What do Normative Approaches to Argumentation Stand to Gain from Rhetorical Insights

Zenker, Frank

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What Do Normative Approaches to Argumentation Stand to Gain

from Rhetorical Insights?[1]

Frank Zenker

Abstract

This article appropriates Thomas Conley's (1990) four classical positions on the nature and function of rhetoric, and assesses their relevance vis-à-vis three contemporary normative approaches to argumentation: the epistemological approach, pragma-dialectical theory, and informal logic. In each case, the room for the integration of rhetorical insights into argument evaluation is found to be restricted by dialectical and logico-epistemic norms endorsed in these approaches. Moreover, when rhetorical insights could fit the so restricted room, then the reliability and the specificity of such insights remain inversely related, with methodologically well-hardened knowledge of what persuades remaining too general. The trade-off between reliability and specificity of suasory knowledge, or so is our thesis, undermines the claim that rhetorical insights can presently inform the evaluation of natural language arguments in these three normative approaches.

Keywords: epistemological approach, informal logic, pragma-dialectics, reliability, specificity, suasory knowledge

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Introduction

Rhetorical analyses typically characterize structural, topical, and stylistic features of written or spoken argumentative text, and may also consider the context of interaction as well as the epistemic and social standing of participants as these relate to the goals of gaining, sustaining, and strengthening an audience's adherence to a thesis or a course of action. Such considerations, broadly conceived, are taken to constitute *rhetorical insights*, insofar as they bear on effecting audience persuasion or, for that matter, fail to do so.

In the following, I am concerned with the question what a normative approach to argumentation may stand to gain from rhetorical insights. First, I follow Thomas Conley (1990) and lay out the four classical positions on the nature and function of rhetoric that are associated with the names of Gorgias, Protagoras-Isocrates, Aristotle, and Plato, respectively. Then I assess their relevance for three approaches to argumentation: the epistemological approach, pragma-dialectical theory, and informal logic. I argue that the relevance of rhetorical insights for these approaches varies depending on assumptions as to the accessibility of factual and moral truths. Consequently, rhetoric either pertains to the effective transmission of such truths to audiences (in these instances, rhetoric may be subordinated to or treated as an equal to dialectic and logic) or rhetoric is *total* in the sense of informing, and being informed by, all aspects of decision and world making. Adopting a proposal by William Harpine (2004), I conclude with a discussion of the reliability of suasory devices, suggesting that reliable insights into what counts as persuasive remain overgeneral. The resulting trade-off between reliability and the specificity of suasory knowledge undermines the claim that rhetorical insights can inform the evaluation of natural language arguments in the three normative approaches discussed here.

Four Classical Positions

The four classical positions are associated with the names of Gorgias, Protagoras-Isocrates, Aristotle, and Plato. Conley describes the nature of each position as motivistic, controversial, problematic, and dialectical, respectively, labeling their functions as audience manipulation, consensus, situated persuasion, and truth transmission, respectively (1990, 23). Building on Conley's work, I adopt his proposal that we view the history of rhetoric "as the story of the elaboration and rearticulation through the ages of the four basic models . . . in classical Greek thinking about the nature and function of persuasive discourse" (1990, 24).

Having arisen in the fourth and fifth centuries BC, the four positions are divided on the question of whether moral or factual truth is within human reach, the Platonic and Aristotelian view being that it is and the Gorgian-Protogorean position being that it is not. They also differ, among other ways, with respect to whether the audience takes an active role in the suasory process (fig. 1).

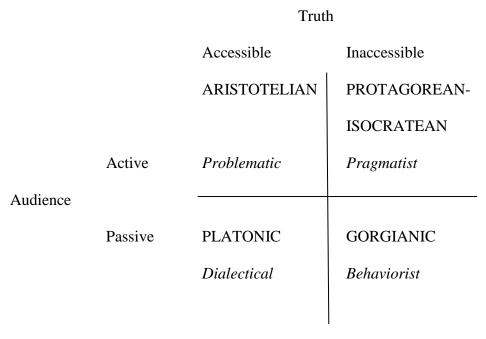|	Truth	
	Accessible	Inaccessible
	ARISTOTELIAN	PROTAGOREAN-ISOCRATEAN
Active	*Problematic*	*Pragmatist*
Passive	PLATONIC	GORGIANIC
	Dialectical	*Behaviorist*

Audience (Active / Passive)

Fig. 1. Four Classical Positions on Rhetoric

The Aristotelian position can be distinguished from the Platonic, among others, in that it allows for various forms of knowledge (e.g., of universals, of the probable, of particulars), while the Platonic recognizes knowledge of universal forms (accessed through insight or recollection). For Plato, rhetoric is the handmaiden of dialectic, the latter term naming a method, indeed an *art*, by which truth (including its moral variant) might be obtained. Exploiting the similarities, discovered through dialectical reasoning, between an audience's extant attitudes and beliefs (*endoxa*) and these truths, rhetoric enables knowledge of such truths to be instilled in various audiences (Murray 1988, 286). On the Aristotelian view, dialectic is concerned with knowledge of universals (given as collections of *endoxa* that together withstand critical scrutiny), while rhetoric deals with knowledge of particulars, the probable, and with human opinion. Here, the terms "rhetoric" and "dialectic" can stand for two ways of accessing and treating (fallible) truths. So, contrary to the Platonic view, both may count as arts (Rapp 2010).

With admissible simplification, Plato's lover of wisdom has insights into universal forms (ideas), then seeks to communicate these to a largely passive audience in ways the latter can grasp. By virtue of also possessing forms of knowledge (e.g., via imagination, the senses, or reasoning), an Aristotelian audience is active. It reacts to a speaker, and speakers will seek to adapt their arguments to their audiences' attitudes and dispositions. Similarly, on the Protagorean-Isocratean model, speakers interact with the audience. But since it rejects claims to knowledge, this position reduces more or less to the idea that uncoerced consensus comes about *only if* an audience's various *endoxa* are successfully addressed. At the most extreme end, the Gorgianic position leaves truth inaccessible from the start and views all *doxa* as being equally contestable. With neither speaker nor audience members having access to truth, the audience degrades to a potentiality, to a set of attitudes to be moved by the rhetor.

With respect to these distinctions, the Aristotelian position emerges as the richest, since it remains sensitive to various forms of knowledge, to the intellectual and political constitution of audiences, and to the context of interaction. Conley describes the nature of the Aristotelian position as problematic because it is informed by the way language users adapt to situated constraints arising from their fallible epistemological condition and their differential social standing, as well as from the matter at hand. Lacking evaluative standards other than the de facto assent of audiences, the Gorgianic position amounts to a stimulus-response behaviorism. The Protagorean-Isocratean position can be construed as a Machiavellian operationalization of the consensus-seeking process characteristic of political deliberation, likewise unable to qualitatively evaluate a consensus other than in nonepistemic ways. Plato's position, finally, appears as an elitist truth-driven one.

The four positions in place, in the next section I lay out the main question of this article and then assess the relevance of these positions for the three contemporary normative approaches to argumentation.

Relevance for Argumentation Studies

A set of modern terms for the classical positions might be "relativist" (Gorgias), "pragmatist" (Protagoras-Isocrates), "contextual" (Aristotle), and "idealist" (Plato). When read from left to right, the four terms yield an ordinal scale that measures the increasing impact of nonsituated evaluative standards of argumentation. This scale can provide a rough measure of the impact of epistemological and moral standards on the normative evaluation of natural language argumentation. To the left of the Platonic position, ever stronger views on the (relativistic) rhetoric-as-epistemic thesis are possible, once knowledge of ideas (Plato) and universals (Aristotle) is no longer assumed.

Since empirical knowledge depends on conceptual knowledge, and because conceptual knowledge proves open to revision, epistemological positions to the left of the Platonic are characteristic of modern humankind. Further, though many take mathematical knowledge to be exceptionally stable, moral views have changed throughout history and differ widely in open and pluralistic societies. It may now have become clearer that—unless ideal normative standards (such as premise truth) can be presupposed—scholars dealing with rhetorical insights in the normative evaluation of natural language argumentation face the question of how far left of Plato one has moved epistemologically speaking. In addressing this question, I assume that reconstructions of argumentation (e.g., on a purely descriptive, or reconstructive, approach) matter but that the norms of argument evaluations count more. If so, then another way of phrasing this question is which of the four basic rhetorical positions is compatible with which of the three major approaches to argumentation, given the extant normative evaluative standards endorsed in each approach?

With this question in mind, we now turn to the epistemological approach to argumentation, to the extended version of pragma-dialectical theory, and to the informal logic approach. As each of these accounts endorses *some* norms of good argumentation, the result will be a comprehensive overview of several limitations of rhetorical insights in the evaluation of argumentation set by three reasonably influential contemporary approaches.

The Epistemological Approach

Epistemological approaches to argumentation generally see the purpose of argumentation as the promotion of true belief and the avoidance of error. Their proponents tend to evaluate argumentation primarily with respect to how well it serves as a communicative means in support of this aim. Authors such as Alvin Goldman (1994, 1999, 2003), Harvey Siegel and

John Biro (1997), and the contributors to the special issues of *Informal Logic* edited by

Christoph Lumer (2005, 2006) endorse standards of argumentation intended to secure that

justification, or warrant, can transfer from premises to conclusions and from speakers to

audiences and do so correctly (e.g., a subjective, or an internal, warrant for a proposition *p*

will not suffice to justify *p* objectively, or externally). For instance, Goldman endorses rules

such as "a speaker should assert a premise only if she believes it" (1994, 34) and is justified

in believing it. Similarly, she should assert a conclusion only if it is strongly supported by

such premises, and she justifiably believes this to be so (1994, 34). Such rules may be

understood as explicating speakers' objective or subjective duties, which in each case are

motivated by the "fundamental goal of argumentative discourse," namely, "to persuade

people (of truths)" (1994, 37).

Typical of an epistemological approach is the explicit prohibition of attempts at

deceiving an audience, for example, Goldman's rule 5 is that "a speaker is not allowed to

assert any proposition with the primary intention of inducing her audience to infer a further

proposition that she herself believes to be false" (1994, 37), which echoes the Platonic

position.[b] As for dialectical norms, Goldman explicitly endorses an arguer's responsiveness

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[b] The phrase "primary intention" is loaded. Plato's position in the *Republic* allows for the

elite to *simplify* the truth without that simplification constituting a case of deception, although

successful acts of deceiving continue to require a speaker to communicate to a hearer what is

untrue, or false. It may be permissible to knowingly deceive, that is, lie (stating *p* while

knowing *p* to be false, with the intent of making the hearer believe that *p* is true), for instance,

when one's interlocutor, if undeceived, would probably act in harmful ways. The example

from the *Republic* concerns the case of one person exasperatedly asking another to return a

dagger he had lent that will then probably be used to stab someone else. Here, one may

to pressing objections as a quality standard of argumentation (1994, 41). In contrast, his rules for the retraction of a premise or a conclusion are based on the speaker having lost belief in that premise or having lost justification for it (1994, 42).

What about rhetorical aspects? Perhaps unsurprisingly, the role assigned to audience adaptation is Platonic. For Goldman, "good argumentation not only embodies a strong support relation but is rhetorically effective in enabling the audience to 'see' this relation" (1994, 39), echoing the view that rhetoric serves in the *communication* of justified belief. Goldman further allows for a distinction between *personal* and *social justification* such that speakers may be personally epistemically justified in believing a given proposition to be true but, for various reasons, may remain unable to defend this proposition successfully with some audience. So audience assent for *p* and being justified in believing *p* remain independent.

This independence is evidence that an epistemological approach to argumentation, of which Goldman's is a concise and explicit example, assigns to rhetoric (and the insights it provides) the role of the handmaiden of truth. To assign a greater importance to rhetoric would require modifying some of the conditions centered on objective or subjective justification. For instance, it may be contingently true that a speaker would be more successful in gaining an audience's assent for *p* by supporting *p* not with what that speaker is objectively justified in believing but with what the audience is subjectively justified in believing (Rescorla 2009). Clearly, if the speaker knows the audience's justification to be deficient, this move—though potentially effective in securing assent for *p*—flouts the aim of promoting truth and avoiding error.

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legitimately though falsely state that the dagger was stolen. I thank an anonymous reviewer for attending to this important distinction.

Pragma-dialecticians have recently elaborated their theory of argumentation (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004), seeking to integrate rhetorical insights into it while maintaining its dialectical norms of reasonableness (Van Eemeren 2010). These dialectical norms have more or less remained those that had originally been laid out with respect to the context of a critical discussion relative to four discussion stages.[c] Violations of any norm in a given discussion stage are interpreted as *fallacious* moves in the pragmatic sense of hindering, or frustrating, a resolution of a difference of opinion on the merits. The movement to integrate rhetorical insights into pragma-dialectical theory has created a space for acts of *strategic maneuvering* (Van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2003), a space that varies to an extent with the argumentative activity types that the theory distinguishes.

Strategic maneuvering will manifest itself in three ways: in the speaker's selection from the topical potential of a situation, the way the speaker adapts to audiences, and in the rhetorical devices employed. A fallacious argumentative move is functionally explained in terms of the goal conflict that occurs when the rhetorical goal (deciding a difference of opinion in one's favor) takes precedence over the dialectical goal (maintaining the appearance of reasonableness). This way of integrating rhetorical insights into the theory does not affect the dialectical norms, although the extent to which and the manner in which participants endorse these norms may de facto be differentially constrained in each activity type. Hence, the analyst's evaluative verdict—her reasonableness judgment concerning some argumentative act—does not change either.

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[c] The changes to the originally seventeen and, as of 2004, fifteen pragma-dialectical rules are traced in Zenker 2007.

This way of subordinating rhetoric to dialectic differs from the Platonic conception. Rather than truth or validity, the pertinent evaluative norm in the pragma-dialectical theory is the discussants' *mutual acceptability* of the premises and of the argumentation schemes in which these premises feature. Other than a commitment to critical rationalism (which assumes the principled argumentative testability of standpoints), epistemological norms—such as premise truth, total evidence, unbiased samples, or forms of logical validity—are absent and so cannot feature as norms for argument evaluation. In particular—and unlike the epistemological approach—no sincerity norm constrains the premises and conclusions speakers may utter. The absence of such norms regularly incurs criticism (e.g., Siegel and Biro 2008; see also Garssen and van Laar 2010) because a pragma-dialectically licensed argumentative resolution of a difference of opinion may instantiate a mere consensus rather than an epistemically grounded agreement.

The criticism being similar to that which Plato raised against (his view of) the Sophists, it suggests that other ways of integrating rhetorical insights into the standard pragma-dialectical theory are unavailable. Anything but assigning rhetoric a subordinated role (governed by dialectic) would require a modification of some extant pragma-dialectical norm. The integration of rhetorical insights into pragma-dialectical theory, a theory built on participatory openness and the contingent acceptedness of premises and argumentation schemes but without norms that promote truth or error avoidance in the resolution of differences of opinion, amounts to the adoption of an explanation of why a discussant behaved dialectically unreasonable (according to the norms of the theory) on some speech occasion (Van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2003, 398–99). Pragma-dialectics is thus close to the Protagorean-Isocratean position (which aims at consensus), with the important qualification that it seeks to theoretically promote a consensus under a dialectical conception of reasonableness, not an epistemological one.

A possible way for the pragma-dialectical theory to further integrate rhetorical insights might be for it to estimate the space between remaining within the bounds of dialectical reasonableness and optimizing on the rhetorical goal of deciding a difference of opinion in one's favor. One might then be able to rhetorically qualify the space for strategic maneuvering by evaluating which among a class of dialectically permissible maneuvers is the *optimal* one. We return to this possibility below, when it will have become pertinent to ask if knowledge of optimal maneuvers is in fact available.

Informal Logic

I focus here on the evaluative component of informal logic, ignoring its contributions to understanding the nature of argument, the structure of argument, how best to display that structure, and so forth. A set of evaluative criteria originally introduced by Ralph H. Johnson and J. Anthony Blair in informal logic comprises the triad of relevance, sufficiency, acceptability (RSA) and its cognates, such as good grounds (1983, 29). The RSA criteria are shared widely among proponents of informal logic. They were proposed as alternatives to the soundness criterion (comprising premise truth and deductive logical validity) in the wake of the observation that soundness yields neither a necessary nor a sufficient criterion for good arguments, especially not for defeasible ones (Blair 1997). In their standard interpretation (see, e.g., Blair 1997 and 2009 and Hitchcock 2000), the three evaluative criteria are *not* intended to cover a process-interpretation of argument. Their intended interpretation is what Wenzel (1990) calls "argument-as-product," a notion that primarily includes other arguments and not so much other arguers.

Following Blair, the RSA criteria can best be thought of as "placeholders for whatever version and standards [of evaluation] . . . are appropriate for the particular situation

in question" (1997, 42). So they function as contextually applicable criteria, with their normative content remaining adaptable to specific contexts. For instance, the relevance and the sufficiency criterion may serve to point out objections and criticisms within the dialectical environment (Johnson 2008). And the acceptability criterion may be read as a version of the truth criterion adapted to everyday human use, contexts in which (for instance, that of moral reasoning) premise truth judgments remain problematic, often making the recourse to intuitions a last resort. In less problematic contexts, however, the truth criterion may well serve to ground the acceptability criterion (Johnson 2000), since not accepting a proposition that is known to be true amounts to an irrational response to evidence.

The acceptability criterion is perhaps the most amenable to being integrated with rhetorical insights, as it opens the analysis to a particular speech situation and to an active audience. In fact, the entire triad of terms can be and they currently are being reoriented so as to allow them to become more sensitive to rhetorical insights, notably by Christopher Tindale (1999, 2004), who takes the rhetorical standpoint as basic and hence sees it as informing logic and dialectic. In this respect, the development of informal logic partly mirrors that of pragma-dialectical theory. Left of Plato, argument evaluation requires that the RSA criteria—even in their product-oriented interpretation—remain applicable vis-à-vis a situated context of argumentation. Their normative content may perhaps be spelled out context independently (e.g., in the case of relevance), but any normative evaluation will apply to a particular argument under recourse to background information. This background is de facto restricted by the analyst's knowledge of the dialectical environment, namely, of the objections and criticisms that participants, or reflective knowledgeable analysts, can forward against some argument product. In each case, the critical questions associated with a given argumentation scheme (Walton, Reid, and Macagno 2008) guide analysts in assessing the dialectical

environment. But these questions will not produce, or force, evaluations independently of being applied in a context.

What could appear as an undesirable flexibility in the RSA criteria now proves to be beneficial. After all, this flexibility allows for evaluative verdicts to vary, first, according to how the RSA criteria are interpreted and, second, according to how the normative contents of these interpreted criteria are weighed in coming to an overall evaluation of the argumentation (but see Blair 2012 for a criticism of similar ideas).[d] Upon separating considerations of argument-as-product (evaluated by an ideal interlocutor) from those of situated arguments (by which speakers attempt to gain, sustain, or strengthen the assent of particular audiences), one may obtain an audience-directed, or an audience-relative, interpretation of the RSA criteria. For instance, using the acceptability criterion one might ask *for which audience* these premises were acceptable and likewise for the relevance and sufficiency criteria. In principle, then, argument evaluation according to the RSA criteria may yield different results depending on the interpretation used.

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[d] For instance, what an analyst deems a dialectically adequate argument-as-product may not automatically secure *any* audience's adherence to its conclusion. Further, logically sufficient support of a thesis, even with acceptable premises, may leave some objections—and thus, audiences not endorsing these premises—unaddressed. Social policy argumentation is a case in point (Zenker 2010). Likewise, the relevance of premises or argument schemes differs when viewed under standards of argument-as-product and when viewed vis-à-vis audiences and contexts: some premises may be stated *twice*, and premises are always presented *in some order*. Neither consideration meets with the requisite sensitivity when arguments are evaluated as products, where premise repetition comes out as a form of irrelevance (redundancy), and the order of premises may as well be arbitrary (free permutation).

The ability to explain why some act of arguing is less than perfect whenever analysts can detail objections and criticisms not successfully dealt with (as these are identified from the perspective of an ideal interlocutor/evaluator) is probably the key contribution that analysis and evaluation offer to the context in which argumentation arises. By and large, this contribution presently consists in pointing out where, why, and how arguers fall short of *dialectical adequacy*.[e] With a rhetorical reinterpretation of the RSA criteria, one may moreover explain why some acts of arguing *are what they are*. So the informal logic approach gains power by explaining why, despite some infelicity or deficiency (as identified on the first interpretation of the RSA criteria), *exactly this* argumentative act rather than another took place. For such explanations—insofar as they build on considerations of the audience's disposition to the speaker, the situation, and the subject matter—rhetorical insights appear to become a necessary ingredient.

Compared to the pragma-dialectical theory (where the integration of rhetorical insights serves to explain why less than perfect acts of arguing occur), however, the *exact* role of rhetorical considerations within the informal logic approach is currently not entirely clear. It appears plausible to use the two interpretations of the RSA criteria I have described side-by-side so as to arrive, on the one hand, at an evaluation of the argument-as-product that can be drawn on to assess the quality of an argument vis-à-vis its dialectical environment (to the extent that analysts are familiar with it) and, on the other hand, at a rhetorical

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[e] Conditions of dialectical adequacy separate felicitous from infelicitous treatments of arguers' dialectical obligations. In order for these conditions to ultimately make possible or even ground a normative evaluation of actual communication processes and their design, the identity of obligations must be fixed and a context-sensitive functional analysis of how they are incurred and discharged must be developed.

interpretation of the RSA criteria that may serve to assess the quality of an argument vis-à-vis an audience, namely, the argument-as-process. After all, for each argument evaluated as inadequate relative to a dialectical environment, there is at least one audience—possibly an entirely imagined one—for which *the same* argument amounts to an adequate means of gaining, sustaining, or strengthening adherence to the conclusion in some situation. This may even hold for acts of arguing that suffer severe content problems (e.g., by trading on a contradiction or by cherry-picking on evidence). In other cases, audiences may well misjudge reality, and in yet others reality may allow for several ways of being (mis)judged. Generally, no matter how dialectically deficient an argument is, analysts can assume it to have come about because—wrongly, or not—a speaker deems that this product may gain, sustain, or strengthen audience assent.

In integrating rhetorical insights, the informal logic approach moves further left of Plato, as it becomes sensitive to the audience(s) that an act of arguing affects. If logico-epistemic and dialectical considerations continue to inform the nonrhetorical part of argument evaluation, informal logic seems to remain at the Aristotelian position. So, as in the case of pragma-dialectics, rhetorical considerations do not change the evaluative verdict. Rather, they contribute to explanations why an act of arguing occurred as it did by referring to the speaker's persuasive intent with respect to the audience's assent to a thesis or a course of action.

Summary

With respect to argument evaluation, I hope to have illustrated that the room for an integration of rhetorical insights into these three (primarily nonrhetorical) normative approaches to argumentation is constrained, or limited, by extant logico-epistemic and

dialectical evaluative norms. Under these constraints, such rhetorical insights currently contribute to explaining the occurrence of argumentative acts by recurring to the speaker's assessment of an audience's cognitive capacity or its political constitution, that is, the values an audience endorses and the hierarchy that structures these values.

Adopting the three key terms of the extended version of pragma-dialectical theory, such explanations may recur (i) to the speaker's choice of argumentative strategies from the topical potential—classically termed "inventio"—including the classical means of persuasion (*logos*, *ethos*, *pathos*); (ii) to the speaker's adaptation to the constitution of the (primary, secondary, mixed, or the universal) audience; and (iii) to the speaker's use of rhetorical devices, standardly classified under aspects of style and codified in that part of rhetoric that concerns arrangement and delivery.

This constellation currently leaves to rhetorical insights no greater role in argument evaluation, unless estimating the availability of better ways of packaging a message fall under argument evaluation, which is normally not the case. The assent of an audience is no normative quality criterion at all on the epistemological approach. If an audience does de facto assent, then on the pragma-dialectical view, it does so reasonably if analysts find that a set of dialectical rules has been obeyed and from the perspective of informal logic, it does so legitimately if analysts find the speaker to have satisfactorily negotiated the dialectical environment.

Rhetoric as Deliberative and Rhetoric as Epistemic

Rhetorical insights might contribute more to normative evaluations of argumentation if a strong case could be made that acts of arguing *need not* be evaluated primarily as to their remaining within the bounds set by dialectical, logical, and epistemological norms, widely

understood. Further to the left of Plato is the domain of *genuinely* rhetorical argumentation, which has been claimed to be that part of discursive reality where a clash of moral and political values is inevitable (e.g., Kock 2009 and Meyer 2010). Farthest to the left, rhetoric has even been claimed to *create knowledge* rather than serve to communicate it well (Scott 1967). We now turn to these views.

The Deliberative as the Genuine Domain of Rhetoric

On the view presented by Christian Kock (2009), scholars of argumentation have tended to misconceive rhetoric's role when seeking to confine it to the discovery and the artful deployment of the means by which a speaker achieves her suasory goal of winning the audience's assent. In the domain of rhetorical argumentation, Kock argues, in deliberations over actions—that is, choices, say, between tea or coffee, high or low taxes, peace or war— the truth predicate no longer applies. Because "proposals and choices cannot be 'true,' and do not aspire to it" (2009, 76) in the sense that "in principle, none of the opposing standpoints in a deliberative [discourse] can ever possess truth" (2009, 76), it follows that "two opposite standpoints may both be legitimate and reasonable" and hence that "neither debater may be dialectically compelled to retract his standpoint and agree with the other" (2009, 73). Kock provides ample textual evidence that "a strong and unbroken tradition of rhetorical thinking from Aristotle until the present sees rhetoric as defined by its domain: issues of choice in the civic sphere, where the adherence of other individuals may be worked upon and perhaps gained" (2009, 77).

If the foregoing is accepted, then the adherence of an audience—for example, the assent of the majority in democracies or of the powerful or the learned in elite societies—is the *sole* quality criterion of good argumentation in the deliberative domain. On our measure

of rhetorical positions, we now reach the Protagorean-Isocratean or the Gorgianic position, depending on whether the audience's *endoxa* can ground a resistance to a speaker's persuasive attempts, which may sometimes (Protagoras-Isocrates) or always (Gorgias) be overcome. The Aristotelian position, in contrast, recognizes that "choice is not true or false" (see Kock 2009, 75) but also takes some moral values to be superior to, or more important than, others. Kock's view is thus that rhetoric can be characterized as Aristotelian insofar as it admits that deliberative discourse may witness conflicts between the *highest values*, that is, genuine moral dilemmas (Meyer 2010). Absent such genuine dilemmas, the hierarchy of values that are established de facto will, as in the Protagorean-Isocratean position (where such hierarchies are viewed as contingent malleable facts), constitute some form of motivated resistance to persuasive attempts. Trivially then, those seeking to sustain the entrenched order of values tend to gain the assent of conservative audiences, and those arguing for policies that bring (radical) change to the establishment tend to win favors among those hoping to improve their socioeconomic status.

It is hard to see how the three normative approaches to argumentation I have been considering could profit from such insights. Kock correctly points out the importance of the deliberative genre for the (historical) understanding of rhetoric, including the criticisms of, among others, Plato, Böthius, Locke, and Kant of what they took to be the Sophistic positions. However, it is less clear what a normative approach to argumentation stands to gain from acknowledging that, in the practical domain, one either caters to the established order of values or attacks it or else—in the case of a conflict between the highest values—produces an *inevitable* episode of tragedy, in each case seeking to please (at least) one's primary audience. Faced with such insights (and with the empirical realities that by and large seem to support Kock's view), proponents of *normative* approaches may feel forced to diagnose a naturalistic fallacy. And they might add that the social reality here discerned to be properly rhetorical can

appear questionable under alternative normative standards. Ultimately, with participants to deliberative contexts (e.g., politicians, lawyers, the clergy) continuing to receive training by scholars and practitioners of rhetoric—seemingly to their mutual economic advantages— the "strong and unbroken tradition of rhetorical thinking from Aristotle until the present" may be viewed as a self-perpetuating and a self-serving form of social technology.

What could inform normative approaches to argumentation (in the light of the view on the deliberative being the proper domain of rhetoric) are well-established accounts of values, or value hierarchies, having been established, maintained, or changed through acts of arguing. For such uses of argumentative language in treating objects of moral knowledge, Robert Scott has coined the phrase "rhetoric as epistemic" (1967).

Rhetoric as Epistemic

Scott's (1967, 1976, 1993) rhetoric-as-epistemic thesis conveys the idea that beyond a scholarly tradition of *rhetorica docens* (rhetoric as theory) canonizing *inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *memoria*, and *pronuntiatio* lies *rhetorica utens* (rhetoric as praxis), which although it may create not objective truth may produce a form of knowledge nevertheless. "Rhetoric aims at knowledge that is social and ethical; it has the potential of creating commitment," Scott claims, suggesting a social-constructivist view of reality to which rhetoric provides a special kind of clarity (1976, 259):

> Rhetoric may be clarifying in these senses: understanding that one's traditions are one's own, that is, are co-substantial with one's own being and that these traditions are formative in one's own living; understanding that these *traditions are malleable and that one with one's fellows may act decisively in ways that continue, extend, or*

truncate the values inherent in one's culture; and understanding that in acting

decisively that one participates in fixing forces that will continue after the purposes for

which they have been immediately instrumental and will, to some extent, bind others

who will inherit the modified traditions. Such understanding is genuinely knowing and

is knowing that becomes filled out in some particulars by participating rhetorically.

(1976, 261, emphasis mine)

In other words, Scott points out that humans tend to be committed to values

historically passed on within families, groups, and communities; that these values and the

hierarchies organizing them are dynamic; that both continuity and change are effected

through the persuasive use of language; and, finally, that understanding this aspect of our

social lives—in the sense of *knowing that it is so*—amounts to a form of knowledge

(episteme). More specifically, Scott asks "What sort of knowledge does rhetoric seek to

achieve?," answering "the understanding of what it means to be persuaded and to persuade"

(1976, 263). He perhaps seeks to make this claim more precise when he states in his

conclusion that "rhetoric may be the art of persuasion, that is, it may be seen from one angle

as a practical capacity to find means to ends on specific occasions; but rhetoric must also be

seen more broadly as a human potentiality to understand the human condition" (1976, 266).

Scott's view makes rhetoric central to all speech endeavors. His other two articles

(1967, 1993) on the topic provide an elaboration and a defense, as well as the origin of his

position. But they do not add substance to the main idea; instead, he merely regrets having

used the term "epistemic," which is easily interpreted as denoting certainty (1993, 132–33).

After all, the epistemic state of certainty excludes fallibility. His more mature position is that

in cases in which "uncertainty cannot be obviated . . . , rhetoric has a genuine role. In the

world of certainty, it does not" (1993, 133).

Following Scott comes down to acknowledging (as part of the human condition) that the realm of values is uncertain, in the sense that dynamic value hierarchies organize a plurality of values. Even when this is assumed to be de facto correct—and it is perhaps especially plausible in (post)modern times when, from small groups to societies, humans appear to polarize over a range of values and practical matters (Sunstein 2002)—dynamic value pluralism, however, will only help explain why an argumentative act came about. Thus, again, such an explanation will not serve to qualify argumentative acts other than by equating argumentative quality with audience adherence. Having reached the relativistic implications of the Protagorean-Isocratean position, and more so of the Gorgianic position, it should become plain that Scott's rhetoric-as-epistemic thesis expresses neither more nor less than self-reflective knowledge of the human condition under dynamic value pluralism. So, value hierarchies *must* be sustained—or changed, as the case may be—through acts of arguing because an ultimate, or an absolute, hierarchy of values is absent (and so cannot be appealed to in front of *any* audience), while the highest values of disparate hierarchies may clash whenever a choice of actions remains.

Even those endorsing dynamic value pluralism will presumably agree that acceptance of the idea that the realm of values is uncertain does not immediately entail that dialectical or logico-epistemic norms have *no* role to play in the evaluation of argumentation for or against some choice of action. Rather, it can remain reasonable to assume that the better argument persuades the intended audience *and* does not stray outside the bounds set by such norms. The orientation toward a practical context and toward values, as well as the assumption of dynamic value pluralism, then, do not conflict with a stance according to which good acts of arguing make *optimal* use of what (in allusion to the pragma-dialectical theory) may be called the space for strategic maneuvering. It is here, perhaps, that rhetoric—now understood in its Aristotelian characterization as providing a form of knowledge of the available means of

persuasion in a given situation—can indeed contribute insights that are valuable in the evaluation of argumentation. These insights may tell analysts whether, vis-à-vis various kinds of audiences, a speaker's persuasive attempt has *forgone* a potential advantage, in the sense of having remained a suboptimal suasory choice.[f] To assess such optimality I turn now to what Harpine (2004) in criticizing the rhetoric-as-epistemic thesis has called the reliability of suasory devices.

The Reliability of Suasory Devices

In reaction to Scott's rhetoric-as-epistemic thesis, Harpine employs the notion of reliability to propose a reorientation toward a rhetorical research program of wide social relevance. Remarking that "rhetoricians have long shown a fondness for poetic definitions" (2004, 340), Harpine criticizes the imprecision in Scott's definition of rhetoric as epistemic and argues that "rhetoric-as-epistemic theorists . . . have plenty of room to discuss the *reliability of the various argumentative and suasory* devices that rhetoricians employ and to discuss when rhetoric does and does not *reliably contribute to knowledge*" (2004, 348, emphasis mine).

So, if humans are subject to persuasion, then there will be cases in which uses of argumentative and suasory devices in deliberative contexts reliably contribute to endorsing actions and beliefs in ways that remain within the boundaries of logical, dialectical, and epistemological considerations (i.e., the boundaries of one's normative approach to

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[f] For instance, speakers may succeed in addressing their primary audience, although another audience, say, their antagonist's, may also be addressed if they have made an effort to explicate the reasons that motivate the values shared among the primary audience, or if they have engaged the concerns of the other audience.

argumentation). Notably, one may assume that there can be *more than one* correct action, and that the *suspension of belief* (in place of selecting among the beliefs on offer) can, at times, be an appropriate response to persuasive attempts. If so, then rhetoric cannot be understood as the handmaiden of truth, because this view becomes absurd once a plurality of, as it were, equally true values is assumed. The role of rhetorical insights would rather consist in informing speakers as much as analysts how to attempt audience persuasion in ways that are highly reliable, that is, that result *much* more often than not in a state of being persuaded, and in informing audiences how to react to such attempts (see Zenker 2013).

Those who deem such information irrelevant to rhetoric may consider that audiences can, at times, be ascribed a rational interest in being persuaded, for example, of carrying out an action that is good (for them), or of ceasing habits—including habits of reasoning (biases)—that are known to be risky in some contexts. If such ascriptions remain possible, then an inquiry into the reliability of argumentative and suasory devices cannot, and should not, be beyond the scope of rhetorical scholarship. Furthermore, the requisite empirical research methods and methodologies required to investigate the reliability of suasory devices had become widely available in the social sciences and parts of the humanities by the second half of the twentieth century. Alas, scholars self-identifying as rhetoricians were, and today still are, unlikely to employ such methods. With notable exceptions (e.g., Jørgensen, Kock, and Rørbech 1998), empirical inquiry into persuasion has for the most part been restricted to communication studies, psychology, and sociology (O'Keefe [2001 and 2009] provides an overview of approaches and theories). So far, the results of this inquiry seem to suggest that: "there is no single way of presenting information that guarantees persuasion. Much depends on the relations between communicator, audience, the nature of the communication, and the particular circumstances of the communication" (Billig 1996). For instance, a recent review of a two-decade empirical research program into small group communication concludes that

"the overview of our research program and allusions to the work of others, as well as the challenges discussed, underscore the important role that argument plays in group decision making processes and outcomes. Still, we are far from understanding the complexity involved in group members' argumentative practices and group products" (Seibold and Meyers 2007, 329).

Under one interpretation, such results vindicate adherents to the *rhetorica utens* tradition (e.g., Zhao 1991) who had always known or at least expected as much. "Of all a rhetorician's rules, teach nothing but to name his tools," wrote Samuel Butler in 1663 (qtd. in Sloane 2001, ix). Alternatively, our apparent lack of knowledge of the reliability of suasory devices may be accounted for along lines suggested by Daniel O'Keefe: "There is some trade-off between having a parsimonious and widely applicable general account [of persuasion] and having a maximally satisfactory account of some particular circumstances" (2001, 583). Despite all caveats under which empirical research results must be placed, O'Keefe does point to the existence of several robust elements in real-world arguments. For instance, explicit conclusions tend to be more persuasive than implicit ones; appeals to fear tend to be more persuasive when the degree of induced fear is high; one-sided messages tend to be less persuasive than refutational two-sided messages. Nevertheless, with respect to both the construction of persuasive messages and their subsequent uptake by audiences, reliable information remains *general* in the sense of suggesting broad constraints. Presently, such information does not suffice to predict the persuasive success of specific messages in particular contexts.

Insofar as the current state of knowledge of the reliability of argumentative and suasory devices is inadequate, the prospects for rhetorical insights to contribute to the evaluation of natural language argumentation vis-à-vis a normative approach are not good. I have indicated that normative approaches might stand to gain from rhetorical insights

whenever the latter assist analysts in assessing whether the space for strategic maneuvering has been used optimally or not. Such assessments will be methodologically sound to the extent that experimentally well-hardened results on persuasion are available and transfer from the laboratory to real life situations. Reservations with respect to external validity aside, one may assume that the variety of real-life argumentative situations will, for some time to come, surpass the range of models studied under controlled experimental conditions.

Conclusion

In this article, I have discussed three normative approaches to argumentation: the epistemological approach, the pragma-dialectical theory, and informal logic, arguing that they provide limited room for the integration of rhetorical insights, because they all submit natural language argumentation to evaluation under some set of logico-epistemic or dialectical norms, widely understood. It is the application of these norms that supports analysts' judgments as to the quality of some act of arguing. Unless the norms apply independently of audience considerations (as in the epistemological approach), the audience's adherence to be effected by such acts is always constrained by dialectical or logico-epistemic normative factors. Further, I have argued, these constraints may remain in place even if the *genuinely rhetorical* is located in deliberative contexts, under the assumptions of dynamic value pluralism or relativism.

    Theorists of normative approaches to argumentation who seek to assign a more important role to rhetorical insights in the evaluation of natural language argumentation vis-à-vis a normative approach appear to find their strongest opponent among those who take rhetoric to be praxis (e.g., Zhao 1991)—a praxis that does not easily yield to theorists' attempts at systematic generalization in order to achieve predictive power. Nevertheless,

there is reason to expect methodologically well-hardened facts as to the reliability of suasory devices to be available in *some* region of the interface between the general and the specific. Such empirical knowledge, however, is not currently nurtured by rhetoricians.

To the extent that they are robust and available, then, rhetorical insights may be useful to normative approaches for explaining why particular acts of arguing arise via a consideration of the context and the audience(s) addressed. In particular, such insights could contribute to assessing whether a speaker has chosen optimally or not, that is, whether the most has been made out of the space *not* normatively constrained. However, I have also argued on the grounds of empirical results that, presently, robust insights into the reliability of argumentative and suasory devices tend to remain *general*. So they can mostly not serve in assessing whether a given *specific* communicative choice is the optimal suasory means for a given context.

The resulting trade-off between reliability and specificity of rhetorical knowledge undermines the claim that rhetorical insights can presently inform the evaluation of natural language arguments in the three normative approaches discussed here.

Department of Philosophy and Cognitive Science

Lund University

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