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## TOWARDS AN ENACTIVE DRAMA THERAPY: IMPLICATIONS IN THE COUNSELLING OF DISABLED CLIENTS

RAREȘ-MIHNEA IOSIFESCU<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Mechanisms of change in dramatherapy are poorly understood, compromising its *bona fide* therapy status. Given growing attention to how alternative frameworks of cognition might inform mental health practices, I aim to provide an enactivism-congruent and affordance-based account of dramatherapy. A secondary aim is to suggest why disabled or differently abled clients might benefit more from such psychotherapies that veer from a brain-centered approach to a holistic outlook that situates the mind within a dynamical system.

**Keywords:** dramatherapy, enactivism, affordance-based therapy, disability.

### Introduction

There is a surging interest in establishing the efficacy of drama therapy, with a recent meta-analysis (Orkibi et al., 2025) putting forth encouraging results. However, the scarcity of empirical studies and the visible explanatory gap concerning why and how such practices have promising effects on mental health outcomes severely undermine the credibility of dramatherapeutical interventions. This article aims to contribute to scholarly attempts to identify mechanisms of change in dramatherapy (de Witte et al., 2021) by situating these processes within an enactive framework (de Haan, 2020). A secondary, exploratory objective is to

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investigate whether disabled or differently abled individuals might benefit more from dramatherapy than from other *bona fide* therapies, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT).

### 1. Accounts of drama therapy

The field of drama therapy is not, by any means, unitary, with each theoretical school having its own techniques and core assumptions. For instance, Sue Jennings's Embodiment-Projective-Role paradigm (Jennings, 1992) puts forward the idea that sense-making throughout development entails dramatic play and, depending on the child's age, it can be embodied (i.e., sensory exploration), projective/symbolic or appeal to role-taking.

Rooted in Jungian practices, the Sesame approach (Watts et al., 2013) emphasizes non-verbal enactment of myths, fairy and folk tales provided by a facilitator. This school understands dramatherapy as *bridging in* a liberating liminal space, where individual insight is gained by relinquishing former habits and convictions. Therefore, by *bridging out*, there is no need to share or overtly analyze an individual's psychological change. The facilitator, also called a trainer, is not seen as a full-fledged therapist.

Also of interest is Landy's Role Model of Dramatherapy (Landy, 1993), which has the role as its main unit of analysis. He proposes that dramatherapy should be centered on finding ways to cope and negotiate with a rigid set of roles.

I do not intend to provide an exhaustive account of dramatherapy. Rather, I will adhere to already established operationalizations of drama therapy that view it as a fantasy-based intervention involving "the intentional use of drama and theater processes such as embodiment, dramatic projection, improvisation, role-play, and performance to facilitate physiological, psychological, and social change" (de Witte et al., 2021, p. 3).

## **2. The enactive turn in cognitive science**

Classical cognitive science deems the mind as an information processing system confined in the skull (Gallagher, 2018) which manipulates stored mental representations of the external world in a rule-based fashion. One reverberation of the classical model in clinical practice is the generic cognitive model (Beck & Haigh, 2014), which explicates psychopathology in terms of faulty pre-existing schemas that are in charge of processing social information and give rise to personal meaning.

Many critiques have been raised concerning such neurocentric “representation-hungry” (Clark & Toribio, 1994) approaches, with the enactive turn aiming to relocate cognition (or “sense-making”) into a larger dynamical system that also encapsulates the body and the environment. For enactivists, the agent uses the (real) world as its best model and the possibilities of action (i.e., affordances) it offers (Ward et al., 2017).

Coined by Gibson (1979), “affordance” refers to opportunities for action that an ecological niche offers an individual. Gibson claims that perception and action are inextricably linked, as one understands the world in terms of what possibilities to act each object provides. I will adhere to the enactive stance to affordances, according to which they are already in the environment but depend on an agent’s skillful action to be brought forward (Chemero, 2003). Affordances need not be only physical; they could also be socio-culturally constructed (Rietveld et al., 2013) or affective (Krueger & Colombetti, 2018).

## **3. Enactive drama therapy**

Enactive psychiatry (De Haan, 2020) makes the case for psychiatric conditions as disordered patterns of sense-making. At the core of these maladaptive patterns are altered fields of affordances (i.e., the possibilities of action that stand out for an individual). According to de Haan et al. (2013), fields of affordances can be analyzed along three dimensions: width (number of perceived action possibilities), depth (the possibilities of action along the temporal axis) and height (how relevant

or salient affordances are to the individual). Given shortcomings of categoric models of psychopathology and the growing interest in transdiagnostic approaches (Dalglish et al., 2020), I find such an affordance-driven stance of much value.

The idea of affordance-based therapies has been already visited, especially in the context of managing chronic pain (Vaz et al., 2023). However, it has not gained much momentum in the study of mental health. I aim to reappraise drama therapy as an affordance-based therapy with the scope of “opening up” fields of affordances in a collaborative fashion, where the therapist and other clients co-construct meaning.

Of initial interest is the enactive account of pretense play (Rucinska & Reijmers, 2015), according to which symbolic play need not be representational (i.e., it need not evoke mental representations or involve offline symbol swapping). In the context of the action-perception-action loop, novel affordances are generated (or discovered), as illustrated in the case study of John. Their “Staying Within Play” approach involved John offloading/extending problematic relationships and different affective states to objects/toys. He was later asked to arrange and physically manipulate them in ways that made him feel comfortable, granting novel affordances *via* an adjusted sensorimotor experience and participatory sense-making (de Jaegher & di Paolo, 2017).

Throughout our lives, we move through rich landscapes of affordances, yet we don’t act on all of them. That is, not all affordances solicit the individual. Various factors come into play, including personal needs (broccoli affords eating but may solicit it only if other options are not present), habits (doomscrolling stands out more easily than reading if it’s a habit) and ability (a party affords socialization only if I have previously been exposed to such practices and have acquired their norms). This begins to explain why, in drama therapy, enacted experiences feel transformative and echo into our personal lives. I argue that affordances themselves are not transferred to other life contexts. Rather, they may lead to acquired skills: “In acquiring a skill we learn in which places in the environment to find the affordances relevant to our concerns and what aspects of environment to attend to” (Rietvald &

Kiverstein, 2014, p. 331). This nicely fits Gibson's "education of attention", or even Vygotsky's approach to scaffolded learning.

For instance, de Gruijter et al. (2024) designed an intervention for people with personality disorders that placed emphasis on experiential practice (i.e., interpersonal skills) and exploring behavioral alternatives through enactment. The authors provide the example of participant Y, aged 45, who struggled with managing conflicts and confronting others, especially their parents. Dramatherapy sessions centered around enacting vulnerability, courage and interpersonal interactions, inoculating habitual and mastered practices, allowing for possibilities for action to actually guide behavior (i.e., affordances becoming solicitations) in similar environments and marking the transfer from "I know that [x]" to "I know how to [x]". From a cultural anthropology lens, this therapeutical setting bears some resemblance to rituals and ceremonials wherein certain practices are instilled.

#### **4. Drama therapy with disabled/differently abled clients**

Living with a disability increases the individual's risk to develop a mental health condition. Recruiting data from the 2021 National Health Interview Survey conducted in the USA, Koenig et al. (2024) report that individuals with high functional disability have 552% greater odds of receiving an anxiety diagnosis and 697% greater odds of receiving a depression diagnosis. Such startling results should place responsibility on mental health practitioners and researchers alike to inquire into the underlying phenomena leading to the high prevalence of psychopathology in disabled individuals and to devise/adapt interventions to partly mitigate that risk. I argue that enactive-ecological models can help with this.

Cohabiting and negotiating with the same environment can sometimes be challenging for vulnerable individuals. Differently abled people struggle to navigate spaces designed by able-bodied people which severely limit their possibilities for action. Toro et al. (2025) put forward the concept of "disabling scaffolding" to describe those environmental

structures that obstruct the individual's possibilities for action. Reliance on scaffolds (e.g., braille displays, wheelchair ramps, simplified language) is essential for asserting autonomy, whereas losing access to them might impair one's spatial agency, with such ruptures being linked to psychopathology (Krueger, 2024). Moreover, the relationship between oppression and disruptions of spatial agency is bidirectional – social practices constrain affordances, and obstructed affordances shape which practices individuals (don't) engage in. This unveils a disordered pattern of sense-making where disabled individuals, even though they might be embedded in nurturing environments, operate with disrupted fields of affordances.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is often deemed the “golden-standard” in this field (David et al., 2018) and by no means do I seek to contest the robust empirical findings at the nomothetic level, albeit some of its assumptions reflect outdated theories of emotion and cognition. However, I do wish to make the case that its use is problematic in disabled clients. Pathologizing thoughts and behaviors driven by oppression, marginalization and hostile environments and framing them as “cognitive distortions” may sometimes foster the client's feelings of hopelessness. Moreover, the principle of “reality testing”, according to which assumptions are empirically challenged by investigating evidence reaped from the external environment, may be perceived as dismissive.

An enactive drama therapy aiming at maximizing affordances, instead of changing or reappraising cognitions, might be better suited for some disabled clients, as most of their struggles stem from restrained navigation in socially or structurally inhospitable environments. Drama therapy sessions grant access to safe, compassionate and playful opportunities to reassert one's spatial agency by the creation of what Dokumaci (2023) calls “activist affordances” or finding ways to work around hostile niches. Systematic manipulation of the environment is rarely possible, so drama therapy should center on enacting an array of situations where the actor-client puts into practice their skills to access regulatory resources (including affective affordances). Moreover, non-verbal or minimally verbal aspect of enactment may benefit clients

with intellectual disabilities who struggle to provide narratives of their psychological change in talk therapies.

## 5. Conclusion

I offered drama therapy as an effective practice by providing an affordance-based model. To the best of my knowledge, such a proposal has not yet been considered in the literature. Currently, drama therapy is not included in the American Psychological Association's list of empirically-based treatments, yet I hope my enactivism-informed account persuades researchers into further exploring its efficacy and regarding it as a *bone fide* therapy.

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## A 4E APPROACH TO TRAUMA-INDUCED DISSOCIATIVE EXPERIENCES: DEVELOPMENTAL TRAUMA AS DISRUPTION IN THE ECOLOGICAL NICHE

IRINA ALEXE<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Dissociative disorders are generally understood in psychiatry as a disruption or discontinuity in the normal integration of consciousness, memory, identity, emotion, perception, body representation, motor control or behavior. Still, no definitive theoretical model makes sense of the full spectrum of experiences that currently fall under the large umbrella of “dissociative”. This lack of a sturdy theoretical foundation encourages cross-sectional studies that seek to correlate dissociative experiences with pathologies, and relatively few articles focusing on case studies or phenomenological investigation.

I first present two main explanatory paradigms that contend to capture the fairly wide array of dissociative experiences. Then I attempt to enrich the trauma-based model with a 4E understanding of traumatic experiences. I propose that the kind of trauma that may lead to dissociative experiences can be understood as continuous disturbances in an individual’s ecological niche. This would put them in the position of not having constant and predictable access to a personalized regulatory affective, cognitive and instrumental niche, which are integral parts of the individual’s whole ecological niche. To flesh out the hypothesis, I articulate making sense of developmental trauma in the language of affordances, and explore the implications for derealization and depersonalization as a subset of dissociative experiences.

**Keywords:** affordances, ecological niche, 4E cognition, dissociative disorders, developmental trauma, depersonalization/derealization disorder.

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## Introduction

Dissociative disorders and symptoms have incurred several attempts at reconceptualization. They were first introduced as a separate category in 1980, after being for quite a long time amassed under the very lax label of “hysteria” (Van Der Hart & Dorahy, 2022). Although there are currently different competing explanatory models of dissociation, it is generally understood as a disruption or discontinuity in the normal integration of consciousness, memory, identity, emotion, perception, body representation, motor control and behavior (DSM-5-TR; American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2022).

Although an abundance of theoretical models seek to explain the causes and processes that drive dissociative experiences, most focus on various predictors without trying to find a common denominator among them and without providing a complete causal mechanism that would account for the formation and persistence of dissociative symptoms. These thereby fail to do justice to the phenomenology of experiences centered around the feeling of disconnection from the environment, from one’s own body and from one’s personal identity.

In this text, I argue that a 4E approach of the mind can better conceptualize at least some dissociative experiences by tracing them back to disturbances in affordance spaces. I limit the scope of this analysis to depersonalization/derealization disorder (DDD), although I believe that it can, with suitable changes, be extended to cover multiple experiences that fall under the dissociative umbrella.

My analysis will be restricted to an etiological explanation that is based on the posttraumatic model of dissociation, which takes prolonged distress to be the cause of DDD. There is, arguably, a difference between the conditions in someone’s past that have led them to develop pathological levels of depersonalization/ derealization and the way this disorder manifests in their everyday life once the symptoms surpass the clinical threshold. The disorder presents itself as recurring dissociative episodes that can vary in duration (a couple hours up to several years, as per the ICD-11 description), that are usually precipitated by stressors or by personal triggers. What exactly happens during an episode and how

the triggering occurs are questions beyond the scope of this work and my current understanding of the subject.

One limitation of my approach is that it takes for granted the already lacking, current psychiatric understanding of DDD (as presented in the DSM-5-tr and ICD-11 and instrumentalized in the psychiatric measures presented below), and so it inherits its critiques. These include: whether the symptoms grouped under DDD are homogenous enough, in their phenomenology and etiology, to be considered one clinical disorder, how valid is pathologizing these phenomena in the first place, and whether it is justified to classify DDD as a different disorder rather than a class of symptoms that appears in trauma-related and affective disorders.

### **1. Explanatory models of dissociative disorders and concept instrumentalization**

Two main explanatory models compete in the literature. One major challenge in trying to make sense of dissociation consists in the fact that the word “dissociation” is used in the literature to refer to quite a wide range of experiences. This makes ensuing research seem patchy and not grounded in a comprehensive theory, which was perhaps to be expected given the history of the disorder classification and the heterogeneity of experiences clustered under this concept.

The sociocognitive model (Lynn et al., 2022) questions whether trauma is an exclusive or necessarily potent catalyst of dissociation and proposes that the intricacies of dissociative disorders, DDD included, are to be at least in part explained by a combination of socio-cultural factors. These factors include understanding the mind as somehow separate from the body and considering the self as composed of different parts that can be contradictory, and this contradiction as pathological. This model also highlights the role of therapeutic jargon and methods in ingraining patients and clients with the abovementioned ideas and thus precipitating dissociative symptoms. Individual traits like suggestibility and fantasy proneness, as well as cognitive failures such as memory lapses are cited as factors that make an individual more prone to develop dissociative symptoms if exposed to this fragmented view of the human mind and self.

This model calls into question the clinical organization and description of the symptoms and leaves room for an argument to be made about the possible iatrogenic nature of the diagnosis. It bears mention that arguing against the theoretical conceptualization and explanation of a set of symptoms differs from claiming that the “symptoms” are born out of improper use of metaphors and fallacious understanding of the mind as separate from the body. Yet even if the complete dissolution of the diagnosis were warranted, this would not help make sense of anomalous distressing experiences.

The trauma-based model, which seems to be the most in-tune with the general line of psychiatric explanations, posits that dissociation occurs as a defense mechanism against early traumatic experiences in order to protect the mind against inescapable psychic pain (Şar et al., 2017). The feeling of one’s self and environment as unreal or divorced from one’s immediate experience is hypothesised to happen as a means of distancing the present self from reminders of past trauma or abuse. Attachment theory has been integrated into this model, adding that disruptions in attachment to the caregiver and the resulting incompatible representations of the self can partly account for depersonalization/derealization symptoms by causing elevated and persistent distress and negative affect (Buchnik-Daniely et al. 2021). These conditions have been listed as necessary but not sufficient, positing, as an added condition for developing these symptoms, the ability to enter a self-induced hypnosis-like state and relying on it consistently.

The trauma-based model seems to me the most fertile starting point. Positing some adverse experiences as the precursors to the dissociative experiences is, apart from highly intuitive, quite convenient, since multiple ways of defining trauma and adverse experiences make enough room to fit in the idea of disturbances in affordance spaces, which indeed can be perceived as inconsolably painful.

A somewhat separate matter is the operationalisation of dissociative experiences, separate only in the sense that research uses atheoretical clinical measures and scales that can only go so far in making sense of the varying etiology of these mental phenomena and in providing directions for therapeutic interventions. relations between

various comorbidities and dissociative symptoms – for establishing causal links is often impossible with cross-sectional studies.

Such correlations have been found between dissociative symptoms and PTSD symptoms, for example, which provides support for the trauma-based model. Other disorders that have significant correlations between the symptoms are DID, BPD (Borderline Personality Disorder) and schizophrenia (Carlson, E. B., & Putnam, F. W., 1993). However, without a properly conceptualized and testable explanatory mechanism that accounts for the phenomenological qualities of the dissociative experience, empirical research cannot do much more than identifying high-risk populations and quantifying the societal cost of these disorders.

Multiple scales circulate in the literature, three particularly relevant here. First is the Dissociative Symptoms Scale (DSS) (Carlson et al., 2016), which measures an array of dissociative symptoms experienced in the last weeks – so it focuses more on state rather than trait. The DSS has 4 sub-scales: Depersonalization / Derealization, Gaps in Awareness and Memory, Sensory Misperceptions and Cognitive-behavioral Reexperiencing, and has demonstrated reliability and validity in multiple clinical and non-clinical samples, being particularly useful in research.

The Dissociative Experience Scale II (DES-II Carlson, E. B., & Putnam, F. W., 1993), has been modeled after clinical population and attuned to pick up clinical cases. The third and most recent and comprehensive scale is the MID (Multidimensional Inventory of Dissociation) (Dell, 2006), which was built with the purpose of assessing the phenomenology of pathological dissociation, so as to diagnose dissociative disorders while trying to exclude any non-pathological forms of dissociative behavior. The MID was designed for clinical research and for diagnostic assessment of patients who present a mixture of dissociative, posttraumatic, and borderline symptoms. It has demonstrated incremental validity over DES by predicting 18% more of the variance in weighted abuse scores on the Traumatic Experiences Questionnaire (TEQ).

The depersonalization/ derealization facet of dissociation, the one I aim to provide an account for, is focused on the feeling of disconnection between one's body and environment. Items that fall under this in the DSS

are “My body feels strange or unreal”, “Things around me feel strange or unreal”, “I felt like I was outside myself, watching myself do things”, “I felt like I was in a movie – like nothing that was happening was real”, “I felt like I wasn’t myself”, “Parts of my body seemed distorted – like they were bigger or smaller than usual”. This is the kind of phenomena that I claim a 4E approach can provide an etiological explanation for.

## **2. Dissociative experiences as consequences of disturbances in affordance spaces**

Two core tenets of the 4E approach are that the mind is not limited to the brain and skull, but extends into the body and environment, and that the mind is a dynamic system coupling body and environment in action. It would follow that whatever perceived disconnection should be called “disconnection” only metaphorically, as severance is literally impossible. If so, when someone feels like their reality is not real, this should be interpreted in terms of their reality presenting as unreal and uncooperative to them, which can be translated in the language of affordance spaces. The same can be said in relation to the presupposed etiology of dissociative disorders: I argue that the kind of “trauma” that can make someone have pathological dissociative experiences can be conceptualized as the person being denied the construction of and/or constant and predictable access to a reliable regulatory ecological niche. In this section, I put forward my reinterpretation of the posttraumatic model of dissociative pathology and sketch a mechanism that may cause the phenomenological peculiarities of people who end up exhibiting dissociative symptoms.

“Affordance” refers to how an individual perceives and responds to features in their environment; it represents the possibilities for action that something or someone presents to the subject. As we go through life we construct, maintain and modify our personal niche: a structured self-styled environment tailored to reflect that person’s needs and personal way of living, a perceptually modified environment that constrains their affordance spaces. Our personal niches have at least in part shared with

those of other people, and their construction and proper functioning depends on a communal effort.

For the purpose of my analysis, I find it useful to delimit three categories of affordances: affective, cognitive and instrumental. Affective affordances are related to our emotions and their regulation, cognitive affordances underwrite our cognitive capacities and ability to make sound inferences and to judge situations, whereas instrumental affordances pertain strictly to the satisfaction of basic physical needs, survival and safety. Of course, one object or a person can afford all three aspects to someone, or one thing to a person and another to someone else: petting a cat can afford emotional comfort and regulation for an animal lover and just a way to get rid of farm pests for another.

This threefold distinction is relevant to a 4E reconceptualization of trauma, as each type of affordances pertain to different events or experiences that fall under the “trauma” umbrella in the literature. Instrumental affordances are directly impacted in so-called “life-threatening” traumatic experiences, when the basic physical needs cannot be met because of the precarity of the environment (living through poverty, war, physically abusive relationships). Disturbances in affective affordances capture emotional abuse. And cognitive affordances ground cognitive distortion as result of under-negotiated shared reality with the people one shares an ecological niche with. The three types of affordances bleed into each other and scaffold one another; heightened negative affect impacts cognitive abilities, which in turn limits the availability of cognitive affordances. In the context of depression and suicidality, the pervasive feeling of hopelessness can restrict cognitive affordances involved in problem-solving situations, so that a bridge affords jumping off as a maladaptive solution to problems that appear otherwise unsolvable. This tripartition of affordances groups under the same explanatory model different noxious experiences that can lead people to exhibit post-traumatic *sequelae*, and avoids generating laundry lists of traumatic events as in some scales that test for developmental trauma (Adverse Childhood Experience scale, for instance).

In what follows, I will focus on affective aspects of the ecological niche, as it appears to me that the disruptions incurred in this area are more insidious than others. The affective niche covers all the regulatory possibilities that we attribute to the environment (people included) that are key to the proper functioning of our psyche. Reliable access to a predictable affective niche is essential for regulating and making sense of the inevitable undesirabilities of life, just as reliable access to a predictable instrumental and cognitive one is. I take traumatic experience to consist of an individual being denied the construction and constant access to a reliably scaffolded predictable niche. This covers both what the literature calls “developmental trauma”, as well as traumatic experiences that can occur in adulthood. I also co-classify physical and emotional trauma because, even if it is pretty easy to see how physical trauma can impact people whereas it is more of a challenge to account for severe symptoms in the absence of severe physical abuse or neglect, traumas of differing severity can sometimes lead to comparable results notwithstanding.

Niche constructing begins in childhood: people manipulate their environment, the space they inhabit regularly, by refining preexistent affordances and generating new ones – cognitively, instrumentally, affectively. Much like the spider’s web, humans modify their surroundings by decorating or renovating a house or office in a way that fits their needs and way of life (and one person’s way of living may not fit another’s). Affective niches rely on personal symbolism (e.g., putting on a particular bracelet during a hard exam), or they can be grounded in social or cultural practices (prayer or yoga affords emotional regulation). People also provide regulatory opportunities for each other in healthy relationships. Being provided with comfort, advice and support are essential for a healthy emotional life and overall function – when these are missing, expect negative consequences. Others enrich our affordance spaces and, in our early development, we learn to build affective niches with support from caregivers. Children learn the social constraints that confine their affordance spaces (don’t throw the porcelain plate on the ground), they seek comfort when upset – in the presence of the caregiver, or in holding a particular toy.

Niches change more during early development because so do the individual's physical and mental abilities which shape them. Adults expect themselves and others to have already built affective, cognitive and instrumental niches tailored to their own needs. Sometimes children's needs are not being properly met or recognized, and parents may constantly and unpredictably deny the child access to objects that afford regulation without helping them to substitute the function of that object. Same goes for denying them the customization of their personal space in a way that fits their natural inclinations. Out of abuse or neglect, because of the child's inability to benefit from a stable niche, their predictions regarding the regulatory possibilities their environment affords are constantly wrong or impossible to make, so the set of affective affordances they work with shrinks.

In adult life, a similar thing can happen. Even supposing that an adult learned to construct a personal niche and benefited from it, unplanned events can destroy it. One then ends up in the same situation of having to prop up a limited set of assumptions against environmental uncertainty or adversity, which hinder niche construction. Derailing events may include home displacement (due to war, natural disasters, gentrification), abusive relationships, or moving to a different country without your friends and loved ones. All these call for niche reconstruction and can be more or less traumatic or cumbersome, depending on what one can achieve and whether one intended it to begin with. Pending resolution, niches lost or rebuilt on the go make for an unpredictable and unreliable environment. These disruptions invite an array of mental health issues.

Unpredictability and instability can feel like your agency is eroded. Being able to draw life narratives that round up your identity and goals is undermined. For the capacity to organize a coherent self-concept is scaffolded by your social environment and interaction with others. These others could fail to include you in their shared space, or you could find the affects they afford conflicting or destructive. One way out is to block

the integration of bothersome events, affects and thoughts into your self-concept. This provides a how-possibly causal explanation of dissociative experiences, as the main symptoms described in scales like MID (Multidimensional Inventory of Dissociation) revolve around amnesic episodes, the perception of multiple states of personality and feeling detached from one's body and environment.

Especially for depersonalization and derealization, the bouts of dissociation can be accounted for as periods of time in which fewer affordances are accessible, the expected or needed scaffolding is missing, and routine cognitive or affective processes cannot take place as intended, whence the perceived disconnection and the feeling of unreality. Feelings of derealization, of reality not being "real", echo a mismatch between one's environment and what was required to meet one's goals. Depersonalization, or the feeling of detachment from one's own body, I relegate to a lack of integration of the self, body or certain body parts. Integration is described in the literature as the living body's ability to take something into itself and thus reconfigure how we experience our bodies and what we can do with them. Object incorporation obtains when we get used to maneuvering a foreign object with our body so that the object becomes transparent to us; we act as if the object is part of our body. In depersonalization, one's body (or parts of it) lose the property of being experientially transparent: one no longer experiences the body as being part of their self, or as being seamlessly connected with their mind. The body is experienced as affording limited manipulation possibilities instead of its full range of physical abilities, in a way that is dysfunctional and possibly accompanied by skill regression (clumsiness).

### **3. Conclusion, further directions and implications**

I conceived of dissociative experiences as being the fallout of a traumatic past in which one was (perhaps repeatedly) denied the construction of and/or constant and predictable access to a regulatory affective and cognitive niche, generating failed predictions about environmental

changes. I illustrated how that applies to depersonalization and derealization, i.e., how the lack of predictable and reliable regulatory affective scaffolding may lead to experiencing one's own body or the environment as unreal and unintegrated into the self. While I would not venture to claim that every ailment under the dissociative umbrella can be accounted for this way, I believe that dissociative identity disorder can also be seen through this lens. This extrapolation, however, would involve explaining how feeling dispossessed of agency and self-narratives one cannot coherently integrate into a self-concept can precipitate a dissociative identity disorder.

The reconceptualization of developmental trauma as presented above provides a unified account of multiple kinds of experiences that are damaging to the psyche, and the sense of self of a person. It integrates both physical harm and more subtle aspects of emotional neglect under a framework that uses the same conceptual tool, affordance spaces, to explain symptoms traditionally attributed to a narrow list of events.

Enlarging the definition this way may account for a larger part of the pool of people who have this experience even if they don't check the boxes for standard physical developmental trauma. Niche disruption on the three levels described would include both physical trauma of the sort that appears on ACE questionnaires and emotional abuse and negligence that affect emotional dysregulation; it encompasses the predictors of dissociation under the same conceptual framework. All of this is conceptual work that requires testing.

Knowing predictors can be useful in identifying the population at risk for developing dissociation disorders. But it cannot do much in terms of healing for specific people who already experienced upticks in specific predictors. A how-possibly causal explanatory mechanism of dissociative experiences, such as that sketched here, could be leveraged in therapy *via* intervention plans. This 4E model of traumatic experiences may also be used in clinical assessment if turned into a scale. As it encompasses a wider range of experiences, its comprehensiveness may facilitate the diagnostic process.

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## WHERE DO SLIPPERY SLOPES LIVE: IN CONVERSATION, IN REASONING OR IN BETWEEN?

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*Abstract:* Slippery slope arguments are arguments that have historically been seen as informal fallacies and are prevalent in discussions of ethics, public policy, and legal reasoning. While many accounts of what a slippery slope argument is have been proposed, none encompasses all central features of slippery slope arguments, as there is little agreement on what exactly one is supposed to evaluate. In this article, I aim to offer a way to deal with the issues that have made it difficult to evaluate slippery slope arguments. I propose that progress can be made by combining pragma-dialectical theory with soft Bayesian argumentation, in order to account for both normative and descriptive dimensions along which such arguments are characterized in contemporary argumentation theory.

*Keywords:* pragma-dialectical theory, Bayesian argumentation, slippery slope arguments, argumentation theory, consequentialist arguments.

### 1. Introduction

Slippery slope arguments (SSAs) are common across debates in ethics, public policy and legal reasoning, and have been traditionally treated as informal fallacies. SSAs are commonly<sup>2</sup> understood as arguments, to the

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<sup>2</sup> SSAs are sometimes confused with other types of arguments, such as consistency arguments, arguments from cumulative effects, straightforward inductive generalizations,

effect that accepting an initial premise (regarding a decision or action) will inevitably lead to the acceptance of another premise that would result in an undesired or disastrous outcome (Hinton, 2020; Rizzo & Whitman, 2019). Even though this has been construed as a distinct type of argument, the definitions provided do not agree with each other, and do not provide a way to solve the problem of how to evaluate SSAs (Walton, 2015).

I tackle this problem by combining the normative framework specific to pragma-dialectical approach with Bayesian argumentation<sup>3</sup>. I will argue that pragma-dialectical theory provides normative standards for SSAs, but does not have the means to explain why some SSAs are considered valid or fallacious. By combining it with methods from Bayesian argumentation, I argue it can nonetheless explain why some agents find SSAs persuasive or convincing. Providing an account for both normative and descriptive dimensions of SSAs in turn delivers a comprehensive assessment of SSAs.

My plan is as follows: I will first describe the factors that lead to the development of so many different views in the argumentation research surrounding SSAs. Second, I will explain pragma-dialectical theory and how it approaches fallacies, with a focus on SSAs. Third, I shall also describe Bayesian argumentation and how it addresses SSAs. Fourth, addressing the worry that these approaches supposedly conflict with each other, I present a way in which they can be integrated. Lastly, I assess how their integration can be beneficial for the evaluation of SSAs.

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straightforward causal arguments, arguments from negative consequence, which should not be labeled as SSAs (M. D. Hinton, 2017; LaFollette, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> The current state of the art in argumentation theory is characterized by a coexistence of theoretical perspectives and approaches to SSAs, which, while being considerably different from one another, contribute immensely to understanding argumentation overall (Van Eemeren et al., 2014). Notwithstanding, I choose to discuss only pragma-dialectics and Bayesian argumentation because, it seems to me, the form of the integrated solution I offer applies to other approaches to SSAs as well. Making that case, however, goes beyond the scope of the article.

## 2. From bad to worse

Aside from a minimal description, scholars working in argumentation theory seem to agree on no other characteristic of SSAs. No single comprehensive definition of SSAs is forthcoming. For example, Lode (1990) claimed that trying to provide a definition that covers current usage would be in vain, because it would not be narrow enough to bring forth a distinctive argument form deserving of separate discussion. Many others have tried to provide comprehensive definitions of SSAs which would allow for the construction of an argumentation form that would differentiate SSAs from other argument forms (see Govier, 1982; Walton, 1992, 2015; Corner et al., 2011; M. Hinton, 2020; M. D. Hinton, 2017). Only these often forms differ.

Lack of consensus concerning definitions or argument forms influences debates regarding how many distinct types of SSAs there are. For example, Walton (1992) classified four categories of slippery slope arguments: precedents, causal mechanisms, conceptual vagueness, and a fourth type that incorporates elements of the first three categories. Jefferson (2014) makes a similar claim, distinguishing between empirical, logical and hybrid SSAs (based on Den Hartogh, 2009 and Van Der Burg, 1991). Logical SSAs arguments, according to Jefferson (2014), are also known as 'no principled distinction' and are not consequentialist arguments. Instead, logical SSAs are concerned with the question of what the decision to take a certain step A commits us to (Jefferson, 2014). Empirical SSAs (also called soritical by Jefferson), are consequentialist arguments that focus on the bad results that would of necessity follow if a certain course of action is taken, and are cumulative (Jefferson, 2014). Empirical and logical forms allegedly combine in hybrid SSAs. On the other hand, Hinton (2020 p.10) claims that the only type of SSA that should be representative is the logical SSA. Empirical or hybrid arguments are more akin to arguments from material consequence (M. Hinton, 2020 p.10). Similarly, Rizzo & Whitman (2003) also insist on the logical type, by claiming that, once the first step is taken, the slope of arguments should abruptly lead to the catastrophic consequence. Furthermore, the distinction between empirical and logical also seems to

relate to the slope metaphor and other like phrases, such as “the thin edge of the wedge” or “the camel’s nose in the tent” (M. Hinton, 2020 p.9). That refers to allowing a minor, seemingly harmless conduct to pave the way for more significant, obviously negative consequences (M. Hinton, 2020 p. 10).

The relation between vagueness and the SSA plays a role for some authors but not for others. Walton (2015) claims that vagueness is an essential component of the slippery slope, insofar as it makes it harder, or even impossible, for the agent to stop at a cutoff point, committing them to the path downwards the undesirable outcome. But is it true that no single example of SSA is a reasonable argument? As such, in agreement with Hinton (2020), it is unclear if all SSAs involve vagueness. Still, the relation between vagueness and SSAs resembles the semantic treatments of sorites. One main difference is that vagueness is a semantic phenomenon (Raffman & Hyde, 2025); even though the vagueness can be partly responsible for SSAs, the indeterminacy of SSAs can be the result of other determinants too. Among those we can count: how the agents involved in the argument express their commitment through linguistic indicators (Liga & Palmirani, 2020) and that the arguments are presented in compressed form, jumping in one step straight to the conclusion (M. D. Hinton, 2017; Walton, 1992, 2015). Examples:

- (1) If homosexual “marriage” is universally accepted as the present step in sexual “freedom,” what logical arguments can be used to stop the next steps of incest, pedophilia, bestiality, and other forms of unnatural behavior? (TFP Student Action, 2015).
- (2) If voluntary euthanasia is legalized, then in the future there will be more cases of “medical murder” (M. D. Hinton, 2017 p.20).
- (3) Legalizing cannabis will ultimately lead to increased use of cocaine or heroin, hence it should remain banned (Hahn & Oaksford, 2006 p.223).

The examples seem to have something in common which is specific to arguments labeled as SSAs: accepting an initial premise culminates in an undesirable outcome that cannot be avoided once we commit to the first initial premise. However, the arguments realize this in different ways. (1) seems to hinge on poor use of language, similar to vagueness, because it can be interpreted as either: allowing same sex marriage will force one to accept behaviors as the one mentioned above or it would force one to accept marriage between siblings, human and non-human animals, adults and children<sup>4</sup> (M. D. Hinton, 2017). In (2), the initial commitment leads to an unavoidable change in the attitudes of a group of people towards a certain idea or action. (3) revolves around an incremental effect, where use of a psychoactive substance increases the probability of consuming other psychoactive substances in the future rather than a change in attitude, at the level of the population, towards drug consumption.

Different argumentation theorists also have different goals and backgrounds: some study argumentation primarily for normative purposes, in order to develop criteria that can be used to qualify arguments as rational, whereas others study it for descriptive reasons, being interested in how reasoners persuade others (Van Eemeren et al., 2014).

Having different goals in view can also explain why some theorists argue not all SSAs are fallacious. Given that SSAs are often mixed with other types of arguments (see footnote 2), I advocate a cautious approach, on which finding a reliable way to identify when a person commits an SSA doesn't imply deciding whether the arguments made are valid or not. In the next section I aim to provide an argument why the pragma-

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<sup>4</sup> One reason why this argument is fallacious is that there are already "cut off points" in place, mainly laws, that define marriage as an act that can be performed only by two consenting adults who are not related; as such excluding close relatives, non-human animals and children (M. D. Hinton, 2017). The male-and-female requirement does not constitute a counterargument against same sex marriage because the latter respects the rule of being between consenting adults, and there are logical arguments and laws that will not permit marriage in the cases mentioned above (M. D. Hinton, 2017).

dialectical theory can accommodate SSAs as fallacies and specify the circumstances they often occur in.

### 3. Pragma-dialectical theory

Pragma-dialectical theory is an approach to argumentation developed by van Eemeren and Grootendorst, aiming to elucidate argument quality by determining procedural rules of argumentation that can be applied to judge the quality of individual arguments (Collins & Hahn, 2017). The cornerstone of pragma-dialectics is the observation that arguments take place in dialectical contexts, where (at least two) parties take part in argumentative exchange (Collins & Hahn, 2017; Van Eemeren et al., 2009). Argumentation itself is a part of reasonable argumentative discourse that has the goal to resolve a difference of opinion on the merits (Van Eemeren et al., 2009). Resolving a difference of opinion does not mean attaining a state of mutual consensus that resolves the argument once and for all (Van Eemeren et al., 2014 p.4). The argumentative process can be resumed at any point in the future if the conclusion is deemed unsatisfactory (Van Eemeren et al., 2014 p.4).

The difference of opinion is resolved on the merits by subjecting the standpoints at issue to a regimented critical discussion (Van Eemeren et al., 2014 p.521). The means to resolve an argument on the merits are provided by the ideal model of critical discussion (Van Eemeren et al., 2009), which delineates the stages involved in the resolution process and the verbal maneuvers that are essential components of each stage, supplemented by a set of rules that specify which types of speech acts are permissible and functional at each stage of the discussion for the purpose of resolving a difference of opinion on the merits. The four stages are: confrontation, the opening stage, argumentation and the concluding stage (Collins & Hahn, 2017, Van Eemeren et al., 2009), abiding to the 10 rules of critical discussion: “freedom rule”, “*discussants may not prevent each other from advancing standpoints or from calling standpoints into question*”; “obligation-to-defend rule”, “*discussants who have advanced a standpoint may not refuse to defend a standpoint when requested to do so*”; “standpoint rule”, “*attacks on standpoints may not bear on a standpoint that has not actually*

*been put forward by the other party”; “relevance rule”, “standpoints may not be defended by non-argumentation or argumentation that is not relevant to the standpoint”; “unexpressed premise rule”, “discussants may not falsely attribute unexpressed premises to the other party, nor disown responsibility for their own unexpressed premises”; starting point rule, “discussants may not present something as an accepted starting point or falsely deny that something is an accepted starting point”; “validity rule”, “reasoning that in an argumentation is presented as formally conclusive may not be invalid in a logical sense”; “argument scheme rule”, “standpoints may not be regarded as conclusively defended by argumentation that is not presented as based on formally conclusive reasoning if the defense does not take place by means of appropriate argument schemes that are applied correctly”; “concluding rule”, “inconclusive defenses of standpoints may not lead to maintaining these standpoints, and conclusive defenses of standpoints may not lead to maintaining expressions of doubt concerning these standpoints”; and “language use rule”, “discussants may not use any formulations that are insufficiently clear or confusingly ambiguous, and they may not deliberately misinterpret the other party’s formulations” (Van Eemeren et al., 2009 p.21-p.24).*

In pragma-dialectics, the performance of any speech act that constitute an argumentative move that violates any of the rules for critical discussion is viewed as a fallacy, regardless of what party performs and at what stage of discussion<sup>5</sup> (Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2003; Van Eemeren et al., 2014; van Eemeren & Garssen, 2023). Fallacies are always identified conditionally: an argumentative move is considered a fallacy *only* if the discourse in which it occurs can be viewed as attempting to resolve a disagreement and *only* after determining the extent to which a discourse may be reconstructed in terms of a critical discussion (Van Eemeren et al., 2014 p.545). However, while critical rules for discussion provide the norms relevant to resolve a difference of opinion on the merits, it does not

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<sup>5</sup> In pragma-dialectics, the cooperative communicative and interactional basis of argumentative discourse is reflected in the way in which participants as defined agonists have the task to defend their standpoint systematically; the role of antagonists is to critically challenge all viewpoints taken by the protagonists until a resolution is achieved together (Van Eemeren et al., 2014).

always make it clear whether or not the pragma-dialectical standards of reasonableness<sup>6</sup> have been infringed (Van Eemeren et al., 2014 p.563). The pragma-dialectical approach to fallacy detection in argumentative discourse basically consists of identifying whether the (reconstructed) speech acts expressing the argumentative moves made in the discourse agree with the relevant rules for critical discussion and, in the event of a norm violation, determining the type of fallacy that has been committed (Van Eemeren et al., 2014 p.564). Such a decision may only be made if it is completely evident what criteria must have been fulfilled in that particular situation in order to satisfy the particular critical norm(s)<sup>7</sup> relevant to it (Van Eemeren et al., 2014 p.564).

Within the pragma-dialectical framework, committing SSAs requires the protagonist to violate the *argument scheme* rule of the argumentation stage, which concerns the correct use of argumentative schemes (F. H. Van Eemeren, 2018). An argumentation scheme describes the method in which the reason given in support of the standpoint is intended to facilitate a shift in acceptability towards a specific standpoint in certain types of argumentation (Van Eemeren, 2018 p.7). For example: "Bart will love cheese because he is Dutch and it is characteristic of Dutch people that they love cheese" (Van Eemeren, 2018 p.7) is an argumentation scheme. Based on the type of relationship established by the argumentation scheme, particular kinds of *critical questions* are applicable in order to assess the argumentation (F. H. Van Eemeren, 2018 p.7). These critical questions capture the pragmatic rationale for arguing in order to facilitate a shift in acceptability from the reason that is advanced to the standpoint one argues in favor of (F. H. Van Eemeren, 2018 p.45). The protagonist commits a SSAs fallacy when she presents a

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<sup>6</sup> Reasonableness in pragma-dialectics favors a systematic engagement in argumentative discourse following suitably regulated discussion procedures; it can be described as a "critical rationalist" philosophy (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984).

<sup>7</sup> Moreover, in the pragma-dialectical approach, a functional variety of norms is differentiated in resolving a difference of opinion on the merits, and the norm of logical validity is just one of them (Van Eemeren et al., 2014). Pragma-dialectics discerns a plurality of functional norms, that are neither just categories inherited from the past, nor violations of one and the same norm (e.g. validity).

proposition in which a prediction is made, without any further reason, regarding the undesirable consequence of accepting a premise (a decision or an act), deriving from it an evaluative proposition which claims it is necessary to perform that action (Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2003) or, respectively, to refrain from performing it.

It thus seems that pragma-dialectics defines committing an SSA fallacy in such a way that it results from the wrong use of an argument scheme which “good” SSAs are often mistaken for. In this way, it does not restrict SSAs to being the invalid use of a specific argument form. Any consequentialist argument misused by a protagonist who fails to provide a reason why one should or should act on its conclusion counts as a necessary condition for committing an SSA. This way of approaching SSAs narrows them down to a specific violation of the argument scheme rule as the argument progress, making it much easier to filter when an SSA has been committed. Examples in section 2 are thus all fallacies, regardless of whether (1) and (2) concern a change in attitudes, at a population level, whereas (3) relies on incremental effects.

This approach does not, however, explain what make SSAs persuasive for some interlocutors. Therefore, in the next section I will define strict Bayesian and soft Bayesianism approaches to argumentation, and provide reasons for why I choose a soft Bayesian approach over strict Bayesianism.

#### **4. Bayesian Argumentation**

The objective of the research initiative known as Bayesian Argumentation is to apply Bayesian inference to argumentation (Collins & Hahn, 2017). From a Bayesian perspective (as construed here), probabilities are subjective degrees of belief (Collins & Hahn, 2017). The central inferential aim is to determine how strongly a conclusion is supported by a given body of evidence, expressed as the posterior probability of the conclusion given the evidence,  $P(C|E)$ . This posterior probability is calculated on the basis of three components: the prior probability of the conclusion,  $P(C)$ ; the likelihood, representing the probability of the evidence assuming the

conclusion is true,  $P(E|C)$ ; and the overall probability of the evidence,  $P(E)$ <sup>8</sup> (Collins & Hahn, 2017).

There are two strands of Bayesian argumentation, strict and soft. Strict Bayesian argumentation begins with Bayesian decision theory as a normative framework (Elqayam & Evans, 2013; Hahn & Hornikx, 2016). This status derives from the fact that strict Bayesians work down from the normative account of probability to psychological interpretation of reasoning and behavior in judgement. It places strong constraints on subjective probabilities, which must align with the classical probability calculus (Elqayam & Evans, 2013). Moreover, strict Bayesianism also tries to prove that reasoning maximizes utility<sup>9</sup> (Elqayam & Evans, 2013). Degrees of belief as well as degrees of convincingness<sup>10</sup> in an argumentative context are simply represented by the probability calculus. Furthermore, strict Bayesians claim that the approach they propose helps identify relevant critical questions and assess their impact on inference, both individually and in combination, particularly in terms of the factors they target (Hahn & Hornikx, 2016). Another feature of the strict Bayesian approach is that it is computationally explicit; for each argument scheme employed by argumentation, it can indicate how posterior degrees of belief may be computed (Hahn & Hornikx, 2016). This is not just an “add-on” used in order to conform Bayesian reasoning with other approaches in argumentation theory, it is actually an essential component of the normative program itself (Hahn & Hornikx, 2016).

By comparison, soft Bayesian argumentation starts with observations of human reasoning and finds them broadly compatible with Bayesian principles (Elqayam & Evans, 2013). But it does not require norm fitting as a general part of a psychological account or close conformity with normative theory based on Bayesian principles. The account is also different in how it interprets degrees of belief. In soft

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<sup>8</sup> Modeled on by this formula  $P(C|E) = \frac{P(E|C)P(C)}{P(E)}$  (Collins & Hahn, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> Utility refers to subjective utility, which is the technical term used to denote psychological value, or goals: whatever an agent holds desirable has subjective utility (Elqayam & Evans, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Degrees of convincingness refers to how persuasive arguments are.

Bayesian approaches, degrees of belief are considered a psychological construct, and probability serves as a convenient formal language (Elqayam & Evans, 2013). From this point of view, observing that people hold beliefs more or less strongly and act on them does not imply the strong constraint as on a strict Bayesian approach, which suggests that normative constraints are outside of psychological science. Soft Bayesianism is sceptical of the psychological reality of maximization; behaviors such as buying lottery tickets seem to directly contradict the principle (Evans, 2007).

I draw on the soft Bayesian approach. The first reason why I choose it is due to the role biases and heuristics play in human reasoning. More often than not, soft Bayesianism provides evidence that human thinking departs from the dictates of probability calculus. Furthermore, I think that the strict Bayesian normative standard does not touch upon all features that can be ascribed to SSAs. For example, thinking of SSAs strength<sup>11</sup>, on a strict Bayesian approach, in terms of whether the expected negative value of the undesirable outcome outweighs that of the alternative being considered (Hahn & Oaksford, 2006) does only seem to account for incremental considerations of argument (3), and do not address the concern of attitude change that is implicit in arguments (1) and (2), due to the fact that the framework limits itself only to what can be accounted for by probability calculus. As I see it, subsuming all argument schemes to the probability calculus threatens to obscure how different types of consequentialist arguments actually differ, insinuating that SSAs instantiate a unique argument scheme – “the slippery slope” – that can be either invalid or valid. It leaves it unclear how consistency arguments, arguments from cumulative effects, straightforward inductive generalizations, straightforward causal arguments and arguments from negative consequence could all boil down to one scheme; while similar, they are formalized in different ways (see LaFollette, 2005). An additional worry pertains to how the probability calculus could even

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<sup>11</sup> Strength, in the case of SSAs, tracks how likely it is that the first premise will lead to an undesirable consequence, and how objectionable that consequence is (Fumagalli, 2020).

in principle work as a norm that guides argumentative discourse; it might assess when an argument is inductively valid or not, but not how a reasonable discussion among interlocutors with different standpoints ought to be conducted.

A soft Bayesian approach to SSAs would still analyze them by factoring in the disutility (undesired future consequence) and its probability of occurrence. But it would not restrict SSAs only to interpretations that align with the probability calculus. By not being so restrictive and starting from observing how people actually reason, it allows for SSAs being fallacies based on consequentialist argumentation schemes without imposing only one scheme on them all. This is plausible because people assess consequentialist arguments using different probabilities.

Moreover, soft Bayesianism's emphasis on the relevance of cognitive psychology (biases, heuristics) to persuasiveness, it is open to empirical studies done in psychology of argumentation. For example, the study conducted by Corner, Hahn, and Oaksford (2011) suggests that SSAs with more probable outcomes were rated higher than those with improbable outcomes. Additionally, probable arguments were judged to be stronger than less probable arguments when the results were extremely negative (Corner et al., 2011). These findings cannot be taken to support a strict Bayesian approach. However, they match the soft approach because people do seem to consider disutility and probability of occurrence, *inter alia*, as instrumental to argument assessment.

### **5. Is integration possible?**

In the introduction, I mentioned that integrating pragma-dialectics and Bayesianism can be problematic. For example, Walton (1992) rejects the conception of SSAs as arguments that predict an outcome based on a probability. The strict Bayesian standard does not allow for much integration. It might adopt different argument schemes, only to then structure them in terms of the probability calculus.

The integration I propose is different: probability can provide insights into evaluating SSAs, but it needs spelling out into specific argument schemes as gleaned from argumentative discourse.

The main idea is to evaluate SSAs more comprehensibly. Pragma-dialectics makes it easier to identify an SSA by finding violations of the rules of critical discussion. Moreover, pragma-dialectics also marks the distinction between arguments that are fallacious due to using vague terms or if an indeterminacy characteristic of SSAs is in play. Violation of the eighth rule is necessary if an SSA will have been committed. Additionally, pragma-dialectics accommodates a plurality of norms.

Unlike its stricter version, soft Bayesianism is compatible with this pragmatic plurality. For example, (3) can be considered fallacious by applying Bayesian probability calculus to determine if the premises, explicit or implicit, respectively, increase the likelihood of the undesirable consequence that may materialize at some point in time if we take the initial step. Soft Bayesian argumentation also provides ways to determine why *some* people find *some* fallacies persuasive while dismissing other arguments even when those are valid – a feature pragma-dialectics lacks. The reason is that soft Bayesianism investigates human reasoning while considering preexisting heuristics and biases that influence what standpoints one is willing to accept in dialogue.

To conclude, mixing pragma-dialectics with soft Bayesian argumentation, in my view, addresses the problem of evaluating SSAs. Furthermore, the paper seeks to initiate a conversation between two perspectives that could benefit from the integration I proposed. The mix specifies a necessary condition for reliably identifying them, and not confuse them with other consequentialist arguments. It accepts a plurality of norms, and thereby allows SSAs to results from the wrong use of multiple types of consequentialist argument. Consequently, it captures both normative and descriptive features of argumentation, and is able to evaluate both logical and empirical SSAs by integrating them under one construct. SSAs live in between dialog and reasoning.

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