Special Accusation Types: Anonymous Accusation, Non-evidential Accusation, and Self-Accusation

Jan A. Bergstra

janaldertb@gmail.com

Informatics Institute, Science Park 900, 1098 XH, Amsterdam,
The Netherlands

Marcus Düwell

mduwell62@posteo.net

Institute for Philosophy, Technical University of Darmstadt,
Germany

Abstract

Straight accusations are considered a normal case for accusations with special accusation types referring to other forms of accusations. Three special accusation types will be considered: anonymous accusations, non-evidential accusations and self-accusations. Anonymous accusations (AA's) are accusations with an anonymous accuser. We describe the remarkable effects which anonymous accusations may have, and we propose various key properties of anonymous accusations: (i) the viral character of AA's, (ii) the potentially explosive effect of AA's, and (iii) the forensic challenge creation characteristic of AA's. These characteristics suggest, and in may contexts impose, rather restrictive rules of engagement for dealing with AA's. Secondly we describe non-evidential accusations (NEA's). Such accusations do not allow any meaningful form of validation of the body of the accusation. Nevertheless NEA's play a significant role nowadays. Finally we provide some remarks on self-accusations. A self-accusation may also be non-evidential.

1 Introduction

In Bergstra & Düwell [12] we have outlined what we call accusation theory. In Bergstra & Düwell [13] we discuss by way of a case study the use of accusation theory in the context of computer programming, the latter work also illustrates relations between promises and accustations. Most work on accusations in philosophy has been written in a legal context, we mention Pavlich [25, 26]. Accusations in court (legal accusations for short) are among the special accusation types as discussed below. However, we will not discuss legal accusations below. Related to accusation theory is the theory of blame in Malle et. al. [24], which is written in a psychological tradition, rather than in a tradition of applied informal logic.

Accusations come in many forms. We suggest to use the terminology of accusation types. Special accusations deviate in some way from the most plausible patterns of accusation, which we will refer to as straight accusations. In a straight accusation a known accuser accuses a known accusee of some known form of wrongdoing. The accusee may convert the accusation into a self-accusation and then determine either to admit its validity, or to reject it, or to keep both options open for some time to come.

Special accusation types deviate from the straight accusation type in one or more characteristics. We will discuss three most prominent types of special accusations: anonymous, non-evidential and self. Of these the non-evidential accusations are least known and probably most important. An accusation is non-evidential if the accuser does not even intentend to demonstrate the validity of the body of the accusation. For a non-evidential accusation the absence of evidence is a characteristic feature of the accusation. Many other types of accusations occur, to mention a few: criminal accusations, plagiarism accusations, infidelity accusations, personal character accusations, and negligence accusations.

In the daily human context accusations play a major role, and so it seems do so-called anonymous accusations, that is accusations with an anonymous accuser. Equally common are non-evidential accusations, that is accusations where the validity of the body of the accusation is problematic and is left unanalysed and where the adverse reputational impact on the accusee, as caused by the accusation having been issued, is not only intended but serves as the primary rationale for the accusation's coming about. Anonymous accusations and non-evidential accusations each have quite particular characteristics worthy of detailed attention, to begin with at a scholarly level. Below we will discuss key properties of anonymous accusations (AA's) and non-evidential accusations (NEA's), thereby proposing reasonably practical rules of engagement for dealing with AA's and NEA's. We refer to [12] for a comprehensive account of accusations and for the ground work on accusation theory, though below we will recall some elements of [12]. The motivational starting point of accusation theory is expressed by the following claim:

Claim 1.1. *Accusations are ubiquitous. Accusations play and have played pivotal roles in many social and political events.*

Now bicycles are ubiquitous too and we take the absence of a substantial philosophy of bicycles for granted. Accusations, however, play a constitutive role in human communication and for that reason merit scholarly attention.

Claim 1.2. *An accusation is a voluntary speech act performed by the accuser.*

The following observation motivates work on accusation theory:

Claim 1.3. *The concept and practice of accusation has received remarkably little attention in philosophy and relatively little attention in various social sciences as well.*

We will make use of conceptual distinctions that were developed in another context, namely Promise Theory. Promise theory is reviewed in Section 1.2 below. In the following definition we incorporate a scope just as it occurs in promise theory.

Definition 1.1. *A general theory of accusation may profit from a framework inherited from the framework of Promise Theory: initially only agent roles and aspects of content are distinguished and are provided with labels and names:*

(i) accuser: a (human) agent, a group of (human) agents, perhaps an institution represented by one or more human agents (in principle this could as well be a non-human agent like God, the Devil or a machine),

(ii) accusee (accused) possibly a plurality of accusees: one or more agents, which may also be institutional, and which may be animate, human or non-human, as well as inanimate, including human developed artefacts,

(iii) accusation body: text, content, which is communicated and may also be stored in some form,

(iv) a scope, containing one or more agents (possibly but not necessarily including the accusees) who are made aware of the accusation (including information about accusser and accussess(s), though not necessarily about the identity of other agents in scope),

(v) life cycle: understood as a speech act, an accusation may be equipped with time and place of being made, and it may expire at some moment in time. At various stages of the life-cycle, an accusation may be repeated, and it may be modified, accusees and scope may be modified as well. Whether or not an accusation is a new one, or is a repeated instance of an existing one, is a matter of ad hoc judgement.

1.1 From promises to accusations

Promise Theory was designed by Mark Burgess in a series of papers from 2005 onwards. For a survey of this work and extensions of it see Burgess 2015 [17, 18] and the more technical exposition in Bergstra & Burgess 2014 [7]. Promise Theory is claimed to be of use in the context of informatics, see e.g. Bergstra 2020 [3], Bergstra 2020b [4], Bergstra & Burgess 2019 [9, 10] and Bergstra & Burgess 2020 [11]. Within informatics, Promise Theory allowed for a description and reconstruction of the internal logic of different communicative moves. Moreover, Bergstra & Burgess 2017 [8] and 2020 [9] both provide extensive case studies for Promise Theory outside the realm of informatics. In Bergstra [5] a theory of threats is put forward based on the assumption that a threat is a special case of a promise. (For an original account of threats we mention Baldwin [1].) The work in [5] is extended in Bergstra [6] with an application of accusation theory.

Accusation and promise share a typing framework. Where Promise Theory adopts the notion of a promiser, Accusation Theory adopts the notion of an accuser. Where Promise Theory adopts the notion of a promise body, Accusation Theory adopts the notion of an accusation body. Promise Theory works with the notion of a promisee, and in some cases of a plurality of promisees, Accusation Theory uses the notion of an accusee, and in some cases of a plurality of accusees. Both Promise Theory and Accusation Theory maintain a notion of scope, that is, the collection of agents who are supposed to be notified of a promise in case of Promise Theory, and of an accusation in case of Accusation Theory. In promise theory the notation

$$\pi \colon p \to_S^b q$$

indicates a promise with promiser p, promisee q, body b and scope S. Similarly

$$\alpha \colon p \to_S^b q$$

indicates an accusation with accuser p, accusee q, body b and scope S. We will alternatively write

$$A \Longrightarrow_S^b B$$

for an accusation where in this case the double arrow signifies accusation in the absence of a name α that by its form indicates that an accusation is named.

2 Accusation versus complaint

Accusations are distinct from complaints. We will be precise about complaints. A complaint is a a speech act written as follows:

$$\gamma \colon p \to_S^b q$$

Here (complainer) p complains with (to) (complainee) q with content (body b, and scope S. Typically the complainee is an agent who might, according to the complainer, deliver an assessment about b and issue measures of compensation to the complainer. An accusation can be the body of a complaint. For instance with accusation $\alpha \colon p \to_S^b r$ there may be a complaint issued to q about r as follows:

$$\gamma \colon p \to_{S \cup T}^{\alpha} q$$

Moreover given a number (say two) of accusations $\alpha_1 \colon p \to_S^{b_1} r_1$, and $\alpha_2 \colon p \to_S^{b_2} r_2$ a complaint

$$\gamma \colon p \to_S^{(p \Rightarrow_{\{r_1, r_2\}}^{b_1} r_1, p \Rightarrow_{\{r_1, r_2\}}^{b_2} r_2)} q$$

about both accusations combined can be issued for being handled by q. There are many ways in which the scope of accusations and complaints may vary, and of course a complaint that comes about from an accusation may have a somewhat different or expanded body. What matters is that to the extent that the complaint is understood as an accusation the complainee is not the accusee, rather the accusee occurs as a component of the body of the complaint.

A complaint need not be based on an accusation, for instance a complaint about one's own body may be issued towards a physician in which case there is no accusation around. In an institutional setting complaints can be formally handled only upon having been received by some person or body (serving as the complainee) who/which is entitled to accept and to take care of complaints. Often anonymous complaints and non-anonymous complaints can be handled formally and in a different and suitable manner. In many institutions, however, anonymous complaints will not be taken into consideration. Below we will discuss anonymous accusations. Anonymous complaints are similar: a complaint is anonymous if the complainer is not known to the complainee.

3 Accusation dynamics: propagation of an accusation

In order to analyse the dynamics of accusations, the notion of an accusation needs to be be extended with additional features. Besides accusers we postulate the presence of zero or more propagators. Propagators transmit an accusation thereby slightly changing the accusation, for instance by changing the scope.

3.1 Accusation propagation

The following claim captures the intuition of propagation of an accusation. By propagating an accusation the agent performing the propagation becomes complicit with the accusation having been issued. We make the latter explicit with the following Claim.

Claim 3.1. *It is plausible, advisable, or even morally required (if one prefers to think in such terms) that an agent A who propagates an accusation, say α, supports the following views:*

(i) the body of α is not manifestly implausible,

(ii) it is not manifestly implausible that the accusers of α play their role in that capacity,

(iii) the risk of reputational damage to the accusee(s) of α, which arises from the increased visibility (i.e. the scope of α', the propagated accusation), balances appropriately with the expected (by A) advantages of the propagation at hand (at the time of effecting said propagation).

The notion of an accuser is far from trivial, especially in the case of anonymous accusations. We first describe propagation of an accusation with known accusers. The idea is that propagating an accusation takes place if an agent extends the audience (scope) of it by repeating the accusation. Propagation of an accusation comes with a very light form of participation in the role of an accuser, this role will be called that of an *accusation propagator* or alternatively a *propagating accusor*. In order to take this phenomenon into account as a new feature for the concept of an accusation, an accusation is endowed with a set of propagators. In Definition 1.1 the set of propagators is implicitly assumed to be empty; in other words Definition 1.1 uses an implicit assumption that there are no propagating accusers. There might be some, however. The first accuser(s) in a chain of propagation are referred to as original accuser(s) of the accusation. It is possible (and even plausible) that the original accusers are also propagating co-accusers at the same time (once acting as propagators of their own accusations).

Definition 3.1. *(Propagating an accusation.) An accusation α is propagated in the form of an accusation α' by an agent C if the following five conditions are met:*

(i) C is in scope of α,

(ii) the body of α' coincides with the body of α,

(iii) the set of accusees of α' is non-empty and is included in the set of accusees of α,

(iv) the scope of α' extended with C is a proper extension of the scope of α, and

(v) α' has the same original accusers as α,

(vi) the set of propagators of the accusation α' equals the propagators of α extended with C.

In Definition 4.2 below we will define accusation propagation once more, and in a setting where accusations may be also anonymous, and with the corresponding details worked out somewhat more fully.

3.2 Accusation replication

Replication takes place if accusers issue an accusation that was issued already though with a different scope (and perhaps also via different means of communication). Replicated versions of the same original accusation may be taken together as a single accusation with the union of the various scopes as its scope.

Sustained replication may contribute to the impact of an accusation. In principle replication ought to come with the introduction of a reference (in the new accusation) to the accusation that has been replicated, though admittedly there is no way to force an accuser into such discipline.

Replication may come with various other modifications:

- accusation narrowing: the scope is reduced,

- accusation opening: the scope is enlarged,

- accusation widening: the body is made more comprehensive,

- accusation weakening: the body is made less comprehensive,

- accusation grounding: the set of accusers is increased,

- accusation focusing: the set of accusers is reduced.

3.3 Investigating an accusation

An accusation α may be handed over to a committee or whatever entity in order for the accusation to be investigated. The start of an investigation requires transfer by way of propagation of the accusation at hand to a representative of the investigating entity.

3.4 Accuser replacement

An accusation with accusers V_{acc} may be taken on board by agent B who then acts as the accuser (then called a replacing accuser). Then the accusation has become equipped with a non-empty set of replacing accusers. Replacing accusers is a common mechanism

in legal procedures. It is plausible that upon accuser replacement the original accusers are removed and now become witnesses of the events as specified in the body of a new accusation. In that case the replacing accusers become accusers.

Technically there will be a chain of replacing accusers. In order to accommodate (in an adapted definition of accusation) a notion of accuser replacement it must be acknowledged that there may be a chain of subsequent replacements. This is a fairly complex attribute for something as seemingly simple as an accusation, but there seems to be no other way, at least when the approach is meant to be general. We will skip the possibility that some but not all of the accusers are replaced by other accusers, such complications may be dealt with if and when working on the analysis of actual cases suggest a need for that level of detail.

However, we will simplify the picture and assume that upon accuser replacement a new (set of) accuser(s) adopts the rol of accusing while the former ones are incorporated in the documentation of the accusation. Doing so complicates the notion of an accusation in another way, i.e. by incorporating aspects of the history (i.e. an initial part of the life cycle) of an accusation as a component in its description. Incorporating historical information can be done by way of a reference to a previous accusation from which the current on has been derived, for instance by way of replacement. Thus, an accusation α' may include a reference to another accusation α from which it has evolved by way of one of a menu of possible transformations. Propagation is an instance of such transformations, and so are replication and replacement. At this stage we do not claim to strive for presenting a comprehensive survey of transformations for accusations.

Definition 3.2. *(Accuser replacement.) An accusation α is transformed by way of accuser replacement into an accusation α' with accuser C if the following five conditions are met:*

(i) C is in scope of α,

(ii) the body of α' coincides with the body of α,

(iii) the set of accusees of α' is non-empty and consists of C,

(iv) the scope of α' extended with C is a proper extension of the scope of α, and

(v) α' makes reference to α as the accusation from which it was derived (by way of accuser replacement),

(vi) the set of propagators of α' equals the set of propagators of α extended with the accusers of α and with C.

It is implicit that accuser replacement take place with the consent of the accusers of α, as well with the consent of C. A typical instance of accuser replacement takes place if an accusation is taken on board by a court. Then the prosecutor replaces former accusers.

3.5 Notations

The notation for a promise with promiser A, promisee B, body b and scope S as used in promise theory reads:

$$A \longrightarrow_S^b B$$

Threats being a special case of promises, a similar notation can be used: we suggest as a notation for a threat with originator A, threatee B, body b and scope S may be denoted with:

$$A \dashrightarrow_S^b B$$

As a notation for an accusation with accuser A, accusee B, body b and scope S we will use:

$$A \Longrightarrow_S^b B$$

The body is supposed to be a sequence of parts, $b = (b_1, \ldots, b_n)$, which is understood as a conjunction. It is also understood that components in the conjunction may refer to or make use of previous components.

3.6 Timing and accusation withdrawal

An accusation is issued at some time t and then stands as a historic fact until it is obsolete or forgotten.

$$A \,@\, t \Longrightarrow_S^b B$$

An accusation may also be withdrawn. A notation for: at time r (assuming $r > t$) A withdraws the accusation $A \Longrightarrow_S^b B$ that A made at time t

$$A \,@\, r \nRightarrow (A \,@\, t \Longrightarrow_S^b B)$$

4 Anonymous accusations and anonymised accusations: definitions

The simplest intuition of an anonymous accusation is an accusation where the name of the accuser is kept secret. This notion is somehow puzzling, however, because for the accuser of an accusation it may be the case that if their name were made public, they would prefer not to have produced said accusation in the first place. Another form of an accusation with a hidden name can be distinguished: besides anonymous accusations there are also anonymised accusations, which are accusations that have been mediated by an agent who

hides accuser's names. Anonymous accusations and anonymised accusations are disjoint classes of accusations.

Why would an accuser prefer not to be named in connection with an accusation? A first possible answer is that an accuser A, upon producing an accusation with body say b towards accusee B, and with scope S, might be accused (by $C \in S$) of engaging in defamation of B, for whom C feels entitled to establish some form of protection, a state of affairs which may come with a substantial claim towards A. This very risk may prevent A from issuing said accusation. The risk felt by A (when contemplating issuing said accusation) is called the defamation-claim risk. The defamation-claim risk is a realistic one, which is connected to the legal basis of claims of defamation and which may prevent an accuser from accusing. Without any further specification of what an anonymous accusation might be in detail the following claim is relevant:

Claim 4.1. *Minimizing or even eliminating the defamation-claim risk is a driver for the occurrence of anonymous accusations.*

Besides risk reduction for defamation-claims different motives for an accuser to act in anonymous mode are conceivable: by making an accusation anonymous it may be more easily circulated because no questions arise about the origin of the accusation. In fact agents in scope will not know the motive for bringing an anonymous accusation into circulation by its original accusers.

When theorizing about anonymous accusations, looking for generality suggests to allow for flexibility in the number of unnamed accusers. At this early stage of analysis, however, it is a defensible simplification to assume that multiple accusers will produce multiple accusations, which may have identical bodies, rather than that a single accusation has multiple accusers.

Assumption 4.1. *(Single anonymous accuser assumption.) For simplicity it is assumed that an anonymous accusation originates from a single origin.*

More generally we use the simplifying assumption that all accusations have a single accuser and a single accusee only. Generalisation to the case of multiple accusees is a straightforward matter, so we expect, at least when it comes to the analysis of specific practical examples as case studies.

For an accusation one may use a variable for the name of an accuser and then hide (localise) the name of the accuser with a binding operation. However, at present we see no advantage in making use of bound names for agents, and we opt for a simpler form of information hiding: just skip the name/identity of the accuser:

$$\star \Longrightarrow_S^b B$$

The above notation suggests, however, that the hidden accuser (say A, as an interpretation of $\star$) is different from B, an assumption which we will not adopt. Indeed self-accusation is an option in the context of anonymous accusations.

4.1 Abstraction applied to accusations

Abstraction involves hiding of parts of the information content of an accusation. The idea of an anonymous accusation comes about as an instance of abstraction.

Definition 4.1. *(Anonymous accusation) A (single accuser) accusation α is anonymous if its accuser is unknown to all of the agents in scope, including the accusee(s) B. It is conceivable that one of the accusees $p \in B$ secretly acts as the accuser as well. For a notation we have:*

$$\alpha = (\star \Longrightarrow_S^b B)$$

Definition 4.2. *(Propagating an anonymous accusation) An anonymous accusation α is propagated in the form of an accusation α' by an agent C_T (paired with a scope T) if the following five conditions are met:*
(i) C is in scope of α,
(ii) the body of α' coincides with the body of α,
(iii) the set of accusees of α is non-empty and is included in the set of accusees of α', and
(iv) the scope of α extended with T is the scope of α',
(v) α' has the same original accusers as α while its set of propagating accusers is extended with C_T.

4.2 Further steps of abstraction for anonymous accusations

An anonymous accusation allows further abstraction. For instance in the following entity the target of the accusation has been made invisible/unknown.

$$\star \Longrightarrow_S^b \star$$

Further abstraction is possible by having some elements of b made unreadable, e.g.:

$$\alpha_1 = (\star \Longrightarrow_S^{(b,c,\star,\star,d,e,\star)} B)$$

and

$$\alpha_2 = (\star \Longrightarrow_S^{(b,c,\star,\star,d,e,\star)} \star),$$

The accusation α_2 merely serves as an anonymous message to the agents in scope that some issue has occurred as specified by the body $(b, c, \star, \star, d, e, \star)$. If all of the body has been hidden one simply writes

$$\alpha_3 = (A \Longrightarrow^{\star}_S B), \alpha_4 = (\star \Longrightarrow^{\star}_S B), \text{ or even } \alpha_5 = (\star \Longrightarrow^{\star}_S \star)$$

Here α_5 is a meaningless accusation which merely comes about from the notations at hand. Although we conceive of promises and accusations as speech acts, it is plausible that for an anonymous accusation only written text, or alternatively mechanically produced audible language, serves as a means of communication, where it is assumed that the communication technology disallows tracing back the accuser from the physical appearance of an anonymous accusation.

In fact the communication technology needed for handling anonymous accusations requires ample attention.

Definition 4.3. *(Accusation to unknown.) A (single accuser) accusation α is an accusation to unknown if its accusee is unknown to the accuser. It is conceivable that one of the accusees secretly acts as the accusee as well. For a notation we have:*

$$\alpha = (A \Longrightarrow^b_S \star)$$

With square brackets we indicate the piece of information in an agent's memory which acknowledges that an accusation has taken place and has been received by the agent, as in

$$[A \Longrightarrow^b_S B]$$

and with a time tag it can be indicated when the agent became aware of the accusation:

$$[A \Longrightarrow^b_S B]@\,t$$

and if the accusation was made earlier say at time $r < t$:

$$[A @\, r \Longrightarrow^b_S B]@\,t$$

with anonymous versions:

$$[\star \Longrightarrow^b_S B], [\star \Longrightarrow^b_S B]@\,t, [\star @\, r \Longrightarrow^b_S B]@\,t, [\star @\, r \Longrightarrow^{(\star,b,\star,c,d)}_S B]@\,t$$

A non-empty sequence say $W = (C_{T'}, C''_{T''}, C'''_{T'''})$ of propagators can be attached as a subscript:

$$[A @\, r \Longrightarrow^b_S B]_{(C'_T, C''_{T''}, C'''_{T'''})}@\,t, [\star @\, r \Longrightarrow^{(b,\star,\star,c)}_S B]_W @\,t$$

12

For an agent G one may list its stock of incoming accusations between angular brackets, for instance:

$$G\langle [A \Longrightarrow_S^b G], [\star \Longrightarrow_{S'}^{b'} G], [\star \Longrightarrow_{S''}^{b''} G]_{(U)}, [A' \Longrightarrow_{S'''}^{(u,v)} G]\rangle$$

An incoming accusation may be received after several rounds of transmission

$$[\star @ r \Longrightarrow_{S''''}^{(b''',\star)} G]_{(C_T', C_{T''}'', C_{T'''}''')} @ t]$$

Here it is assumed that $G \in T'''$ so that G finds the accusation only in round 4 of transmissions, starting from an unknown origin at time r.

5 Complications with handling anonymous accusations

Propagation of an anonymous accusation may backfire in the following manner. If agent C_T with $T = \{U, V\}$ propagates the anonymous accusation $\alpha = (\star \Longrightarrow_{\{A,B\}}^b \{D, E, F\})$ then for instance D may complain towards C_T about the fact that the accusation has now reached all agents in T, in particular $V \in T$. By acting as a propagator of α, C_T may become legally vulnerable for defamation by merely propagating α.

Stated differently: let p be an anonymous accusation with agent A in scope S. Now A may "publish" p by making it available to a larger audience, say $S' \supset S$, i.e. by extending its scope to S'. We claim that by propagating p, agent A becomes involved in the accusation as a co-accuser. In other words the anonymous accusation p is made less anonymous by considering A among its accusers, and it has become less private through its scope extension. An anonymous accusation is viral in the sense that it cannot be propagated without risk by any agent. Whoever handles and thereby propagates an anonymous accusation becomes in some sense a co-accuser.

5.1 How to deal with an anonymous accusation?

The communication mechanism behind anonymous accusations is critical. If the original accuser is able to create a wide circulation for α, i.e. to deliver it to a large scope, then α may for instance be used as a warning against one or more of its accusees.

Quite the opposite is the situation if an anonymous accusation reaches a very limited group only, such as for instance the management team (MT) of some organisation. If that happens the MT needs to proceed with extreme care. One option is to involve law enforcement right from the start. Another option is to install an independent committee IC4AA (informal committee for handling anonymous accusations) which can deal with the

situation and the coming about of which is motivated externally only with the statement that anonymous accusations have to be dealt with and that doing so requires much care. It is then exclusively a task for IC4AA to interact with the outside world about the triggering accusation(s).

5.1.1 Explosiveness and miraculous impact

Inadequate handling of an anonymous accusation may have an explosive (even miraculous) and highly damaging impact on the accusee(s) involved. Here lies the strength of anonymous accusations as well as the root of the ethical problem on how to deal with such accusations. Clearly the mechanism of anonymous accusations can be used, as an informal (if not illegal) variation on whistleblowing, as well as misused, as an instrument for harassment by accusation.

5.1.2 Forensic challenge creation

Each occurrence of an anonymous accusation or of an anonymised accusation, and of its propagation by some agent, will (re)introduce the forensic question: who has been the original accuser? Finding out who was the original accuser may be very difficult and time consuming, and it may create intense speculation.

For an accuser the seemingly harmless action of issuing an anonymous accusation (or an anonymised accusation) may have unexpected consequences caused by the determined search for the origin of the resulting accusations which may be invoked by those at the receiving end of these accusations. Rather than leaving the accuser safely in peace the accuser may find themselves trapped in a climate featuring an unexpected level of scrutiny to find out what has happened.

5.2 Anonymous accusations in the light of a personalised precautionary principle

Because the handling of anonymous accusations requires much care and is difficult anyhow, forecasting the impact of an anonymous accusation is hardly possible. However, it may be so that viewed from the perspective of the accuser, spreading around an anonymous accusation constitutes the only way to avoid a very problematic future development. In that case the accuser uses a personalised precautionary principle for justifying the use of anonymous techniques.

6 Non-evidential accusations

A *contra-evidential accusation* is an accusation which is made in spite of strong evidence for the falsity of the body. An accusation is false if the body turns out to be an invalid statement. Some accusations, however, have different issues with the validity of the body.

An *unproven accusation* is an accusation for which proof might in principle be found, if only the accuser would be given access to the relevant data. At closer inspection, and with more data available, an unproven accusation may turn out to be false and even contra-evidential.

A *para-evidential accusation* is an accusation made by an accuser who does not care about providing evidence for the body. There may or may not be such evidence but in any case the accuser has no intention to provide it and may not be worried if they cannot provide any evidence to that extent.

A subclass of para-evidential accusations are the *non-evidential accusations*. Non-evidential accusations are to be distinguished from false accusations (see e.g. [21]) and from contra-evidential accusations, by intrinsically lacking proof or disproof of critical aspects of the body of the accusation. Not only is proof lacking, the accuser does not expect, or even wish, any proof to be found or deduced. More precisely: the accuser assumes that no proof or disproof of the body can be found. We notice that e.g. [16] asserts that accusations can be disputed also if there is no disagreement concerning the underlying facts. In the case of a non-evidential accusation, however, it is more likely than not that there will be disagreements about the facts of the matter in case the accusation becomes involved in a conflict.

As was already discussed in [12], we provide a rationale for issuing non-evidential accusations. Indeed they propose that non-evidential accusations are issued (or at least that such an option is considered) in case accusers are unable to issue accusations with a stronger foundation. Individuals who trust the accuser may be satisfied with their words (i.e. a non-evidential accusation as received) without proof. They may then, when deemed necessary, individually or collectively act against the accused as long as the accused is not being deprived of their legal rights and entitlements. This mechanism is reasonable so it seems, and definitely serves to make the point that non-evidential accusations may be important.

An accusation is *meta-evidential* if it is conceptually implausible that evidence for it can be found, for instance "most politicians that B has met are corrupt" as an accusation with B as the accusee. All meta-evidential accusations are non-evidential as well.

6.1 On propagating non-evidential accusations

If an agent propagates a non-evidential accusation problems may arise just as in the case of anonymous accusations. Now, however, one notices that liability claims may come both from the accuser and from the accusee. Indeed the accuser A may be unwilling to have it made known to certain agents (e.g. agent U) outside the scope $S = \{B, P, Q, R\}$ that A has issued a non-evidential accusation $A \Longrightarrow^b_{\{B,P,Q,R\}} B$. If then P propagates the accusation with scope S' containing U then A may accuse P of having communicated to U private information (that the non-evidential accusation to B was issued at all) and having inflicted resulting damages on A.

6.2 Motivating role of a precautionary principle

A reason for propagating a non-evidential accusation may be found in the idea that the accusation serves as a warning against certain forms of interaction with the accusee. As an example consider a hypothetical non-evidential accusation $\alpha = A \Longrightarrow^b_{\{P,Q,R\}} B$. First of all we notice that it is plausible that B is left outside the scope of α. Now A may issue α in order to obtain support from P, Q, and R in order to prepare for some form of retaliation against B, or alternatively A may issue accusation α in order to warn P, Q, and R for the possible consequences of interaction with B. The second motive is precautionary.

Whatever the motive for issuing a non-evidential accusation may be, it is advisable (for the accuser) that except for the accusee only trusted agents (by the accuser) are in scope.

7 Self-accusations

A self-accusation is an accusation where accuser and accusee are identical entities:

$$A \Longrightarrow^b_S A$$

For a self-accusation it makes perfect sense that the scope contains no other agents than the accuser/accusee:

$$A \Longrightarrow^b_{\{A\}} A$$

Sharing with other agents in scope is equally plausible, however:

$$A \Longrightarrow^b_{\{A,B,C,D\}} A$$

In psychology the notion of a self-accusation occurs with the connotation that someone wrongly thinks of themselves as causing harm by some form of wrongdoing. Self-accusations may concur with phases of depression. Self-accusations alternatively exist under the connotation that a person believes the (body of the) accusation to be valid.

However, the Cambridge dictionary simply states that a self-accusation is "the act of accusing yourself of doing or having done something wrong", which is the meaning that we will adopt. Neither the validity of the (body of the) self-accusation, nor acceptance of that validity is implied in the notion of self-accusation.

Self-accusations may be issued for a plurality of reasons. For instance the following self-accusation

$$A \Longrightarrow_{\{A,B,C,D\}}^{(e,f,g)} A$$

may constitute an intentional lie (from the perspective of A) if A was involved in action e and in action g but not in action f, while A prefers agents B, C, and D to believe that A was involved in action f as well.

7.1 Anonymous self-accusations

An anonymous accusation $\star \Longrightarrow_S^b B$ may be thought of as the external manifestation of an underlying accusation $A \Longrightarrow_S^b B$ where A succeeds in keeping their identity secret (in the role of an accuser). The case that $A = B$ may be contemplated and the situation would be that $\star \Longrightarrow_S^b B$ is the external manifestation of a self-accusation $B \Longrightarrow_S^b B$.

It might make sense for B to produce anonymous and false self-accusations in order to gain publicity. A classical case of an anonymous self-accusation occurs if an unknown (i.e. anonymously operating) group accuses itself of having performed a terroristic attack (say as expressed by b): $\star \Longrightarrow_S^b \star$ with S a large audience. Yet another example of an anonymous self-accusation arises if an anonymous agent, say A, accuses themselves of having abducted a person p and makes relatives of p included in the scope of the accusation.

7.2 Abstraction in the context of self-accusation

When communicating a self-accusation to agents in scope an accuser/accusee may wish to hide some of the details of the (body of the) accusation at hand, e.g. as in:

$$A \Longrightarrow_{\{A,B,C,D\}}^{(a,\star,c)} A$$

In some religions self-accusation is coupled with the assumption of concurrent acceptance of the self-accusation by the accuser/accusee into the concept of a confession, which may in turn lead to remorse, and subsequently there may be compensation (if others are involved), perhaps involving an apology, or some kind of self-discipline or even self-punishment.

Upon having made a confession in the presence of a priest P, and upon having given a complete account of the self-accusation at hand, after some moments Δ the situation

may come about, if the priest so decides, that A is not anymore in need of maintaining the self-accusation at hand.

$$[A@t \Longrightarrow^{(a,b,c)}_{\{A\}} A)] \cdot [A@t' \Longrightarrow^{(a,b,c)}_{\{A,P\}} A] \cdot [P \text{ signals absolution}] \cdot$$

$$[A@(t' + \Delta) \not\Rightarrow (A@t \Longrightarrow^{(a,b,c)}_{\{A\}} A)]$$

Here $X \cdot Y$ denotes as in process algebra (see e.g. [14]) or in the thread algebra of [15] the sequential composition of processes X and Y. Moreover $t' > t$ and $t' - t$ measures the time that A takes to move towards making a confession after having first engaged in an initial self-accusation.

7.2.1   From deliberate information hiding to self delusion

The following variation on the same theme may seem to work for A but may fail (depending on the relevance of feature b of the body of the self-accusation at hand):

$$[A@t \Longrightarrow^{(a,b,c)}_{\{A\}} A)] \cdot [A@t' \Longrightarrow^{(a,\star,c)}_{\{A,P\}} A] \cdot [P \text{ signals absolution}] \cdot$$

$$[A@(t' + \Delta) \not\Rightarrow (A@t \Longrightarrow^{(a,b,c)}_{\{A\}} A)]$$

Indeed, A proceeding as above, by making information element b invisible for P, may engage in self-delusion. One may object that the priest can notice that some information is being witheld but, upon being asked for an explanation regarding the hidden information, A will always be able to suggest some valid though irrelevant information which was supposedly hidden from the priest for the sake of ease of communication.

7.2.2   A role for a precautionary principle

As a rationale for disclosing self-accusations during confession the Roman Catholic Church traditionally provides an instance of the precautionary principle (PP): you better confess major wrongdoings when alive, or face potentially disappointing consequences after death. This PP is generic in that it works for many individuals, but its application, by way of a decision rule, is personal.

7.3   Apology

We understand an apology as one of the results of the occurrence of self-accusation. Apology may take place with an implicit self-accusation, and an implicit confession regarding the validity of the self-accusation, in which case an agent pays tribute to their own past

mistakes by issuing an apology. Organisations and nations may see their leaders issue apologies regarding actions of their historic predecessors. For instance the Dutch government issued an apology in connection with the Dutch in slave trade and slavery as recently as December 2022.

Of course self-accusations may be unfounded. For instance a parent may self-accuse that they failed to spend enough time and energy on certain issues regarding one of their children, though feeling unsure about the substance of that sentiment, then to find out that in fact this was not the case, and that other causes than lacking parental support have been predominantly involved when these issues became problematic over the years.

8   Concluding remarks

The contribution of this work consists in the development of terminology and notation. The idea of special accusation types is introduced and three of the most important accusation types are discussed in some detail. An integrated notation for promises, threats and accusations is suggested.

Special accusation types are by no means exhausted with the three forms discussed above. In Barnhill 2022 [2] charge is used as accusation. The case at hand is that some forms of online behaviour are being charged to be manipulative. A charging accusation classifies a known straight accusation in terms of a different category of behaviour so as to change the moral perspective from which the body of said straight accusation is perceived.

Klenk [23] proposes that in some cases machines can be charged (and for that reason accused) with injustice which then grounds a charge of machine manipulation. This charge is made in spite of a diversity of philosophical accounts imposing requirements on manipulation that an artificial system cannot meet given today's technology. Klenk's paper contains an important remark about the term manipulation which applies to accusation just as well:

> Moreover, 'ion' terms like manipulation are ambiguous between process and result. As Hacking (1999) (*our reference [20]*) suggests, each of these terms negotiates the difference between both in its own way, and manipulation allows for a distinction between the active process of manipulating and the passive, receptive upshot of being manipulated.

Accusation features some 'ion' term style ambiguity as well: for some the mere body is the accusation, while, following the approach of promise theory we take the context with accuser, accusee and scope into account as well. However, we do not include the reputational outcome (which might be seen as a result) as a part or component of an accusation.

In Jongepier & Wieland [22] the charge is made that so-called microtargeting makes use of people as a mere means, whence microtargeting is wrong. It seems that charging is an important special accusation type which merits further attention form the perspective of accusation theory. An important issue is to determine who is in scope of the various charges mentioned above, and to illuminate whether or not scopes are constitutive of said charges.

Special accusation types may also emerge in specific contexts and then be 'popular' for some time. For instance recently the (so-called) transphobia accusation made headlines in connection with significant disagreements regarding the rights and obligations of transgender persons. This particular case is revealing about the communicative power of certain special accusation types. We expect that further development of accusation theory will to a large extent involve the additional context and information that comes along with special accusation types.

References

[1] David A. Baldwin. Thinking about threats. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 15 (1), 71–78, (1971).

[2] Anne Barnhill. How philosophy might contribute to the practical ethics of online manipulation. In: *The ethics of Online Manipulation*, eds. Fleur Jongepier and Michael Klenk, Routledge Research in Applied Ethics, Routledge New York, 49-71 (2022). URL

[3] Jan A. Bergstra. Promise theory as a tool for informaticians. *Transmathematica*, (2020). DOI

[4] Jan A. Bergstra. Promises in the context of humanoid robot morality. *International Journal of Robotic Engineering*, (2020). URL

[5] Jan A. Bergstra. *Promises and Threats by Asymmetric Nuclear-Weapon States.* χt Axis Press. ISBN: 978167318215, (2019).

[6] Jan A. Bergstra. An opinion on promises, threats, and accusations in the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian war. *Transmathematica*, (2022). DOI

[7] Jan Bergstra and Mark Burgess. *Promise Theory: Principles and Applications.* χt Axis Press. ISBN: 9781495437779, 2014; Second edition ISBN: 9781696578554, (2019).

[8] Jan Bergstra and Mark Burgess. *Promise Theory: Case Study on the 2016 Brexit Vote.* χt Axis Press. ISBN: 9781974545339 (2017).

[9] Jan Bergstra and Mark Burgess. *Money, Ownership, and Agency.* χt Axis Press. ISBN9781696588379, (2019).

[10] Jan Bergstra and Mark Burgess. A promise theoretic account of the Boeing 737 Max MCAS algorithm affair, [cs.OH] (2019). URL

[11] Jan Bergstra and Mark Burgess. Candidate software process flaws for the Boeing 737 Max MCAS algorithm and a risk for a proposed upgrade, [cs.CY] (2020). URL

[12] Jan A. Bergstra and Marcus Düwell. Accusation theory. *Transmathematica*, (2021). DOI

[13] Jan A. Bergstra and Marcus Düwell. Accusations in the context of computer programming. *Transmathematica*, (2022). DOI

[14] J.A. Bergstra and J.W. Klop. Process algebra for synchronous communication. *Information and Control*, **60** (1-3), pp. 109–137 (1984).

[15] J.A. Bergstra and C.A. Middelburg. Thread algebra for strategic interleaving. *Formal Aspects of Computing*, **19** (4), pp. 445–474, (2007).

[16] Deryck Beyleveld, Marcus Düwell and Andreas Spahn. How should we represent future generations in policy making? *Jurisprudence* 6 (3), 549–566, (2015).

[17] Mark Burgess. *Thinking in Promises: Designing Systems for Cooperation.* O'Reilly Media (2015).

[18] Mark Burgess. *A Treatise on Systems, Volume II: Intentional Systems with Faults, Errors, and Flaws.* χt Axis Press. (2017–2019).

[19] Janice Dowell and David Sobel. Sexual harassment in philosophy, Part 2. *Daily Nous, news for and about the philosophy profession,* September 5 (2019). URL

[20] Ian Hacking. *The Social Construction of What?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (1999).

[21] Lawrence E. Hedges. False accusations: genesis and prevention. *American Journal of Psychotherapy,* 56 (4): 494–507 (2002).

[22] Fleur Jongepier and Jan Willem Wieland. Microtargeting people as a mere means. In: *The ethics of Online Manipulation*, eds. Fleur Jongepier and Michael Klenk, Routledge Research in Applied Ethics, Routledge New York, 156-179 (2022). URL

[23] Michael Klenk. Manipulation, injustice and technology. In: *The Philosopy of Online Manipulation*, eds. Fleur Jongepier and Michael Klenk, Routledge Research in Applied Ethics, Routledge New York, 108-132 (2022). URL

[24] Berrtram F. Malle, Steve Guglielmo and Andrew E. Monroe. A theory of blame. Psychological Inquiry, 25: 1–40, (2014).

[25] George Pavlich. Before the law: criminalization, accusation and justice. *Law and Critique,* 28, pp 345–365 (2017).

[26] George Pavlich. Restorative justice and the rights of the accused. *Restorative Justice, an International Journal,* 5 (3), pp 396–407 (2017).