Book Review

Strategic Maneuvering in Argumentative Discourse: *Extending the Pragma-dialectical Theory of Argumentation*
by **Frans H. van Eemeren**

Review by **CHRISTOPHER W. TINDALE**

After the early years of development and clarification, the pragma-dialectical theory has for some time been a mainstay in argumentation studies. Theorists and practitioners alike are familiar with its principal notions and terminology and our students have learned to assimilate it into their studies, comparing it with other theoretical approaches and applying it where useful. For the past decade and a half, and particularly since the untimely passing of one of the theory's originators—Rob Grootendorst—pragma-dialectics has undergone a major revision (or in terms used by the author of the book under review, "extension"). With the able collaboration of Peter Houtlosser, the other originator—Frans van Eemeren—has developed the theory to incorporate important aspects of a rhetorical perspective under the title of "Strategic Maneuvering." Perspectives (like the dialectical and the logical) allow "a particular way of interpreting a phenomenon" (p. 51, n. 1), and so the rhetorical brings a richer set of conceptual lenses to pragma-dialectics. Since this work has been widely published in many venues over a number of years, people may be forgiven for thinking the current book is somewhat surplus. But they would be quite wrong to persist in such thinking.

Strategic Maneuvering in Argumentative Discourse is in many ways the most up to date and accessible account of pragma-dialectics, both in what is now called its standard form, and the extended theory. The book brings together the core of van Eemeren and Houtlosser's work, providing a full exposition of the associated ideas and, most importantly, il-

lustrating their integration in a theory that is still in transition. Since the argumentation community has also now been deprived of the talents of Peter Houtlosser, this work was completed without him. But it stands as a testament to what he brought to the field and it seems unlikely the book would have been much changed had Houtlosser lived to co-author it.

While not exactly a U-turn, the extended version does amount to a major adjustment to pragma-dialectics. Readers will be familiar with the way rhetoric was marginalized in the standard theory. As recently as 2004, van Eemeren and Grootendorst had reiterated a key point made in (1992) between reconstructions that were audience-oriented, and aimed at effectiveness, and those that were resolution-oriented, aiming at the resolution of a dispute (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004: 24; 1992: 7-8). And there had been a consistent dismissal of rhetorical staples like *ethos* and *pathos* in favour of *logos*. Now, the strategic maneuvering project brings rhetoric into the dialectical fold, quite literally. And does so on dialectic's own terms. Aristotle had spoken obscurely of rhetoric being an *antistrophos* to dialectic. Strategic maneuvering judges the relationship to be one in which rhetorical insights can be brought selectively into a dialectical framework (p. 90).

The occasion for this rapprochement is the need to bridge a gap (as the above orientations suggest) between argumentation that is reasonable and argumentation that is effective. Arguers do not only want to resolve differences of agreement, they want also to do so in terms that promote outcomes they prefer. Strategic maneuvering is a balancing act that bridges the gap. It "refers to the continual efforts made in all moves that are carried out in argumentative discourse to keep the balance between reasonableness and effectiveness" (p. 40). The dialectical ensures reasonableness (as seen through the procedures of the standard theory recapitulated in Chapter1), while the rhetorical brings the audience-oriented concerns of effectiveness from the earlier books into a full pragma-dialectical account.

Once the details of the standard theory have been rehearsed and the justification for strategic maneuvering explained in Chapter 2, the heart of the account is laid out in Chapters 3 through 6. For those already familiar with pragma-dialectics and the introduction of strategic maneuvering, these are the chapters on which to focus. In the remainder of the book, van Eemeren shows how strategic ma-

neuvering enhances the pragma-dialectical approach to core concerns like fallacies (Chapters 7 and 9) and burden of proof (Chapter 8). Chapter 10 indicates the research agenda that might still be fulfilled, as well as expressing an openness to other approaches to argumentation.

Effectiveness cannot be reduced to persuasiveness, as other rhetorical accounts may have suggested. This is because persuasiveness is limited to those parts of argumentative discourse that can be reconstructed as belonging to the argumentation stage, whereas effectiveness also applies to the confrontation, opening, and concluding stages. At each stage, arguers desire an outcome that is optimal for them (p. 45). So, the analysts may look at the choices arguers make at each stage and provide a more extensive analysis that determines when strategic maneuvering is acceptable and when not.

These choices are elaborated in Chapter 4, but not before the van Eemeren provides the valuable service in Chapter 3 of traveling back through the dialectical and rhetorical traditions, exploring reasonable argumentative discourse in the classical and modern accounts of dialectic, and effective argumentative discourse in classical and modern accounts of rhetoric. The results are admittedly uneven, but in a positive sense that allows the author to determine how he will resolve some of the debates that persist and to clarify how the dialectical and rhetorical perspectives operate in strategic maneuvering.

In Chapter 4 we are introduced to the central strategic maneuvering triangle of topical potential, audience demand, and presentational device. These are effectively three types of choice made in maneuvering. There are, for example, many options available to an arguer in making her or his moves at various stages in a discourse, and these are captured in the idea of "topical potential." I may decide that my interests are best served by adopting analogical reasoning, and I maneuver well if I employ this in a reasonable fashion. Beyond this, I also need to consider the audience, since I want an effective outcome. Adjusting the presentation of issues to the audience at the confrontation stage, for example, involves adjusting to "audience demand." Finally, we choose "presentational devices" that we judge strategically best, drawing from whatever repertoire of such devices we have available.

Van Eemeren hastens to downplay any claims to originality here, since other authors have captured all three ideas

(p. 101). Thus, there is an eclecticism to the project that underlines the selectiveness of the use of rhetorical features. But insofar as each of the triad is drawn from the tradition, a stand is taken on how what is adopted should be interpreted. In discussing topical potential, for example, van Eemeren notes that there is no agreement on how *topoi* are to be understood. But he makes good use of recent scholars like Rubinelli (2009) and Braet (2007) in exploring the state of theory and explaining how the debate is ongoing and that still further understanding of topical selection is in the future (p. 108).

Questions of audience demand require consideration of who is the intended audience dealing with problems of heterogeneity. These are difficult matters, handled here as best as anyone might expect. A distinction between primary and secondary audiences acknowledges the existence of bystanders but separates them from those who are intended. And the diversity of audience makeup encourages an arguer to "take refuge in multiple argumentation" (p. 110), addressing different arguments to different segments of an audience. If strategic maneuvering aims at the whole audience, then "all views and preferences of the audience that are pertinent to determining the starting point of the argumentative discourse must be taken into account" (p. 110). This itself can be a difficult demand on arguers, and we may need to look elsewhere for tools to assist such determinations. Once identified, these starting points are commitments an audience can be held to at later stages of an exchange, an idea that echoes the concern over such commitments in Robert Brandom's pragmatism (Brandom, 1994).

The discussion of presentational devices considers both formal and informal devices (p. 121) and draws on theorists as diverse as Paul Grice, whose Maxim of Manner can be used to achieve certain effects, albeit implicit and indirect, and Jeanne Fahnestock, whose extensive work on figures associates them both with *topoi* (as general lines of argument) and even with certain forms of argument themselves (p. 125). Choice of presentational device in agreement with topical choices and those that adjust to audience demand reduces to the "framing" of argumentative moves in a communicatively and interactionally functional way" (p. 119).

Although not all communicative activity types are argumentative, those that are are important to strategic maneuvering, and Chapter 5 explores this importance. Commu-

nicative activity types need to be distinguished from communicative *activities*, like deliberation. The focus is on activity types like those that are legal, political, interpersonal, scholarly, medical, commercial, problem-solving, and diplomatic. And they can all be defined by the goals involved (p. 144). For example, the political activity type aims at democracy, while the legal at justice.

Once again, there are precedents in the tradition for ideas such as these. They are closely compared to Walton and Krabbe's dialogue types as contexts of conversational argument, and even to Bakhtin's speech genres. But also again, they remedy problems found in their earlier counterparts such as the unclear theoretical status of Walton and Krabbe's concept of dialogue type (p. 134).

In Chapter 6, a further set of parameters governing strategic maneuvering is illustrated through the analysis of the Shell advertorial regarding its role in Nigeria in 1995. These parameters involve the results that can be achieved in making specific moves, the routes taken to achieve them, the constraints imposed by the institutional context, and the commitments of the parties defining the argumentative situation. In the Shell case, for example, van Eemeren shows how "at each of the four stages of its argumentative discourse, Shell strategically uses the available topical potential, adapts its message to the views and preferences of the audience, and exploits certain presentational devices" (p. 168). He then determines the strategic function of the argumentative moves pertinent to his analysis by concentrating on the results Shell aspires to, the routes available for achieving them, the institutional constraints conveyed through the properties of the activity type involved, and the commitments expressed through the argumentative situation. As before, in the discussions of these ideas earlier theorists are invoked and revised. Lloyd Bitzer's concern with constraints in his examination of the rhetorical situation is a case in point (pp. 180-182).

The pragma-dialectical theory of fallacies—that a fallacy is any violation of one or more of the rules governing a critical discussion—is now familiar in the field. This theory is rehearsed in Chapter 7, along with other accounts of fallacies. We then learn what strategic maneuvering contributes to the study and understanding of fallacies. Fallacy judgments depend on the activity type involved and thus are always contextual (p. 198). When effectiveness overrules reasonableness we have a derailment. But these can be difficult

to identify because each fallacy has a sound counterpart. In a veiled allusion to C.L. Hamblin's famous definition, fallacies here are "strategic maneuvers that seem to comply with the critical discussion rules but in fact do not" (p. 199). The details of the strategic maneuvering project are thus deemed to better explain how fallacies work in practice, how they deceive in part because of their similarity to legitimate instances. Determining a fallacy in any case is contextual, based on a prior understanding of clear cases of sound strategic maneuvering (p. 202), and the chapter closes with some illustrations of this, including the Shell advertorial.

A further nuance to our understanding of the pragma-dialectical treatment of fallacies is provided in Chapter 9. Taking inconsistency as something that can have legitimate and fallacious instances, and exploring it through some complex cases, van Eemeren entertains the question of whether fallacies can be repaired. He believes they can, and after looking at similar attempts in the work of Erik Krabbe and Scott Jacobs, he provides a solution for re-railing what has been derailed by adopting a middle position between those of these two theorists. The party who detects the fallacy assumes the other still wants to resolve the difference between them and so points out that the other party's "strategic maneuvering as regards *this issue*, in response to *this opponent*, and *presented in this way* has *in this case* derailed" (p. 260). The party then continues this sub-discussion so that a re-railment is brought about that brings the discussion back on track (p. 261). Strictly speaking, it is the dialogue that is repaired rather than the fallacy, which retains its incorrectness and thus must be maneuvered around.

The above account of the book does not cover all the themes and details provided. There is no room to consider the treatment of burden of proof in Chapter 8, for example. But enough has been relayed to indicate the coherence of the various elements of strategic maneuvering as a theoretical extension to pragma-dialectics. It is made quite clear that the research is ongoing and several aspects need further refinement and development. There are also many points at which the theoretical work of other theorists is challenged in a constructive way in order to point to revisions that strategic maneuvering can adopt.

A testament to the richness and importance of a theory is the range of critical debates it inaugurates, and there will be more than a few issuing here. We may question, for example, how innovative the theory really is and whether

there is the need to repeatedly recast ideas in new terms. As it is often observed in the text, much of it is original in its expression or naming, not in its nature. The issue of choice is an important one to stress and explore. Too often, students are presented with argumentation that is ready-made and asked only to evaluate it. They rarely have a sense of how that argumentation came about and, most importantly, the different possibilities that would have been available to the arguers and the reasons they took the routes they did. The attention to choice shifts the focus onto to participants' decision making at each stage of an exchange. But the theorists who have approached questions of choice all seem to do so in very similar ways. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) provided a similar triad to the one used here, with, for example, communion capturing the sense of audience demand. And van Eemeren recognizes that the triad has been studied by other authors (p. 101). Now we have the new language of topical potential, audience demand, and presentational device. But we may be left wondering how much we really needed new terminology to capture previous ideas. Chapter 10 extends an implicit invitation to others, welcoming what is happening in other approaches and the inspiration of critical exchanges. "Therefore, regular contacts need to be maintained with fellow argumentation theorists representing other approaches" (p. 265). It is heartening to see no tendency toward insularity. But this openness might also be advanced on the level of more agreements in terminology and meanings.

Furthermore, while strategic maneuvering claims to be selective in what it adopts from rhetoric, some remarks and discussions tend to contradict this. Throughout the book the reader might wonder what is not taken from the full rhetorical ledger. Indeed, the question of *ethos*, one of those features so readily marginalized in the standard theory, is often raised, sometimes under the guise of other language. This is most readily apparent in the analysis of strategic maneuvering in the Shell advertorial. There are references to Shell creating an image and maintaining it. References that speak of the company enhancing its credibility by emphasizing its knowledge and respect for truth (p. 173). Then, there is an explicit mention of the wish to "enhance its humanitarian ethos" (p. 174). The Carlsberg and *Trouw* examples in Chapter 8 receive a similar aside. The language used by the two entities is judged to advance evaluative standpoints and suggest objective justification for them. But an accompany-

ing footnote observes: "Another rhetorical function of this phrasing could, of course, be raising Carlsberg's and *Trouw*'s ethos" (p. 240, n. 45). This all points to the recognition of an alternative rhetorical reading of the examples, using terms from the rhetorical tradition which have not been explicitly adopted in the language of strategic maneuvering. This is more explicitly admitted in an earlier comment, also marginalized in a footnote. In the midst of Chapter 4's discussion of the strategic maneuvering triad, we are alerted to the following, apparently favorable, note: "In Fahnestock's view, the first two aspects of strategic maneuvering, topical selection and adaptation to audience demand, link to *logos* and *pathos*; the second aspect "could be expanded to include how rhetors construct themselves as well as their audiences in their language choices, thereby projecting an *ethos* appropriate to the occasion and heir goals"' (p. 96, n. 4). Indeed, this expansion is exactly what strategic maneuvering is shown to include in the key examples of the later chapters. The note concludes with a more telling remark from Fahnestock: "In short, the complete rhetorical canon may be useful in the pragma-dialectical pursuit of how meeting rhetorical goals can still satisfy dialectical demands" (Fahnestock, 2009:211). If Fahnestock is right—and van Eemeren in reporting of this insight without comment would seem to agree—then strategic maneuvering is not as selective in its adoption of rhetoric as claimed.

Perhaps this further accommodation of the rhetorical is what awaits strategic maneuvering as research on it continues. The final Chapter of the book encourages such open thinking. One of the announced areas for further research is "the use of values and value hierarchies in strategic maneuvering" (p. 267), and there will be much in the rhetorical cannon (and from modern rhetorical theorists) that could contribute to this. All this bodes well for a theory that seemed at once turned in on itself but has now found an avenue to expand and advance and become even more able to accommodate argumentation in its natural environments. We may quibble about the exact relationship that should exist between the dialectical and rhetorical perspectives, but that there is wide agreement on a relationship at all can be judged a move in the right direction. *Strategic Maneuvering in Argumentative Discourse* is a welcome addition to a growing number of standard texts in argumentation theory. It should replace earlier books as the one to use when teaching both the standard and extended theories. And with that in

mind, we might hope John Benjamins sees fit to offer a cheaper paperback version in the near future.

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