

IN MEMORIAM

Stephen Edelston Toulmin

1922-2009

We were saddened to learn of the death of Stephen Toulmin on December 4th, 2009, in Los Angeles, California. His passing will already have been noted by most of our readers. For anyone seeking a brief, rounded account of his life, we recommend the *New York Times* obituary notice by William Grimes:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/11/education/11toulmin.html>

In our tribute, we especially remember Toulmin's work in logic—only briefly discussed in the *New York Times* obituary. Anyone associated with informal logic or who is a reader of this journal cannot have failed to be aware of his importance to this field. His *The Uses of Argument* (1958) is one of the seminal works in the development of informal logic. The approach to the analysis of argument he presented there has been widely influential. Many would agree with David Hitchcock, who has said, “the concept of a warrant is a major and valuable contribution to the understanding of the macrostructure of arguments. . . . [I]t is the most important contribution since Aristotle distinguished premises from conclusions” (*Informal Logic*, 18:2&3, p. 275).

Thirty years ago, when preparing the bibliography for the 1978 *Symposium on Informal Logic*, we noted that Toulmin's influence had largely been outside the logico-philosophical establishment. That remains true to this day. However, his influence in communication theory, rhetoric, law, and other areas where argumentation is studied, has been substantial.

We were honoured to have Toulmin present a keynote address at the *Third International Symposium on Informal Logic* in 1989. In that paper he stressed the relevance and importance of Aristotle's *Topics*. His most recent contribution, “Reasoning in Theory and Practice” appeared in *Informal Logic* in Vol. 24, No 2 (2004). In it, Toulmin related the following anecdote:

When my wife was taking her law courses at DePaul University in Chicago, the young man sitting next to her remarked her surname was familiar as his girlfriend was studying communication. My wife replied, "Oh, yes, I am married to him." Next week the young man came back and said, "No, my girlfriend said that was quite impossible. Toulmin lived shortly after Aristotle." I knew I was old, but not quite as old as that.

The student got her history wrong, but not her sense of theoretical affinity. Aristotle would have recognized the importance of Toulmin's work in logic, in dialectics and in rhetoric. Unlike many of the intervening theorists, Toulmin remained true to the Aristotelian interest in this triad by addressing questions pertinent to problems in each of the three. Witness the ways his ideas have so clearly been drawn upon and developed by contemporary logicians, dialecticians and rhetoricians, as well illustrated in *Arguing on the Toulmin Model* (edited by Hitchcock & Verheij, 2006) and in *The Uses of Argument: Proceedings of a conference at McMaster University*, (edited by Hitchcock & Farr, 2005).

Stephen Toulmin died after a full and fruitful life. The informal logic community of scholars and scholarship is one of many that are grateful to him. He gave us his bequest while he was alive; we will treasure and honour it in his memory.

J. Anthony Blair Ralph H. Johnson
Hans V. Hansen Christopher W. Tindale

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