

University of Windsor

Scholarship at UWindsor

OSSA Conference Archive

OSSA 6

Jun 1st, 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM

Induction and Invention: The Toulmin Model Meets Critical Rhetoric

Satoru Aonuma

Kanda University of International Studies

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/ossaarchive>



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

Aonuma, Satoru, "Induction and Invention: The Toulmin Model Meets Critical Rhetoric" (2005). *OSSA Conference Archive*. 2.

<https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/ossaarchive/OSSA6/papers/2>

This Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences and Conference Proceedings at Scholarship at UWindsor. It has been accepted for inclusion in OSSA Conference Archive by an authorized conference organizer of Scholarship at UWindsor. For more information, please contact scholarship@uwindsor.ca.

Induction and Invention: The Toulmin Model Meets Critical Rhetoric

SATORU AONUMA

Department of International Communication

Kanda University of International Studies

1-4-1 Wakaba, Mihama

Chiba 261-0014 JAPAN

satorua@mac.com

ABSTRACT: The aim of this paper is to (re)articulate the relationship between "critical rhetoric" and Stephen Toulmin's conception of practical reasoning. Among students of rhetoric, particularly those who work in communication departments in (US) American universities, the project of reason, once cherished as central to the 20th century Renaissance of argument, seems to have become outdated and irrelevant. With the recent "critical turn," reason was especially given a bad name in the field of rhetoric. Some rhetoricians have even joined reason's Other, dissociating themselves from the project of reason as much as possible. The paper contends that the difference between critical reasoners and rhetoricians is not so substantial as it may look. It boils down to a question of emphasis, not substance, in our practice of practical discourse. Drawing on Toulmin's idea of the "modernity," "reasonableness," and "warrant-establishing," the paper seeks to call for argument and rhetorical scholars' attention to the assumptions that Toulmin's project shares with critical rhetoric and argues for their "solidarity," a much needed intellectual project of Reason when the "reasonable" is to be given the equal weight as the "rational."

KEY WORDS: critical rhetoric, Stephen E. Toulmin, reasonableness, substantial argument, warrant-establishing argument

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to resituate the idea of reason in public discourse of our time. In so doing,

SATORU AONUMA, THE TOULMIN MODEL MEETS CRITICAL RHETORIC

I hope to rearticulate relationships between what reasoners and rhetoricians do in a culture where fragmentation is not an exception but a rule. I am compelled to do so, because the project of reason, once cherished as central part of the 20th Renaissance of argument, seems almost discarded by many students of public discourse at this turn of millennium. Our interest in reason seems to have waned; the project of reason became outdated and irrelevant as we entered a new age. We do not talk about reason very much and, when we do, most likely our attitude toward it is less sympathetic than antipathetic. This is particularly true among those of us who work in communication studies/speech communication departments in (US) American universities, a place where the concept of rhetoric has always been the primary defining characteristic of public discourse. With the recent advent of “critical turn,” reason was especially given a bad name in the field of rhetoric. Many now seem to feel betrayed. It looks as if we came the last forty years, just to discover that the idea of reason is contrary to what we do as students of rhetoric. In fact, some have even joined reason’s Other, dissociating themselves from the project of reason as much as possible.

This paper specifically attempts a re-reading of Stephen Toulmin’s project of practical argument (1958, 1990, 2001) in the context of “critical rhetoric.” Critical rhetoric, initially formulated by McKerrow (1989) and later extended by others (Clark, 1997; Ono & Sloop, 1992; McGee, 1990; Zompetti, 1997), is the leading proponent of the radical critique of reason in the field of rhetoric. With “a postmodern conception of the relationship between discourse and power” (McKerrow, 1989, p.111) as their orientation, critical rhetoricians dismiss the idea of reason altogether, and it is in this context that Toulmin, together with Habermas and Perelman, is criticized, for he “privilege[s] reason above all else as the avenue to emancipation.” (McKerrow, 1989, p.91)

It is my contention that the difference between critical reasoners and rhetoricians is not so significant as it may look. It boils down to a question of emphasis, not substance, in our practice of practical discourse, where rhetoric and reason are complimentary, to say the least. Drawing Toulmin’s formulation of practical reasoning, his idea of “warrant-establishing” argument in particular, this paper seeks to demonstrate why so.

1. RHETORIC AS THE OTHER OF REASON

Ever since Plato’s assault, students of rhetoric had long been forced to explain why rhetoric is

SATORU AONUMA, THE TOULMIN MODEL MEETS CRITICAL RHETORIC

not an inferior art. For this reason, many had turned to the idea of reason in the mid 20th century, hoping that it could save rhetoric. There should be no such thing as “empty” rhetoric, for rhetoric always has a “substance” as well as form. That substance is “good reasons” (Bator, 1988; Fisher, 1978; Wallace, 1963), and, by incorporating good reasons as essential ingredients to rhetorical discourse, we hoped we could elevate the status of our professional enterprise. In this context, Aristotle became a figure more favorable than ever, for he championed both rhetoric and dialectic, i.e., human’s capacity to discourse as well as to reason rationally. We also discovered philosophers of our contemporaries sympathetic to our cause; we made friends with Henry Johnston, Jr., Chaim Perelman, and Stephen Toulmin, among others, hoping that our friendship with them would make rhetoric more respectable and rational as a scholarly endeavor.

Rhetoric thus became “reasoned” discourse, turning our enterprise into a study of “rational” argument. This is what critical rhetoricians react against. Critical rhetoric distances itself from everything that reason stands for, and “[i]t is precisely this stubborn refusal of reason. . . that gives the CR project a distinctly postmodern aura.” (Gaonkar, 1993, p.150) It “rejects. . . not only universal reason, but also reason rooted in the deliberative practice of a community,” (Murphy, 1995, p.5) since any reason, whose telos is geared toward “consensus,” is necessarily tainted by the will to power. No matter how nicely we make it up, the idea of reason has historically served the power that be after all. Critical rhetoricians regard the project of reason as already invested by and overpopulated with powermongers. Specifically, they hold that the project of reason is another version of the Foucaultian power/knowledge, the nature of which is incorrigible. Critical rhetoricians tell us a story that the 20th century Renaissance of argument has resulted in turning rhetoric into reason’s loyal accomplice in crime. The story also tells us that their alliance with reason ended up with their own trivialization: Rhetoric is now “tamed” by reason. “While rehabilitating rhetoric in some degree, efforts nonetheless continue to place it on the periphery. . . In so doing, they preserve for rhetoric a subordinate role in the serve of reason.” (McKerrow, 1989, p.91)

Critical rhetoric not only problematizes and criticizes reason: Rhetoric becomes the other of reason. In the discourse crafted by critical rhetoricians, the project of reason is contrary to everything that rhetoric should stand for. Reason and rhetoric are now in the “stark opposition,” and “[i]n so doing, a critical rhetoric reclaims the status of centrality in the analysis of a discourse of power.” (p.92) Thus contextualized, the goal of rhetorical enterprise is to unmask and reveal the power/knowledge in the society; it is by way of rhetorical performance

SATORU AONUMA, THE TOULMIN MODEL MEETS CRITICAL RHETORIC

alone that critical rhetoricians are able to critique discourses that perpetuate and sustain this complicity.

2. RHETORIC AS THE OTHER OF RATIONALITY

Accepting the history of rhetoric (and reason) as it is told by critical rhetoricians is problematic, however. As they themselves would agree, historical discourse cannot but be multidimensional, and speaking of a history as if it were singular would obscure its multidimensionality. It is simply “too totalizing,” for history always has the other side. This is particularly significant in case of the relationship between rhetoric and reason in history, in which students of discourse had traditionally listened only to the words of philosophers up until recently. With the advent of critical rhetoric, rhetoric is on the side of the offensive; time has come to let the other side talk. We should turn to the project of reason and listen to what reasoners say about their status, particularly their relationship with rhetoric.

I thus turn to Stephen Toulmin, the leading proponent of the project of reason in our time. Together with Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s *The New Rhetoric*, his 1958 publication *The Uses of Argument* marks the beginning of the 20th century Renaissance of argument. Before turning directly to *The Uses of Argument*, however, I would first like to discuss two of his later works, i.e., *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (1990) and *Return to Reason* (2001), for it is in these works that Toulmin explicates the telos of his project in the form of historical narrative. And it is in this historical account that the reformulation of practical reasoning he put forth in *The Uses of Argument*, particularly his “layout” or “modeling” of argument, should be understood and reappraised.

In *Cosmopolis* and *Return to Reason*, Toulmin’s overall argument is clear and straightforward. Just as many of his contemporaries, he grounds his project of reason in the history of so-called “modernity.” The history he tells us, however, significantly departs from those told by others. He specifically distances himself from many others who see rationalism represented by the Cartesian thought as the landmark of the modernity. According to Toulmin, the “modernity” in Europe rather began in the 16th century, when they entered the Renaissance. It was the beginning of a new era in which thinkers (re)discovered and were fascinated that “[h]uman beings were sinful and fallible.” (1990, p.26) It also was a period in which “[a]ll the varieties of fallibility, formerly ignored, began to be celebrated as charmingly limitless

SATORU AONUMA, THE TOULMIN MODEL MEETS CRITICAL RHETORIC

consequences of human character and personality” (p.27) not only by intellectuals but also by lay readers.

In Toulmin’s project of reason, “reasonableness” and “rationality” constitute the singularly crucial pair of concepts; what “we need” is “to balance the hope for certainty and clarity in theory with the impossibility of avoiding uncertainty and ambiguity in practice.” (1990, p.175) Precisely for this reason, reason saw its heyday in the Renaissance, according to Toulmin. In the Renaissance, rationality of physical and natural sciences was effectively counterbalanced by reasonableness of arts, literature, politics, and morality: It was a time when both “logic” and “rhetoric” were “in.” In the last three hundred years, however, the project of reason has lost its balance as we forgot its “twin aspects,” (2001, p.14) which he finds problematic and damaging. From the 17th century on, the idea of the reasonable gradually has given in to the idea of the rational. With the enthronement of the Cartesian thought as the one and only epistemic authority, the quest for certainty and the equation of rationality with formal logic obscured reasonableness and expelled it from the project of reason. While we should not totally discount rationalism and its contributions to humanity, argues Toulmin, they “must be weighed against the losses that came from abandoning the 16th century commitment to intellectual modesty, uncertainty, and toleration.” (1990, p.174)

Logic became in, rhetoric out. This “injury” of reason still continues to date. It was so damaging that we still are unable to fully recover from it. He observes that, in the discourse of our time, “the spotlight remains [only] on the intellectual validity of Rationality itself; the human value of Reasonableness are expected to justify in the Court of Rationality.” (2001, p.2) In focusing too much attention on rationality, we have neglected the complementary concept of reasonableness: “In the World Academy. . . the term ‘rationality’ can amount to anything, only if it amounts to everything: otherwise, it will amount to nothing, and the claim made on its behalf will become absurd.” (2001, p.2)

It is in this particular historical context(ualization) that Toulmin calls for the “return to reason.” And he suggests that the path we should take toward it is to reclaim the “hidden agenda of the modernity.” Unlike Habermas who grounds his project of modernity in the Kantian thought, i.e., a philosophy of civil society and the (bourgeois) public sphere, however, Toulmin’s project of modernity is an attempt to resume the project of reason abandoned by many self-acclaimed “modernists,” by correcting its imbalance. What is needed now specifically is to reclaim the centrality of reasonableness and recover the commitment to modesty, uncertainty,

SATORU AONUMA, THE TOULMIN MODEL MEETS CRITICAL RHETORIC

and toleration as human virtues in our words and deeds. Thus, Toulmin suggests that we should denounce foundationalism in contemporary thoughts, for “[t]he search for a permanent and unique set of authoritative principles for human knowledge. . . proves to be just a dream.” While this may “[have] its appeal in moments of intellectual crisis” we face, most likely it will “[fade] away when matters are viewed under a calmer and clearer light.” (1990, p.174) Conversely, he endorses the modernity’s insistence

on the moral importance of continuing the emancipation that began in the Enlightenment, and still goes on in South Africa and elsewhere: struggling against those human inequalities that offended Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and the stick in the craw of people of good will to this day. (1990, p.174)

Having heard Toulmin, our understanding of the relationship between reason and rhetoric should begin to change. The historical account he gives to the project of reason indeed has significant implications. In the first place, what is central to his project is not the idea of rationality but of reasonableness: The commitment to modesty, uncertainty, and toleration as the hidden agenda of the modernity and as an essential characteristic of reasoners. Equally important is a sign of “optimism” expressed in Toulmin’s understanding of our time: The return of the oral, of the particular, of the local, and the timely in our discourse. As Fisher (1990) points out, Toulmin endorses the recent “critical/practical turn” in a variety of modern intellectual thoughts and deeds. Philosophers as well as natural and social scientists have begun to question and critique the complicit relations of “power/knowledge” in their disciplines (although he does not use this Foucaultian term), by addressing issues of practical concern such as nuclear war, medical ethics, and ecological crisis. His optimism specifically has do with rhetoric, more precisely its revival in the mid 20th century. “Since the mid-1960s, rhetoric has begun to regain its respectability as a topic of literary and linguistic analysis, and it now shares with ‘narrative’ an attention for which they both waited a long time.” (Toulmin, 1990, p.187) He further states of communication studies/speech communication departments in US American universities that “are responsible for college debating teams” and “their faculty members also do serious research on different aspects of oral communication and argumentation.” He even mentions Donald McCloskey who “has raised powerful questions about how economists judge the relevance of their theories to concrete situations, under the title of ‘the rhetoric of economics.’” (1990, p.187)

3. (PRACTICAL) REASON MEETS (CRITICAL) RHETORIC

According to Toulmin, then, it is the project of reason that is in crisis. What is at stake in our time is the idea of reasonableness which is tainted and damaged by the excess of rationality. What we need is a redemption of reason, and he sees in the 20th century revival of rhetoric a potential to mitigate the effects of the 17th century rationalism. Namely, it is not rhetoric that needs to be rescued by reason. Rather, it is reasoners who are in need of rhetoricians' help, which I argue is manifest in Toulmin's formulation of practical reasoning, particularly his discussion of "warrant." In *The Uses of Argument*, Toulmin defines warrants as "general, hypothetical statement, which can act as bridges, and authorise the sort of step to which our particular argument commits us." (1958, p.98) Understanding the function of warrant is crucial in his layout of argument, perhaps more so than other Toulminian concepts such as "data," "claim," and "rebuttal." His clearest and simplest explication of the role of warrant as a bridge is found in the following passage:

[A] man who is given the data and the conclusion and who understands perfectly well what he is told may yet need to have explained to him the authority for the step from one to the other. "I understand what your evidence is, and I understand what conclusion you draw from it," he may say, "but I don't see how you get there." The task of the warrant is to meet his need: in order to satisfy him we have to explain what our warrant is, and if necessary show on what backing it depends, and until we have done this it is still open to him to challenge our argument. (p.130)

A warrant is important part of the process of critical discourse. In the first place, it is an assumption that is *being made explicit* as we engage in argumentative exchange. Just as critical rhetoricians attempt to "reveal" the relationship between power and knowledge (claim) which is concealed otherwise, critical reasoners are forced (or force their interlocutors) to explain, in the form of explicit statement, why "[d]ata such as D entitle one to draw conclusions. . . such as C" or "[g]iven data D, one may take it that C." (1958, p.98) As Burnyeat (1996) notes, a critical exchange such as this one "is a positive expression of human reasonableness in a world where issues are complex and deciding them is difficult." (p.91) Moreover, we do not normally engage in a critical exchange in a vacuum; most argumentation emerges in a particular "field" (or a

SATORU AONUMA, THE TOULMIN MODEL MEETS CRITICAL RHETORIC

“situation” as Toulmin seems to prefer to call in his later works (2001)), where analytic argument (apodeixes) is not a paradigm any more. Rather we deal with substantive argumentation, a series of critical discourses that are “historically situated and rely on the evidence of experience: the best they can claim to do is put a conclusion ‘beyond a reasonable doubt.’” (2001, p.19)

Yet, appealing merely to one’s “historical situation” or “experience” is not a recourse to warrant or warranting in substantive argumentation, for such “deduction” does not always work. In addition, it does not necessarily suffice to put one’s conclusion “beyond a reasonable doubt,” for one’s history or experience is not the same as her interlocutor’s. It is in this context that the distinction Toulmin makes between “warrant-using” and “warrant-establishing” becomes crucial. A warrant-establishing argument is the one “in which a single datum is relied on to establish a conclusion by appeal to some warrant whose acceptability is being taken for granted.” A warrant-establishing one, by contrast, will be the one “in which the acceptability of a novel warrant is made clear by applying it successively in a number of cases in which both “data” and “conclusion” have been independently verified.” (1958, p.120) Namely, just as critical rhetoricians create rhetoric out of cultural “fragments,” Toulmin’s reasoners engage in “warrant-establishing” by pulling together and “synthesizing” disparate scraps of historical and cultural experiences available in a given situation. In so doing, reasoners as arguers become “inventors” of warrants, i.e., bridge-like statements that authorise the step to which their argument commits them. And, as a process of synthesis, one cannot but proceed warrant-establishing by way of “induction,” which never guarantees the certainty or establish the taken-for-grantedness of her claim or conclusion. Dictated by one’s commitment to reasonableness, a Toulminian reasoner engages critically with his interlocutor’s reasonable doubt, “I understand what your evidence is, and I understand what conclusion you draw from it; but I don’t see how you get there.”

CONCLUSION

This paper attempted a re-reading of Toulmin’s project of reason in the context of critical rhetoric. Put more accurately, the attempt was made to re-contextualize and re-historicize the critique of reason launched recently by rhetoricians in his narrative of the modernity. While limited in scope and space, I hope my analysis above at least suggests a potential of their renewed friendship. What we need is the proper balance, not the total critique nor displacement, of reason, and, as Toulmin suggests, the modernity’s hidden agenda, i.e., the commitment to

SATORU AONUMA, THE TOULMIN MODEL MEETS CRITICAL RHETORIC

intellectual modesty, uncertainty, and toleration, should be reclaimed both in theory and in practice.

I have also argued that, to Toulmin's critical reasoners, reasonableness is more germane than rationality, as his idea of warrant and warrant-establishing should imply. In retrospect, what was unfortunate in the 20th Renaissance of argument is *not* that students of rhetoric at communication studies/speech communication departments in US American universities turned to reason to rescue rhetoric; it is rather that they turned to rationality, not of reasonableness. (Farrell, 1977; Fisher, 1978; McKerrow, 1977, 1982) This makes an interesting contrast not only with Toulmin's project, but also with those undertaken by other students of rhetoric in continental Europe. For instance, the idea that the reasonable is central to the practice of rhetoric (and argument) is shared by Perelman (1979) and Bons (2002). Although from a somewhat different perspective and background, Rescher (1998), an American philosopher, also argues that, even in the "professional" discourse of philosophy, both "inferential" (demonstrative/rational) and "evocative" (rhetorical) modes of explication are a necessity; they constitute "an uneasy but indissoluble union." (p.323)

We live in a time when the reasonable is to be given the equal weight as the rational. To counterbalance the excess of the rational effectively, even a 1969 Situationist International's slogan "Be reasonable. Demand the impossible!" does not sound so oxymoronic today; it may, in fact, give rhetoricians a good point of departure, a cultural fragment with which they can start (re)writing the history of the relationship between rhetoric and reason which is divorced from the constraints of Platonic thought as well as of the 17th century rationalism.

REFERENCES

- Bator, Paul G.: 1988, 'The "Good Reasons Movement": A "Confounding" of Dialectic and Rhetoric?', *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 21, 38-47.
- Bons, J. A. E.: 2002, 'Reasonable Argument Before Aristotle: The Roots of the Enthymeme', In F. H. van Eemeren & P. Houtlosser (Eds.), *Dialectic and Rhetoric: The Warp and Woof of Argumentation Analysis* (pp. 13-27). Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht.
- Burnyeat, M. F.: 1996, 'Enthymeme: Aristotle on the Rationality of Rhetoric', In A. Oksenberg-Rorty (Ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Rhetoric* (pp. 88-115). University of California Press, Berkeley.

SATORU AONUMA, THE TOULMIN MODEL MEETS CRITICAL RHETORIC

- Clark, Norman: 1996, 'The Critical Servant: An Isocratean Contribution to Critical Rhetoric', *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 82, 111-124.
- Farrell, Thomas. B.: 1977. 'Validity and Rationality: The Rhetorical Constituents of Argumentative Validity', *Journal of the American Forensic Association*, 13, 142-149.
- Fisher, Walter R.: 1978, 'Toward a Logic of Good Reasons,' *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 64, 376-384.
- Fisher, Walter R.: 1990, 'Toulmin's Critique of Modernity and Postmodernity', *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 27, 36-38.
- Gaonkar, Dilip P.: 1993, 'Performing with Fragments: Reflections on Critical Rhetoric', In R. E. McKerrow (Ed.), *Argument and the Postmodern Challenge* (pp. 149-155). Speech Communication Association, Annandale.
- McGee, Michael C.: 1990, 'Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture', *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 54, 274-289.
- McKerrow, Ray E.: 1977, 'Rhetorical Validity: An Analysis of Three Perspectives on the Justification of Rhetorical Argument', *Journal of the American Forensic Association*, 13, 133 - 141.
- McKerrow, Ray E.: 1982, 'Rationality and Reasonableness in a Theory of Argument', In J. Robert Cox & C. A. Willard (Eds.), *Advances in Argumentation: Theory and Research* (pp. 105-122). Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville.
- McKerrow, Ray E.: 1989, 'Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis', *Communication Monographs*, 56, 91-111.
- Murphy, John M.: 1995, 'Critical Rhetoric as Political Discourse', *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 32, 1-15.
- Ono, Kent A. & John M. Sloop: 1992, 'Commitment to Telos: A Sustained Critical Rhetoric', *Communication Monographs*, 59, 48-60.
- Perelman, Chaim: 1979, 'The Rational and the Reasonable', In *The New Rhetoric and the Humanities: Essays on Rhetoric and its Applications* (pp. 117-123). D. Reidel Publishing, Dordrecht.
- Rescher, Nicholas: 1998, 'The Role of Rhetoric in Rational Argumentation', *Argumentation*, 12, 315-323.
- Toulmin, Stephen: 1958, *The Uses of Argument*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Toulmin, Stephen: 1990, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*. Free Press, New York.
- Toulmin, Stephen: 2001, *Return to Reason*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- Zompetti, Joseph P.: 1997, 'Toward a Gramscian Critical Rhetoric', *Western Journal of Communication*, 61(1), 66-86.