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Argumentation by Analogy as a Comparison of Argumentative Relationships

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ABSTRACT: The thesis of this paper is that what characterises argumentation by analogy is that it is based on a comparison of argumentative relationships. I distinguish two types: intra-argumentative relationships and interargumentative relationships. By the former I mean the relationship between what is presented as a reason and that which that reason allegedly support. This is usually marked by expressions such as 'so,' 'therefore,' 'because,' 'consequently,' etc. By interargumentative relationships I mean the relationship between two or more reasons. This is usually marked both by coordinative locutions such as 'in addition,' 'on the other hand,' 'what's more,' 'moreover,' etc., and by adversatives expressions such as 'but,' 'though,' 'yet,' 'having said that,' and so on. On the basis of this, two varieties of argumentation by analogy are distinguished: argumentation by parity of reasons and argumentation by parity of weighings.

KEYWORDS: analogy, argumentation by analogy, argumentative relations, comparison argumentation, similarity

1. INTRODUCTION.

Analogy is an elusive concept. The best example of this is that the practice of beginning the investigation by pointing out this issue has become commonplace. John Stuart Mill, for example, laments that "there is no word […] which is used more loosely, or in a greater variety of senses, than analogy" (Mill, 2009 [1843], p. 534); John Woods and Brent Hudak, for their part, point out that "analogy is one of those ideas as old as logic itself, and yet, perhaps more than the others, it has resisted analytical reconstruction to the point of theoretical impotence" (Woods and Hudak, 1989, p. 125), and Douglas Walton, Chris Reed and Fabrizio Macagno notice that "so much has been written on it, in so many fields, including philosophy, cognitive science, artificial intelligence, linguistics, psychology, law, and computing, that we can barely scratch the surface here" (Walton, Red and Macagno, 2008, p. 43). We could say, to use an Aristotelian expression, that analogical is said in many ways.

This state of affairs requires a certain amount of delimitation work from the outset. In what follows, I will not study analogy in general, but what has been called 'analogical argumentation' or 'arguments by analogy,' i.e., a way of arguing in which an analogy plays a non-trivial role in giving support to a claim. This excludes both non-argumentative uses of analogy, as in illustrations or imageries, and cases where the analogy is not part of the reason put forward, as in argumentation for an analogy. Nor will I deal with reasoning by analogy, understood as the psychological process attributed to an agent making analogies. These are important topics for a general theory of this notion but can be left aside here.

Within this narrower context, my aim is to highlight ways of saying the analogical that have been largely neglected by argumentation scholars. Specifically, I will try to show that what characterizes analogical argumentation is that it is based on a comparison of argumentative relationships. As we shall see, this gives rise to a meta-argumentative account, i.e., one in which the analogy itself is about other arguments. Certainly, this claim is not new (see Govier 1985; Woods and Hudak 1989; Marraud 2007; Juthe 2009; or van Laar 2014), but some of its consequences are: by applying the same idea to more complex combinations of reasons a new variant of arguments by analogy can be distinguished. This slightly more complex way of arguing has gone unnoticed in argumentation theory,[1] and it is important to make the distinction since both varieties are not assessed in the same way – mainly because the comparison is different.

To show this, I will first explain what I mean by 'analogy' and 'analogical argumentation.' This will be done in the following section by distinguishing two general ways of understanding these notions, one based on a comparison of properties and the other on a comparison of relations. The next step will be to specify what kind of relations arguments by analogy operates on. My thesis is that they are argumentative in nature, in the sense that they involve considerations that are presented as reasons in a given context. Based on this idea, two types of argumentative relations will be identified. On the one hand, there is the relation between what is presented as a reason and that which that reason supposedly supports, and on the other hand, there is the relation between different considerations that are presented as reasons for the same or for incompatible claims. Following Marraud (2015), I will call this 'intra-argumentative relationships' and 'inter- argumentative relationships,' respectively. From here, two varieties of argumentation by analogy will be distinguished: argumentation by parity of reasons and argumentation by parity of weighings (Alhambra 2022 and 2023a). The aim of the final section will be to illustrate these varieties by analysing a couple of real examples.

2. ARGUMENTATION BY ANALOGY

As has been said, the multiplicity of approaches makes it difficult to find a precise and unified definition of the notion of analogy –if anything like that is even feasible. To get around this pitfall, I will just borrow Paul Bartha's characterization and use it as a tentative starting point. According to this author "an analogy is a comparison between two objects, or systems of objects, that highlights respects in which they are thought to be similar" (Bartha 2010, p. 1). Here is an example: "I'm the Michel Jordan of lazy sport analogies" (Conan O'Brien, *Twitter*, 23/09/19[2]). Although this is obviously a joke, it can be seen that two objects or domains are being compared: the domain of playing basketball and the domain of drawing analogies. Furthermore, it is clear that the comparison is put forward to highlight something in which those domains are believed to be similar, namely the respective positions of Miche Jordan and Conan O'Brian in them.

[1] An exception is (Marraud 2021, pp. 181-184). Of course, it is not that cases of this type have not appeared in the repertoire of examples of other theorists (see Alhambra 2022, pp. 776-780); the problem is rather that their complexity is overlooked due to overly simplistic theoretical tools.
[2] https://twitter.com/conanobrien/status/1176197542041837570.

From this general idea, we can characterize analogical argumentation as "one in which a comparison between two objects or systems of objects is presented as a reason for assigning to one of them a property that the other —it is claimed—has" (Alhambra 2023a, p. 4). I will call these objects or systems of objects 'source case' and 'target case,' and I will understand 'case' in a broad sense. Thus, in principle, an argument by analogy may concern objects, relations between objects, systems of relations, and so on.

Now, we have something to start with. The problem is that this characterization is too broad to be useful. We can distinguish at least two general –but to some extent incompatible– ways of understanding what these comparisons consist of. On the one hand, there are those who place the emphasis on a similarity of properties. Analogies would work, according to these authors, in an additive way, so to speak: the more properties the objects share, the better the analogy and, therefore, the better the argument by analogy. John Stuart Mill gives a good example of this idea:

"The moon resembles [395] the earth in being a solid, opaque, nearly spherical substance, appearing to contain, or to have contained, active volcanoes; receiving heat and light from the sun, in about the same quantity as our earth; revolving on its axis; composed of materials which gravitate, and obeying all the various laws resulting from that property. And I think no one will deny that if this were all that was known of the moon, the existence of inhabitants in that luminary would derive from these various resemblances to the earth, a greater degree of probability than it would otherwise have" (Mill 2009, p. 394).

On the other hand, we have those who argue that argumentation by analogy is primarily based on a comparison of relations. In the words of Richard Whately: "analogy being a 'resemblance of ratios', that should strictly be called an argument from analogy in which the two things (viz., the one *from* which, and the one *to* which, we argue) are not, necessarily, themselves alike, but stand in similar *relations* to some other things" (Whately 1963, p. 90). What matters here is not so much that the cases compared resemblance each other, but rather that the relations that obtain in one domain also obtain in the other. Here is an example of this second idea:

"When a country which has sent out colonies is termed the mother country, the expression is analogical, signifying that the colonies of a country stand in the same relation to her in which children stand to their parents. And if any inference be drawn from this resemblance of relations, as, for instance, that obedience or affection is due from colonies to the mother country, this is called reasoning by analogy" (Mill 2009, p. 393).

In what follows I will develop a variant of the second approach. So, to me an analogy will be a comparison of relations of a certain kind and, consequently, an argument by analogy will be one in which a comparison of relations is presented as a reason for assigning to one case (the target) a property that the other (the source) it is claimed has.[3] This provides us with a somewhat more precise characterization of our subject of study,

[3] Elsewhere (see Alhambra 2023b) I have proposed a general category that I have named 'comparison argumentation.' This category encompasses both arguments based on a similarity of properties and arguments based on a similarity of relations. I have called the former 'arguments by resemblance' and the latter 'argumentation by analogy.' Thus, although I reserve the term analogy for cases based on a parallelism of relations, I do not deny that there are other ways of arguing based on other kinds of comparisons. A similar strategy has been adopted by authors such as (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2016, p. 133-134; Juthe 2005, p. 7, or Doury 2009, p. 147), although the criteria used to make the distinction and, therefore, the types of arguments distinguished, do not coincide.

but it also raises the question: what do the relations compared in an argument by analogy consist of?

3. ARGUMENTATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

As has been said, my thesis is that what characterizes arguments by analogy is that they are based on a comparison of argumentative relationships. I have shown elsewhere (see Alhambra 2022) that this idea gives rise to a meta-argumentative account, i.e., one in which the analogy itself is about other arguments. See, for example, the following case:

"When people tell him they don't fear surveillance because they have nothing to hide, Snowden says he tells them: "Arguing that you don't care about privacy because you have nothing to hide is like arguing that you don't care about free speech because you have nothing to say"" (Schrodt 2016)[4].

In this example, the source and the target cases are themselves arguments: 'I have nothing to hide so I don't care about privacy' (target) and 'I have nothing to say so I don't care about free speech' (source). Snowden argues that the target argument is bad because the source argument is obviously so, and they are parallel. Although in this example the analogy is used to attack the target argument, something that has been called 'logical analogies' (Govier 1985) or 'refutation by parallel argument' (Juthe 2009), it can also be used to defend it, as Woods and Hudak (1989) first openly proposed and we shall see in the next section.

This approach seems plausible enough –at least for cases like Snowden's–, but it poses a problem. In order to explain what arguments by analogy consist of, one must first have a general notion of argument, and that can be seen as begging the question. I of course defend a particular theory of argumentation, the so-called 'argument dialectics' (see Leal and Marraud 2022), but in what follows I will try to avoid this issue by not committing myself to particular theoretical assumptions. Thus, I will characterize argumentative relationships on the basis of general ideas on which there seems to be consensus in argumentation theory. If I do not succeed in this attempt, I hope that at least the case analyses in the next section will lend some plausibility to my proposal. This would be a good starting point to discuss the adequacy of the notions I advance here.

I will start my characterization of the notion of argumentative relationships from the assumption that the practice of arguing has to do with the public exchange of reasons. The relationship between arguments and reasons has been pointed out by many scholars in the field. Trudy Govier, for instance, claims that "an actual argument is simply a piece of discourse or writing in which someone tries to convince others (or himself or herself) of the truth of a claim *by citing reasons* on its behalf" (Govier 2017, p. 7); Robert Pinto defends that "argumentation involves offering and/or *exchanging reasons* –either reasons for adopting various attitudes towards specific propositional contents or else reasons for acting in various ways" (Pinto 2009, p. 268), and Hubert Marraud characterises the very notion of 'arguing' as "presenting to someone something *as a reason* for something else" (Marraud 2020, p. 2 –all italics are mine).

But what is a reason? This notion is not easy to grasp. In Alhambra (2022, pp. 763-768) I try to explain what a reason is in terms of the criticism that a consideration that is

[4] https://www.businessinsider.com/edward-snowden-privacy-argument-2016-9

presented as such has to go through in order to be called, first, a reason and, second, a good reason. For the sake of simplicity, here I will just borrow the following definition by Anthony Blair: "a single reason is the smallest amount of information that by itself lends some measure of credence to a position" (Blair 2012 p. 148). Reason-exchange practices usually involve at least two kinds of reasons: justifying reasons and explanatory reasons (see Álvarez 2017), although the criteria for drawing the distinction are the subject of dispute. What is generally agreed upon is that reasons are weighted notions (see Lord and Maguire 2018). The weight or strength of a reason may vary depending, among other things, on other reasons considered. Because of this feature, it makes sense to combine them in different ways. In Blair's words: "It is often appropriate to have more than one reason for a position, since in that case more reasons can mean *stronger* support" (Blair 2012, p. 148 –italics are mine). The same idea is behind the pragmadialectical notion of argumentative structure: "in an argumentation with a more complex structure, several reasons are put forward for or against the same standpoint" (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2003, p. 4). This is especially clear with coordinatively compound argumentation, where reasons are combined to increase the strength of support for the standpoint (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992, pp. 76-77).[5]

From this idea that it is possible to distinguish between single reasons and combinations of reasons, two types of argumentative relations can be also identified. On the one hand, there is the relation between the consideration presented as a reason and the claim that consideration supposedly supports. This is usually marked by expressions such as "so," "therefore," "because," "consequently," "in view of the fact that," and so on. This idea has received different names in argumentation theory: atomic inferences (Juthe 2018, p. 417), single argumentation (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2016, p. 73) or microstructure (Freeman 2011, p. 1). Following Marraud (2015), I will call it 'intra- argumentative relationships.' These relationships can be expressed by resorting to conditionals such as "if it were the case that *R*, then there would be a reason for *C*."[6]

On the other hand, there is the relationship that obtains, not between a reason and its claim, but between two or more reasons. This is usually mark both by coordinative locutions such as "moreover," "in addition to," "what's more," "on top of that," and so on (see Eemeren, Houtlosser and Snoeck Henkemans 2007, pp. 201-219), and also by adversatives expressions such as "but," "though," "yet," "even so,", "having said that," and so on (see Juthe 2018, pp. 431-434; Leal and Marraud 2022, pp. 315-319). The difference is that the former are usually used to combine reasons for the same or similar claims, while the latter are usually used to combine reasons for incompatible claims, as we shall see in the next section. This has been called molecular inferences (Juthe 2018, p. 419), complex

[5] The same applies in principle to the notion of 'premises set structure' and 'convergent argument', more commonly used in the informal logic or North American tradition (see for, example, Freeman 2011). However, due to the usual terminological confusion between the notions of 'premise' and 'reason,' I have preferred not to mention these notions in the body of text. For an insightful analysis of this issue see (Juthe 2018, pp. 417-419).
[6] I construe these conditionals as expressing the relationship conveyed by connectives such as "so," "therefore," "because," and so on, but I think they do not add anything to an argument. That is, they are neither premises nor warrants in Toulmin's sense. I also agree with (Verheij 2005, p. 353) that they are not material conditionals, because material conditionals are truth-functional and that does not capture the meaning those expressions (see also van Laar 2017, p. 44).

argumentation (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2016, p. 71) or macrostructure (Freeman 2011, p. 1). I will call them 'inter-argumentative relationships.'

My thesis is that the analogy in an analogical argumentation may operate on both types of argumentative relationships, which gives rise to two varieties of argumentation by analogy. In different articles (Alhambra 2022, 2023a and 2023b) I called this varieties 'argumentation by parity of reasons' and 'argumentation by parity of weighings.' To better understand my proposal, let's look at a couple of examples.

4. TWO VARIETIES OF ARGUMENTATION BY ANALOGY

4.1 ARGUMENTATION BY PARITY OF REASONS

In the first variety the analogy is a parallelism of what I have called intra-argumentative relationships. This was indeed the case in Snowden's example in the previous section, but let's look at one more case.

In a report on the decision of the Virginia Supreme Court (USA) to remove the monument of Confederate General Robert E. Lee, reporter Gregory S. Schneider collects the testimony of Janice Hall Nuckolls, a citizen who lives near the monument. Asked what to do with the base on which the statue stands, she answers as follows:

> "The base will be forever linked to the Lee monument, no matter how much paint is on it," she [Janice Hall Nuckolls] said. "Having to start with that would be like being given a canvas to paint but being told to work with the painting that has already been started by someone else. And it's not a good painting." Gregory S. Schneider, "Virginia Supreme Court clears way for Lee statue in Richmond to come down," *The Washington Post*, 02/09/2021.[7]

In the first line, Nuckolls seems to answer the question posed by Schneider, which could be formulated as "Do you think it is a good idea to use the base to build on?". If we assume that she is being collaborative here, this sentence can be seen as a reason to take a negative stance on the issue. And if so, we can reconstruct her move as an argument:

Diagram 1. Monument argument.

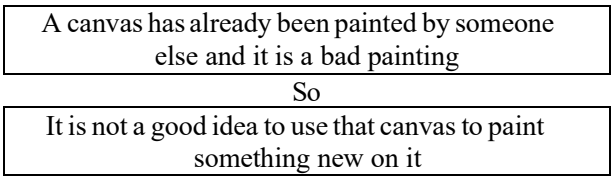
The base will be forever linked to the Lee monument
So
It is not a good idea to use the base to build something new on it.

In the second sentence, Nuckolls makes a comparison between the monument and the canvas cases. This is an analogy, as the expression "that would be like" suggests (see Snoeck Henkemans 2003, p. 971, or Doury 2009, p. 148), but the question is, in what sense are these situations analogous? It cannot be because the base of a monument and a canvas are similar objects, as they seem quite different in principle. Nor can it be because the

[7]https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/virginia-politics/lee-statue-richmond-court-removal/2021/09/02/4a2ee794-0bee-11ec-a6dd-296ba7fb2dce_story.html.

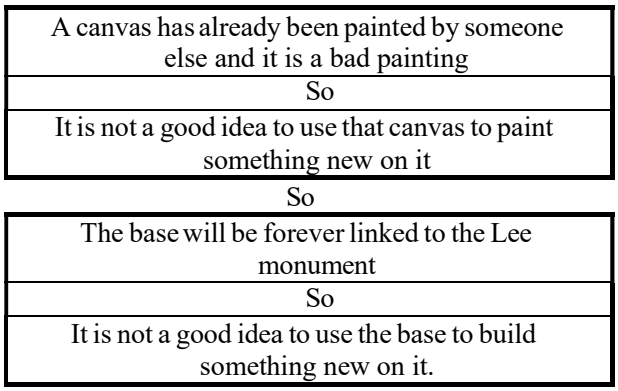
sentences compared express true propositions, since the canvas case is hypothetical, as the verb tense suggests. I contend that this is so because the considerations mentioned in both situations are argumentatively oriented towards parallel claims. If this is correct, the canvas case can be reconstructed as a parallel argument:

Diagram 2. Canvas argument.



Thus, what Nuckolls is doing here is to argue that the consideration put forward for removing the monument base is a worthwhile reason because it parallels the consideration put forward for not using the canvas –which is supposed to be a worthwhile reason. We could represent the argumentation by means of the following diagram:

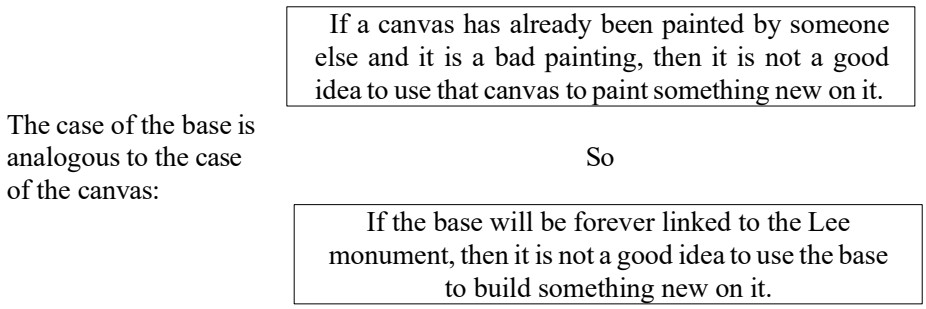
Diagram 3. Monument-canvas argumentation by analogy.



Here, the premise of the argument by analogy (upper bold rectangle) is the canvas argument and the conclusion (lower bold rectangle) is the monument argument. We have then an argument about other arguments, a meta-argument.

Nevertheless, it has to be noted that not all aspects of the arguments compared play the same role in Nuckolls' argumentation: it makes no difference, as far as the analogy is concerned, whether there is in fact a canvas that has been painted or whether it should not actually be painted on it (note that it is a hypothetical case). What matters here are the relationships between the considerations presented as reasons and the claims those consideration favour in each situation. As said, these relationships can be expressed by resorting to conditionals. Thus, we can simplify Nuckolls' argumentation as follows:

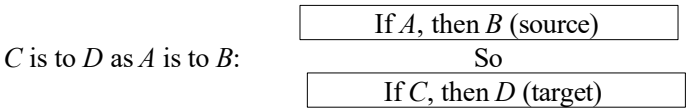
Diagram 4. Monument-canvas argumentation by analogy simplified.



"Being analogous" must be read here as "being parallel." We can resort to the typical expression of a parallelism and say something –much more cumbersome– like this: "The base will be forever linked to the Lee monument" is to "it is not a good idea to use the base to build something new on it" as "a canvas has already been painted by someone else and it is a bad painting" is to "it is not a good idea to use that canvas to paint something new on it."

Using variables, we can design an argumentative scheme as follows:

Diagram 5. Scheme for argumentation by parity of reasons.



4.2 ARGUMENTATION BY PARITY OF WEIGHINGS

In the second variety of analogical argumentation the analogy operates upon what I have called "inter-argumentative relationships." Let us consider another case:

> "Well, I have just had a pang of regret, yes: since Cardinal Cañizares said the other day that cells from aborted foetuses are being used to make a vaccine against Covid-19. [...]
>
> Respected Monsignor, imagine that you have just spiritually assisted a youngster who has been "legally" executed, horror, and that in a hospital bed there is a person whose life depends on the youngster's heart, or his kidneys. Would your eminence authorise the transplantation of his organs? [...] I think so. Does not your eminence not find any similarity between the youngster's corpse and the aborted foetuses? I do, with apologies" (Agapito López Villa, "El diablo y las vacunas" [The devil and the vaccines], *Hoy*, 21/06/2020 – translation is mine).[8]

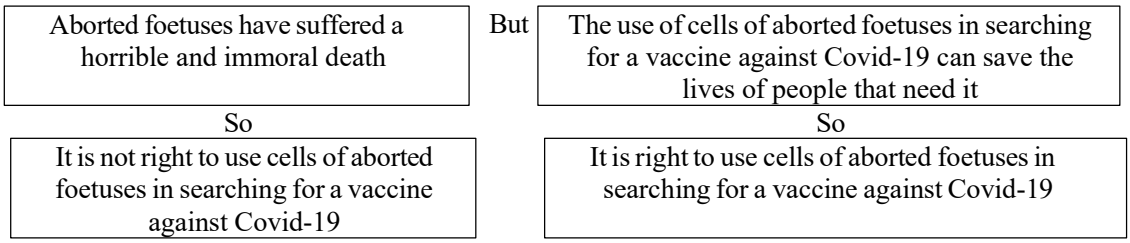
Here Agapito López Villa replies to Cardinal Cañizares, who had argued that the use of stem cells from aborted foetuses in the search for a Covid-19 vaccine was wrong, because those foetuses had suffered a horrible and immoral death. López Villa does not directly state his position but uses a hypothetical case: the situation in which a youngster

[8] https://www.hoy.es/extremadura/diablo-vacunas-20200621112832-nt.html.

has been executed and another person needs his organs. What we have here is a typical moral dilemma: two considerations that favour incompatible claims are weighed against each other. After presenting this hypothetical case, López Villa does two things by means of rhetorical questions. First, he attributes more weight to the second consideration, because he says that the transplantation is right on the base of the reasons considered. And second, he draws an analogy between the foetuses' and the youngster's case. In presenting both cases as analogous, he means that the same verdict applies to the case of vaccines. We may reconstruct this case as follows: "it is true that aborted foetuses have suffered a horrible and immoral death, but the use of their cells in searching for a Covid-19 vaccine can save lives, so it is legitimate to use them."

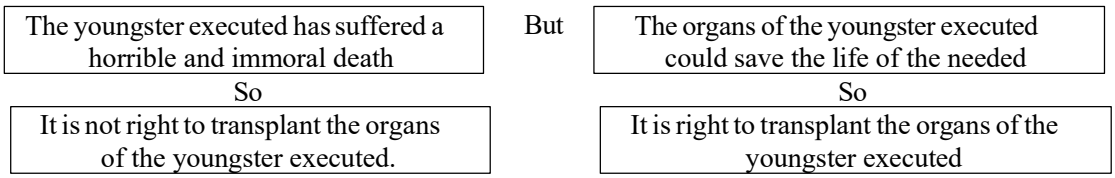
What is interesting here is that the subject of the analogy is not arguments, as in Nuckolls' case, but weighings of reasons for incompatible claims. As we saw, this is the case of inter-argumentative relationships expressed by adversative expressions such as "but," "however," or "although." We can depict López Villa's position as follows:

Diagram 6. Foetuses argumentation.



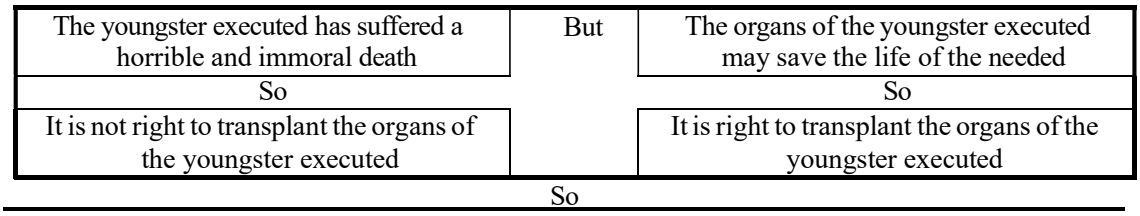
As we have just seen, in order to justify the attribution of weight expressed by the connector "but," López Villa appeals to the hypothetical case of the youngster executed, which can be represented as follows:

Diagram7. Youngster executed argumentation.



The following diagram depicts López Villa's whole argumentation:

Diagram 8. Foetuses-youngster executed analogical argumentation.



Aborted foetuses have suffered a horrible and immoral death	But	The use of cells of aborted foetuses in searching for a Covid-19 vaccine may save lives
So		So
It is not right to use cells of aborted foetuses in searching for a Covid-19 vaccine		It is right to use cells of aborted foetuses in searching for a Covid-19 vaccine

As said, I call these variety "argumentation by parity of weighings." I propose the following scheme:

Diagram 9. Scheme for argumentation by parity of weighings.

A	But	B
Therefore		Therefore
C		Non-C

Reason D is to reason E as reason A is to reason B: Therefore

D	But	E
Therefore		Therefore
F		Non-F

Both argumentation by parity of reasons and argumentation by parity of weighings are arguments about other arguments. In both varieties it is argued that a claim is supported by reasons because the case is parallel to another –hypothetical– case in which a claim is supported by reasons. The difference is that while in Nuckolls' case it is argued that the claim is supported by a worthwhile reason, in Lopez Villa's case it is argued that the claim is supported not only by a worthwhile reason, but by one that is stronger than a reason against. In other words, while in Nuckolls' case the property transferred from the source to the target is "to pose a *pro tanto* reason", in López Villa's case it is "to pose a relatively strong reason."

5. CONCLUSIONS.

In this paper I have defended the claim that what characterises argumentation by analogy is that it is based on a comparison of argumentative relationships. To show this, I have first explained what I mean by 'analogy' and 'analogical argumentation.' I did this by distinguishing two general ways of understanding these notions, one based on a comparison of properties of objects and the other on a comparison of relations of a certain kind. The next step has been to specify what kind of relations are these. As said, my position is that they are argumentative in nature, in the sense that they involve considerations that are presented as reasons in a given context. Based on this idea, I have distinguished two types of argumentative relationships. On the one hand, we have the relation between what is presented as a reason and that for which that is a supposedly reason, and on the other hand, we have the relation between different reasons for the same or for incompatible claims.

Following Marraud (2015), I have call this 'intra-argumentative relationships' and 'inter-argumentative relationships.' Accordingly, two varieties of argumentation by analogy have been identified: argumentation by parity of reasons and argumentation by parity of weighings Alhambra (2022 and 2023a). In the former, the arguer defends that an argument puts forward a worthwhile reason because it parallels another argument that is supposed to do so. While in the latter, the arguer claims that an argument poses a relatively strong reasons because it parallels another argument that is supposed to do so.

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