

University of Windsor

Scholarship at UWindor

OSSA Conference Archive

OSSA 5

May 14th, 9:00 AM - May 17th, 5:00 PM

Commentary on Takuzo

Alan Gross

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

Gross, Alan, "Commentary on Takuzo" (2003). *OSSA Conference Archive*. 60.
<https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/ossaarchive/OSSA5/papersandcommentaries/60>

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

Author: Alan G. Gross
Commentary on: T. Konishi's "Establishing Informal Logic through Dissociation"

© 2003 Alan G. Gross

It is a pleasure, as always, to visit Canada again, a country with which we are not at war, at least for the moment and, finally, a pleasure to comment on the paper just given by Takuzo Konishi on my favorite Perelman-Olbrechts-Tyteca *topos*, that of dissociation. In the spirit of Professor Konishi's topic, however, I would like to dissociate myself somewhat from his views. In the first place, I do not see a problem where he sees one: Is dissociation a scheme or a technique of argument? Both, I would say. It is a technique in pragmatic contexts, a scheme when, for heuristic or analytical purposes, we abstract it from these contexts. But this is by the way; this dissent does not speak to the disagreement I have with Professor Konishi concerning dissociation.

I cannot fault his definition, except in so far as it permits him to apply it to his example, a paper by Ralph Johnson and Tony Blair. I think the problem may be in Konishi's definitional step 2: "X that is assumed to be one and united is not actually a single thing." While a necessary condition of dissociation, it is not sufficient. The problem is that for Perelman philosophical pairs, his prototype of dissociation, consists of two terms in *deadly* opposition, such as appearance and reality. Formal and informal logic, Konishi's example, are not opposed as I understand them, but rather partners assisting us in our understanding the structure of reasoning. My response begins by defining dissociation and ends by giving a philosophical example from Descartes.

First, I would like to attend to definition. In the midst of the Civil War, in a letter to his good friend, James C. Conkling, a letter meant to be read publicly at a meeting of Union supporters that Lincoln could not attend, the President tackles the issue of the cause for which the War is being fought:

You say you will not fight to free negroes. Some of them seem willing to fight for you; but, no matter. Fight you, then, exclusively to save the Union. I issued the [Emancipation P]roclamation on purpose to aid you in saving the Union. Whenever you shall have conquered all resistance to the Union, if I shall urge you to continue fighting, it will be an apt time then, for you to declare that you will not fight to free negroes (722-723).

In this passage, Lincoln is breaking the links between the fighting of the Civil War and the freeing of the slaves; he is saying, in Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's terms, that he is "affirming that elements that should remain separate and independent have been improperly associated" (411). This is very different from the associated and more important concept of dissociation:

Dissociation assumes an original unity of elements comprised within a single conception and designated by a single notion. The dissociation of notions brings

about a more or less profound change in the conceptual data that are used as the basis of argument. It is then no more a question of breaking the links that join independent elements, but of modifying the very structure of these elements (411-412).

In the following passage, Lincoln dissociates the founding and flourishing of America from the framing of the Constitution; he does so in the interest of promoting what he sees as the real principle animating our Union and our continuing prosperity, then as now, the principle of liberty to all:

Without the *Constitution* and the *Union*, we could not have attained the result; but even these, are not the primary cause of our great prosperity. There is something back of these, entwining itself more closely about the human heart. That something, is the principle of "Liberty to all"—the principle that clears the *path* for all—gives *hope* to all—and, by consequence, *enterprize* and *industry* to all. The *expression* of that principle, in our Declaration of Independence, was most happy, and fortunate. *Without* this, as well as *with* it, we could have declared our independence of Great Britain; but *without* it, we could not, I think, have secured our free government, and consequent prosperity. No oppressed people will *fight* and *endure*, as our fathers did, without the promise of something better, than a mere change of masters (513).

In forming this dissociation, Lincoln's is "prompted by the desire to remove an incompatibility arising out of the confrontation of one proposition with others" (Perleman 413). The dissociation assumes an original unity of elements, the notion of a nation whose prosperity has as its cause its Constitution and the Union that Constitution creates. Lincoln feels that this view, because it leads to an incompatibility, is deeply mistaken: no one risks life and limb for a document. The removal of this incompatibility forces us, he thinks, to modify our view: the Constitution and the Union become the means by which the real cause of our continuing prosperity—the principle of liberty to all—works its magic.

While the dissociation of concepts is useful in the analysis of political argument, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's central insight concerns philosophy; philosophy, they aver, arrives at its truths precisely through dissociation. It is their view that philosophical argument is *essentially* dissociative. The claim is a strong one:

"any new philosophy presupposes the working out of a conceptual apparatus, at least part of which, that which is fundamentally original, results from a dissociation of notions that enables the problems the philosopher has set for himself to be solved. It is for this reason, among others, that we consider the study of the techniques of dissociation to be so significant" (414).

This is certainly the case with Descartes, prompted to dissociation by what he considers the deceptiveness of a received view of the world.

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca call each of the dissociations through which, they contend, all philosophies are constructed, a philosophical pair, consisting of two terms,

Term I, the term to be devalued, and Term II, the term to be privileged. Their prototypical philosophical pair is

appearance

reality

According to the Belgians, this pair of opposites operates throughout Western philosophy. For Plato, the world around us is only an appearance; only the Forms are real. For Locke, sights and sounds are appearances, perceptions of the secondary qualities of matter; only primary qualities, such as extension, are real; for Marx, the socio-economic system we see around us is an appearance, the superstructure; only the base, the dialectical struggle leading to the triumph of the proletariat, is real. In contrast, for the phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty, reversing this philosophical pair, it is these very appearances that are real; the so-called realities of Plato, Locke, and Marx are illusions. In all cases, it is Term I that is devalued, as against Term II.

For the purposes of exemplification, I shall focus on the role of dissociation in the work of Descartes, the *Third Meditation*. As is well known, Descartes launches his philosophical program with a series of skeptical arguments designed to separate us from our comfortable sense that we are in constant touch with reality. First, he questions the reliability of the senses. He has good reason to be wary of sense perception since, obviously, it sometimes deceives us. But there is another, stronger reason for doubt: sometimes we have dreams so vivid that we confuse them with a waking state: is it not possible, then, that our waking state is also a dream? Finally, is it not possible that there is a Deceiver, a God who allows us to infer from our sense impressions that there is a real world when, in fact, nothing exists beyond those impressions themselves?

Even in the face of these arguments, the most unsettling of which is the third, one clear and distinct belief survives, the *cogito*, the belief that I am a thinking thing. Why is this? Because the *cogito* is a clear and distinct idea, a technical term defined by Descartes in his *Principles of Philosophy*:

I call a perception "clear" when it is present and accessible to the attentive mind—just as we say that we see something clearly when it is present to the eye's gaze and stimulates it with a sufficient degree of strength and accessibility. I call a perception "distinct" if, as well as being clear, it is so sharply separated from all other perceptions that it contains within itself only what is clear (Dicker 85).

For Descartes, clear and distinct ideas are immune to skeptical doubt.

But even if I am sure that I exist as a thinking thing—and how can I deny this proposition without affirming it?—I cannot be sure that I am not deceived when I think I am in touch with the world as it really is. The Deceiver argument makes it imperative that the idea of God be clear and distinct: "I must examine whether there is a God, and if there is, whether he can be a deceiver. For if I do not know this, it seems that I can never be quite certain about anything else" (74). Because of the Deceiver argument, only the existence of God can halt Descartes's skeptical regression and affirm the power of human beings to know themselves and the world.

Fortunately, by natural light, that is, clearly and distinctly, I have an idea of a "supreme God, eternal, infinite, <immutable,> omniscient, omnipotent and creator of all

things that exist apart from him" (77). But does this image I have correspond to anything real outside of myself? Indeed, it does:

it is clear to me, by the natural light, that the ideas in me are like <pictures, or> images which can easily fall short of the perfection of the things from which they are taken, but which cannot contain anything greater or more perfect.

The longer and more carefully I examine all these points, the more clearly and distinctly I recognize their truth. But what is my conclusion to be? If the objective reality of any of my ideas turns out to be so great that I am sure the same reality does not reside in me . . . and hence that I myself cannot be its cause, it will necessarily follow that I am not alone in the world, but that some other thing which is the cause of this idea also exists (Dicker 78).

While "it is true that I have the idea of substance in me in virtue of the fact that I am a substance . . . this would not account for my having the idea of an infinite substance, when I am finite, unless this idea proceeded from some substance which was really infinite" (79-80). Moreover, the God that gives me the idea of God as a perfect being cannot be a deceiver, "since it is manifest by the natural light that all fraud and deception depend on some defect" (82). It is thus that Descartes's systematic skepticism is halted; it has turned into a device, a means for affirming the self and the world, and may be discarded forthwith. This use of dissociation, I submit, is very different from the separation Johnson and Blair make between formal and informal logic. They are not in the metaphysical business of overturning our settled view of the world and its underpinnings.

The dissociations of Descartes coincide exactly with what constitutes his originality. For Descartes, there is the dissociation, first, between our unsure sense of ourselves and of the world, as revealed to our five senses, and our sure sense of ourselves as thinking things. There is also the dissociation between confused and indistinct ideas and clear and distinct ideas, especially our clear and distinct idea of God as a guarantor of a world our unaided senses can never guarantee. In this analysis of dissociation and philosophy, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca provide us with more than insight; they help to repair the damage Plato did by dividing philosophy from rhetoric.

References

Dicker, George. *Descartes: An Analytic and Historical Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Gross, Alan G. and Ray D. Dearin. *Chaim Perelman*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2003.

Perelman, Chaim and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca. *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver, trans. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969.