing so, he aims to describe argumentation as a communicative process that puts its participants in an epistemically privileged position to safely establish whether a proposition *p* (the object of discussion) is true. Accordingly, the expected outcome of the argumentation process should be that of attaining safe knowledge compared to the initial lack of knowledge (or a safer state of knowledge compared to the initially less safe state) concerning the proposition under discussion. This is because people involved in an argumentative process tend to rely on more reliable methods of inquiry than when they are trying to discover individually whether a proposition *p* is true. More specifically, by critically examining their arguments for and against *p*, they are more likely to acquire accurate beliefs, and thereby extend their knowledge safely.

Let's look in more detail at how Smokrović (2015: 226-227) describes the communicative dynamics and the structure of the argumentation process. According to him, its starting point is a situation in which an addresser, while sincerely believing the proposition *p*, does not know whether *p* is true. Insofar as not even her addressee knows whether *p* is true,[111] but

[111] Henceforth, whenever the gender of the addresser or of the addressee is not specified, the pronoun "she" (plus "her", "hers" and "herself") will be used to refer to the

(propositional) curiosity is present in both of them to know that,[112] they may be prepared to involve themselves in an argumentation process.[113] Smokrović points out that although it is clear that the addresser and her addressee play different roles in this process, their involvement suggests that they are committed to pursuing the same goal because they both want to find out whether *p* is true. While the addresser is expected to put forward the proposition *p* whose merits are to be established, and provide reasons and/or evidence supporting it, it is up to the addressee to evaluate the acceptability of *p* and establish its relationship with those reasons and/or evidence.

It is to be noted that, in arguing for their claims, people may make errors of various kinds, or be influenced by *confirmation bias*.[114] In particular, when confirmation bias is at work, they are more likely to focus only on the reasons and/or evidence supporting their claims, and not consider those contrary to those claims (Smokrović 2015: 227). It is clear that when people reason in isolation, they are unlikely to notice when they have made a mistake or when their reasoning has been influenced by confirmation bias. In an argumentative exchange, on the other hand, things are very different. In fact, an addressee may point out to the addresser that her reasoning is fallacious, or that she has failed to consider specific evidence, or that there are inconsistencies in her speech. Moreover, he can counterbalance the addresser's tendency to confirmation bias by presenting counterexamples to her argument in an attempt to falsify the claim under discussion. More generally, Smokrović (2015: 227-228) maintains that the dialogical structure of the argumentation process typically prompts an effect of "stepping back" on the part of the addresser. Indeed, when appropriately challenged by the addressee, she may be stimulated to reconsider the reason(s) and evidence presented to support her claim and reassess the strength of the relationship between the two. In this way, the dialogical structure of the argumentation process has beneficial consequences for the addresser (but also on her addressee) in that it enhances their reasoning abilities and limits the influence of confirmation bias on their way of reasoning (Smokrović

addresser and "he" (plus "him", "his" and "himself") to refer to the addressee.

[112] Smokrović (2015: 225) regards propositional curiosity, namely the wish to know whether a proposition is true or false, as the primary form of curiosity, underlying any other type.

[113] Smokrović (2015: 229) rightly observes that, while not knowing whether *p* is true, both the addresser and her addressee may be acquainted with some facts concerning *p*.

[114] In the psychology of reasoning, confirmation bias refers to the tendency, usually considered contrary to the norms of good reasoning, to look for (or interpret) evidence or proofs in favor of one's beliefs, expectations or hypotheses rather than those that could falsify them (see Nickerson 1998).

2015: 229). Indeed, by challenging each other, they are prompted to use the most reliable methods to establish the truth of the claim under discussion, thereby increasing their chances of attaining safe knowledge. In Williamson's terms, if they come to establish the truth (or the falsity) of the claim under discussion by using argumentative exchange, it is likely that they would not be wrong about the claim in other similar situations (namely, in worlds suitably close to the actual one).

Smokrović (2015: 229) proposes an interesting example to show how participants in an argumentation process can safely extend their initial knowledge, or revise their false beliefs, by producing and evaluating each other's arguments. Imagine, he suggests, that Hercule Poirot and Colonel Hastings are trying to solve a murder case. Suppose Hastings claims it was the gardener, even if he does not know whether it is true, but he truly believes that to be the case. Poirot himself does not know whether the gardener is the murderer. So, there is a proposition *p*, "The gardener is a murderer", of which both of them are curious to ascertain the truth. Poirot and Hastings certainly possess some evidence related to the crime scene, about which (we can say) they may have safe knowledge. The moment Hastings uses some of this evidence to support *p* directly or to develop a piece of reasoning having *p* as its conclusion, we can consider them to have entered into an argumentative exchange. In doing so, he might be influenced by confirmation bias in that he might have considered only evidence in support of *p* or not have noticed other evidence that is contrary to it. Furthermore, his piece of reasoning might be fallacious, e.g., it might start from mistaken or unjustified premises. Clearly, Poirot might consider the evidence sufficient or the piece of reasoning convincing and thus accept Hastings's claim. More probably (knowing Poirot) he might point out that Hastings has failed to consider other evidence or that his reasoning does not work. In other words, as addressee, the fundamental role of Poirot is to correct what is wrong in Hastings' reasoning. In fact, there is no way they could attain safe knowledge about *p* by relying on epistemically unsound bases or methods. It should be pointed that they can swap roles, and so after Poirot has pointed out the weaknesses in Hastings' reasoning, Hastings can inform Poirot whether his counter-reasoning actually works. In this virtuous argumentative exchange, it is possible for both of them to overcome the negative influence of confirmation bias and fine-tune their ability to reason. Thanks to these mutual exchanges and role-swapping, it is likely that they will acquire safe knowledge about *p* (whether true or false) in a way that makes it unlikely that they would be wrong in other similar cases (Smokrović 2015: 231).

4 Cooperation and adversariality in argumentation

The picture of argumentation provided by Smokrović is a very comforting one, also because he describes it as a process of mutual adjustment between an addresser and her addressee.[115] This process starts because of their shared curiosity about whether the proposition under discussion is true and continues until they safely establish whether it is or not. However, they may come to the conclusion that it is impossible to establish (or find an agreement about) the truth of the proposition. Even in this latter case, however, the fact remains that both participants were prepared to find out something more about *p*. This means that, according to Smokrović, in order to be engaged in an argumentative exchange, there must be a modicum of cooperative attitude on the part of the participants. Indeed, in Gricean terms (1975: 26-30), this desire to know whether the proposition under discussion is true can be seen as the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which addresser and addressee are engaged. Of course, they may have a whole range of different reasons for aiming to achieve that goal. But the fact remains that wanting to know whether that proposition is true is the mutually accepted goal for both of them. Accordingly, the representation of the argumentation process provided by Smokrović contains an essential cooperative component. This does not preclude the fact that the argumentative exchange must be adversarial to some extent. It is a fact that the absence of conflict would make it impossible (or well-nigh impossible) to achieve safe knowledge. Indeed, it is precisely the adversariality which is present in a cooperative framework that puts its participants in an epistemically privileged position from where to safely establish whether the proposition under discussion is true. However, this way of conceiving adversariality does not seem to fit well with what Mercier and Sperber have described in some of their writings. In particular, in response to comments on their target article in *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, when clarifying their views on the social origin and functions of reasoning they claim that:

> "[t]he main function of reasoning is indeed social, but by serving the social interests of individuals rather than the collective interests of the group" (Mercier, Sperber 2011b: 96);
> "[w]hat makes communication advantageous to communicators is that it allows them to achieve some desirable effect in the receivers. For this, the information they emit has to be conducive to this effect, whether it is true or false" (Mercier, Sperber 2011b: 96);

[115] As we saw with Poirot and Hastings, the participants can exchange roles: the participant playing the role of addresser can shift to the role of addressee and vice versa.

> "[communicators] argue for whatever it is advantageous to them to have their audience believe" (Mercier, Sperber 2011b: 96).

Let me remind you that Smokrović assumes Sperber and Mercier's theory to be the starting point for his account of argumentation. Accordingly, the problem for him is how to connect these quotations as to the irrelevance of truth and the collective interests of the group to his account. Indeed, insofar as Mercier and Sperber hold that the function of reasoning is to give us what is advantageous to us, they appear to conceive of reasoning as an instrument for achieving one's interests in communicative contexts. Thus, they trace the argumentative nature of reasoning back to the purely individualistic component of dialogical situations, and namely, the goal of achieving "personal" advantages from these situations. If we follow this line of argument, however, reasoning should be conceived as best adapted to adversarial contexts. Accordingly, the function Smokrović attributes to reasoning in the argumentation process should be seen at best as a by-product of its original "strategic" function.[116] Obviously, the fact remains that reasoning is argumentative by its nature, but given its strategic function in argumentative exchanges, it seems unable to play a significant role in the attainment of safe knowledge. Indeed, if reasoning evolved as a strategic instrument to serve one's interests, and not to establish the truth, any truth that results from it would be mostly incidental. Moreover, the reason(s) an addresser provides in support of her claim should not be regarded as aimed at truth, but at persuading her addressee of whatever is to her advantage to have him believe. In short, if Smokrović assumes Sperber and Mercier's theory to be the starting point for developing his account of argumentation, he really needs to explain whether (and if so, how) their way of conceiving reasoning fits into his curiosity-driven, cooperative picture of the argumentation process.

It seems to me that Smokrović has three possible ways of defending his account against this criticism.

First, he could respond that he does not take the entire argumentative theory of reasoning at face value, but only the part regarding the effectiveness of reasoning in dialogic situations. However, since Smokrović has clearly stated that he wants to integrate the argumentative theory with epistemological insights, this way of overcoming the criticism is not viable.

[116] In two previous works, I have argued that the argumentative theory of reasoning represents reasoning as a persuasive device and so appears to presuppose an instrumental conception of rationality (see Labinaz 2014, 2020). Catarina Dutilh Novaes (2018) and David Moshman (2018) have also argued that Mercier and Sperber emphasize too much the "strategic" component of reasoning in argumentation.

In fact, he does not seem to distance himself from specific aspects of the argumentative theory. It is also true that if it is his intention to integrate the theory, he is obviously not entirely satisfied with it, and so we would expect him to explain how his revised or extended version is supposed to be better than the original. But there is none of that in Smokrović's article. As far as I can understand, he does not wish to reject specific parts of the argumentative theory, including the one characterizing reasoning as a strategic instrument serving one's own personal interests.

Second, he could point out that the criticism focuses only on one dimension of the reasoning capacity (namely that of producing arguments), and omits the one related to evaluating arguments. That is true. If one considers this second dimension, one could argue that the capacity to evaluate arguments can counterbalance attempts at persuasion that are accomplished through the capacity to produce arguments. However, the fact remains that the quotations presented above suggest that people do not usually get involved in an argumentative process with the aim of knowing whether *p* is true, but in order to convince the addressee that they are right, regardless of the truth of what they are claiming. From this perspective, cooperativity should not be considered a relevant property of the argumentation process. However, this conflicts with Smokrović's picture of the argumentative process presented above.

Third, like Goldman, Smokrović could argue that his account describes what happens in an argumentative exchange in a somewhat idealized way. Accordingly, the argumentation process presented above does not need to exactly fit real-life instances of argumentative discourse. Instead, it describes what is supposed to happen in an argumentative exchange when certain conditions hold. More specifically, by considering argumentation as a curiosity-driven, cooperative process, Smokrović focuses on how an addresser and her addressee should behave in an argumentative exchange if they want to acquire safe knowledge. This means that his account concerns a very specific kind of argumentative exchange. In other words, it is the kind of argumentative exchange in which the adversarial component is not predominant. After all, argumentation can occur in various different forms of interaction, including negotiation, persuasion inquiry, deliberation, information-seeking and so on (for a complete list, see Walton 1998: 30-34). Some are highly adversarial (e.g., persuasion), while others are cooperative in nature (e.g., inquiry). But if argumentation is not inherently adversarial (despite the fact that certain forms of interaction in which it is involved are adversarial), it would be wrong to consider the argumentative function of reasoning as essentially persuasive. Indeed, reasoning also serves argumentation in situations where cooperativity is predominant or

adversariality occurs in a cooperative framework, such as in the kind of argumentation process described by Smokrović. What is needed, then, is another way of elaborating the idea that reasoning is argumentative by its nature, which can then be applied to those cases of argumentation lacking in any predominant adversarial component. If we could do this, then we could argue that the reasoning involved in the kind of argumentative process described by Smokrović is not the same kind of reasoning suggested by Sperber and Mercier.

5 The reason-giving function of reasoning and its role in the argumentation process

The claim that reasoning has an argumentative function may be understood in (at least) two different ways: as the attribution of a function which is either reason-giving or persuasive. The reason-giving function refers to one's ability to reason, that is, the ability to make the connection between premises and conclusions. The persuasive function consists instead of the ability to produce convincing arguments, namely to be able to convince one's addressee of something. It should be noted that, on the one hand, one may be very good at making premises-conclusions connections, but not necessarily interested in using this ability to produce arguments to convince other people and, on the other, that it is quite possible to successfully convince other people with what one says without needing to use one's ability to make premises-conclusions connections. In light of this, one could justifiably assume that these abilities are independent of each other. They might have developed at different times and for very different reasons, which are not necessarily connected. By way of contrast, the argumentative theory of reasoning conflates being able to reason and being able to produce convincing arguments with the more general ability to argue. However, reducing the argumentative function of reasoning to producing persuasive arguments does not really explain much about our special attention for (and interest in) reasons and their relationship to the claims in support of which they are presented. Indeed, devising arguments intended to persuade is only one of various things that we can do thanks to our ability to reason. For example, we can provide reasons for a whole series of motives, such as giving meaning to our speech or actions, making explicit the premises of what we say or do, collaborating with others, or even improving our self-image. Of course, we can also give reasons in order to persuade others. But there is no compelling reason why the main function of reasoning should be regarded as primarily persuasive. Instead, it seems more reasonable to consider the reason-giving function of reasoning as more basic than its persuasive function. If we conceive this as the primary

function of reasoning, our interest in reasons may have something to do with accountability, rather than personal advantage. Philip E. Tetlock (together with Jennifer Lerner), who first defined this term, characterizes it as "the implied or clearly expressed expectation that one will be called upon to justify one's beliefs, feelings or actions to others" (Lerner, Tetlock 2003: 434). It is thanks to reasoning that we can give reasons to explain and justify ourselves. More specifically, insofar as we are held to be accountable for our beliefs, feelings or actions, reasoning enables us to motivate and justify these beliefs, feelings and actions to others, thereby letting people know what to expect of us. Obviously, the reason-giving function of reasoning can be exploited to convince others of a certain claim or opinion and thus become part of a more complex social situation involving adversariality.

If we focus now on our ability to argue, we can observe that this ability depends on our acquaintance with specific social practices, which involve, among other things, the rules and expectations that guide our behavior when engaged in them. As suggested by many argumentation theorists (cf. van Eemeren, Grootendorst 2004; Walton 1998), these rules and expectations involve (among other things) attributions of entitlement, undertakings of commitments, turn-taking, ways of questioning each other's claims, adoption of standards of precision, and so on. However, there is no single set of rules and expectations that governs any argumentative practice. Even if argumentative exchanges often seem to evolve into a competition among interlocutors, argumentation is not a monolithic enterprise. Indeed, as said above, adversarial interaction is just one of the forms of interaction where argumentation is involved. These forms of interaction can differ because of the initial situation, the goals of the arguers involved, and the aim of the interaction as a whole. Differences on these aspects determine differences related to the rules and expectations governing a certain argumentative exchange. Being able to make premises-conclusions connections, then, is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition to be engaged in argumentative practices. Indeed, one needs to respect the rules characterizing the argumentative situation in which one is involved and be guided by expectations as to how to proceed when engaged in it if one wants to achieve the goal one is pursuing to achieve in that situation.

Returning to the picture of the argumentation process provided by Smokrović, the beneficial epistemic effect to which he refers (which is attaining safe knowledge) may only come about against a backdrop of specific conditions that ensure a certain degree of cooperativity between interlocutors. These conditions apply to both the interlocutors involved in the argumentation process and the interaction that takes place between them. If these conditions obtain, the result will be that no interlocutor emerge as

"loser." Indeed, those involved in the argumentation process described by Smokrović are expected to benefit from the exchange by acquiring something of value, namely safe knowledge. It is hard to see here how reasoning as a persuasive device can be suitable for the purposes of this argumentative process.[117] If such reasoning were predominant in it, then arguers were involved in an argumentative practice, which may be similar to some degree, but not identical, to that described by Smokrović. If instead we consider reasoning in its basic form, that is as a reason-giving device, we can understand why people can jointly try to find out whether the proposition under discussion is true. On the one hand, for the addresser, it is a question of accountability in front of her addressee: she will want to bring appropriate epistemic support to her claim by providing what she recognizes as valuable epistemic resources in the form of evidence, justification etc. On the other, her addressee may want to evaluate the accountability of the addresser by challenging her claim through appropriate objections, requests for further clarifications, or defeaters. And it is precisely this kind of adversariality occurring in a cooperative framework that puts its participants in an epistemically privileged position to safely establish whether the proposition under discussion is true.

6 Concluding remarks

This paper dealt with Smokrović's thought-provoking account of argumentation as a curiosity-driven, cooperative effort. I have focused mainly on one of the two assumptions on which his account is based: that reasoning is argumentative in nature. Since Smokrović assumes Mercier and Sperber's argumentative theory as the starting point for developing this account, I have tried to highlight the difficulties one encounters when attempting to put together their way of conceiving reasoning as a persuasive device with the picture of the argumentation process Smokrović provides. I have suggested that one can assume the argumentative nature of reasoning while dismissing that picture of reasoning. In particular, I have proposed an alternative way to elaborate the idea that reasoning is argumentative by highlighting its reason-giving function. Indeed, since devising arguments intended to persuade is only one of the various things that we can do thanks to our ability to reason, we should consider the reason-giving function as more fundamental than that of devising persuasive arguments. I went on to argue that the former function appears to be better suited to the argumentation process described by Smokrović than the latter. Indeed, as

[117] Obviously, this does not mean that reasoning aimed at producing persuasive arguments cannot be appropriate in certain interactions involving argumentation.

I have tried to show, only if we consider reasoning in its basic form, that is as a reason-giving device, can we understand why two or more people driven by their curiosity can get together in a collaborative effort to safely establish whether a certain proposition is true, without manipulating each other. If their goal were to use their reasoning capacity to manipulate each other, they would no longer be engaged in the argumentative process described by Smokrović but in a totally different argumentative practice in which the adversarial component would be predominant.

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