

Rhetoric and Argumentation: An Introduction

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When the editors suggested this special issue on rhetoric and argument, they playfully appended a sub-title: "What every informal logician should know about rhetoric, but was too shy to ask." The common ground on which informal logicians and rhetoricians meet is argumentation, and both parties share a common goal, i.e., understanding argumentation—in theory, practice, and criticism. A well developed theory of argumentation, I submit, requires principles and standards drawn from three sources that, together, make up the controversial arts *par excellence*: rhetoric, logic, and dialectic. If that's a fair statement, then it behooves informal logicians to attend to insights derived from rhetorical studies of argumentation.

Argumentation is both a natural phenomenon and a unique human accomplishment. People argue naturally as one means of managing disagreements, but they typically do so imperfectly and without conscious art. Argumentation appears as a remarkable human accomplishment, however, when the method is skillfully employed for the sake of resolving differences. Indeed, when the potential of argumentation as a method of critical decision-making is fully realized, it is revealed as the paradigm of rational procedures for creating knowledge and achieving wise decisions—at least in the Western tradition. At its best, argumentation is a process whereby problems are brought to attention and analyzed, interested parties become more knowledgeable and more critical about relevant facts and values, and solutions are hammered out on the anvil of controversy. It is a process both creative and

disciplined, depending on the skillful deployment of the three controversial arts.

First, argumentation arises in a rhetorical situation. By that I mean a situation in which a human agent perceives an exigence, believes that something can be done about it by mobilizing the efforts of other human agents, and addresses them as an audience in a way calculated to influence their beliefs, feelings and/or actions with respect to the exigence (Bitzer, 1968). But, every rhetorical situation carries with it the potential for being transformed into a dialectical situation, that is, one in which opposing discourses are brought forth in a way that invites mutual criticism and facilitates a choice between them. Dialectic comes into play most clearly within institutions that have been created for the specific purpose of resolving contested claims and proposals, e.g. courts, legislatures and the journals and meetings of learned societies. Within such controversial situations, logic enters at each moment when a particular claim and its support are singled out for evaluation. Central to this entire process is rhetoric, that is, the creative use of language by human agents striving to find the "fitting words," to craft the discourse that makes sense of the problematic situation in a way that withstands the criticism of opposing discourses, and satisfies a critical audience, e.g. "a community of model interlocutors" (Blair & Johnson, 1987). Rhetorical art drives the creative struggle to find ameliorating language; logic provides the critical standards by which to insure cogency; and dialectic frames the entire enterprise with principles intended to promote cooperative, comprehensive,

candid, and critical interaction (Wenzel, 1990).

No one of the controversial arts, alone, is sufficient for the production of informed understanding or sound decisions. Rather, human judgment is an accomplishment that depends upon all three. Hence, a fully developed theory of argumentation requires a synthesis of principles, standards, insights and modes of understanding drawn from the perspectives of dialectic, logic and rhetoric.

Now, the foregoing implicitly characterizes rhetoric as a practical art, as Aristotle described it, a trained capacity for producing forms and materials of proof appropriate to problematic questions. That conception of rhetoric is featured in the first essay in this issue. Thomas Conley locates rhetoric as one of the arts of language central to education in the Western world for many centuries. He accounts for the trivialization of some aspects of that educational tradition, but argues that rhetoric—even in apparently trivial exercises such as declamation—retained its vitality and utility because it never lost touch with the robust idea of *controversia*.

The contemporary study of rhetoric has expanded beyond its original formulation as the art of the speaker, however. It now embraces sophisticated methods of analysis and criticism that have much to teach us about how arguments are fashioned in ordinary (and not-so-ordinary) language, and how cognitive changes are effected by discourse. Michael Weiler's essay demonstrates this potential as he explores the rhetorical character of ideology. From a rhetorical point of view, ideology can be understood as a distinct species of argumentation that functions to legitimize the exercise of political power. As such, it challenges the rhetorical critic to uncover the partiality hidden behind its claims to universality.

John Lucaites and Charles Taylor take up another important dimension of political rhetoric, centering on the concept

of prudential judgment. Their exemplary study of debate in the U.S. Senate over authorization for the use of military force in the Persian Gulf helps to explain, on the one hand, how the particular decision was reached. But, more importantly, it demonstrates that the very grounds of decision-making—in this case, a particular conception of prudence—are often rhetorically constructed in the course of deliberation.

G. Thomas Goodnight is also interested in the crafting of reason through deliberative rhetoric. In his contribution to this issue he blends the interests of informal logicians and rhetoricians in an intriguing way. Starting with an apparently technical problem in logic, the choice of backing to authorize a warrant, he expands the horizon to examine "legitimation controversies" which emerge when consensus about the grounding of judgment is challenged. His case study demonstrates the possible expansion of the domain of inquiry for informal reasoning.

In the essay rounding out this issue, Dilip Gaonkar reflects on the implications of certain terms of recent currency: "the revival of rhetoric," "the new rhetoric," and "the rhetorical turn." He locates those terms in recent intellectual movements, explains how each one invokes a particular conception of rhetoric, and concludes by showing how the "rhetorical turn," in his words, "signifies a radical shift in the self understanding of rhetoric." It may be fair to say that the full implications of that turn for rhetoric's relation to argumentation have yet to be realized by most of us.

Certainly this issue cannot tell informal logicians *everything* they might want to know about rhetoric, but one hopes it makes a helpful start. In addition to the authors, who deserve the chief credit for producing this issue, there are others to thank. I am grateful to the reviewers for their careful reading and commentary on manuscripts: J. Robert Cox (University of North Carolina), Robert Hariman (Drake

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