

This is a draft. The published version is:

Stevens, K. (2021). Charity for moral reasons? - A defense of the principle of charity in argumentation. *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 57(2), 67-84.
doi:10.1080/10511431.2021.1897327

Charity for Moral Reasons? – A Defense of the Principle of Charity in Argumentation

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Abstract: In this paper I argue for a pro tanto moral duty to be charitable in argument. Further, I argue that the amount of charitable effort required varies depending on the type of dialogue arguers are engaged in. In non-institutionalized contexts, arguers have influence over the type of dialogue that will be adopted. Arguers are therefore responsible with respect to charity on two levels: First, they need to take reasons for charity into account when determining the dialogue-type. Second, they need to invest the amount of effort towards charity required by the dialogue-type.

Keywords: principle of charity, ethics of argumentation, adversarial argumentation, strawman

1. Introduction

We do not typically expect lessons in morality from critical thinking textbooks. Still, many contain a section on what some consider a moral principle: The principle of charity. Students learn that when confronted with an argument that could be understood in different ways, they should interpret it to be a strong argument (see, e.g. MacDonald and Vaughn 2016). In

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argumentation theory, the principle of charity is controversial.¹ The questions are whether charity is required, how much of it, and which form it should take. Here, I am interested in a narrower topic. I will argue that there are moral reasons for charity towards our interlocutors in argument, and that consequently there is a *pro tanto* moral duty for charity.

However, I claim that not all arguers in all contexts need to exert the same effort towards charity. Rather, this depends on the dialogue-type, whether it is, e.g., deliberation or persuasion. However, at least in non-institutionalized contexts, arguers can influence the choice of dialogue-type and therefore they can be held morally responsible for it. The appropriate dialogue-type is determined by the balance of moral reasons applicable to the situation in which the argument arises, those for charity included. This complicates the way in which the moral reasons for charity apply: They figure into the determination of the dialogue-type arguers should adopt, and this type determines the effort arguers need to invest in charity.

2. Preliminary Clarifications

It is worthwhile to clarify which kind of charity I am interested in, and in what contexts. First, I am interested in the principle of charity that is discussed in argumentation theory, *not* the one known from the philosophy of language and often associated with a Quinean/Davidsonian theory of radical interpretation (Davidson 1973, 1994; Quine 1960). The problem that the philosophy of language's principle of charity is meant to solve is how we could understand another's utterances if we neither know what they believe *nor* have any mastery of their language. It requires us to

¹ See, e.g. Adler 1996; Govier 1981a, 1981b, 1987; Griffin 1981; Johnson 1981, 1984; Lewinski 2012; Manning 1983 but also literature on straw men, e.g. Aikin and Casey 2016; Lewiński 2011.

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assume that the other person's beliefs coincide largely with our own, i.e. that from our point of view, she holds largely true beliefs (e.g. that a ball falls if dropped). This allows us to reconstruct what she *must have meant* by an utterance given what we observe about her behavior and the environment, providing a basis for translating her language.

The principle of charity in argumentation also concerns the interpretation of other people's utterances and requires the assumption that they are apt epistemic agents. But the commonalities end there. Argumentation is possible only in the context of a shared language and vast agreement that forms the background of the argument. Further, argument arises when interlocutors either disagree, or at least consider disagreement possible.² The principle of charity in argument applies where the beliefs at issue *cannot* be presupposed to be shared, but language and background beliefs can. Instead of requiring that the interpreter assumes that the interlocutor believes what is true with respect to the contentious claim, it requires that the interpreter assumes that the interlocutor's attempts at justification are strong in some sense (in which sense is subject to debate).

Second, I am interested in the principle of charity in the context of interpreting an interlocutor's contribution to an argument that the interpreter is engaged in with them (argument₂ in O'Keefe's [1977] terminology), not the interpretations of arguments-as-artifacts *only* (arguments₁). If I am reading Hume's text on the problem of induction and attempt to determine

² Whether disagreement is necessary for argument is contentious. Some, like Hundleby (2013), argue that argumentation may simply concern an open question, even if no one has a standpoint to defend. However, Aikin (2017) points out that presenting arguments to justify possible positions makes sense only under the assumption that those positions *could* elicit disagreement.

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the argument he actually offered, then I am interpreting an argument as an artifact, but I am not *in* an argument *with* Hume, except in a very wide sense that I am not interested in here.

3 Charity - What is it Good For?

The literature discusses several different versions of the principle of charity, among them a strong version attributed to Scriven (1976), and Govier's (1987, 151/152) "moderate charity." The strong version of the principle of charity requires interpreting arguments such that they are as strong as possible, even if this requires considerable massaging.³ For reasons that will become clear in section 5, I am not advocating this version. Rather, I argue for a principle of charity aimed at making it easier for interlocutors to effectively communicate their reasons: Arguers should interpret their interlocutor's argumentative contributions under the assumption that, from the interlocutor's point of view of how the world is, they are offering reasons for their claims capable of meeting their argumentative burden (or of contributing adequately to it), and that the interlocutor's point of view of how the world is has some merit. This is a stronger version of what Govier (1987, 151/152) introduces as "moderate" charity which requires us to assume that arguers "are trying to give good reasons for claims they genuinely believe, . . . their purpose [is] to communicate information, acceptable opinions and reasonable beliefs, and to provide good reasons . . . by offering good arguments."

³ I take "strong" charity to require that the interpreter attributes to the arguer that argument which they think is most successful at providing the strongest justification for the claim from the interpreter's point of view, with premises that the interpreter is willing to accept. I think this deals with Lewinski's (2012) worry about what a "strong" interpretation would look like.

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This might raise the question why I am discussing this kind of charity in the context of ongoing arguments₂. After all, if an interpreter is unsure how to understand her interlocutor's contribution, why not ask for clarification? Why make the interpreter do what can be more efficiently done by the interlocutor?

The answer is threefold. First, the interlocutor might *not* be able to do the work better. She might not have the skill to formulate her thoughts better than she did. Argumentation does not take place exclusively between people capable of reformulating their arguments as often as is necessary for the interpreter to understand (Young 1996). Additionally, the interlocutor herself might still be in the process of working out what her reasons are. Formulating one's ideas is often a vehicle for becoming clear about them, and arguments might arise before this process of clarification has yielded stable results. The interlocutor might need the interpreter's help in clarifying her contributions, and only through this help fully realize what she was trying to express (Cohen 1995; Gilbert 1994).⁴

Second, charity might be necessary for the interpreter to notice that her interpretation has alternatives. Jumping to conclusions about an interlocutor's meaning may be an automatic move rather than a conscious choice. Hoping that the interlocutor will correct the interpreter is both unreliable and inefficient, even if the interlocutor *would* be able to reformulate her contribution.

Third, the interpreter might not be able to ask for clarification. Arguments₂ are had in all kinds of ways and through all kinds of media. For example, an interpreter might contribute to an

⁴ Those who doubt that one can have reasons that one cannot formulate clearly may profit from reading Fricker's (2007) work on hermeneutical lacunae.

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argument₂ on Twitter, a social-media platform whose design discourages careful inquiry into another's meaning. Or she might be in a social situation in which asking for clarification would be embarrassing or rude. So it is plausible that charity has a role to play even in ongoing arguments₂. But this does not yet answer the question whether arguers *should be required* to interpret charitably and whether the reasons for this are (also) moral ones.

4 Why Be Charitable?

I am not alone in claiming that we have moral reasons to interpret charitably. Scriven's (1976, 72) classical account introduces charity as an ethical principle: "The Principle of Charity is more than a mere ethical principle, but it is at least that . . . It requires you to be fair or just in your criticisms." However, in the subsequent discussion, the moral case for charity has not found much acclaim. Both Lewinski (2012) and Govier (1987) criticize it. And it might seem that a moral requirement not to attribute implausible interpretations to one's interlocutor's contributions (i.e. not to strawman them) is enough and already follows from Blair's (2011) requirement of fairness to abstain from deliberately committing fallacies. Why should morality stop an interpreter from using what Lewinski calls the *strategy of the easiest objection* and select the easiest way to criticize her interlocutor's arguments as they appear according to the interpretation that comes naturally (Lewinski 2012)?

Epistemic and prudential reasons for charity seem more plausible: Scriven (1976) also notes that charity is prudent because interpreters avoid criticizing a version of the argument so weak that it is easily repaired and then needs to be answered again. And Adler (1981, 1996) claims that where argument aims at the truth, epistemic concerns recommend charity because it will speed

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up the process of identifying the strongest reasons (see also Aikin and Casey 2016). However, prudential reasons apply only where it is likely that one's interlocutor will detect that a charitable interpretation could strengthen her argument, and epistemic reasons apply only where the interpreter's interest in the truth is greater than that in victory.

Govier (1987) also offers what she takes to be non-moral reasons for her moderate principle of charity. She claims that moderate charity is a requirement for *authentically* engaging in argumentation. Arguing is a social activity in which arguers engage with each other's reasons. Not applying moderate charity means *not* assuming that one's interlocutor is trying to present reasons and *not* trying to engage with them. This is pretending to argue while not really believing that one is in an argument. Applying moderate charity is a part of engaging in good-faith argument.

I agree that arguing in good faith often requires that we interpret our interlocutor's utterances under the assumption that she is trying to present reasons. However, I worry that either Govier's moderate principle of charity requires more of the interpreter than just good-faith engagement, or that it does not go far enough. Sincerely engaging with an argument certainly requires interpreting without any conscious or negligent ill-will. However, we are not playing at argument, nor are we denying our interlocutor's honest attempt at arguing, if we interpret her arguments in the way that comes naturally. But where an interlocutor is rhetorically not apt enough, where she is in the process of becoming clear about her reasons, or where the interpreter needs to employ charity to notice that additional interpretations are possible, interpreting to enable the interlocutor to make her reasons heard requires more. The interpreter might have to

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invest considerable resources to understand her interlocutor's way of speaking, her background beliefs, etc. The more different interlocutor and interpreter are, the more effort is required. In addition, inborn human biases make it easier to detect flaws in arguments for conclusions we reject and harder to appreciate their strengths (e.g. Mercier and Sperber 2011). Neither the assumption that the interlocutor is sincerely participating in argument nor the lack of culpable negligence or ill will cuts it: Interpreting in the way that seems most natural can be both, consistent with a sincere participation in the argument *and* what I would consider *prima facie* too uncharitable. Therefore I think that either Govier's moderate principle requires more than just sincere argumentative engagement, or it is too weak.

I argue that there are *moral* reasons for a kind of charity that is stronger than Govier's. We have a *pro tanto* duty to interpret under the assumption that our interlocutors do not only sincerely try to represent reasons, but that they indeed *have* reasons to represent, at least from their view of how the world is, and that this view has some merit, however sloppily formulated or *other* it might appear. I offer, first, a deontological argument based on the duty not to humiliate others. Second, I offer a consequential argument based on the importance of having a voice. I point out that these arguments are only meant to establish the existence of a *pro tanto* moral duty to interpret charitably.

4.1 The Deontological Argument

The deontological argument for charity is closely related to dignity-based arguments regarding the treatment of persons as epistemic agents which can be found, for example, in the literature on epistemic injustice (e.g. Fricker 2007), deliberative democracy (e.g. Gutmann and

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Thompson 2004) or the procedural rule of law (e.g. Waldron 2016). The concept of dignity is controversial, but I think one of its less controversial elements is that respect for a person's dignity requires respect for her as a being capable of having reasons, acting and believing on their basis, and understanding the reasons of others; and that this respect also includes acknowledging her as in this respect equal to other reasonable beings (e.g. Kant, Hill, and Zweig 2002). Engaging people in argument in a way that allows them to communicate their reasons, see them answered and integrated appropriately into the argument's result expressly acknowledges this dignified status; it shows them respect. However, this alone is not an argument for charitable interpretation, not even for engaging people in argument whenever possible. The mere fact that some behavior expresses respect cannot establish a duty to engage in it – unless imperfect, such a duty would be forbiddingly heavy. Instead, I argue that *if* a person engages another in argument (and does so freely or because she has an independently established duty to do so), then refusing to invest the appropriate effort into interpreting charitably is *prima facie* humiliating.⁵ It denies the interlocutor the respect owed to her according to her equal standing as a reasonable being.

Like Govier (1987), I think that argumentation is fundamentally a practice of exchanging reasons. Behaviors which aim at persuasion through fallacious argument, like propaganda, are parasitic on it. Arguments₁ are at least purported attempts at giving reasons. And arguments₂ are at least purported attempts of the arguers to resolve an issue by determining the balance of

⁵ It is an important caveat that this must be done freely. Asking charity of those who do not want to engage in argument, as is included in the phenomenon of “trolling,” can be a dishonest practice meant to discredit their position simply because they do not want to engage with the same view over and over again, or with a view designed to humiliate them. I thank Maureen Linker for bringing this to my attention.

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applicable reasons through the mutual presentation of arguments¹.⁶ Therefore, approaching someone argumentatively means at least pretending to address her in her capacity as an equal, reasonable being and at least pretending that the proposed interaction's goal is at least partially to determine the balance of applicable reasons, *hers included*. If she engages in the argument², then the arguers are now in what at least seems like a reciprocally respectful structure that exists based on the mutual agreement to aim at taking each other's reasons into account.

Of course, arguments are not reasons, but only at least purported attempts at representing reasons. This is why they need interpretation in the first place. And one thing that turns a real attempt at argumentatively resolving an issue into a *merely* purported attempt is if an arguer refuses to invest as much effort into charity as is necessary to give her interlocutor a real opportunity to make her reasons heard. Purporting to do something without really trying to do it is engaging in deception. And so arguing with someone without investing the appropriate amount of charity amounts to a deception. Such deception is humiliating because it expresses the deceiver's refusal to recognize her interlocutor's equal standing as a reasonable being. By engaging her interlocutor in argument, the deceiver starts an activity in which the interlocutor needs to treat her in a manner expressly respectful of her dignified standing. But then she refuses to reciprocate, treating her own standing as higher and her own reasons as more important than her interlocutor's. She refuses to express respect that is, now, owed.

⁶ If both arguers only purport to give reasons, know this of each other and know that they know, then they only play at argument.

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Of course, it requires different amounts of charitable effort to understand different arguers. As Young (1996) points out in the context of deliberative democracy, there are vast differences between persons in rhetorical capability, the ability to concentrate on a difficult task like formulating reasons, or the ability to become aware of one's reasons. However, a person's dignity and the requirement not to treat her disrespectfully does not vary according to rhetorical prowess or degree of self-insight. This is why I reject Johnson's (1984, 8) claim that interpreters cannot be expected to exert much charitable effort when arguments "seem to have been sloppily put together" by a "loose reasoner with scant knowledge of the demands of the argumentative process." Sure, if a capable rhetor wantonly refuses to invest the necessary effort, or if there is ample evidence that the arguer is being intentionally sloppy as is the case with online-trolls, Johnson has a point. But many arguments are sloppy because their authors do not have the capacity for more – often due to no fault of their own. Refusing to treat them charitably amounts to humiliation.

4.2 The Consequential Argument

The argument above assumed that there is a stringent moral requirement not to treat people disrespectfully. If this is so, then a *pro tanto* duty to charity is established just because engaging someone in argument without investing the appropriate effort in charity is humiliating. However, not everyone will accept such deontological arguments. Therefore, I will provide two arguments that engaging someone in argument without affording them meaningful opportunity to make their reasons understood is harmful.

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First, as Lind, Kanfer, and Earley (1990) argue on the basis of their research, people feel that they are valued members of their community when they are being invited to argue and see that a sincere effort is made to understand their reasons. For us intensely social creatures, treatment that suggest that we are *not* a valued member of the community causes emotional and psychological harm that may sometimes be significant. Taking part in an argument but realizing that no or very little effort is made to understand our reasons creates this kind of harm because it communicates that the associated social appreciation is only apparent. How great the harm is will depend on context. Realizing that others do not value one's contributions enough to invest energy in understanding them shows their low regard, causing harm that, if it is unnecessary, must be avoided.

Second, sometimes there are consequential reasons that require that a person has influence on the process of making a decision or coming to a conclusion. For example, not allowing her to contribute to a decision might make it unlikely that the decision will take her interests into account when it should. If the chosen process is argumentation, the same consequential reasons also require that her contributions be interpreted charitably, otherwise she does not have the influence on the outcome that she should have (compare e.g. allowing her to raise her hand during a vote, but not counting her).⁷

⁷ Research in psychology has shown that people consider decision-making processes in which they are given a voice to be more just (see, e.g. Lind, Kanfer, and Earley 1990) and they react poorly when they realize that the giving of a voice was only apparent (Folger et al. 1979).

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5 A Moral Argument Against Charity?

I have offered two arguments for my claim that we have a *pro tanto* moral duty to interpret our interlocutors charitably. Now I need to engage with Govier's (1987) argument to the effect that there are also moral reasons *against* charitable interpretation. Govier's argument is directed against strong charity, not her own moderate charity. I think that my stronger-than-moderate principle of charity is vulnerable enough to it that it needs defending, but that this can be done.

5.1 Govier's Argument

Strong charity aims at making the interpreted argument as strong as possible even if this requires considerable interference, such as the addition of premises. The core of Govier's moral argument against strong charity is that it can amount to something similar to a kind of cultural imperialism. Interpreting charitably, if this means that the interpreter chooses the interpretation she believes makes her interlocutor's argument strongest, means making the argument convincing to the *interpreter*.⁸ Doing so may well mean transforming what the interlocutor was trying to express into what the interpreter would like to hear, or would express if they were arguing for the interlocutor's conclusion. The act of interpretation then potentially makes the argument represent a reason other than the one the interlocutor attempted to give, one that the interlocutor might not even consider a good reason. This is toxic charity. Govier (1987, 139) argues: "A fundamental problem is that the otherness of other minds and cultures may be lost if charity goes too far. . . . With too much charity we will seek understanding of others to find only ourselves."

⁸ I think that this would amount to a kind of *iron-manning* as Aikin and Casey (2016) describe it.

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This argument deserves to be taken seriously because my argument for charity relies heavily on considerations of respect for dignity and the importance of treating others as valued community-members. Replacing the interlocutor's reasons with ones that fit the interpreter's worldview neither expresses respect for her, nor gives her real influence on the argument's result or shows regard for her as valuable. Rather, it expresses the prioritization of the interpreter's point of view over that of the interlocutor *before* the test of argumentation. It shows the interpreter's prejudicial belief that the interlocutor's reasons need to be changed to become worth considering. That is just as or even more humiliating and harmful as making no attempt at charity at all.

5.2 Stronger Charity Can be Defended ...

My principle of charity is stronger than Govier's in that it asks the interpreter to operate under the assumption that the interlocutor not only honestly aims at, but actually has reasons to give. I want to maintain that it is morally desirable, so I must give a more detailed account of what it requires. Charity as I describe it asks more of the interpreter than identifying a version of the offered argument that she finds convincing as strong charity does. Rather, it requires the attempt to gain insight into the reasons her interlocutor is trying to offer from the *interlocutor's* point of view.⁹ Raz (1979) calls the perspective the interpreter has to take the *detached point of view*, presumably because it requires detachment from one's own viewpoint. The detached point of

⁹ Importantly, this does not mean that the interpreter tries to discern the reasons why the interlocutor holds the view, but the reasons the interlocutor is trying to *give* for her view. An interpreter does not discharge her charitable duty by doing a kind of armchair psychological analysis of the interlocutor, proclaiming that the interlocutor is just trying to rationalize her view, when really she holds the view for other reasons than the ones she is trying to represent. I thank Maureen Linker for making me aware of this.

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view is not easy to achieve. Interpreters need to do something that Lewinski (2012, 412) calls “methodologically suspicious”: They need to try ascertaining what “the arguer really just means.” I think that this attempt is not suspicious but difficult, sometimes so difficult that it can only remain a goal, pursued but never fully achieved. It asks the interpreter to imagine herself different than she really is. So it may require large amounts of intellectual and emotional energy, empathy, and open-mindedness, and it can be painful.¹⁰ The difficulty increases the more *other* the interpreted interlocutor is, and with it the difficulty of treating the understood perspective as valuable. At the most extreme, both might become impossible. On the other hand, the difficulty should not be overstated. Most arguments take place between people who share considerable background. It is often possible to accomplish an acceptable degree of understanding with just a little effort. Still, my kind of charity is more challenging than either rejecting charitable interpretation or endorsing strong charity. Fortunately, it is also morally less worrisome because it does not imply the interpreter’s superiority or deny the value of the interlocutor’s contributions.¹¹

5.3 ...But!

I do not think that charity as I advocate it is as straightforwardly toxic as strong charity, but I would make my own task too easy if I did not acknowledge that I can only alleviate Govier’s worry so far. *Completely* taking the perspective of another is impossible; it would

¹⁰ See the growing literature on rhetorical and compassionate listening (e.g. Glenn and Ratcliffe 2011; Lipari 2014).

¹¹ Similar to the concern about toxic charity might be a concern about *lazy* charity – the charitable interpretation of an argument in order to get around having to formulate an objection to it. This, too, is potentially an expression of contempt and as such humiliating (I thank my reviewer for pointing this out). However, lazy charity would amount to a distortion of what the arguer aimed to communicate. My version of charity forbids this.

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require the interpreter to become the other (e.g. Baumtrog, 2018). It is a commonplace that every interpretation carries some of the interpreter with it. This means that the worry that interpretation might influence the content of the interpreted always applies, including but not especially to my version of charitable interpretation. In fact, all engagement in argument₂ will lead to the mutual influencing of each other's arguments₁. The reason for this is threefold:

First, the dialogic nature of arguments₂ means that arguers influence each other's efforts in argument-creation from the beginning. Tindale (2004) points out that the arguer's wish to be understood by an audience means that the audience influences the way she constructs her arguments. Arguers consider what their assumed interpreters believe or find convincing. Where arguers know who will interpret them, as is common in arguments₂, the interpreter's influence begins even before the interpretation does.

Second, I doubt that an interpreter can avoid letting their own worldview exert some influence on her interpretation, charitable or not. The way she uses language influences which meanings she will try out for ambiguous terms, which connotation she gives certain words (is "bitch" negative or neutral?), etc. More importantly, because most arguments leave *some* room for interpretation as stronger or weaker, interpreters are not even able to stay neutral in this respect. They can try to diminish their influence by aiming for the Razian detached perspective, but because they are unable to see the argument through any but their own eyes, the question is not *whether* but *how* their interpretation influences the argument.

Finally, arguers influence the content of their interlocutors' arguments₁ through their responses. Every objection or suggestion will provide information about how the interpreter

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understood the argument. She might have gotten it right or wrong, *or* she might have given her interlocutor a potential filler where their own understanding of their reasons had a gap. The interlocutor might acknowledge good interpretations and correct bad ones. But the interpretation, whether correct or not, might also lead the interlocutor to change her reasoning, potentially even without noticing it. This may happen, e.g., because the incorrect interpretation makes the argument more appealing, the correct interpretation is accompanied by signs of displeasure from the interpreter, or the filler clarifies something.¹²

We should not think that arguers develop arguments₁ all by themselves, or that we can fully control our influence on our interlocutor's arguments. Arguments₁ grow as the argument₂ progresses, and this growth is influenced in complex ways by the contributions of all participants. Therefore, when I argue for charity, I am not arguing for adopting an interpretive attitude that can influence the content of arguments when otherwise there would be no influence. Rather, I am arguing that there are reasons to adopt one kind of attitude – a charitable one – rather than others. This does not mean that Govier's worry is toothless. On the contrary, we should be mindful of the way we influence our interlocutor's ability to make their reasons heard. Interpreters and arguers need to be careful not to distort what they are interpreting or answering to. Toxic charity (or iron-manning (Aikin and Casey 2016)) is a concern potentially as serious as straw-manning. Especially where an interpreter is in an advantaged social position, she can

¹² I believe that often, arguers should be permitted to change their arguments – and their reasoning – in response to their interlocutor's reactions. However, my reviewer made me aware that this can be abused: Arguers may do so to avoid appropriate criticism, or to send a dog-whistle while maintaining plausible deniability. Working out when it should be permissible to change one's argument mid-dialogue is an important topic that unfortunately cannot adequately be dealt with here.

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carelessly and maybe even accidentally bulldoze all over others' reasoning. Wherever possible, interpreters should try to allow their interlocutors to determine whether the shape their argument takes in the interpreter's hands still represents their reasons. They may need to offer possible interpretations and invite corrections. Morally desirable charitable interpretation in argument₂ cannot usually be a process that takes place hidden in the interpreter's mind.

6 How Much Effort is Required?

The above argument that my version of charity is not toxic comes at a price: I had to admit that charity can be difficult and costly. Sometimes, the interpreter might be internally motivated to invest in charity, e.g. because she is invested in the interlocutor's dignity and well-being. But often, such motivation will be absent or too weak to overcome the interpreter's interest in winning the argument. After all, being charitable might require the interpreter to extend considerable energy against her own interests in potentially high-stakes situations. I need to tackle the question how much charitable *effort* interpreters can be expected to extend.

6.1 Charity and the Dominant Adversarial Model of Argumentation

It might seem not much. Lewinski (2012) criticizes a general requirement that arguers be charitable by pointing out that charity works against both the individual goals of arguers and the epistemic goal of argument₂ by diverting energy away from each arguer's task to win the argument. Arguers can therefore only be required to avoid *implausible* interpretations.

It is important to point out that Lewinski self-consciously and clearly makes his argument in the context of subscribing to a specific understanding of what an argument₂ is and should be. Following a number of dialectical theories of argumentation (most prominently van Eemeren and

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Grootendorst 2004), Lewiński (2012, 416) characterizes an argument₂ as a “contest of opinions in which . . . individual victory or loss are at stake” but which is also cooperative because, in the end, aimed at epistemic gains. This understanding of argumentation has been dubbed the *Dominant Adversarial Model* (DAM) by Cohen (2015). According to the DAM, arguers should pursue the goal of winning by vigorously defending their own claim and attacking their interlocutor’s arguments in order to realize the epistemic goal of argumentation, namely creating epistemic gains by separating the chaff from the wheat. Requiring arguers to be charitable, rather than merely prohibiting the selection of *implausible* interpretations means asking them to work against their goal of winning and take on responsibility for their opponent’s case. This would impose unnecessary burdens on them because the DAM-structure places responsibility for justifying each arguer’s claim squarely on the arguer’s shoulders. More: Because the argument₂ accomplishes its epistemic goals by using the motivation of the arguers to win for ensuring that bad arguments will be weeded out, diverting motivations towards charity could “seriously skew the joint examination of the . . . thesis” (Lewinski 2012, 417).

I believe that where an argument₂ is structured according to the DAM, Lewinski’s arguments carry considerable weight. In fact, it appears that in DAM arguments, the moral reasons I described do not require much effort towards charity. After all, where an arguer has taken on the DAM’s proponent or opponent role, treating her accordingly neither denies her standing as a reasonable being nor excludes her from a community. Quite the opposite: Because the DAM’s survival-of-the-fittest structure is designed towards epistemic ends, she is included in

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an argument aimed at integrating her reasons appropriately. Therefore, only so much charitable effort might be required as is necessary to avoid even unintentional implausible interpretation.

However, it is important to realize that according to my understanding of charity, the boundary between avoiding straw-manning and being charitable is one of quantity rather than quality, and where lack of charity turns into straw-manning might well depend on point of view.¹³ Straw-manning happens, after all, if the interpreter ascribes an *implausibly* weak interpretation to the arguer's arguments (e.g. Aikin and Casey 2011; Lewiński 2011; Tindale 2007). So avoiding straw-men already requires some effort towards the goal of charity: understanding what the interlocutor is trying to communicate. In addition, what is an implausibly weak interpretation might well depend on who judges this. Lewinski would not allow the interlocutor to judge the plausibility of her own argument's interpretation, and I agree that this would open the door to call anything but great efforts towards charity straw-manning. But it seems to me that when interpretations cross the line from plausible to implausible is audience-dependent. Especially if interpreter and interlocutor come from significantly different backgrounds, this might mean that what the interpreter's peers would consider a plausible interpretation would be called straw-manning by the interlocutor's peers. Even if we determine that the "uninterested bystander" shall be judge here, avoiding straw-manning might well ask so much effort from the interpreter that it *feels* as if it crosses the line towards active charity.

This is made even more likely by the psychological conditions for argumentation that the DAM creates. The DAM encourages arguers to identify with their pre-chosen conclusion and to

¹³ The connection between charity and straw-manning has been noted by Lewiński (2011) and Aikin and Casey (2016).

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concentrate on winning. Losing the argument will easily feel like a personal loss (compare Govier 2020). DAM therefore creates exactly those vested interests that enhance the effects of the confirmation bias – the inborn bias that leads the human mind to interpret evidence in ways conducive to their pre-chosen conclusion, even if it is in fact not.¹⁴ As a result, avoiding straw-manning under the DAM is difficult enough to require quite a lot of charitable effort.

Admittedly, the idea of the DAM is that arguers will identify each other's fallacies so that what I describe here does not become a problem. But I am not convinced that all fallacies will reliably be caught by the opposing party, so it is nonetheless important that arguers invest effort to avoid fallacies.

More importantly, all these considerations presuppose that arguing in a structure following DAM is morally acceptable (and epistemically beneficial). But this is only the case under certain conditions. Arguers need to be somewhat more interested in learning the truth than winning the argument so that they will acknowledge when their interlocutors make good contributions and withstand the temptation of using dishonest tactics. Additionally, arguers have to be at least roughly equally matched, both with respect to their ability to formulate and evaluate arguments and with respect to the degree to which they are clear about their own reasons.¹⁵ Otherwise, the DAM structure cannot generate its epistemic gains because its battle for the survival of the fittest turns from one of reasons into one of wits. If this happens, arguers are no longer protected from the kinds of humiliation and harm I spoke of above because the structure

¹⁴ See e.g. <https://www.britannica.com/science/confirmation-bias>.

¹⁵ Even Mercier and Sperber (2011), who argue that following the adversarial model can help arguers fight against their in-born my-side/confirmation bias, remark that these conditions apply.

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no longer ensures that their reasons will be integrated appropriately. In fact, through the psychological impact it has, the structure may now create conditions under which such humiliation and harm is likely to occur.

Further, as feminist argumentation theorists have argued, DAM not only puts arguers who are less clear about their reasons or rhetorically less apt than their opponents at risk for humiliation or harm. Playing the DAM's proponent/opponent roles is associated with assertive behaviors, like criticizing one's opponents explicitly and defending ones' arguments vigorously. This kind of behavior may well clash with, e.g. politeness-norms that some (but not all) arguers are expected to follow, like the politeness-norms of deference applied to some female-gendered arguers (Burrow 2010; Hundleby 2013), or those applied to arguers faced with socially higher situated interlocutors. Arguing effectively in a proponent/opponent role may have face- or relationship-costs that arguers cannot shoulder, or the politeness-norms may be so internalized that arguers are unable to shake them. Consequently, they see their ability to make their reasons understood diminished. Therefore, where the DAM's success conditions are not fulfilled, the DAM is not morally acceptable, nor is its diminished requirement of charitable effort.

6.2 Charity and Dialogue-Type

Lewiński (2011, 2012) recognizes that depending on context, arguers may have to do more than avoid implausible interpretations. In what Lewinski (2011, 492) calls "constructive" contexts, such as discussions among friends, some amount of charity might be expected, and

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following the strategy of the easiest objection might be unacceptable straw-manning.¹⁶ This recognizes contexts in which avoiding straw-manning might demand a degree of charity.

Thereby Lewinski accounts for DAM-arguments where arguers cannot fully trust that the dialogue type will take care of epistemic goals while they concentrate only on winning, like in classroom discussions, or chats around the dinner table.

Additionally, Lewinski (2012) acknowledges that non-DAM-based conceptions of what argumentation is, such as Gilbert's (1997) coalescent account, might reject the DAM-based argument against requiring charitable efforts. Indeed, the DAM structure is not the only structure for argument. Others have been described in the form of dialogue-types (e.g. Walton 1998).¹⁷ Examples are deliberations or inquiries, in which arguers try to come to a decision/conclusion by contributing reasons in all directions. Another alternative is a dialogue in which arguers argue to support their own conclusion but will pause whenever an interlocutor has trouble making themselves understood. Then they enter an information-seeking dialogue aimed at formulating the struggling arguer's reason before resuming the 'cooperative contest' with all weapons equally sharpened.

¹⁶ Though, as one reviewer pointed out, some straw-manning in friendly contexts might simply serve the purpose of making the arguer aware of possible mis-interpretations of their contributions and give them a chance to clarify, in which case there is no problem.

¹⁷ I will use Walton's dialogue types here even though I agree with one of my reviewers that it is unlikely that arguers will adopt normative structures that are as well-defined and rigid as Walton's models – especially when it comes to his more elaborate descriptions of the dialogue-types. But I do believe that arguers are socialized to recognize different types of arguments₂ and can distinguish an argument in which arguers argue against one another with the goal of persuasion from one in which they try to come to a compromise or where they are trying to solve a problem together. I also believe that arguers will, when they believe to be in one of these kinds of arguments₂, associate certain norms for argumentative behavior with this, including norms about how charitable to be. I think that Walton's dialogue types are just close enough to those different kinds of arguments₂ that they can serve as valuable tools for me to get my points across.

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These dialogue-types require more effort towards charity than the DAM. A deliberation is aimed at identifying and formulating all relevant reasons together. Refusing to invest in the charitable interpretation of an arguer's contributions is humiliating and harmful because it signals that the interpreter pre-judges these contributions as not adding anything worthwhile. Even more effort is required where an argument₂ includes regular information-seeking dialogues aimed at understanding various arguers' reasoning. Here, arguers are committed to changing gears if they suspect that they might not see the full impact of an interlocutor's contributions, which requires constant monitoring of their understanding and investing considerable effort during information-seeking-ports. Not doing so for one arguer while it is done for others means treating them as lesser. Accordingly, how much effort towards charity is required depends on the argument₂'s dialogue-type. The norms associated with the type constitute what counts as respectful and inclusive treatment within that dialogue type and thereby determine how much charity is needed.

6.3 The Individual Arguer's Responsibility

However, it would be a mistake to believe that the arguers can simply pick any dialogue type they wish and assume that they have fulfilled their duty towards charity by following the dialogue's norms. The moral reasons for charity are not defeated because an arguer decides they want to argue in a DAM-structured persuasion dialogue. I have already discussed the limits of the DAM-structure and the associated anti-charity argument. And elsewhere, I have argued that all dialogue-types can put arguers in positions that make it forbiddingly hard to give their reason effect (Stevens 2019). For example, there are situations in which an arguer would be harmed

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should they be forced to argue according to the norms of a deliberation, maybe because they are in a position where cooperative behavior would undermine authority that they need to preserve.

How then do the moral reasons for charity interact with the norms that belong to dialogue types? I believe that moral reasons for charity, together with other moral reasons that are applicable in the context in which the argument arises, determine which dialogue type is appropriate.

Above, I showed how broad background-duties to avoid humiliation and harm translate into a *pro tanto* duty to charity. This duty councils in favor of more cooperative dialogue types, like deliberations. But the background-duties interact with the context in which the argument takes place in various ways. For example, a duty to avoid harm may speak *against* much effort towards charity where much evidence suggests that the interlocutor is engaged in dangerous propaganda and that the audience is easily misled (compare Aikin and Casey 2016; Govier 1987). Or the duty to avoid humiliation might council adopting a DAM structure because requiring, e.g. a plausible victim of discrimination to *deliberate* with her alleged perpetrators would potentially force her to help them develop arguments assuming her inferiority. So it is possible that the moral reasons for charity are outweighed by other moral reasons which council for a dialogue-type that does not prioritize charity.

There are then a multitude of moral reasons that these broad moral background-duties may translate into. Which dialogue-type is appropriate is determined by the balance of those reasons, a balance which always includes the reasons for charity, but does not therefore always

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come down in favor of types that require most charitable effort.¹⁸ How much effort an arguer has to invest in charity depends on her argument₂'s dialogue-type, and which type this should be turns on the overall balance of moral reasons that apply to the situation in which the argument₂ arises, the moral reasons for charity included.¹⁹

Therefore, arguers must do more than simply follow the norms associated with the dialogue-type they find themselves in to fulfill their duty to charity. For unless the dialogue-type is authoritatively pre-determined,²⁰ the arguers are responsible for it. Elsewhere I have combined the insights of argumentation-design-theorists (e.g. Jackson 2015; Jacobs 1998; Jacobs 2017) and role-theorists/ethicist (e.g. Hardimon 1994; Turner 2001) to explain how arguers determine and are responsible for their arguments₂'s dialogue-types (Stevens 2019). According to this approach, dialogue-types consist of sets of argumentative roles, which are clusters of norms, expectations, typical behaviors, etc. that are associated with playing a certain part in the dialogue.²¹ Dialogue-types that follow the DAM, for example, assign a proponent and an opponent role to the arguers. The norms associated with the proponent role require the arguer to

¹⁸ The moral reasons may well underdetermine which dialogue-type is *most* appropriate because several do not threaten harm or humiliation.

¹⁹ It is important to note that the context in which the argument₂ takes place may change during the argument, more information about it might be discovered, or it might turn out that the initial evaluation of the context was mistaken. Then the dialogue type that governs the argument may not be morally acceptable anymore. It might, for example, turn out that low effort in charity has a more devastating effect on one arguer's ability to be heard than previously thought. Then a dialogue shift might be morally required. It should be noted, however, that once arguers have come to an (potentially implicit) agreement about a dialogue type, they will rely on the associated norms and reliance reasons might count against shifting dialogues.

²⁰ It is important to note that while an authoritatively pre-determined dialogue-type takes some of the moral responsibility off the individual arguer's shoulders, it is not the case that no one is responsible if such a dialogue-type causes humiliation and/or harm.

²¹ These roles function similarly as other social roles. The role of "teacher," for example, comes with norms, typical behaviors, etc. that the reader is probably well acquainted with.

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commit to a claim, concentrate on formulating arguments for it and defend it against objections, but they do not require helping her opponent to develop their arguments. Certain behavioral expectations for how proponents typically act also belong to the role, such as forceful presentation of claims and arguments.

People learn how to play at least the most basic argumentative roles through socialization and they recognize it when others are playing them by the associated behaviors. This means that when an argument begins, arguers can take roles associated with, e.g., the DAM or a deliberation, and they can recognize when their interlocutors take those roles by observing the way they present their arguments. If an interlocutor states her claim forcefully and attacks the arguer's position in a confident tone, then she exhibits clear proponent-of-a-DAM-behavior. The arguer now has a choice. They can adopt a complementary role, such as that of a passive audience or an opponent, thereby establishing that the argument is a persuasive speech or a DAM argument. Or they can try to change the dialogue-type that has been suggested by their interlocutor's behavior. They might act according to norms associated with a role that does not fit the DAM, e.g. by asking the interlocutor to help them work out their reasons, inviting them into a deliberation. If this does not work, they might try to start a meta-dialogue about dialogue-types, asking why the arguer is so aggressive, or whether they could work together.

Because each arguer has some influence over the argument's dialogue-type, they also have some responsibility for it. How much influence and responsibility an arguer has varies. Differences in social power, for example, may give an arguer an advantage in determining the dialogue-type. If a professor takes an aggressive opponent role during a Ph.D. candidate's talk,

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the candidate may not feel comfortable asking the professor to argue more cooperatively for fear of losing face or damaging their relationship (compare Stevens 2019). The more power an arguer has to influence the choice of dialogue-type, the more she is responsible for taking the applicable moral reasons into account when she decides how to behave. This includes the moral reasons for charity in argument.

This shows that moral reasons for charity create a responsibility for individual arguers that applies on two levels. First, the arguer is responsible to take the continuously applicable moral reasons for charity into account when she uses her influence on the argument₂'s dialogue-type. Second, once a type has been determined, she must invest the amount of charitable effort that it requires.

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