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Revisiting the Logical/Dialectical/Rhetorical Triumvirate

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ABSTRACT: Many argumentation theorists have adopted the view that argumentation may be approached from three different perspectives: the logical, the dialectical and the rhetorical—which I refer to as the Triumvirate.). According to Wenzel (1990), the conceptual foundation for this Triumvirate is the distinction between argumentation as product, as process and as procedure (the Tripartite Distinction.). In this paper, I want to raise questions about the Triumvirate View and the Tripartite Distinction on which it is based.

KEYWORDS: argumentation theory, dialectical, distinction, logical, process, product, rhetorical

1. INTRODUCTION

Many argumentation theorists (Wenzel (1990), Tindale (1999), Blair (2003) to name but three) have either cited or adopted the view that argumentation may be approached from three different perspectives: the logical, the dialectical and the rhetorical. For reasons revealed later, I have dubbed these three perspectives ‘The Triumvirate.’ I take Wenzel’s 1990 paper as the locus classicus for this view. There Wenzel puts down a conceptual foundation for this triumvirate—the distinction between argumentation as product, as process and as procedure (The Tripartite Distinction) and lays out the view he calls Perspectivism. This paper has made quite an impression having been cited by 22 researchers [retrieved from Google Scholar, March 2009].

I endorse the spirit of pluralism that marks Wenzel’s position. However, there are aspects of it that give me pause, so I want to raise some concerns about both the Triumvirate View and the Tripartite Distinction. In the paper, I begin by sketching the history of the Triumvirate View. Then I recap the Triumvirate view and the Tripartite distinction. In the following section, I state my concerns. To conclude, I suggest a possible alternative to Wenzel’s way of understanding these matters.

2. A SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF THE TRIUMVIRATE VIEW

In this section, I sketch just a bit of the history of the view I am considering. As all roads always seem to lead back to Aristotle, so we begin there.
Aristotle

The seeds of the distinction can be found in Aristotle, at least if we follow Perelman’s reading in *The Realm of Rhetoric* (1982). Aristotle developed the first logic (his *Prior and Posterior Analytics*), though the term ‘logic’ does not appear until later. In addition, Aristotle deals with dialectical reasoning in the *Topics* and wrote extensively about *Rhetoric* as an inquiry. Note, however, that for Aristotle, rhetoric is a development out of dialectics:

Aristotle says that rhetoric, i.e., the study of persuasive speech, is a ‘counterpart’ (*antistrophos*) of dialectic and that the rhetorical art is a kind of ‘outgrowth’ (*paraphues ti*) of dialectic and the study of character types. The correspondence with dialectical method is straightforward: rhetorical speeches, like dialectical arguments, seek to persuade others to accept certain conclusions on the basis of premises they already accept. Therefore, the same measures useful in dialectical contexts will, *mutatis mutandis*, be useful here: knowing what premises an audience of a given type is likely to believe, and knowing how to find premises from which the desired conclusion follows.

With Aristotle, then, we find the beginnings of a tradition in which rhetoric, logic and dialectic are conceived as inquiries each of which has something to contribute to the study of argumentation. But there is tension between, for example, rhetoric and philosophy (logic), and the relationship between rhetoric and dialectics is problematic. For much of this period, logic is treated as more or less the same as dialectic(s) (Leff 2004). However, we must remember that logic, as we now think of it, does not undergo its greatest development until the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Perelman

One of the most forceful proponents of the rhetorical perspective is Perelman. In *The Realm of Rhetoric*, Perelman discusses logic, dialectic and rhetoric in the process of presenting his own views about argumentation. His way of understanding these approaches played a formative role in the development he calls *The New Rhetoric*, particularly his view of logic:

It is certainly well known that in modern logic […] the mathematical logicians […] identify logic not with dialectic but with formal logic, with Aristotle’s analytic reasoning [he means here the *Prior and Posterior Analytics*], and completely neglects dialectical reasoning as foreign to logic. (p. 4)

In Perelman’s view, there is an inquiry that he calls ‘dialectic.’ It studies dialectical reasoning and “begins from theses that are generally accepted with the purpose of gaining acceptance of other theses which could be or are controversial”(p. 2). According to Perelman, instances of dialectical reasoning are not made up of a series of valid and

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1 Alexander of Aphrodisias is widely thought to have been the originator. (Thanks to John Woods for the reference.)
compelling inferences [that would be the subject of logic]. Dialectical reasoning advances arguments, which are more or less strong.

We are well aware that there has traditionally been tension between logic and rhetoric. Perelman seems to resolve this tension by more or less abandoning the logical perspective and bringing in dialectics to handle certain aspects of argumentation.

Wenzel

Beginning in the 70s, Wenzel authored a series of articles about various ‘perspectives’ on the study of argumentation (1990, pp. 11-12). In this paper, I focus on the 1990 version as the most mature version. According to Wenzel, argumentation consists of a set of complex activities that people engage in together for the sake of making decisions, solving problems and generally managing disagreements. His thesis we may take from pages 25-26:

The final moral of this essay should now be clear: human judgment depends on argumentation, and argumentation depends equally upon the resources of rhetoric, dialectic and logic.

This view—which he calls Perspectivism ³—distinguishes and relates three perspectives ⁴ on argumentation: the rhetorical, the dialectical, and the logical. This view emerged from a lively debate about how to study argumentation, and it acknowledges “the legitimacy of multiple approaches” (p. 11). Each of these perspectives, says Wenzel, “is grounded in the tradition of Western humanism. Each […] takes certain of those activities within its scope and focuses on them in distinctive ways” (p. 11). Until the 70s there were, it seems, mainly the two perspectives of logic and rhetoric. But then Habermas, Zarefsky and Brockreide brought the dialectical perspective back into the equation. ⁵ “To the conception of argument as a rhetorical process and logical product, Brockreide added the notion of argumentation as dialectical method” (p. 11).

Here, then, we find the origin of what I am calling the Triumvirate View. I quote Wenzel:

[...] [P]erspectivism has much to recommend it. First, it acknowledges the legitimacy of multiple approaches to arguments. Second, once we begin to see how different research traditions are grounded in different perspectives, we can appreciate how each kind of research produces unique results, how it differs from other approaches, but also how the perspectives relate to one another… (Wenzel 1990, p.11)

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³ Wenzel takes this term from Brockreide (1990, p. 11).

⁴ Sometimes ‘approaches’ and ‘point of view.’ In discussion, Hansen asked: What is a perspective? The term ‘perspective’ is not defined here, nor is ‘approach.’ At first, this matter did not seem important, but I have come to see that Hansen’s question raises several important issues which, however, I cannot deal with in this paper.

⁵ However, we know from earlier discussion that Perelman’s approach acknowledges the dialectical perspective. Nevertheless, it does seem that dialectic(s) disappeared at some point. It then reappears with great vigor with the emergence of the dialectical perspective. Leff says: ‘They (dialectics and rhetoric) are not fixed entities but evolving disciplines’ (2002, p. 53).
In the remainder of his 1990 paper, Wenzel fleshes out these three perspectives using a number of different categories: purposes, scope, focus, situation, resources, standards and roles. I cannot here follow the lucrative details of that discussion, which I recommend.

What I want to do now, with this bit of history behind us, is get a better grasp of the Tripartite Distinction and then move on to deepen our understanding of the three perspectives which together constitute what I call the Triumvirate.

3. THE TRIPARTITE DISTINCTION

Wenzel writes that

working independently, but about the same time, [he] essayed a detailed analysis of the three perspectives, using similar key terms: the rhetorical process, dialectical procedure and logical product (Wenzel 1990, p.11).

Wenzel suggests that the notions of process, procedure and product will prove helpful in sorting out these differences among the perspectives. I am not so sanguine. Let us see.

The distinction between process and product seems to me fairly secure. It has a longstanding history here and in other disciplines. In logic, for instance the term ‘inference’ is understood as ambiguous as between the process of drawing an inference and the inference that results from that process. That logic is focused on the product is, for the most part, correct. But two comments need to be made. First, formal deductive logic is not, in my judgment, a theory of argumentation so much as it is a theory of deduction. That is, formal logic studies the norms that apply to forms of the sort: If P, then Q; P; therefore Q. That arguments sometimes take such a form is not to be denied. That formal logic provides the norms, procedures, etc., that are necessary and sufficient to study all argumentation is highly contentious. Second, it should be noted that there are logical approaches that focus on process—viz., Dialogue Logics. (See Johnson 2000, pp. 290ff.), so the logical perspective cannot be successfully characterized solely in terms of a focus on product.

The distinction Wenzel draws between process and procedure strikes me as much less secure. Nowhere does he indicate how he would differentiate between these two terms that would ordinarily be thought to be quite close in meaning. Wenzel writes:

Of all the meanings of the term ‘dialectic,’ the one I employ here takes dialectic to be a method, a system or a procedure for regulating discussions among people’ (Wenzel 1990, p. 14).

This passage suggests that Wenzel is not wed to the idea of procedure when it comes to unpacking the term ‘dialectical.’ Later, I will suggest a way of grounding these (and other) perspectives that does not invoke a distinction between process and procedure.

4. THE TRIUMVIRATE

The idea behind what I have called ‘The Triumvirate View’ is that three perspectives—the logical, the dialectical, and the rhetorical—each have something equally important to contribute to the study of argumentation. As noted earlier, Wenzel does not clarify what he means by a perspective, but we can make inferences from what he has said that will
allow us to flesh out this concept. He says that each of these perspectives is grounded in the tradition of Western humanism (12). He refers the fact that ‘different research traditions are grounded in different perspectives’ (11). When he writes that “argumentation depends equally on the resources of logic, dialectics and rhetoric,” it is tempting to flesh this out by reference to the disciplines of logic, dialectics, and rhetoric, each of which have developed tools and resources for dealing with argumentation. The obvious problem with any such move is that though there is a dialectical perspective, there is—to my knowledge—no discipline called ‘dialect(s)’ that studies argumentation—though there was at one time (see Leff 2002). We shall be returning to this point shortly. Let us continue to see how Wenzel unpacks each of these members.

**Logic**

Wenzel says: “Logic helps us to understand and evaluate arguments as products people create when they argue” (p. 9). One issue that arises now has to do with the standard to be used in evaluation. Wenzel’s position seems somewhat ambiguous to me. When he talks about logic, in some instances he seems to have in mind traditional formal logic and in other instances, informal logic. Thus on page 12 he says that “the logicians might say, ‘A good argument is one in which a clearly stated claim is supported by acceptable, relevant and sufficient evidence” (Wenzel 1990). These standards (criteria) are highly associated with informal logic. But on page 15, he writes that “logical theory as about the standard and criteria used to distinguish sound arguments from unsound ones” (Wenzel, 1990). The term ‘soundness’ is often associated with formal logic, the view that a good argument is a sound argument and a sound argument is one that has true premises and is valid. (It is not clear that this is the meaning that is being invoked here.) The differences between informal logic and formal logic have largely (but not only) to do with the appropriate standards for appraisal of argument. Historically, informal logic originated out of dissatisfaction with the approach taken by traditional (formal deductive) logic to the evaluation of argument which featured deductive validity. So on the issue of what standards are to be used in evaluating arguments, these two logics give different and perhaps incompatible accounts. What this means, and here is the relevant point for this discussion, is that one cannot easily speak of ‘the logical perspective.’ Rather it must be acknowledged there are a number of ‘perspectives’ within the logical perspective: the perspective of deductive logic, inductive logic, informal logic, etc. There are many other logics—modal logic, epistemic logic etc, but here we are concerned with those logics that have a direct bearing on argumentation.

**Rhetoric**

Wenzel writes that “as a first general statement, we may say that rhetoric helps us to understand and evaluate arguing as a natural process of persuasive communications” (1990, p. 9). An immediate problem that seems to confront us with unpacking the idea of the rhetorical perspective is: whose view of rhetoric is to be adopted in fleshing out this perspective? For there are many candidates. As our earlier discussion indicates, there is Aristotle (but whose Aristotle? [Poster, 2008]), Perelman (1969) (whose Perellan?),
Wenzel (1990), Tindale (1999) and many others whose perspectives may all be classified as rhetorical.

In anything but the most general of senses, then, it seems to me that there is no such thing as ‘the rhetorical perspective.’ And I suspect that most who use the phrase do not intend it as a definite description [‘the so-and-so’] but rather as meaning something like ‘one example of a rhetorical approach.’ But that does not provide much comfort, since it would be difficult to offer an account of what counts as such a perspective that all those who consider themselves to be practitioners of this approach would agree with. For example, Perelman’s normative theory makes essential reference to the universal audience but Johnstone Jr. (1959) and Koch (2009) take quite different stances towards normative matters. We face something of the same situation we saw in connection with the logical approach: it seems that here too there exists a plurality of incompatible perspectives within the larger rhetorical perspective.

Another problem is that though rhetoric as a discipline remains vital, it appears that it has fallen on hard times as an academic unit. Departments of Rhetoric have closed and the study of rhetoric has been “shunted off” to the Department of English or perhaps to the Department of Communication (or Communication Studies). Here we need pause to take note of an important development—the emergence of a new perspective—Communication—that has obvious relevance to the study of argumentation. It might be suggested that this new perspective can simply be included under the rhetorical, but that strikes me as dismissive of the integrity and autonomy of this important new area of research.

This recent course of reflection has brought to the fore two important ideas. First, there are incompatible perspectives within the logical and the rhetorical perspectives. Second, new research communities and traditions have come to prominence or emerged since Wenzel wrote, and their perspectives need to be included if we mean to do justice to perspectivism.

Dialectic(s)

I have already noted that Wenzel takes dialectic to be a procedure (or method or system) for regulating discussions among people. He writes ‘dialectic helps us to understand an evaluation argumentation as a cooperative method for making critical decisions’ (1990, p.9). He notes that the simplest form of dialectic is that depicted in Plato’s dialogues. Aristotle wrote of the method as “the ability to raise searching difficulties on both sides of a subject will make us detect more easily the truth and error about several points that arise” (Topics, 101a. 35). Wenzel writes:

Within in the dialectical perspective, the chief resources are designs or plans for conducting critical discussions. The term ‘discussion’ is used to include all kinds of communicative interaction ranging from simple conversation to formal debate. Any of these interactions is ‘dialectical’ to the degree that it is motivated by the desire to examine a question critically by means of orderly procedures. (p. 21)

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6 There is a fairly strong connection between academic units and disciplines, and also between disciplines and perspectives (and sub-perspectives).
However, as we shall shortly see, there is considerable variation in how to understand what constitutes a dialectical perspective.

To conclude the expository part of my paper, let me state that while I think there is both utility and validity to what I have called The Triumvirate View, concerns have been accumulating. Let me turn to those now.

5. SOME CONCERNS ABOUT THE TRIUMVIRATE

A triumvirate is rule by three parties. This way of speaking here runs the risk of creating a presumption that fails to acknowledge the legitimacy and importance of other perspectives. Wenzel is aware of this danger:

You should not expect these perspectives to reveal everything you might want to understand about argumentation; there are many other approaches, some of which are represented in other chapters of this book. Nevertheless, rhetoric, dialectic and logic are central to the study of argumentation’ (1990, p.25).7

The continued use of the triplet of adjectival forms—the logical, dialectical and rhetorical—may lead us to ignore what Wenzel here acknowledges—the fact that other perspectives besides these three have important insights and contributions to make to the study of argumentation. For as recently noted, there is an approach to the study of argumentation associated with Communication that is quite separate from rhetoric. And what about the contributions of linguistics? Here one could readily mention the work of theorists like Anscombe and Ducrot (1983) and also Zagar (1996).8 I do not think such initiatives as these can readily be placed within the purview of the Triumvirate. Even more important is to acknowledge the huge impact that our colleagues in Computer Science have had since a significant shift took place about 20 years ago when scholars changed their focus from knowledge to argumentation. Henry Prakken recently wrote:

The first articles on argumentation in computer science appeared circa 20 years ago. Since then we have seen great advances, establishing a solid theoretical basis, a broad canvas of applications, and, most recently, some realistic implementations. The field has gone from infancy to maturity, and the initial questions that researchers posed—’how do we do this?’ ‘what is it good for?’ and ‘how do we implement it’?—are mostly answered. (Dix et al. 2008)

Continued reference to the Triumvirate may contribute to our overlooking or marginalizing the contributions of other perspectives. I am not saying that the acceptance of The Triumvirate View causes exclusivist tendencies but it may well support them.

My second concern picks up on the point made above in connection with rhetoric—that in any but the most general and vaguest of senses, it seems to me that there is no such thing as ‘the rhetorical perspective.’ When it comes to ‘the logical perspective,’ possibly you might find something approaching unanimity as regards the formal logical approach. But that is just one of the ways in which ‘the logical perspective’ can be instantiated. If you went to a different way of implementing it—viz., informal logic—you

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7 A similar note is sounded by the Editors of the volume, who say that ‘we need to explain our perspectives by acknowledging that other perspectives may be just as legitimate as the ones we have adopted’(1990,2), but they do not mention any.
8 For a brief treatment of these, see van Eemeren et al (1996, pp. 350-53).
would find quite a few variations regarding just what is meant by informal logic and what that approach would look like. Even here at the University of Windsor—the home of informal logic—while Johnson and Blair agree on certain things about informal logic, they disagree on others (on the need for a dialectical tier, on whether informal logic can or should be characterized in terms of the search for a third type of link between premises and conclusion, to name but two). Hence it is important to note that those who do (or say they do informal logic) do quite different things under that label. Here again we see incompatible alternatives within a given perspective.

When it comes to ‘the dialectical perspective,’ even greater problems appear, which is my next point. Finocchiaro says that ‘the dialectical approach has become the dominant one in argumentation theory’ (2003, p.13). A partial listing of authors who have made essential use of the term dialectic(s)/dialectical to characterize an approach to argumentation would include the following: Hamblin, 1970; Wenzel, 1980, 1990; Barth and Krabbe, 1982; van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1984, 1988, 1992; Blair and Johnson, 1987; Finocchiaro, 1987, 2003; Blair, 1998, 2003; Johnson, 2000; Walton and Godden, 2007. (For more detail, I refer the reader to the Appendix)

I am not sure that the dialectical approach has become the dominant one but it surely has enjoyed prominence. Why? Several factors might help explain the recent emphasis on the dialectical perspective. I would note the emergence of dialogue logics (the Erlanger School) in the 60s, Barth & Krabbe’s work on dialogue logic in the 70s and 80s; Hamblin’s idea of Formal Dialectic; and in the 80s, the emergence of the pragma-dialectical approach (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1984, 1992). As I reviewed the references made by many different authors who have made use of the term ‘dialectical’ in connection with an approach to the study of argumentation, certain conclusions have suggested themselves.

First, different theorists (of whom I am one) have used the term in different ways. Blair put the matter this way:

Up to this point the word ‘dialectic’ has not figured in this paper. Its omission was deliberate. A glance at the literature on argument and argumentation will show that the terms dialogue, dialogical, dialectic, dialectics and dialectical are used either interchangeably or with so much variation that they mark no accepted distinction. (1998, p. 337)

Second, a number of theorists have remarked on this very situation. Thus, Rescher says that “Dialectic is, as it were, the alchemy of philosophy. It is all things to all men” (1977, p. xi). Blair and Johnson say in a note that “[d]ialectical is a much used term, with many senses. Anyone using it owes his readers an explication of the particular meaning he assigns to it” (1987, 102, n.). [It is my impression that most theorists have followed this advice.] Tindale says: “There are a number of senses of ‘dialectical.’” But as the references to Hamblin and Rescher indicate, we can observe as common features the exchange of views within a dialogue, governed by rules, aimed at resolving a dispute (1999: 43). I would say that while not all senses are captured by Tindale’s gloss, a great many are.

9 Leff’s (2002) characterization is not captured, nor is what Finocchiaro (2003) calls the dialectical-monolectical contrast.
Third, I was struck not just by the variety of explanations of the term’s meaning (which may or may not converge on some core sense) but also by the variety of uses to which the term was put. It functions differently for Rescher in *Dialectics* (1977) than for Hamblin in *Fallacies* (1970). Rescher appropriated the term from the tradition of medieval disputation in order to remedy a defect in epistemology that can be traced to Descartes. Hamblin, on the other hand, appropriated his use of the term ‘dialectic’ from Aristotle to designate the study that is to complete the job that Formal Logic has begun. Hamblin says that ‘an analysis of fallacy must turn to formal dialectic’ (p. 254). So for Hamblin, formal dialectic functions to round out logic. [In his account of this, rhetoric plays no role. But see his discussion 69ff. of relations between rhetoric, dialectic and logic.] It is worthy of note that the term ‘dialectical’ had already made an appearance earlier in *Fallacies*, when Hamblin is discussing the task of finding an appropriate set of criteria for argument and had already rejected alethic and epistemic criteria. Here he developed the notion of dialectical criteria:

We can hardly claim that an argument is not an argument because it proceeds *ex consessu*, or that such arguments have no rational criteria of worth. We are in fact talking about the class of argument that Aristotle called dialectical […] (p. 242).

We note here that there may well be a tension between two somewhat different meanings attached to ‘dialectical’ within this one perspective.

Both of the above understand ‘dialectics’ differently from Barth and Krabbe in *From Axiom to Dialogue* (1982) who are working in the tradition of dialogue logic that may be traced back to the Erlangen school. Dialogue logics approach argumentation as a process—a dialogue, an exchange between a proponent and an opponent, where the task of logic is to set forth the norms for the conduct of the dialogue—the assignment of rights and duties in the setting of the dialogue.10 These views in turn had an influence on van Eemeren and Grootendorst who say that they have profited from the insights in the Barth Krabbe work cited above (1984, p. 199, n.60) and have imbedded the term in the name of their project—The Pragma-dialectical Approach—which has been perhaps the most prominent development in the modern history of this complex term. But here we must take note of an important difference in their respective understandings of ‘dialectic.’ The norms of pragma-dialectics are not logical norms and are not put forth as such. Pragma-dialectics falls outside the scope of dialogue logic as it was conceived by Barth and Krabbe.

Readers may have long since noted another complicating factor that hovers over this discussion; viz., the prominence (indeed sometimes the co-occurrence of) the term ‘dialogical.’ Finocchiaro says:

In regard to approaches that might be labeled rhetorical and dialectical, I would begin by delimiting the meaning of these terms as follows. I would take rhetorical in Perelman’s sense, as meaning pertaining to persuasion. And I take dialectical to mean dialogical, that is pertaining to dialogue.’ (Finocchiaro 1987,p.82)

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10 For a fuller treatment of dialogue logic, see Barth (2002).
This text is one possible source of the conflation of two terms which, it seems to me, ought not to be run together. Fortunately, I have a colleague who has made this point very nicely. Blair writes:

It will never happen but it would be nice if the term ‘dialectical’ were reserved for the properties of all arguments related to their involving doubts or disagreements with at least two sides, and the term ‘dialogical’ were reserved for those belonging exclusively to turn taking verbal exchanges. Then we could then use this terminology to express the points that (1) all argumentation is dialectical but by no mean is all argumentation dialogical, and (2) the dialectical properties of dialogues, and the norms derived from the dialogue model, do not apply to non-dialogical argument exchanges, even though the latter are dialectical too. (1998, 338)

Reviewing the variety of meanings, uses and functions that have been labeled ‘dialectical,’ I come to the conclusion that, of the three terms in wide use to designate perspectives on the study of argumentation, ‘dialectical’ appears to be the most problematic. It seems to have the widest range and the most complicated story. In my view, this adjective—dialectical—has four distinct settings. In the first, ‘dialectical’ taken as related to the inquiry known as dialectic(s). The dialectical perspective would be that taken by those who study dialectic(s). We have seen that while there was once was such a discipline, no such discipline currently exists. In a second setting, ‘dialectical’ refers to one perspective on the study of argumentation which, with the logical and the rhetorical perspectives, forms the Triumvirate. In the third, ‘dialectical’ contrasts with dialogical approaches, the apparent conflation of which we have just discussed. In the fourth ‘dialectical’ marks an alternative to monolectical approaches (Finocchiaro 2003, p. 19).

One final problem is that there are various ways of understanding relationships among the three members of the Triumvirate. In the ideal order, members of a triumvirate share the task of governing. And Wenzel sees the situation as one of parity: each of the three perspectives has an equal role to play in the study of argumentation. None stands out as more important than the others. However, I could find there no argument in Wenzel’s paper that these three perspectives are of equal importance. And it is not altogether clear what parity looks like when it is fleshed out in detail. Does it mean that any viable theory of argumentation must have a rhetorical component, a logical component and a dialectical one? Or is the claim to be understood globally: that overall the study of argumentation requires input from all three perspectives? When it comes to individual theories, theorists see matters quite differently. In Pragma-dialectics, the dialectical perspective is basic; the rhetorical is brought in through what is called the strategic maneuvering, logic is barely mentioned at all (though its wares are prominent in the rules). In Tindale’s Acts of Arguing (1999), the rhetorical perspective is taken as basic. In my Manifest Rationality (2000), the logical perspective is assigned the role of being basic.

But the situation—how the various perspectives are related—is even more complex than indicated here. For a careful analysis of the various possible types of relationships among these perspectives, I cannot do better than recommend Blair’s 2003 paper. Even if we restrict ourselves to the Triumvirate, we have seen that there are fundamental disagreements about the roles assigned to each.
6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

I chose the term ‘triumvirate’ as a frame to draw attention to what I take to be the way that many (unconsciously) think about these matters. They take these terms to designate the dominant approaches to the study of argumentation, and believe that each has an important contribution to make. By and large, I agree with this view but believe there are problems with it, which I have hoped to bring to the fore by imposing the term ‘triumvirate.’

The first problem I mentioned was the danger of being insular, of excluding or minimizing the important contributions made by other perspectives. I mentioned linguistics, communication and computer studies but could also have mentioned psychology and epistemology, both of which of which have contributions to make to the study of argumentation.

The second problem emerged from reflecting on phrases like ‘the rhetorical perspective,’ or ‘a dialectical perspective,’ I am led to make the following observation: we would be better off speaking about rhetorical perspectives, dialectical perspectives, and logical perspectives to acknowledge that there are a variety of ways in which theorists could work within these larger perspectives.

The third problem had to do with the wide-ranging views about the so-called dialectical perspective. It is one thing for the pragma-dialectician, another thing for the dialogue logician, and something yet different for some informal logicians. Here I suggested we can minimize one sort of misunderstanding by adopting Blair’s distinction between dialectical and dialogical.

The fourth concern has to do with the distribution of power within the Triumvirate. In the locus classicus, Wenzel took the parity view that the three perspectives are equally valid, equally fruitful. But it seems to me that we want to ask the question: Are the three equally fruitful? Even if there are multiple perspectives, it does not follow that all will be equally fruitful in helping us to understand argumentation better.

To conclude, the three perspectives on the study of argumentation which I have dubbed the Triumvirate emerged over time in various disciplines, or communities of inquiry, all of which have their traditions and libraries (books, journals, encyclopedias) in which are housed their intellectual wares (basic concepts, issues, problems, techniques, theories etc). They are identifiable as being connected with the inquiry known as rhetoric, an inquiry known as logic, and an approach called dialectic(s) whose status is somewhat more problematic. Rather than attempt to locate their respective spheres of influence by means of the process-product-procedure distinction, I have been suggesting an alternative. Members of these communities—the rhetorical community, for example—are bound together, not by a focus on process as distinguished from procedure, not by the acceptance of any one view of what rhetoric is, nor by any commonly accepted definition of rhetoric (any more than is the case with philosophy), nor even by a common understanding of what the rhetorical perspective looks like, nor yet by an agreement about what the crucial issues are. They are bound together by a common history, tradition, education, and an ongoing interest in a wide range of issues and problems.

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11 For an insightful discussion of the various ways of interpreting this idea, see Mc Kerrow (1990).
That these three communities have the longest experience with argumentation seems clear, but that should not blind us to the considerable variations within them, and more important it must not lead us to marginalize or undervalue the insights available from other traditions and inquiries—that is, from other perspectives.

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