Undermining Mimetic Contagion on the Net:
Argumentation Tools as Critical Voices

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Overview

- Reasoned, respectful discourse
- The internet as mimetic medium
- Internet discourse
- Mapping argumentation and dialogue
- Positive mimesis
- Open questions
Reasoned, respectful discourse

- Jaw jaw not war war

- Argumentation as a (the?) principled way to contest truth, or appropriate pragmatic action

- Persuasive discourse as a strategy for, and inevitable medium of, positive and negative mimetic contagion
The Net

- A ‘frictionless’ memetic medium $\rightarrow$ mimetic rivalry
  - “Mimetic contagion on a global scale” - Girard

- We’re drowning in information and starving for meaning

- Attention is the scarce resource (mimesis as attention?)

- Identity as networks of social and conceptual relations, extending for many into cyberspace

- Hypermedia for weaving multiple narratives

- Polarisation or dissolving effect on prejudices?
Discourse on the Net

- Unprecedented ability to publish, discuss and tune to multimedia channels
  blogs, wikis, newsfeeds, social bookmarking, podcasts, screencasts, webcasts...

- Discourse tools do not promote reflective, critical thinking

- Multimedia annotation tools can insert critical voices that subvert popular media

- Dialogue and argumentation tools can elevate the level of discourse, exposing implicit assumptions and fallacious logic (possibly hidden intentionally)
Example: ‘argumentation’ on YouTube

Movie posted by National Front on YouTube to demonstrate their activities
Example: ‘argumentation’ on YouTube

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http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=qD0zFX3BFz4
Example: ‘argumentation’ on YouTube

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Example: ‘argumentation’ on YouTube

BNP election video edited and republished by a critic...

Videos can be posted as “replies” to others, and tagged with the same keywords so that they are identically indexed
Example: ‘argumentation’ on YouTube

http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=qD0zFX3BFz4

BNP election video edited and republished by a critic...

Juxtaposing clips from two separate videos to argue that they were set up artificially
Example: ‘argumentation’ on YouTube

BNP meeting secretly filmed by BBC, and basis for a court case.

Recorded by a viewer from a documentary, and then posted to web
Example: ‘argumentation’ on YouTube (annotation via mojiti.com)

Obsession: Radical Islam’s War Against the West, Part III

Mojiti tools for adding text, highlighted regions, voice and video annotations
Example: ‘argumentation’ on YouTube (annotation via mojiti.com)

Mojiti allows you to add your own annotations to movies on YouTube and other sites.
Example: a “scientific argument” on National Front website

www.natfront.com/prejudic.html

Patterns of Prejudice

A revised and updated version of an article by Steve Brady which originally appeared in Vanguard magazine in April 1987.

One of the favourite accusations thrown at the National Front by its multiracialist critics is that we are simply a bunch of bigots, that our stance on race, at the core of our political philosophy, is just ignorant prejudice against people whose skin colour is no more than a superficial manifestation. Is this so? Are our racial policies merely the product of prejudice, or are they instead based on sober realism and the courage to face facts?
Example: a “scientific argument” on National Front website

“Never Fit

We argue, for example, that West Indian and other Negroes will never fit in, as multiracialists claim, to become equal and integrated members of a predominantly White society. This is because they are inherently unfitted to do so intellectually, and are thus condemned to exist in White society as a permanent underclass, confined to the lower social strata and, not unnaturally, bitterly resentful of the alien society in which they are thus trapped. This resentment will inevitably explode into violence, rioting and crime.”
Example: a “scientific argument” on National Front website

“What are the facts? Over almost seventy years, in study after study, conducted by scientists and educationalists in numerous countries, studies conducted by such bastions of racial rationalism as the Inner London Education Authority, the US Army, and Harvard and Oxford Universities, on every measure of intellectual ability and educational attainment Blacks perform significantly worse, on average, than Whites. In the case of average IQ, for example, the average Negro figure is only 85% of the White average. In fact the higher the proportion of White genes the higher the intelligence: a pure-bred Negro fresh out of Africa scores nearer 70%.”

Readers can consult Race by Dr. John R. Baker, former Reader in Cytology at Oxford University, published by the Oxford University Press, or The Testing of Negro Intelligence, an exhaustive review of hundreds of studies demonstrating racial differences in intellectual ability by Dr. Audrey M. Shuey, and of course there is The Bell Curve by Herrnstein and Murray.
Example: a “scientific argument” on National Front website

“If "social deprivation" and "racial discrimination" are responsible for the poor performance of Negroes, groups such as the American Indians, who score considerably worse than American Blacks on every measure of social deprivation, would be expected to do worse, or at least as badly, as Blacks. In fact they do a lot better in the same tests.”
Example: a “scientific argument” on National Front website

“Real World

Stepping out from the arcane field of intelligence measurement, what do we see in the real world? We see exactly what honest psychologists' conclusions would lead us to expect. Negroes, innately less intelligent, are at the bottom of every White social heap, but this is blamed by advocates of the dogma and their tan-skinned imitators on "White racism."

[...]

“So what about Black performance when there are no Whites to be "racist"? What did the Negro accomplish in Africa before the White Man came? As Baker illustrates in Race, virtually nothing.”
Mapping the structure of the National Front’s “negro intelligence” argument

National Front website: "The Truth about Negro Intelligence"

is discussed in

Can we have a harmonious multiracial society in the UK?

responds to

* "West Indian and other Negroes will never become equal and integrated members of a predominantly White society."

therefore

+/-

"Blacks will be a permanent underclass in a White society, leading to chronic social unrest."

* "Blacks have never built great civilizations of their own"

* "Blacks are always the underclass in White society"

"Resentment from being an underclass will inevitably explode into violence, rioting and crime."
Mapping the structure of the National Front’s “negro intelligence” argument
Mapping the structure of the National Front’s “negro intelligence” argument

KEY

Green nodes support the top level assertion

Red nodes challenge the top level assertion

"In the case of average IQ, for example, the average Negro figure is only 85% of the White average.

"The aboriginal Australian fares even worse than the Negro.

"The higher the proportion of White genes the higher the intelligence.

"A pure-bred Negro fresh out of Africa scores nearer 70%.

"On every measure of intellectual ability and educational attainment Blacks perform significantly worse, on average, than Whites.

"These tests are unfair they are written by White people in a White society and thus are biased against non-Whites.

"This is due to the environment rather than innate heredity.

Blacks tend to come from deprived environments

"At least 80% of differences in intelligence are inborn.

Other groups from deprived environments perform better than Blacks

Scientific References

"Blacks have lower evolved potentials."

"Chinese and Japanese, who are not noticeably more Caucasian and are often very much more culturally distinct from White society than Negroes, actually do as well or slightly better on average than Whites."

GoTo "Blacks are innately intellectually inferior"
Mapping the structure of the National Front’s “negro intelligence” argument

KEY

- Green nodes support the top level assertion
- Red nodes challenge the top level assertion

GoTo: “Blacks are innately intellectually inferior”

“On every measure of intellectual ability and educational attainment, Blacks perform significantly worse, on average, than Whites.”

Scientific References

“Blacks have lower evoked potentials”

“In the case of average IQ, for example, the average Negro figure is only 85% of the White average.”

“The aboriginal Australian fares even worse than the Negro.”

“The higher the proportion of White genes the higher the intelligence”

“A pure-bred Negro fresh out of Africa scores nearer 70%”

“C” notation very Whit as
Mapping the structure of the National Front’s “negro intelligence” argument

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“On every measure of intellectual ability and educational attainment, Blacks perform significantly worse, on average, than Whites.”

“Blacks have lower evoked potentials”

“These tests are unfair; they are written by White people in a White Society and thus are biased against non-Whites.”

“Chinese and Japanese, who are not noticeably more Caucasian and are often very much more culturally distinct from White society than Negroes, actually do as well or slightly better on average than Whites.”

“Blacks tend to come from deprived environments”

“Other groups from deprived environments perform better than Blacks”

“This is due to the environment rather than innate heredity.”

“At least 80% of differences in intelligence are inborn”
Refuting the NF “negro intelligence” argument using argument mapping
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**Key**

- Green nodes support the top level assertion
- Red nodes challenge the top level assertion

1. Blacks tend to come from deprived environments
2. Other groups from deprived environments perform better than Blacks

**Evidence**

- "IQ and the Wealth of Nations" by Lynn & Vanhanen (2002)

**Criticisms**

- Criticism of Research Funding Sources
- Criticism of Dubious Data Sets
- Criticism of Data Set Sources and their Accuracy
- Criticism of Subjective Statistical Manipulation by Authors

**Hyperlink**

Hyperlink to evidence on a website
Refuting the NF “negro intelligence” argument using argument mapping

- "Race" is an extremely controversial concept, and cannot be defined purely in terms of inherited genes
- The notion that there is such a thing as a culturally neutral intelligence test is disputed
- "These tests are unfair; they are written by White people in a White Society and thus are biased against non-Whites."
- "Chinese and Japanese, who are not noticeably more Caucasian and are often very much more culturally distinct from White society than Negroes, actually do as well or slightly better on average than Whites"
- "Case for Non-Biased Intelligence Testing Against Black Africans Has Not Been Made: A Comment on Rushton, Skuy, and Bons (2004)"
- "Because ethnic differences in intelligence reflect complex patterns, no overall generalization about them is appropriate. The mean IQ scores of Chinese- and Japanese-Americans, for example, differ little from those of Whites though their spatial ability scores tend to be somewhat higher..."
- "IQ and the Wealth of Nations" by Lynn & Vanhanen (2002)
- "Intelligence: Knowns and Unknowns" American Psychological Association (1995)
Refuting the NF “negro intelligence” argument using argument mapping

The structure of an “Argument from Bias” can be exposed.

The structure of an “Argument from Analogy” can be exposed.
Refuting the NF “negro intelligence” argument using argument mapping.

Template for an “Argument from Bias”

Instantiating the “Argument from Bias” template

GO TO: “Mainstream science on intelligence: An editorial with 52 signatories, history, and bibliography” Intelligence (1997)

About 30% of the signatories are recipients of Pioneer Fund grants, about whom concerns have been expressed about racist connections

Many of the signatories are biased

Criticism of the Pioneer Fund

Yes, this is a scientific debate with controversial public policy implications, in which all evidence should be weighed in as balanced a manner as possible, and conclusions expressed in an appropriate manner for public understanding and policy formulation

If a signatory is a recipient of Pioneer Funds, then she is less likely to take the evidence on both sides of the racial intelligence debate into account in deciding to support the arguments in the Bell Curve book

What is the context of dialogue, and in particular, is it a type of dialogue that requires a participant to take evidence on both sides of an issue into account?

What is the evidence for the charge that she is biased?

Arguer is biased

What is the context of dialogue, and in particular, is it a type of dialogue that requires a participant to take evidence on both sides of an issue into account?

If an arguer x is biased, then it is less likely that x has taken the evidence on both sides of an issue into account in arriving at conclusion A

It is less likely that she has taken the evidence on both sides of the issue into account

BASIC PATTERN: Argument from Bias

View All Argumentation Schemes
Template for an “Argument from Analogy”

BASIC PATTERN: Argument from Analogy

A is true (false) in case C2

Are C1 and C2 similar in the respect cited?

Are there differences between C1 and C2 that would tend to undermine the force of the similarity cited?

Generally, case C1 is similar to case C2

Is there some other case C3 that is also similar to C1, but in which A is false (true)?

Is A true (false) in C1?
Template for an “Argument from Analogy”

**Instantiating the “Argument from Analogy” template**

GO TO: Criticism of the Pioneer Fund

Henry Ford held dubious prejudices, but we do not use these to condemn Ford Company today

We should not condemn the Pioneer Fund today for the prejudices that its founders held

Does this vindicate Pioneer Foundation from condemnation of its founders' prejudices

No: unlike the Ford Foundation, Pioneer Fund continues to fund work that reinforces its founder's prejudices

Pioneer Fund also has founders who had prejudices that we condemn today

Are there differences between Ford and Pioneer that would tend to undermine the force of the similarity cited?

No: arguably both promote a set of values through the 'products' that they fund

Are there differences between C1 and C2 that would tend to undermine the force of the similarity cited?

Are C1 and C2 similar in the respect cited?

Generally, case C1 is similar to case C2

Is there some other case C3 that is also similar to C1, but in which A is false (true)?

A is true (false) in case C2

A is true (false) in case C1

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Do both Ford and Pioneer have founders with prejudices that we now condemn?

Yes
Embedding a website inside another

www.mywebsite.net

Video somewhere on the web

My critique (e.g. an argument analysis) linked to the video to provide a commentary
Prior to argumentation — and during it — we often need to switch to **dialogue** to build common ground.
Dialogue Mapping (Jeff Conklin) for deliberation over “wicked problems” (Horst Rittel)

- Participatory deliberation
  - how to define a problem
  - what the success criteria are
  - the arguments for/against possible courses of action
  - (global community of practice reflecting on experiences)

- Simple visual language for Issues, Ideas, Pros and Cons

- Shared display: objectify the problem, not the stakeholders (cf. “Getting to Yes” conflict resolution method)

- Validate the record as contributions are made

- Conversational Modelling is an extension of Dialogue Mapping, extending it with methodologies and models
Dialogue Map from COV&R 2007 opening plenary

- Envy of Muslims' certainty in belief: religious culture is one of duties; modern, liberal culture is one of rights. In the latter, one must provide a reason ("it's my right" is not enough). "It's my duty" is sufficient. Asymmetry.
- Scepticism should breed tolerance: there should be space for self-doubt.
- Quality of discourse?
- How to tackle radicals?

- Communities?
- Palaver: but we also need to ask what rights duties interfere with. We need both, not either or.

- Valenta: Discourse in public spaces: marginalisation of knowledge leads to impoverished dialogue
- T: Valenta: We should NOT marginalise the radical muslims by getting the moderates on our side – how about we get on their side?
- Baruma: marginalise the radicals
- Monjib: how to do this. Theologians need to challenge radical reading, but political isolation is impossible. How to isolate Hamas?

- Valenta: Our national institutions cannot deal with globalisation: the international movements, eg anti-Iraq war demos
- Baruma: Democracy doesn't work like that; politicians are accountable to the people who vote for them, not demonstrators
- Valenta: but the US president has global reach as never before due to globalisation. The NeoCons similarly dismissed the UN etc
Heuristic for balanced Dialogue Mapping
Negative to positive mimetic conversion?

- Education of the next generation: sharpening critical thinking faculties
- Clarification of confusion before it escalates in meetings or on the net
- Slowing down: learning to listen
- Making co-construction of a shared artifact the focus
- Memetic imitation of the tone and content of incisive analysts
Open questions...

- Different mimetic subversion strategies for different media and audiences?
  - movie vs. book culture; intelligentsia vs. pop culture; committed vs. enquirers on an issue...

- Are dialogue/argumentation mapping schemes biased to Western rationality?
  - perpetuating an “epistemology of antithesis” fostering antagonism...or prolonging engaged dialogue which might otherwise break down?

- What to do when the assumptions underpinning rational argumentation break down?
  - Analysis of conflict mediators’ strategies (Mark Aakhus)
  - Possible switch from Argument Mapping to Dialogue Mapping to reframe a new context for conversation
Hypermedia Discourse project:
community / theory / software / screencasts / case studies / user studies
www.kmi.open.ac.uk/projects/hyperdiscourse

Compendium Institute
www.CompendiumInstitute.org

Dialogue Mapping
www.cognexus.org

Visualizing Argumentation
www.VisualizingArgumentation.info