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ABSTRACT: This paper examines whether philosophers of argument, in spite of their disavowing 'timeless principles', nevertheless embrace a set of principles, or axioms, to underlie argumentation theory. *First*, it reviews the thinking of some prominent philosophers of argument; *second*, it extracts some principles common to their philosophies; and *third*, it draws out possible consequences for argumentation theory and asks whether such theory has an underlying political posture.

KEYWORDS: argumentation, axiom, Cartesian God's-eye-view, deliberation, formal logic, informal logic, rhetoric, the human person.

1. INTRODUCTION

Each of the principal founders of the modern argumentation movement — Chaim Perelman, Stephen Toulmin, and Charles Hamblin — has repudiated the Cartesian rationalism of traditional logic. Perelman writes that "the very nature of deliberation and argumentation is opposed to necessity and self-evidence … we combat uncompromising and irreducible philosophical oppositions presented by all kinds of absolutism". Toulmin writes that "certainly language as we know it consists, not of timeless propositions, but of utterances dependent in all sorts of ways on the context or occasion on which they were uttered". And Hamblin notes that "the complicated shuffle [in the practice of formal logic] involving the construction of 'alternative' systems disguises the fact that nothing is proved absolutely at all, and that an unpalatable theorem can sometimes be a ground for going back and altering the axioms or rules".

Each philosopher has challenged the self-enthronement of formal logic's assuming the posture of 'God's eye-view' and establishing self-evident principles. Indeed, these philosophers of argument set the course for those taking up their *manifesto* to rethink argumentation and then to have it address practical matters in the messy world of everyday life where nothing is fixed and permanent. Accordingly, logic, or the assessment of arguments, has been broadened well beyond the impersonal character and timelessness of deductive necessity to include matters traditionally excluded, namely, matters of rhetoric, pragmatics, dialogical dynamics, critical thinking, and communication studies. And while there are a variety of trends and lively differences within the argumentation movement, argumentation theorists are generally agreed about the transitory nature of logic as it addresses the transitory nature of the human condition — that very condition establishing the arena of argumentative discourse. In this connection, then, Christopher Tindale, a contemporary argumentation theorist who invokes Perelman's spirit, writes:

> Truth … relates to the determinations of audiences; it is a product of argumentative situations, open to scrutiny and to challenge. To proceed this way is to break with any notion of objective Truth that is the goal and condition of argumentation. Such a notion of Truth demands the cessation of argumentation.

And Trudy Govier, another contemporary argumentationist, remarks that "if we move from truth to acceptability and from validity to a variety of less determinate and clearcut standards, we are allowing, in effect, that *justification itself is relative to time, place, and background beliefs*". Just here we find a specter of relativism haunting, or putatively haunting, argumentation studies. This topic has been taken up by philosophers of argument, such as Tindale, Govier, and Robert Pinto, and it continues to be a matter of concerned discussion. However, a topic not especially addressed by philosophers of argument concerns the principles, or axioms, underlying argumentation theory as such theory is used in assessing arguments.[1]

This paper investigates whether argumentationists in fact hold a set of underlying principles not subject to deliberation. *First*, it reviews the thinking of some prominent philosophers of argument; *second*, it extracts some axioms common to these philosophers that underpin their philosophies of argument; and *third*, it draws out possible consequences for argumentation theory and asks whether argumentation theory embraces an underlying political posture.

2. AN INITIAL IMPULSE FOR CHALLENGING FORMAL LOGIC

Informal logicians — and argumentationists generally — early experienced an uneasiness about the efficacy of formal logic for treating matters of everyday life. It is no mystery that their having been impelled in this direction emerged from their encountering classroom frustrations during the 1950s and 1960s, particularly in the United States, that combined (1) recognizing that formal logic textbooks were out of touch with everyday matters with (2) an increasing critical dissatisfaction with consumer society — and especially in this connection with the techniques and effects of advertising — along with (3) an ever sharpening criticism of American foreign and domestic policy in respect of the Viet Nam War and civil rights — and in this connection with the rhetoric of disingenuous political figures. A cursory glance at argumentation literature reveals the richness of these studies and their *relevance* for guiding humanists concerned to address the many politically charged 'conversations' in our modern pluralistic and increasingly global community. There is no mistaking an overarching concern among argumentationists, whatever their theoretical differences, to *empower* people with capacities to reason critically and to assess incisively the conflicting argumentations that play an important role in the lives of ordinary human beings. Christopher Tindale, to take only one example, promotes Chaim Perelman's notion that "[a]rguers address the *whole person*, not the isolated intellect or emotion, and they consider as a natural course the circumstances and differences involved" (1999: 201; emphasis added). Moreover, he notes that

> a theory of argumentation and its associated notion of reasonableness should contribute to the development of *the idea of the human*, facilitate an environment in which it can flourish, and promote ends that connect the threads of that project. (1999: 202; emphasis added)

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[1]   Recognizing differences among informal logicians, pragma-dialecticians, communication theorists, dialogue logicians, and rhetoricians, we nevertheless also recognize a core of tenets they share as forming various currents in the <u>argumentation</u> <u>movement</u>. We have coined 'argumentationist' or 'argumentation theorist' to denote a logician who generally subscribes to this core of tenets.

Tindale expresses a foundational humanist impulse animating argumentationists, the same impulse that animated Perelman, Toulmin, and Hamblin, the acknowledged progenitors of the modern argumentation movement. The volume of textbooks on informal logic and critical thinking *and* their selections of practical, real arguments to exercise a student's newly acquired evaluation skills attest to this concern. A salient theme among argumentation theorists is promoting the pragmatics of argumentation to broaden and secure a more democratic society. Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca explicitly state that their *new rhetoric* aims to fight absolutism in all its forms and resists totalitarianism (1969: 510).

3. SOME SHARED TENETS AMONG PHILOSOPHERS OF ARGUMENT

Informal logicians and argumentation theorists have not minced words about their dissatisfaction with traditional formal logic. Hamblin had exhorted that "[w]hat is, above all, necessary is to *dethrone* deduction from its supposed pre-eminent position as a provider of certainty" (1970: 250; emphasis added). This statement was a 'shot heard round the world by new logicians' that opened new and fruitful lines of inquiry that continue to be explored. A review of the original works of the founders of the argumentation movement along with the works of those who have been contributing to argumentation studies since the 1970s reveals a rather uniform set of beliefs underlying the diverse currents of argumentation philosophy. Indeed, recognizing this set of tenets might help to objectify an underlying unity of these various currents. In any case, among these tenets are the following.[2]

*   Soundness is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for a good argument. An argument's goodness turns not on the truth of its premises nor on its formal validity but on the acceptability of its premises and the suitability of its inferential links.

*   The deductive model of a good argument does not properly serve argument evaluation. The distinction between deduction and induction is not only inexact but specious. An argument consists in assertions and statements made by human beings in an imperfect world; it does not consist in atemporal propositions.

*   Arguing is a social activity always embedded situationally and always expressed by means of a natural language. An argument is something personal, not something impersonal. Thus, as a natural language object contextually situated, an argument is replete with ambiguity and nuance.

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[2]   Our representation of informal logic and argumentation theory derives from a variety of sources, notably from informal logic textbooks, collections of essays, and from recent monographs. See references cited below. We have emphasized working with practicing logicians who also treat theoretical matters, and we have worked principally with the texts of Ralph Johnson, J. Anthony Blair, Trudy Govier, Christopher Tindale, Robert Pinto, Douglas Walton, David Hitchcock, and John Woods as a core of proponents not only because of their having been long-time active contributors to developments in argumentation studies, but also because they are among its founders. Among textbooks we surveyed are those by: M. Scriven (1976), R. Johnson & J. A. Blair (1977), R. Fogelin (1978), S. Toulmin, R. Rieke, & A. Janik (1979), D. Hitchcock (1983), T. Govier (1988), J. Freeman (1993), D. Walton (1989), H. Kahane & N. Cavender (1998), and L. Groarke & C. Tindale (2003). These textbooks, many in multiple editions, range over the duration of the informal logic movement and represent an important core of argumentation 'philosophy'. Among recent monographs we have considered, which also serve as excellent digests, are those by: Johnson (2000), Govier (1999), Walton and Alan Brinton (1997), Tindale (1999), van Eemeren, Blair, & Willard (2003), Don Levi (1999), Willard (1989). We also have considered Walton (1987) and Robert Pinto (2001).

*   Appraising the cogency or reasonableness of an argument requires close attention to its context. Reasonableness is not rationality as rationality is traditionally understood to be context-independent. Rather, an argument's cogency is participant- or audience-dependent, and not an objective property inhering in a P-c argument. Since an argument always exists within a particular context, special attention must be given to assessing premise relevance and the sufficiency of their support for a conclusion.

*   There are no clear demarcations between an arguer, an audience, an argument (a product), an argumentation (a process) that involves an exchange between disputants, procedures for managing those exchanges (dialectic), and an argument's presentation (rhetoric).

4. AN ESPECIAL CRITICISM OF FORMAL LOGIC

Argumentationists generally consider formal logic (FL) to prefer axiomatic fixedness and to eschew deliberation. In this connection, then, FL does not describe reality — least of all does it capture how human beings deliberate. The deductive model, even as a regulative principle, is inadequate and not universally applicable, since not only is its ideal unattainable but also it is not subscribed to by every audience. The Cartesian ideal of deducing truths from foundational self-evident truths is suspect; *for, indeed, there are no self-evident, non-controversial truths*. Moreover, FL eschews ambiguity, requires univocity, and works abstractly with a logically perfect language. However, arguing occurs in a natural language, which is replete with ambiguity, nuance, equivocal expressions, and is not abstract — none of which is amenable to such analysis. Applying formal rules to extract the propositions expressed by assertions distorts the original statements.

At this juncture we might cite some passages from prominent proponents on this especially poignant criticism of FL's inadequacy. Ch. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca write:

> [The New Rhetoric] constitutes a *break with a concept of reason and reasoning due to Descartes* [who made "the self-evident the mark of reason"] which has set its mark on Western philosophy for the last three centuries. … The very nature of deliberation and argumentation is opposed to necessity and self-evidence, since no one deliberates where the solution is necessary or argues what is self-evident. (1969: 1)

> Take away the guarantee which God gives to self-evidence and, suddenly, all thought becomes human and fallible, and no longer sheltered from controversy. … But lacking self-evidence that can be imposed on everyone, a hypothesis, to be accepted, must be supported by good reasons, recognized as such by other people, members of the same scientific community. The status of knowledge thus ceases to be impersonal because every scientific thought becomes a human one, i.e., fallible, situated in and subjected to controversy. (Perelman 1982: 159; cf. 24)[3]

Toulmin complements Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca when he writes that:

> The ambition to cast logic into a mathematical form … [motivated logicians to] systematis[e] the principles of sound reasoning and [to] theoris[e] about the canons of argument … [and to maintain] the ideal of the subject as a formal, deductive, and preferably an axiomatic science … as more important than its practical applicability.

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[3]   Consider also: "Objectivity, as it relates to argumentation, must be reconsidered and reinterpreted if it is to have meaning in a conception that does not allow the separation of an assertion from the person who makes it" (1969: 59). "In modern logic, the product of reflection on mathematical reasoning, the formal systems are no longer related to any rational evidence whatever. … The search for unquestionable univocity has even led the formalistic logicians to construct systems in which no attention is paid to the meaning of the expressions" (1969: 13).

> (1958: 177) [Logic, on this model] is concerned with timeless truths about its own theoretical entities (1958: 178).

> [In respect of soundness in predictive arguments] if validity is to be a timeless 'logical relation' between the statements alone, facts about their occasion of utterance must be swept aside as irrelevant. … looking down from his Olympian throne, he then sets himself to pronounce about the unchangeable relations between them. But taking this kind of God's-eye-view distracts one completely from the practical problems out of which the question of validity itself springs. … Questions about the acceptability [or soundness] of arguments have in practice to be understood and tackled *in a context* quite as much as questions about the acceptability of individual utterances, and this practical necessity the purely formal logician strikes out of the account before even beginning his work. (1958: 184-185)

And Hamblin writes:

> A proof, I take it, is just a knock-down argument; but this model of proof, far from setting a *high* standard of argument-worth for us, completely lets slip certain important desiderata. For example, it quite fails to ban circular reasoning for us, and one is encouraged to imagining that there is 'really nothing wrong' with using a formula to prove itself, or an axiom to prove an axiom, or a rule to prove a formula (such as *modus ponens*) interpretable as the expression of the rule. Equivocation is apparently also regarded as impossible, or the invalid arguments that it may lead to as 'formally valid'. The shortness of the steps and the transparency of the axioms and rules, whose rationale is the provision of a guarantee against error, is not only not a protection against these other sources of invalidity but a smoke-screen that can help them to slip through unnoticed; and it is not uncommon for the fussiness of a formal proof to defeat its own end by making it extremely laborious to follow, if not actually obscure. Yet in spite of it all it is a commonplace of modern Logic that highly paradoxical theorems have been 'proved' from harmless-looking axioms and rules. The complicated shuffle involving the construction of 'alternative' systems disguises the fact that nothing is proved absolutely at all, and that an unpalatable theorem can sometimes be a ground for going back and altering the axioms or rules. (1993: 249; cf. 251)

In another but related respect FL focuses on rationality rather than reasonableness. FL has concentrated on a model of Cartesian rationality and diminished the importance of reasonableness. That model of rationality has been proffered as universal, objective, absolute, and atemporal. However, since this platonic realm remains forever beyond human reach, humans are left with having to make *reasonable* decisions based on the available evidence. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca write that:

> It is the *idea of self-evidence* as characteristic of reason, which we must assail, if we are to make place for a theory of argumentation that will acknowledge the use of reason in directing our own actions and influencing those of others. (1969: 3)

> The assertion that whatever is not objectively and indisputably valid belongs to the realm of the arbitrary and subjective creates an unbridgeable gulf between theoretical knowledge, which alone is rational, and action, for which motivations would be wholly irrational. (1969: 512)

Toulmin in this connection calls for a 'return to reason' aims to dethrone the Westphalian, or Cartesian, imperial rationality with egalitarian reasonableness (2001: 21-22, 156-157; cf. 204), the one — theoretical arguments — formal, abstract and general, empty, context-free, and platonic pure and timeless, value-neutral, the other — factual narratives — substantive, timely, practical and local, empirical, situation-dependent, and everyday and ethically loaded (2001: 24), desituated or disembedded on the one hand, situated or embedded on the other hand (2001: 26). In addition, Toulmin's social history of logic locates the split between the reasonable and the

rational in the Peace of Westphalia, out of which came absolute sovereignty, established religion, and logical demonstration, all of which share two common features: "[1] all of them operated top-down, and gave power to oligarchies — political, ecclesiastical, or academic — that supported one another … [2] they formed a single [ideological] package" (2001: 156).[4]

    And Hamblin notes that:

> So long as it is the logic of practice that is being discussed, it is important to relate the concepts of truth, validity, and knowledge to dialectical concepts in the right way. … In the limiting case in which one person constructs an argument for his own edification … his own acceptance of premises and inference are all that can matter *to him*; and to apply alethic criteria to the argument is surreptitiously to bring in the question of *our own* acceptance of it. When there are two or more parties to be considered, an argument may be acceptable in different degrees to different ones or groups, and a dialectical appraisal can be conducted on a different basis according to which party or group one has in mind; but again, if we try to step outside and adjudicate, we have no basis other than *our own* on which to do so. Truth and validity are onlookers' concepts and presuppose a God's eye-view of the arena. … [onlookers might intervene and thus] become simply another participant in an enlarged dialectical situation and that the words 'true' and 'valid' have become, for [the participant] too, empty stylistic excrescences. To another onlooker, my statement that so-and-so is true is simply a statement of what I accept. (1993: 242-243) "*This point … is of fundamental philosophical importance*" (1993: 243; emphasis added)

> However, there is also more to be said against the alethic criteria and in favour of a set based on acceptability or acceptance rather than truth. … we should consider, also, the case in which someone, *with good reason*, accepts a given set of premises and a given inference-process, and becomes convinced of a consequent conclusion [outside of making a quasi-moral judgment]. … but, if we are to draw the line anywhere [respecting relevance of 'to whom'], acceptance by the person the argument is aimed at — the person for whom the argument is an argument — is the appropriate basis of a set of criteria [for argument appraisal]. (1970: 241-242)

Now, having reviewed some tenets of argumentation philosophy, we are in a position to identify some additional principles that underlie and direct their thinking. Particularly important in connection with their overarching concerns for (1) the pragmatics of discourse, (2) requirements of relevance, (3) audience adherence, and (4) a theater of *good will* is their concern for the *human person*. In this respect, then, we need to consider in what way the philosophy of argument is more appropriately placed under applied ethics than strictly speaking within the realm of logic *per se*.

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[4]   Toulmin also writes that "[t]he Westphalian Settlement was, then, a poisoned chalice: intellectual dogmatism, political chauvinism, and sectarian religion formed a blend whose influence lasted into the twentieth century" (2001: 158) … the outlines of which "day by day and year by year … have thus been progressively eroded" (161). He then remarks about the contemporary world that "[a]s in politics, tolerance and democracy are winning out over elitism in methodology, and over imperialism in the philosophy of science. To that extent, the imbalance in European ideas about Rationality and Reasonableness shows healthy signs of correcting itself" (2001: 167). Consider also: "Historically, the enthronement of mathematical rationality was just one aspect of a broader intellectual response to the loss of theological consensus following Luther's and Calvin's success in enrolling craftsmen and other members of the newly literate laity into Protestant congregations" (2001: 205).

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