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A Reasons-based Theory of Argument Schemes in Practical Argumentation

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A Reasons-based Theory of Argument Schemes in Practical Argumentation

Abstract: Existing theories of argument schemes in practical argumentation fail to provide a satisfactory solution to the following problem: how to adequately reconstruct an argument representing reasons that provide convergent support for a standpoint by means of an argument scheme? In the present paper, I propose a theory of argument schemes in practical argumentation that does provide a satisfactory solution to this problem. As far as this theory defines the validity of practical arguments in terms of the weighing of reasons, we can say that it is a reasons-based theory. The utility of the proposed theory is demonstrated in two ways – by demonstrating its compatibility with a general account of how real-life practical argumentation can be explained on the basis of empirical data regarding cultural value priorities, and through the analysis and explanation of a case study – the 2018 Bulgarian government debate about the ratification of the Istanbul convention.

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1. Introduction

One of the crucial concepts in contemporary argumentation theory is that of argument (or "argumentation") scheme (van Eemeren 2001). It can be defined as follows.

> An ARGUMENT SCHEME is (i) a pattern of argument, (ii) made of a sequence of sentential forms with variables, of which (iii) at least one of the sentential forms contains a use of a schematic constant or a use of a schematic quantifier, and (iv) the last sentential form is introduced by a conclusion indicator like 'so' or 'therefore' (Hansen 2020, 348). [1]

[1] This definition largely reflects the ordinary use of the term within argumentation theory, although there are some exceptions. For example, Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) use the term "argument scheme" in a broader sense in which it refers to any pattern of argument. Furthermore, the term "scheme" is sometimes applied to Toulmin's model of argument (Toulmin 1958), and Walton and his colleagues would sometimes refer to deductive rules of inference as argument schemes (although not including

The term “schematic constant” in this definition refers to expressions like “causes”, “is an expert”, “is similar to”, etc., whereas the term “schematic quantifier” refers to expressions like “generally”, “normally” and “usually”. The idea is that argument schemes are located ontologically between arguments and argument forms, being more general than the former and less general than the latter (see also Lumer 2022, 213). It must also be noted that an argument scheme is normally accompanied by a set of critical questions that are used for evaluating the arguments that it fits and analysing dialogue.

Thus, argument schemes are useful tools for identifying arguments (including enthymemes, i.e. arguments with unexpressed premises), evaluating arguments and producing arguments (see e.g. Grassen 2001, 81; Macagno 2018, 560). Accordingly, the concept of argument scheme has been incorporated into various contemporary approaches to the study of argumentation, including the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation (see van Eemeren & Grassen 2019), Walton’s new dialectic (Walton 1998), as well as approaches that are concerned with argumentation in artificial intelligence (see Macagno 2021 for an overview).

It must be noted, however, that one can distinguish between the concept of argument scheme as defined above and a theory of argument schemes in the sense of a theory about the things that constitute the extension of this concept. Such a theory might provide an account of the nature of argument schemes, a categorization of argument schemes, a means of distinguishing good argument schemes from bad ones, an articulation of how to use argument schemes to aid in other aspects of argumentation theory, etc (Goddu 2021, 540). Thus, we can say that even though Walton et al. (2008), van Eemeren & Grassen (2019), Kienpointner (1992) and others all use the concept of argument scheme, they actually put forward different theories of argument schemes.

Most theories of arguments schemes are about argument schemes in general. However, Atkinson and Bench-Capon have developed a theory of argument schemes in the particular domain of practical argumentation (see e.g. Atkinson 2005; Atkinson & Bench-Capon 2007; 2021). Furthermore, as far as Walton and colleagues have also devoted special attention to the study of practical argumentation (see e.g. Walton et al. 2008; Macagno & Walton 2018), we can say that their general theory of argument schemes *contains* a theory of argument schemes in practical argumentation.

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them in their compendium of argument schemes – see Walton et al. 2008). Neither Toulmin’s model nor deductive rules of inference, however, fall under the concept of argument scheme as defined above.

Practical argumentation can be defined as argumentation in which the standpoint at issue is a normative standpoint in the sense of a standpoint according to which something ought to be the case, or in other words, an agent ought to perform a certain action.[2] Accordingly, arguments to the conclusion that a normative standpoint is true or false can be called "practical arguments". We can say that such arguments are defeasible, rather than deductively valid, in the sense that they provide inconclusive rather than conclusive justification for a standpoint (see e.g. Walton 2015, Fairclough & Fairclough 2011).[3]

The justification that an argument provides for a standpoint can be understood in terms of considerations that count in favour of a standpoint. In philosophy of action and epistemology, such considerations are commonly referred to as "normative reasons" or simply "reasons". This terminology is somewhat different from the terminology employed in argumentation theory, where the terms "premise" and "reason" are often treated as interchangeable (see e.g. Govier 2014). For the purposes of the present inquiry, however, I am going to adopt the terminology of philosophy of action and epistemology, thus assuming that reasons are considerations that count in favour of a standpoint.

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[2] Sometimes the term "practical argumentation" is understood in a broader sense, in which it refers not only to arguments to the conclusion that a normative standpoint is true or false, but also to arguments that support or attack arguments to the conclusion that a normative standpoint is true or false (see e.g. Kock 2017). For the purposes of the present inquiry, however, I am going to use the term in the narrow sense defined above. Furthermore, I will be concerned only with the internal, and not with the external assessment of a normative standpoint (see Macagno et al. 2017, 28). It is also worth noting that the concept of practical argumentation as understood in the present inquiry is different from the pragma-dialectical concept of pragmatic argumentation (see van Eemeren & Grassen 2019), as far as pragmatic argumentation consists in arguing about causal consequences, and arguing for or against a normative standpoint is not reducible to arguing about causal consequences. Practical argumentation as understood in the present inquiry is also different from what Lumer (2011, 2014) calls "practical argumentation", as far as the standpoint that is at issue in the kind of argumentation Lumer is referring to is not a normative standpoint, but a standpoint according to which a certain action has a certain desirability.

[3] The distinction in question is between defeasible arguments and deductively valid arguments, and not between defeasible arguments and arguments that have the form of a deductive rule of inference, since arguments that have the form of a deductive rule of inference might actually not be deductively valid. Thus, we can speak for example about "defeasible modus ponens" – see Walton (2002) for an insightful discussion.

Thus defined, the concept of reasons can be used as the basis for a requirement that any theory of argument schemes in practical argumentation should satisfy. According to this requirement, such a theory needs to provide a satisfactory solution to what can be called "the problem of convergent support". Neither of the two existing theories of argument schemes in practical argumentation, however, succeed in doing so. In the present paper, I propose a theory that does provide a satisfactory solution to the problem of convergent support. As far as this theory defines the validity of practical arguments in terms of the weighing of reasons, we can say that it is a "reasons-based" theory of argument schemes in practical argumentation.[4]

The utility of the proposed theory is demonstrated in two ways. First, I address the question of how the theory can be used in conjunction with a general account of how real-life practical argumentation can be explained on the basis of empirical data regarding cultural value priorities (Valchev 2026). Second, I apply the theory in the analysis and explanation of a case study – the 2018 Bulgarian government debate about the ratification of the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, better known as "the Istanbul convention".

The text is divided into seven sections. The second section is concerned with the validity of defeasible arguments. In the third section I formulate the problem of convergent support and argue that the two existing theories of argument schemes in practical argumentation fail to provide a satisfactory solution to it. In the fourth section, I formulate an argument scheme to be used in the analysis of practical argumentation. The fifth section is concerned with explaining real-life practical argumentation on the basis of empirical data regarding cultural value priorities. In the sixth section, I analyse and explain the 2018 Bulgarian debate about the ratification of the Istanbul convention. Finally, the seventh section contains a summary and directions for future research.

2. The Validity of Defeasible Arguments

The validity of an argument that consists of a set of premises and a conclusion is traditionally understood in terms of truth preservation and defined as follows. An argument is

[4] This terminology reflects the one employed by Marraud, who uses the term "reasons-based" in order to describe theories of argument that define validity in terms of the weighing of reasons (Marraud 2025a, 2025b). The question of the exact relationship between theories of argument and theories of argument schemes, however, lies beyond the scope of the present inquiry.

valid, if and only if it is impossible that its premises are true and its conclusion is false. This definition, however, fails to capture the intuition that a valid argument is an argument that may reasonably be put forward as a part of argumentative discourse. It classifies all defeasible arguments as invalid, although the act of putting forward a defeasible argument as a part of argumentative discourse can undoubtedly be reasonable.

In order to capture the said intuition, we can define the concept of validity situationally by saying that an argument is valid in a given situation, if and only if its premises entail its conclusion in that particular situation. Thus, deductively valid arguments would be arguments that are valid in all possible situations, whereas defeasible arguments would be arguments that are valid only in some situations. The distinction between situations in which a defeasible argument is valid and situations in which a defeasible argument is invalid can in turn be drawn on the basis of the concept of normative reasons (see Marraud 2025a, 2025b).

The relationship between reasons and arguments can be explained in the following way. We can make a distinction between two senses of the term "argument". On the one hand, arguments can be understood as linguistic entities. This is the meaning we employ when we say for example that an argument consists of a set of premises and a conclusion. On the other hand, an argument can also be understood as that which a linguistic entity represents. This is the meaning we employ when we say for example that an argument from natural discourse and its reconstruction by means of an argument scheme are the same argument. Arguments in the latter sense can be understood as consisting of reasons. Thus, if the term "argument" is used in the former sense, then we can say that the relationship between reasons and arguments is one of representation – arguments represent reasons.

The relationship between a reason and a standpoint, on the other hand, can be one of support or opposition. Consider a reason R and a standpoint S. If the relationship between R and S is one of support, then we can say that R counts in favour of S or that R is a reason for S, whereas if the relationship between R and S is one of opposition, then we can say that R counts against S or that R is a reason against S. Accordingly, if R counts in favour of S, then R counts against the standpoint that consists in the denial of S, and if R counts against S, then R counts in favour of the standpoint that consists in the denial of S.

Furthermore, we can distinguish between different kinds of reasons. On the one hand, we can distinguish between reasons for or against a normative standpoint, i.e. a standpoint according to which something ought to be the case, and reasons that support a theoretical standpoint, i.e. a standpoint according to which something *is* the case. The former kind of reasons are normally called "reasons for action", whereas the latter kind of reasons are normally

called “reasons for belief”. On the other hand, we can distinguish between reasons that can be represented using a deductively valid argument and reasons that can be represented using a defeasible argument. The former kind of reasons can be called “conclusive”, whereas the latter kind of reasons can be called “inconclusive”.

The role of inconclusive reasons in argumentative discourse can be explained using the concept of weight. We can say that a standpoint ought to be accepted, if and only if the following disjunction obtains. Either there is a conclusive reason for the standpoint, or the total weight of the inconclusive reasons for the standpoint is greater than the total weight of the inconclusive reasons against the standpoint. If, however, there are no conclusive reasons for a standpoint, as is the case in practical argumentation, then we can say that argumentative discourse is guided by the following principle. A standpoint ought to be accepted, if and only if the total weight of the reasons for the standpoint is greater than the total weight of the reasons against the standpoint. For convenience, we can call this principle “the balance of reasons principle”.

The balance of reasons principle can be used in order to define the reasonableness of the act of putting forward a defeasible argument. We can say that the goal of an arguer is to put an audience in a position in which they ought to accept a standpoint. Furthermore, we can say that the act of putting forward an argument is reasonable, if and only if it is a means to realize this goal. Thus, we can say that the act of putting forward a defeasible argument is reasonable, if and only if the total weight of the reasons for a standpoint that the defeasible argument represents is greater than the total weight of the reasons against the standpoint represented by the defeasible arguments that have already been put forward as a part of the argumentative discourse.

Thus, if a valid argument is an argument that may reasonably be put forward as a part of argumentative discourse, then we can say that a defeasible argument is valid, if and only if the total weight of the reasons for a standpoint that it represents is greater than the total weight of the reasons against the standpoint represented by the defeasible arguments that have already been put forward as a part of the argumentative discourse. For convenience, I am going to refer to the definiens in this definition by saying that the defeasible argument shifts the balance of reasons in the argumentative discourse. Thus, a defeasible argument is valid, if and only if it shifts the balance of reasons in the argumentative discourse.

3. The Problem of Convergent Support

The concept of convergent support is typically contrasted with that of linked support. The distinction between linked and convergent support was introduced by Thomas (1977) and further developed by Govier (2014), Hitchcock (2017) and others. It can be defined as follows. The premises of an argument provide linked support for its conclusion, if and only if they support the conclusion only jointly; the premises of an argument provide convergent support for its conclusion, if and only if they support the conclusion independently. This distinction can be used as a basis for a distinction between two kinds of arguments – arguments in which the premises support the conclusion only jointly, and arguments in which the premises support the conclusion independently. For convenience, we can call the arguments of the former kind "linked-support arguments" and the arguments of the latter kind – "convergent-support arguments".

Thus defined, the distinction between linked-support arguments and convergent-support arguments applies to arguments as linguistic entities that consist of at least two premises and a conclusion. The concept of convergent support, however, can also be applied to reasons. Consider for example the following two inconclusive reasons for John to rent a certain apartment.

R1: The apartment is in a convenient location.

R2: The apartment has a large balcony.

We can say that these two reasons provide convergent support for the standpoint according to which John ought to rent the apartment.

An initial attempt to define the concept of convergent support as it applies to reasons would be to say that two or more reasons provide convergent support for a standpoint, if and only if all of them are inconclusive reasons that count in favour of the standpoint. The assumption that if two or more inconclusive reasons count in favour of a standpoint, then they provide convergent support for the standpoint, however, is subject to counterexamples. Consider a third inconclusive reason for John to rent the apartment.

R3: The apartment is close to John's workplace.

We can say that R2 and R3 provide convergent support for the standpoint according to which John ought to rent the apartment, but we would not say that R1 and R3 provide convergent

support for that standpoint – regardless of the fact that they are both inconclusive reasons for that standpoint.

We can say that the reason why it seems inappropriate to speak of R1 and R3 as providing convergent support is because they overlap. In order to account for possible cases of overlap, we can define the concept of convergent support as it applies to reasons in the following way. A set R of at least two reasons provide convergent support for a standpoint, if and only if they are all inconclusive reasons that count in favour of the standpoint, and their total weight is greater than the total weight of any set of reasons that consists of some but not all members of R. Thus, the total weight of R2 and R3 is greater than the weight of R2 or R3 taken individually, therefore we can say that they provide convergent support for the standpoint according to which John ought to find a second job, but the total weight of R1 and R3 is not greater than the weight of R1, therefore the concept of convergent support is not applicable.

Real-life practical argumentation often involves putting forward arguments representing reasons that provide convergent support for a standpoint. Thus, any theory of argument schemes in practical argumentation needs to allow for an adequate reconstruction of such arguments. In other words, any theory of argument schemes in practical argumentation needs to provide a satisfactory solution to a problem that can be called "the problem of convergent support" and formulated as follows.

> **The Problem of Convergent Support:** How to adequately reconstruct an argument representing reasons that provide convergent support for a standpoint by means of an argument scheme?

If an argument is reconstructed by means of an argument scheme, then it is reconstructed as an argument that consists of a set of premises and a conclusion. An argument that consists of a set of premises and a conclusion can be a linked-support argument, a convergent-support argument or an argument that has a single premise. However, the theories of Walton and colleagues and Atkinson and Bench-Capon only allow for an argument to be reconstructed as a linked-support argument. It seems that many arguments put forward as a part of practical argumentation can indeed be adequately reconstructed as linked-support arguments. However, if an argument representing reasons that provide convergent support for a standpoint is to be reconstructed as a set of premises and a conclusion, then it can only be adequately reconstructed as a convergent-support argument.

It is generally possible to reconstruct an argument representing reasons that provide convergent support for a standpoint as a non-convergent-support argument, i.e. as an argument that is either a linked-support argument or has a single premise. Thus, an argument representing R1 and R2 can be reconstructed as a linked-support argument by means of the argument from consequences argument scheme from the theory of Walton and colleagues (Walton et al. 2008, 101) in the following way.

> Premise 1: If John rents the apartment, then John will live in a convenient location and have a large balcony.
> Premise 2: It is good to live in a convenient location and have a large balcony.
> Conclusion: Therefore, John ought to rent the apartment.

However, we can say that this kind of reconstruction is not adequate, as far as it may require one to make false assumptions about the genuineness of the reasons represented by the argument.

Consider a situation in which an argument representing reasons that provide convergent support for a standpoint is challenged by a counterargument according to which some but not all of these reasons are actually not genuine reasons. If the original argument is reconstructed as a set of premises and a conclusion, then the counterargument needs to be interpreted as an attack against one of the premises. However, if one of the premises of a non-convergent-support argument turns out to be false, then the whole argument is defeated. Thus, if the original argument is reconstructed as a non-convergent-support argument and the attack is successful, then one is required to make the false assumption that all of the reasons have been demonstrated not to be genuine.

Thus, an argument representing R1 and R2 can be challenged by a counterargument according to which there are no supermarkets near the apartment, and therefore R1 is actually not a genuine reason for John to rent the apartment.[5] If the argument representing R1 and R2 is reconstructed by means of the argument from consequences argument scheme as shown above, then this counterargument is to be interpreted as an attack against Premise 1. However, if Premise 1 is false, then the whole argument is defeated. Thus, if the attack is successful, one

[5] We can say that this counterargument corresponds to critical question CQ_2: What evidence supports the claim that the cited consequences will (may, must) occur, and is it sufficient to support the strength of the claim adequately? (Walton et al. 2008, 102).

is required to make the false assumption that both R1 and R2 have been demonstrated not to be genuine reasons.

One might try to avoid this problem by interpreting an argument representing reasons that provide convergent support for a standpoint as equivalent to multiple arguments, each of which represents a separate reason. Thus, an argument representing R1 and R2 would be interpreted as equivalent to two arguments that represent R1 and R2 respectively. These two arguments can be reconstructed by means of the argument from consequences argument scheme in the following way.

Premise 1: If John rents the apartment, then John will live in a convenient location.
Premise 2: It is good to live in a convenient location.
Conclusion: Therefore, John ought to rent the apartment.

Premise 1: If John rents the apartment, then John will have a large balcony.
Premise 2: It is good to have a large balcony.
Conclusion: Therefore, John ought to rent the apartment.

Thus, a counterargument according to which some but not all of the reasons are not genuine is to be interpreted as an attack against premises of the non-convergent-support arguments representing these reasons. Accordingly, if the attack is successful, then only the arguments in question are defeated and one is not required to make the false assumption that all of the reasons have been demonstrated not to be genuine.

The problem with this strategy, however, is that it fails to account for the fact that the support for the standpoint provided by the reasons represented by the argument is cumulative.[6] If we assume the concept of validity of defeasible arguments as defined in the previous section, then we can explain the failure of the strategy in question by saying that if one interprets an argument representing reasons that provide convergent support for a standpoint as equivalent to multiple arguments, each of which represents a separate reason, then one may be required to make false assumptions about the validity of the argument.

Consider a situation in which an argument representing reasons that provide convergent support for a standpoint is put forward as a rebuttal of an argument representing reasons whose

[6] Govier (2014) and others make a similar claim by arguing that a convergent-support argument is not equivalent to multiple arguments.

total weight is less than the total weight of the reasons represented by the rebuttal, but greater than the weight of each of these reasons taken individually. Thus, if the rebuttal is interpreted as equivalent to multiple arguments, each of which represents a separate reason, then none of these arguments shift the balance of reasons, which means that none of them are valid. We can say that if an argument is equivalent to multiple invalid arguments, then it is itself invalid. Thus, if one interprets the rebuttal as equivalent to multiple arguments, each of which represents a separate reason, then one is required to make the false assumption that the rebuttal is itself invalid.

An argument representing R1 and R2 might be put forward as a rebuttal of an argument representing the following reason:

R4: The rent of the apartment is high.

If the weight of R4 is greater than the weights of R1 and R2 taken individually, then none of the two non-convergent-support arguments representing R1 and R2 respectively shift the balance of reasons, which means that they are not valid arguments. Thus, if one interprets the argument representing R1 and R2 as equivalent to these two arguments, then one is required to assume that the argument representing R1 and R2 is an invalid argument. However, if the weight of R4 is less than the total weight of R1 and R2, then this assumption is false.

If, on the other hand, an argument representing reasons that provide convergent support for a standpoint is reconstructed as a convergent-support argument in which each reason is expressed by a separate premise, then one is not required to make any such false assumptions. If some but not all of the reasons are demonstrated not to be genuine, then the premises expressing these reasons are to be regarded as false. However, since each premise supports the conclusion independently, the argument is not entirely defeated, but remains in an altered form in which it has only the premises expressing the reasons that have not been demonstrated not to be genuine. Accordingly, since all of the reasons are represented by a single argument, this argument remains valid, even if the weight of each individual reason is insufficient to shift the balance of reasons.

Thus, an argument representing R1 and R2 can be reconstructed as a convergent-support argument in the following way.

Premise 1: The apartment is in a convenient location.

Premise 2: The apartment has a large balcony.

Conclusion: Therefore, John ought to rent the apartment.

If R1 is demonstrated not to be a genuine reason, then Premise 1 is to be regarded as false. However, the argument is not entirely defeated, but remains in an altered form in which it has only Premise 2. Accordingly, if the argument is put forward as a rebuttal of an argument representing R4 and the total weight of R1 and R2 is greater than the weight of R4, then the argument is valid regardless of whether R4 has greater weight than R1 and R2 taken individually.

4. Analysing Practical Argumentation

It is generally possible for a defeasible argument to represent multiple reasons that do not provide convergent support for a standpoint. An arguer might say for example that John ought to rent a certain apartment, because it is in a convenient location and is also close to John's workplace. Putting forward such an argument, however, can be interpreted as committing a fallacy that consists in representing reasons that do not provide convergent support as reasons that do provide convergent support. If this interpretation is correct, then we can say that a defeasible argument representing multiple reasons that do not provide convergent support for a standpoint is a fallacious argument. Accordingly, a non-fallacious defeasible argument is an argument representing either a single inconclusive reason or multiple reasons that provide convergent support for a standpoint.

As discussed in the previous section, if an argument representing reasons that provide convergent support for a standpoint is to be reconstructed as a set of premises and a conclusion, then it can only be adequately reconstructed as a convergent-support argument. In convergent-support arguments separate reasons are expressed by separate premises. Thus, if arguments representing reasons that provide convergent support for a standpoint are to be reconstructed as convergent-support arguments, then it would be convenient for arguments representing a single inconclusive reason to be reconstructed as arguments in which the given reason is expressed by a single premise. Thus, if a defeasible argument in general is to be reconstructed as a set of premises and a conclusion, then it would be convenient to reconstruct it as an argument in which each reason is expressed by a separate premise, or in other words, as an argument in which reasons are individuated as premises.

We can say that a defeasible argument in which reasons are individuated as premises is a kind of conductive argument (Wellman 1971; Govier 2014). An extensive treatment of

conductive arguments lies beyond the scope of the present inquiry, but I would like to address two questions that are related to their form. Assuming the distinction between reasons and premises as understood above, these two questions can be formulated in the following way. First, should a conductive argument contain not only premises that express reasons for the standpoint, but also premises that express reasons against the standpoint? Second, should a conductive argument contain not only premises that express reasons, but also an on-balance premise which states that the reasons for the standpoint outweigh the reasons against the standpoint?

Blair (2016) does include a premise that expresses reasons against the standpoint, but a majority of scholars argue against including such premises (see e.g. Govier & Allen 2011, Hansen 2011, Yu & Zenker 2019). Yu and Zenker, for instance, argue that if we include premises that express reasons against the standpoint, then we would depart from the ordinary meaning of the term "premise" (Yu & Zenker 2019, 34). It must be noted, however, that arguers do sometimes state not only reasons for the standpoint that they advocate, but also reasons against that standpoint. This phenomenon can be explained by assuming that they do so in an attempt to achieve a certain rhetorical effect (Xie 2017).

A number of scholars have suggested adding an on-balance premise which states that the reasons for the standpoint outweigh the reasons against the standpoint (see e.g. Govier 2011; Hansen 2011; Blair 2016). However, as Hansen himself points out, if such an on-balance premise is added, then a conductive argument representing multiple reasons that provide convergent support for a standpoint would not be a convergent-support argument, but a linked-support argument (Hansen 2011, 41). And, as discussed in the previous section, arguments representing reasons that provide convergent support for a standpoint cannot adequately be reconstructed as linked-support arguments.

Adding an on-balance premise is normally justified by saying that putting forward a conductive argument entails the claim that the reasons for the standpoint outweigh the reasons against the standpoint (see Xie 2022 for an overview). It must be noted, however, that this claim does not refer to all possible reasons for and against the standpoint, but only to the reasons for and against the standpoint represented by the arguments that are put forward as a part of the argumentative discourse. Thus, it coincides with the claim that the given argument shifts the balance of reasons in the sense specified in the second section of the present text. Thus, if the validity of conductive arguments is defined by saying that a conductive argument is valid, if and only if it shifts the balance of reasons, then adding an on-balance premise becomes

superfluous. Putting forward any argument entails the claim that the argument is valid, but this claim does not need to be stated as one of the premises of the argument.

If a defeasible argument in which reasons are individuated as premises contains neither an on-balance premise, nor premises that express reasons against the standpoint, but only premises that express reasons for the standpoint, then it has the following form.

Premise 1: Reason_1 for standpoint S

…

Premise N: Reason_N for standpoint S

Conclusion: Therefore, standpoint S

This argument form can be turned into an argument scheme by substituting the variables Reason_1 for standpoint S … Reason_N for standpoint S for linguistic expressions that contain schematic constants or schematic quantifiers in the sense specified by Hansen (2020). We can say that such linguistic expressions express the form of the reasons and can therefore be supplied by a theory of normative reasons.

Since practical argumentation is argumentation in which the standpoint at issue is a normative standpoint, we can say that the reasons represented by practical arguments are reasons for action. Research in philosophy of action has led to the formulation of different theories of reasons for action – the desire-based theory of reasons (Schroeder 2007), reasons fundamentalism (Scanlon 1998), the evidence-based theory of reasons (Kearns & Star 2009), the value-based theory of reasons (Maguire 2016). I am going to adopt the value-based theory of reasons in light of the following considerations. First, it allows for a concise articulation of the form of reasons for action. Second, it allows for establishing an explanatory relationship between the validity of practical arguments and empirical data regarding cultural value priorities.

The value-based theory defines reasons for action in the following way. The fact that agent A performing action B would promote state of affairs S is a reason for agent A to perform action B, if and only if state of affairs S is valuable.[7] Assuming that this definition is correct,

[7] The promotion relation in question can be explained by saying that agent A performing action B can promote state of affairs S by instantiating it, causing or partially causing it, constituting or partially

we can say that the form of reasons for action can be expressed by linguistic expressions of the kind: "Agent A performing action B would promote a valuable state of affairs S". If we substitute the variables $Reason_1$ for standpoint S … $Reason_N$ for standpoint S in the argument form under consideration for linguistic expressions of this kind, then we get the following argument scheme.

Premise 1: Agent A performing action B would promote a valuable state of affairs S_1.
…
Premise N: Agent A performing action B would promote a valuable state of affairs S_N.

Conclusion: Therefore, agent A ought to perform action B.

For convenience, we can call this argument scheme "basic practical argument".

As far as the value-based theory is a theory of reasons for action in general, we can say that all practical arguments can be reconstructed by means of the basic practical argument scheme. Such a reconstruction boils down to identifying agent A, action B and the valuable states of affairs S_1 … S_N that are said to be promoted by agent A performing action B. The identification of agent A and action B should normally be relatively straightforward, but identifying the valuable states of affairs S_1 … S_N might require some more interpretative work. The analysis of real-life practical argumentation can be aided by establishing a link between the concept of a valuable state of affairs and other concepts that are commonly employed in practical argumentation, including those of a goal, a consequence, a norm and a value in the sense of an abstract entity.[8]

The relationship between a valuable state of affairs and a value as an abstract entity can be explained by saying that a valuable state of affairs is a state of affairs in which a value in the sense of an abstract entity is realized. Furthermore, to say that performing an action promotes a valuable state of affairs is similar to saying that performing the action has a positive consequence, but the term "consequence" as it is normally understood in argumentation theory refers to causal consequences in particular, whereas the concept of promoting a state of affairs

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constituting it, preventing its prevention, or non-superfluously making it probable (Maguire 2016, p. 238).

[8] Each of the argument schemes from the theories of Walton and colleagues, and Atkinson and Bench-Capon is centered around one of these concepts.

is much broader. The promoted state of affairs might be valuable not only because it is a state of affairs that constitutes a positive causal consequence, but also because it is a state of affairs in which a certain goal is realized or a certain norm is observed.

Critical questions to the basic practical argument scheme can be formulated on the basis of the balance of reasons principle. We can say that criticizing a defeasible argument consists in an attempt to demonstrate that the total weight of the reasons against the given standpoint is actually greater than the total weight of the reasons for the standpoint. Thus, there are two possible strategies one can employ, in order to criticize a defeasible argument – one can either put forward reasons against the standpoint that have not been put forward yet, or argue that the reasons for the standpoint that have already been put forward actually have weights that are smaller than those originally ascribed to them. We can say that these two strategies correspond to the following two critical questions.

CQ1: Are there reasons against the standpoint that have not been put forward?

CQ2: Do the reasons for the standpoint really have the weights ascribed to them?

As far as the two strategies in question are the only possible strategies one can employ in order to criticize a defeasible argument, we can say that the list of critical questions is complete in the sense that it covers all possible critical questions. However, one can make further specifications. Thus, if a reason for action has the form "agent A performing action B would promote a valuable state of affairs S", then its weight depends on two factors – the degree to which agent A performing action B would promote states of affairs S, and the value of state of affairs S in the sense of its degree of valuableness. Accordingly, CQ2 can be further divided into the following two critical questions.

CQ2.1: Would agent A performing action B really promote state of affairs S to degree P?

CQ2.2: Is state of affairs S really valuable to degree V?

5. Explaining Practical Argumentation

In social psychology, values are normally understood as socially desirable, trans-situational goals that vary in importance and serve as guiding principles in people's lives (Sagiv & Schwartz 2022). As far as values vary in importance, we can speak of a hierarchy of values or value priorities. Empirical data regarding the value priorities of different cultures has been collected and interpreted on the basis of different theories of value, including those of Rokeach (1973), Inglehart (1977), Hofstede (1980) and Schwartz (1992). Valchev (2026) proposes a general account of how real-life practical argumentation can be explained on the basis of such empirical data.

This general account makes use of the value-based theory of reasons and Schwartz's theory of human values. It distinguishes between three kinds of facts that pertain to practical argumentation – an audience considering certain reasons for action, an arguer putting forward certain reasons for action and the audience being convinced or not convinced that the given normative standpoint is true. Furthermore, the general account identifies certain conditions under which facts of the latter two kinds can be explained by facts regarding cultural value priorities. Formulating this kind of explanations is a two-step process that can be summarized as shown in Fig. 1. In the present section, I address the question of how the general account can be used in conjunction with the basic practical argument scheme.

<u>Step 1:</u> Identify facts of kinds F1-F4.

- **F1:** Audience AUD is considering basic reasons BR_{1A}, …, BR_{NA}.
- **F2:** Arguer ARG puts forward basic reasons BR_{1B}, …, BR_{MB}.
- **F3:** Audience AUD is (not) convinced.
- **F4:** Culture C ascribes importance I_1, …, I_N to SVT values V_1, …, V_N.

A basic reason for agent A to perform action B is the fact that agent A performing action B would promote a state of affairs, in which an SVT value V is realized to degree R in the lives of a set of people P.

<u>Step 2:</u> Check if conditions C1-C4 obtain.

- **C1:** Importance I_1, …, I_N of SVT values V_1, …, V_N suggests that the cumulative weight of the basic reasons that audience AUD is considering is less (greater) than the cumulative weight of the basic reasons arguer ARG puts forward.
- **C2:** Audience AUD accepts the value priorities of culture C.
- **C3:** Arguer ARG believes that C1 and C2 obtain.
- **C4:** Arguer ARG knows the value priorities of culture C.

If [C1^C2], then F4 can explain F3.
If [C3^C4], then F4 can explain F2.

Figure 1. A summary of the general account proposed in Valchev (2026).

The relationship between values as understood in social psychology and the valuableness of states of affairs can be explained by saying that a state of affairs is valuable, if and only if a value is realized in it. Thus, the form of a reason for action can also be formulated as follows: "Agent A performing action B would promote a state of affairs in which value V is realized to degree R." [9] Accordingly, if valuable states of affairs are individuated on the basis

[9] There are several points of difference between this formulation and the formulation given in Figure 1. First, the formulation given in Figure 1 refers not to values in general but to "SVT values". The term "SVT values" stands for values from Schwatz's theory. Second, the formulation given in Figure 1 refers not to reasons in general, but to basic reasons. The concept of basic reasons is used in relation to the phenomenon of overlap between reasons. Basic reasons are reasons are the reasons with which all other reasons overlap and which are thus the most fundamental weight bearers. What is said in the present section applies both to SVT values and basic reasons in particular, and to values and reasons in general. For the purposes of the present inquiry, I am making a more general point. A third point of difference consists in the fact that the formulation given in Figure 1 refers to realizing the given value in the lives of a certain set of people. In Valchev (2026), the degree of realization of the value is considered to be unrelated to the number of people in whose lives the value is realized. In the present paper, however, I have assumed that the greater the number of people in whose lives the value is realized, the greater its degree of realization. Thus, the number of people is included in the degree of realization, and therefore does not need to be stated separately.

of the values that are realized in them[10], then the basic practical argument scheme can also be formulated in the following way.

Premise 1: Agent A performing action B would promote a state of affairs in which value V_1 is realized to degree R.

…

Premise N: Agent A performing action B would promote a state of affairs in which value V_N is realized to degree R_N.

Conclusion: Therefore, agent A ought to perform action B.

Furthermore, we can say that the valuableness of a state of affairs is a function of two variables – the importance of the value that is realized in it and the degree to which the value is realized. Accordingly, CQ2.2 can be further divided into the following two critical questions.

CQ2.2.1: Does value V really have importance I?

CQ2.2.2: Is value V really realized to degree R?

Thus, the weight of a reason for action depends on a total of three variables – the degree to which agent A performing action B would promote the given state of affairs, the importance of the value that is realized in the state of affairs, and the degree to which the value is realized. Assuming that an audience observes the balance of reasons principle, we can say that empirical data regarding the values[11] that the audience ascribes to any of these three variables in the reasons represented by a practical argument and the reasons represented by the practical arguments that have already been put forward as a part of the argumentative discourse can provide us with a possible explanation of the fact that the audience is convinced or not convinced by the practical argument.

Thus, if the audience accepts the value priorities of a culture, then empirical data regarding the value priorities of the culture can provide us with a possible explanation of the

[10] That is to say, whether two valuable states of affairs are different depends on whether the values that are realized in them are different.

[11] In this instance, I am using the term "value" in order to refer to the realization of a variable.

fact that the audience is convinced or not convinced by the practical argument. Accordingly, if an arguer knows the value priorities of a culture and is aware of the fact that an audience accepts the value priorities of the culture, then empirical data regarding the value priorities of the culture can provide us with a possible explanation of the fact that the arguer puts forward or does not put forward a certain practical argument. Thus, facts of kinds F1-F4 from the general account and the explanatory relationships between them remain essentially the same, but rather than speaking of putting forward certain reasons, we speak of putting forward an argument that represents those reasons.

6. A Case Study: The Bulgarian Government Debate about the Ratification of the Istanbul Convention

The Istanbul convention is a human rights treaty of the Council of Europe, which was opened for signature on May 11, 2011, in Istanbul, Turkey. Its reception within the EU has been generally positive – it has been ratified by 21 EU member states and by the EU itself. However, despite facing repeating pressure from the EU, the remaining six EU member states have not ratified the convention and some of them have even formally rejected it. One of these countries is Bulgaria. As a result of strong opposition by NGOs, religious institutions and private citizens, the Bulgarian government came under pressure not to ratify the convention. However, a bill for the ratification of the convention had been initially approved at the government meeting held on January 3, 2018.[12]

At that time, the Bulgarian government was formed by GERB – the leading political party, and a coalition of three smaller parties, collectively known as United Patriots. GERB supported the ratification of the convention, whereas United Patriots opposed it. Four ministers took part in debating the ratification – Tsetska Tsacheva and Ekaterina Zaharieva from GERB, and Krasimir Karakachanov and Valeri Simeonov from United Patriots. Furthermore, we can identify two strands of the debate – one related to the question of how the decision whether to ratify the convention would be received by the European Union and one related to the question of how the decision whether to ratify the convention would be received by the Bulgarian people. For the purposes of the present inquiry, I will only be concerned with the latter strand.

[12] The transcript of the meeting was retrieved from the website of the Bulgarian government. However, at the moment of writing the present text, the link is no longer active.

As far as the political system of Bulgaria is liberal democracy, we can say that the decisions of the government are supposed to express the will of the people. Thus, we can assume that in their public office as ministers, the members of the government accept the value priorities of Bulgarian culture. Empirical data regarding the value priorities of Bulgarian culture at the time of the government debate about the ratification of the Istanbul convention was gathered from the European Social Survey – an academically driven, cross-national survey, which is conducted biannually among representative samples from most countries in Europe and makes use of Schwartz's theory of human values.[13]

Four values from Schwartz's refined theory played a role in the Bulgarian government debate about the ratification of the Istanbul convention – benevolence-caring, security-personal, tradition and universalism-concern. Benevolence-caring consists in concern about the welfare of in-group members, security-personal consists in safety in one's immediate environment, tradition consists in the preservation of cultural, family or religious traditions, and universalism-concern consists in equality, justice and protection for all people. The results from the ninth wave of the European Social Survey suggest that at the time of the debate Bulgarian people ranked tradition fourth, security-personal fifth, benevolence-caring sixth, and universalism-concern seventh in terms of importance among the 19 values form Schwartz's refined theory.[14]

The debate begins with a statement by Krasimir Karakachanov containing the following argument.

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[13] The European Social Survey measures value priorities through a version of the Portrait Value Questionnaire – an instrument that presents respondents with a list of short descriptions of people, and asks them to rate the extent to which they are like the described person on a Likert scale from 1 (very much like me) to 6 (not like me at all).

[14] The version of the Portrait Value Questionnaire used in the European Social Survey was actually designed for measuring the importance of the ten basic values from Schwartz's original theory. However, previous research (Valchev 2022) suggests that these ten basic values are too broad to capture accurately some of the specifics of the reception of the convention in Bulgaria. Thus, for the purposes of the present inquiry, I have decided to use the 21 values from Schwartz's refined theory instead. Since these 19 values roughly correspond to the descriptions of people used in the Portrait Value Questionnaire, I have assumed that the results from the European Social Survey provide us with sufficient evidence regarding the importance Bulgarians ascribe to these 19 values as well.

> "Of course, [the Istanbul Convention] is about women's rights and equality between the sexes, but it contains expressions and words that give society a serious reason to worry that they can be used afterwards in an attempt to impose untraditional beliefs about the sexes, such as a third sex, and consequently, to claim that same-sex marriages are legal – things that our society is seriously concerned about."

The phrase "expressions and words" refers to the term "gender", which is central for the convention and the source of most of the controversy surrounding it. It is defined as "the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men" (Article 3-c) and is thus explicitly distinguished from the term "sex", which refers not to a social construction, but to a biological category. The opponents of the convention have argued that introducing such a distinction between sex and gender would lead to undermining the traditions of the country.[15] The same argument is also put forward by Karakachanov. Using the basic practical argument scheme, this argument can be reconstructed in the following way.

> Premise 1: Not ratifying the convention would promote a state of affairs in which the value of tradition is realized to a higher degree.
> Conclusion: Therefore, the convention ought not to be ratified.

By saying that the convention is about women's rights and equality between the sexes, Karakachanov is also referring to a reason for the ratification of the convention. As far as the promotion of women's rights and equality between the sexes is a goal associated with the value of universalism-concern, the reason in question can be formulated in the following way: Ratifying the convention would promote a state of affairs in which the value of universalism-concern is realized to a higher degree. Since this reason is a reason against the standpoint defended by Karakachanov, it is not among the reasons represented by the argument, and

[15] It is said that introducing the distinction in question would have two bad consequences – that of providing an opportunity for increasing the rights of same-sex couples by allowing them to get married and adopt children and that of promoting and providing a legal dimension to the idea that one can choose whether to be a man or a woman (or neither a man nor a woman). These two consequences are considered to be inconsistent with the traditions of the country in general and with the Christian faith, the legal system of the country and the traditional understanding of the family in particular.

accordingly, does not figure as a premise in the argument's reconstruction by means of the basic practical argument scheme. As noted earlier, it can be assumed that arguers mention reasons against the standpoint they are advocating in an attempt to achieve a certain rhetorical effect.

It must be noted, however, that the reason in question is one of the main reasons for the ratification of the convention that is stated in the convention itself. It is also a reason that has usually been stated by the proponents of the convention (see Valchev 2022, Valchev and Garvanova 2023). Thus, it can be assumed that it is a reason that the intended audience – the members of the government – are considering. Thus, the fact that at the time of the debate Bulgarians considered the value of tradition to be more important than the value of universalism-concern suggests that the reason in question has less weight for the audience than the reason represented by the argument that appeals to the value of tradition. Accordingly, the fact that at the time of the debate Bulgarians considered the value of tradition to be more important than the value of universalism-concern can explain the fact that Karakachanov put forward an argument that appeals to the value of tradition.

The next statement in the debate is made by Tsetska Tsacheva, who addresses the argument that appeals to tradition in the following way.

> "The Constitution will definitely not be changed. There definitely won't be marriages, different from those between a man and a woman, as it is enacted by the Constitution."

We can say that Tsatcheva interprets the claim that the traditions of the country would be undermined as referring to a possible change in Article 2.46.1 of the constitution of Bulgaria, which states that marriage is a voluntary union between a man and a woman. Consequently, she assures the members of the government that no such change in the constitution will be made. This argumentative action is analogical to raising the following critical question.

> CQ2.1: Would not ratifying the convention really promote a state of affairs in which the value of tradition is realized to a higher degree?

The next statement in the debate is made by Valery Simeonov, who replies to the critical question in the following way.

> "In my opinion, […] there is a great danger not so much of marriages of another kind, but I am more worried about the possibility of incorporating into our educational system

> programs and texts that explain to children that they are not "he" or "she", but "it". […] Bulgaria, after all, is still a country with traditions. Thank god, we still have traditions related to these matters, and I don't think that we should be the reason for them to be changed and to take another direction – at least, it will not be accepted by the public, and the Bulgarian people."

Simeonov is referring to Article 14-1 of the convention, which legislates the implementation into the educational system of topics like "non-stereotyped gender roles". His point seems to be that the ratification of the convention would lead to undermining the traditions of the country not because the constitution of the country will be changed, but because certain untraditional beliefs will be implemented into the educational system.

The next statement in the debate is made by Ekaterina Zaharieva, who addresses the argument that appeals to tradition in the following way.

> "Unfortunately, I think that a false impression has been created – the convention is about protection from domestic violence and its texts related to early education aim namely at creating tolerance between men and women, breaking stereotypes in some of the countries, according to which the woman can be a subject of domestic violence, and this is considered something normal. There are neither texts that require the countries to legalize same-sex marriages, nor texts that contradict our constitution. […] Still very often, unfortunately, do we see in Bulgaria such stereotypes of cases of domestic violence, which go on for years and sometimes have a fatal end. In fact, the texts of the convention introduce an obligation for the state to take care of the victims of domestic violence, and […] such a victim can also be the man, i.e. care for the victims."

Zaharieva is not denying that certain untraditional beliefs will be implemented into the educational system in case the convention is ratified. Instead, she is introducing good consequences that the ratification of the convention would lead to. She is referring to equality between men and women, but not as something important in itself. Rather, the argument is that achieving equality between men and women is a means for reducing violence against women and domestic violence.

Reducing violence against women and domestic violence is itself a goal that is associated with the value of security-personal. However, as far as seeking to reduce violence against women and domestic violence at the societal level is interpreted as implying care for

the victims, we can say that apart from security-personal, Zaharieva is also appealing to the value of benevolence-care. Thus, the argument can be reconstructed by means of the basic practical argument scheme in the following way.

> Premise 1: Ratifying the convention would promote a state of affairs in which the value of security-personal is realized to a higher degree.
> Premise 2: Ratifying the convention would promote a state of affairs in which the value of benevolence-caring is realized to a higher degree.
> Conclusion: Therefore, the convention ought to be ratified.

The fact that at the time of the debate Bulgarians considered the value of tradition to be more important than either of the values of security-personal and benevolence-caring suggests that the weight of the reason represented by the argument that appeals to tradition is greater than the weight of either of the two reasons represented by the argument that appeals to security-personal and benevolence-caring taken individually. Since all three values have high importance for Bulgarians, however, it can be assumed that their importance suggests the total weight of the two reasons represented by the argument that appeals to security-personal and benevolence caring is actually greater than the weight of the reason represented by the argument that appeals to tradition. If this assumption is true, then it can explain the fact that Zaharieva put forward the argument that appeals to security-personal and benevolence-caring.

The final statement in the debate is made by Karakachanov, who addresses the argument that appeals to security-personal and benevolence care in the following way.

> “I don’t agree that we need some new convention to guarantee equality between the sexes. Equality between the sexes is guaranteed by the constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, which says that citizen’s rights are not differentiated on the basis of sex, ethnicity, religion, education, etc.”

Karakachanov is referring to Article 1.6.1-2 from the constitution of Bulgaria. His point is that the claim that ratifying the convention would help reducing violence against women and domestic violence by ensuring equality between men and women is unsubstantiated. Thus, he is raising the following critical question.

CQ2.1: Would ratifying the convention really promote a state of affairs in which the values of security-personal and benevolence-care are realized to a higher degree?

7. Conclusion

Existing theories of argument schemes in practical argumentation fail to provide a satisfactory solution to the problem of convergent support: how to adequately reconstruct an argument representing reasons that provide convergent support for a standpoint by means of an argument scheme? In the present paper, I propose a theory of argument schemes in practical argumentation that does provide a satisfactory solution to this problem. As far as this theory defines the validity of practical arguments in terms of the weighing of reasons, we can say that it is a reasons-based theory.

A practical argument represents either a single inconclusive reason or multiple reasons that provide convergent support for a standpoint. If an argument representing reasons that provide convergent support for a standpoint is to be reconstructed as a set of premises and conclusion, then it can only be adequately reconstructed as a convergent-support argument, and in convergent-support arguments, reasons are individuated as premises. Thus, if a practical argument is to be reconstructed as a set of premises and conclusion, then it is convenient for it to be reconstructed as an argument in which reasons are individuated as premises.

An argument form in which reasons are individuated as premises can be turned into an argument scheme by substituting its premises for linguistic expressions that express the form of reasons. Such linguistic expressions can be supplied by a theory of normative reasons. For the purposes of the present inquiry, I make use of the value-based theory of reasons for action, according to which reasons for action have the form: agent A performing action B would promote a valuable state of affairs S. In this way, I formulate the basic practical argument scheme.

The utility of this argument scheme and the proposed theory in general is demonstrated in two ways – by demonstrating its compatibility with a general account of how real-life practical argumentation can be explained on the basis of empirical data regarding cultural value priorities, and through the analysis and explanation of a case study – the 2018 Bulgarian government debate about the ratification of the Istanbul convention. The participants in the debate put forward two practical arguments – one that appeals to the value of tradition and one that appeals to the values of security-personal and benevolence-caring. The acts of putting forward these two arguments are explained on the basis of empirical data regarding the

importance Bulgarians ascribed to the said three values (and the value of universalism-concern, which also played a role in the debate).

There are two directions for future research that are immediately relevant to the content of the present paper. First, one can attempt to provide a general theory of conductive argument based on the distinction between reasons and premises as understood in the present paper. Second, one can investigate the possibility of extending the theory proposed in the present paper in such a way that it covers not only practical arguments but any defeasible argument in general, including arguments put forward in support of a theoretical standpoint. Such arguments can be interpreted either as representing reasons for belief, in which case one would need to make use of a theory of reasons for belief, or as representing reasons for the action of accepting a theoretical standpoint, in which case one would need to introduce values such as truth, simplicity, explanatory power, etc.

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Declarations

There are no conflicts of interest/competing interests.