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In Response to: Erik C. W. Krabbe's *Strategies in Dialectic and Rhetoric*

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The relationship between dialectics and rhetoric, as Professor Krabbe rightly reminds us, goes back to the Greeks: Plato wished to rend them asunder in his dialogue, *Gorgias*, and Aristotle sought their reconciliation, or at least hinted at the possibility of their productive and peaceful co-habitation, in his *Rhetoric*. Since the Greeks, nearly everyone interested in the theory of argumentation has had a hand at trying either to say what Aristotle really thought the difference was between dialectics and rhetoric, or else at claiming to have found the real difference. The dialectic – or should I perhaps say, ‘the rhetoric’ or ‘the dialectic *and* the rhetoric’ – continues. At one point in their recent work on integrating rhetorical insights into their dialectical model, Van Eemeren and Houtlosser say:

To overcome the sharp and infertile ideological division between rhetoric and dialectic, we view dialectic as a theory of argumentation in natural discourse, fitting rhetorical insight ... [of] ... persuasion techniques into this theoretical framework. (165)¹

The view here is that the pragma-dialectical theory is a theory of argumentation in natural discourse and rhetoric is not, but it can be fitted to the pragma-dialectical theory, and in doing this “the sharp and infertile division between rhetoric and dialectic” is overcome. Whether this marriage is a natural and fitting one between star-crossed lovers, or an arranged one designed to protect the family fortune, is an interesting question.

Rhetoric through pragma-dialectical eyes

We should look carefully at how rhetoric is viewed through pragma-dialectical eyes. She is, of course, contrasted with dialectics.

It is said that there are dialectical norms and that people who have the goal of solving their differences in a rational manner have an eye on these norms, at least imperfectly and implicitly. One goal of those who argue with each other, then, is that their arguing should be done in accord with a set of rules which will allow the best argument to carry the day. Still, one may also hope that things turn out in one's own favour; thus, without violating any of the dialectical rules that the arguers have agreed to, each may engage in certain strategies that he hopes will improve his chances of having the argumentation turn out to his advantage. These strategies, identified as falling into one or another of three categories, Van Eemeren and Houtlosser call “rhetorical aspects of argumentation.”

There are two points to notice here: (i) availing oneself of rhetorical strategies is not inconsistent with engaging in a critical discussion (with being dialectical), and (ii) the dialectical theory comes first and rhetoric is an ‘add-on’ aspect of argumentative discourse.

¹ In another essay van Eemeren and Houtlosser put it this way: “To overcome the sharp and infertile ideological division between rhetoric and dialectic, we view dialectic -- in line with Agricola -- as a theory of argumentation in natural discourse, and fit rhetorical insights into our dialectical framework.” (1999b: 479-97).

A short aside for which we will not have time ...

Just as Van Eemeren and Houtlosser are now worrying the relationship between dialectics and rhetoric, logicians have also taken up the question of the relation between logic and rhetoric and have, in the main, put rhetoric in the weaker position. There is logic, and logic is good; there is also rhetoric, and it is not logic. Susan Stebbing thought logic and rhetoric had naught to do with one another.

Rhetoric is a means of persuasion. The aim of the orator is to induce belief, not to demonstrate a conclusion; his art consists in persuading others to accept a conclusion for which there is no adequate evidence. ... the orator substitutes persuasion for conviction., appealing to emotion rather than to conviction. The speech of a great orator is a work of art; as such it has nothing to do with logic. (Stebbing 1950: 468)

Irving Copi also briefly compares logic and rhetoric in his famous book, *Introduction to Logic*.

... other methods are available which may resolve a disagreement in attitude. Persuasion may be attempted, with its extensive use of expressive discourse. Rhetoric may be of paramount utility in unifying the will of a group, in achieving unanimity of attitude. But of course it is wholly worthless in resolving a question of fact. (Copi 1962: 43)

Logic is good for resolving questions of fact, and rhetoric is not. This division once made between logic and rhetoric is analogous to the one made by those who want to distinguish dialectics from rhetoric, but it is being done in a post-positivist era when we are less hostile to the art of rhetoric.

That the fist will fit into the open hand is not a new idea. The Pragma-Dialecticians know that they are taking up an ancient theme when they say that dialectics and rhetoric should work together. Moreover – taking a hint from Agricola (the common ancestor of Coca Cola and Pepsicola) – Pragma-Dialectics wants to drape the tapestry of rhetoric on the naked scaffolding of dialectical theory. This we should have anticipated. But that rhetorical manoeuvres have been classified into three kinds seems to me very useful, and it leads to what I think is novel and ingenious, namely that Pragma-Dialectics proposes to explore the possible rhetorical manoeuvres at each stage of argumentation calling for a strategy.

The lay of argumentative discourse making room for both dialectics and rhetoric might be this:

AD is a piece of argumentative discourse only if

- 1) *A* and *B* perceive a difference of opinion *X*, i.e., *A* holds that *O* and *B* knows it, and either *B* holds that *not-O* and *A* knows it, or, *B* doubts that *O*, and *A* knows it
- 2) *A* has the goal, *G_a*, of reaching a rational resolution to *X* by means of a dialectical discussion
- 3) *B* has the goal, *G_b*, of reaching a rational resolution of *X* by means of a dialectical discussion

- 4) The realization of Ga = the realization of Gb
- 5) A has a goal, Ra , that the discussion should be decided in A 's favour
- 6) B has a goal, Rb , that the discussion should be decided in B 's favour
- 7) It is not possible that both Ra and Rb are realized

(We might say that people who engage in argumentative discourse have ‘mixed feelings’ about doing so.)

The model as I have presented it, does not show that there is any relation between the goals that a participant may have (e.g., between Ra and Ga). But Krabbe points out what seems to me to be true, namely, that the goals can be “functionally related, as means to ends,” and he goes further, saying that the attempt to meet one’s own goals in dialogue actually serves the purpose of trying to reach a common goal. If Van Eemeren and Houtlosser shared Krabbe’s insight here about how some goals are subservient to other goals, then, they might say that the rhetorical goals are in the service of the dialectical goals. I wonder, however, is there some reason why the dialectical goals couldn’t be secondary to the rhetorical ones? Krabbe’s example of a negotiation dialogue seems to be a case in point: each side hopes to advance its interest through adhering to the rules of that kind of dialogue: but each person’s overall aim is not simply to get a compromise (the goal of the dialogue) but to get a compromise with a content which is an improvement on their initial position (a self-interested goal). And I think that the same could occur in a critical discussion. My first goal is to win, and my second one is to do it by the rules of critical discussion. If I see that I can easily, and by the dialectical rules, send my opponent packing, why couldn’t my goals be related that way?

Krabbe and the wide sense of ‘dialectics’

Krabbe’s point of departure from the Van Eemeren and Houtlosser’s account is prompted by a disagreement about what is to count as dialectical and rhetorical behaviour respectively. Krabbe starts by saying that for behaviour to be *dialectically reasonable* it must conform to the rules of the model, but this is not enough.

If we want to use model M as a model of fully reasonable discussion, we should ask more of both discussants than that they neatly conform to the rules of M [They] ... should also put an effort into the discussion. ... The requirement of putting an effort into the discussion is part and parcel of the concept of reasonableness that is articulated in the model. (Krabbe 2001)

Accordingly, Krabbe formulates a second dialectical requirement (a requirement on those engaged in dialectics) that they should try to win.

The second requirement stresses the competitive nature of critical discussion. But ultimately this competitive character is meant to serve the common goal of reaching the best possible result. Competition is an integrated part of the explication of the concept of “reasonable discussion,” and therefore of the concept of “reasonable argument.” For that reason, strategic behaviour, within the bounds of ... [the rules of the model], ... aimed at winning the discussion is most properly regarded as dialectical. To call such behaviour rhetorical seems off the mark (Krabbe 2001).

Armed with this insight, Krabbe thinks the reach of dialectically reasonable and strategic behaviour is wider than was imagined by Van Eemeren and Houtlosser. For example, whereas

they are inclined to classify the selection of topical material (arguments), and the exploitation of the audience's disposition as rhetorical manoeuvres, Krabbe sees that these moves may be done in accord with the dialectical responsibility of trying to win a critical discussion, and hence that they *may* be classified as dialectical behaviour.

Krabbe also goes on to argue that Van Eemeren and Houtlosser's third level of rhetorical manoeuvring – that which involves the use of presentational devices – may well consist in behaviour that is merely consistent with a dialectical rule about language use (be clear, avoid ambiguity, etc.). Therefore, such apparently rhetorical manoeuvring turns out on closer inspection to be required by the dialectical model, and so there is reason to classify it as dialectical behaviour rather than rhetorical behaviour.

But notice the assumption with which we have been keeping company. *The rules of the model, are dialectical rules.* But what makes them so? Is it analytically so? Is it written at the top of the page?

The famous Rule 10 of Pragma-Dialectics is a rule which we may well wonder about. Would not a rhetor, someone bent on persuasion, who wanted to be clearly and unambiguously understood by his partner-in-dialogue be compelled to follow just this rule?

A party must not use formulations that are insufficiently clear, or confusingly ambiguous, and he must interpret the other party's formulations as carefully and accurately as possible (Van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992: 196).²

This seems on the face of it to be a rule about the standard of communication in argumentative discourse, a standard which is perhaps essential to getting your dialectical point successfully conveyed. But that does not mean that it is a dialectical rule, i.e., *a rule of dialectics*. Thus one can reason opposite to Krabbe, and say that because some behaviour required by Rule 10 is rhetorical in nature, it follows that Rule 10 is not a pure dialectical rule.

Discussion

How then are we to view the relation between dialectics and rhetoric? Krabbe says, "... if it can be sustained ... [a] characterization of the difference between dialectical and rhetorical behaviour will always be relative to some more or less articulated model of dialogue" (Krabbe 2001). This means that it is only in relation to a model of dialogue that we can say what's dialectical and what's rhetorical. What is the model like that it allows us to do this?

The illusive model *M* remains undefined in this discussion. It is supposed to be a model of fully reasonable discussion, a model of dialogue, a model of discussion, and it has rules. Compliance with the rules of *M*, whatever it is, is the first and fundamental dialectical obligation. Krabbe is inclined to think that there may be more than one *M*, and the points he wants to make about dialectical and rhetorical behaviour, he takes to be general points that will be true no matter what the details of *M* are. And the general point is this:

In as far as various choices and moves can be analysed in terms of trying to make a move in *M*, they are properly subsumed under the concept of dialectical behaviour, whereas other aspects of behaviour, that are analysed from some other perspective than trying to

² Actually, there seems to be three rules here.

make a move in *M*, may, in a number of cases, be properly called rhetorical (Krabbe 2001).

I don't disagree at all that there are essential differences between the heart of dialectics and the heart of rhetoric, and that to understand one is to be able to contrast it with the other. I have reservations, however, about a program which, without hesitation, gives pride of place to dialectics in argumentative discourse. This treats rhetoric as an 'add-on', something extraneous to the normative centre of a dialogue-model, and I think it underestimates the importance of rhetoric/communication in argumentative discourse. Hence, I'm inclined to resist Professor Krabbe's expansionist moves on behalf of dialectics; I might even want a narrower conception of dialectics than the one being advanced by Van Eemeren and Houtlosser.

The rules of dialectics and the rules of argumentative discourse are not quite the same thing. Similarly, dialectical models and models of dialogue are not identical either. I'm not sure that everyone appreciates this. For example, some "view dialectic as a theory of argumentation in natural discourse" (Van Eemeren and Houtlosser 1999a). Rule 10, which we just considered, seems a good rule of argumentative discourse, but it is an anomaly as a dialectical requirement unless 'dialectic' is taken as synonymous with 'theory of argumentation in natural discourse.' A model of dialogue should embody some dialectical ideals but it also has to include other components, and saying these are all dialectical components because they are part of the model, amounts to an attempt to rearrange the furniture.

Dialectics and rhetoric are both part of argumentative discourse; argumentative discourse may be modelled in a model of dialogue, and therefore a model of dialogue should not be one that excludes rhetorical requirements. It turns out then that I agree with Professor Krabbe's point that the relation between dialectics and rhetoric must be understood in relation to a model. But I think it must be the kind of model which integrates dialectical and rhetorical aspects of argumentative discourse.

Recently, Ralph Johnson wrote a book in which he wants to develop a theory of argument, and he clearly holds that his theory is not a rhetorical theory. In fact, he sees an important difference between his approach and what he takes to be the rhetorical approach to argument (Johnson 2000: 163). But one of the most important requirements of arguing, for Johnson, is that the rationality of the arguer should be made *manifest*; that is, it should be clear and unmistakable -- transparent, if you like. But why? So that the one who is being persuaded will see the details of the case exactly as they are, in terms of strength, relevance, and in face of the objections. Ironically, this seems to me to be a *rhetorical* requirement ... it is done for the sake of the Other, the persuadee, the audience, whatever Surely, an argument would not be less rational if for some reason it was not fully understood, or misunderstood, by the other, even though that would make it an inefficient instrument of persuasion. Rational persuasion, then, makes rhetorical demands. So too, I think, do models of argumentative discourse.

This gives me a chance to add my own answer to the old question, "What is the difference between dialectics and rhetoric?": Dialectics has to do with reasonableness *in* discourse, rhetoric with reasonableness *of* discourse. As an illustration, take the good argument that is not well communicated. It may well be a reasonable argument (its reasonableness can be found *in* the discourse), but if it is presented to an audience which is not prepared to receive it, or unable to do so, then the use *of* the discourse fails to be reasonable.

The model of argumentative discourse we are looking for is one which integrates rationality both *in* and *of* discourse (and perhaps other considerations too). So, I agree with Professor Krabbe, and Van Eemeren and Houtlosser that the marriage of dialectics and rhetoric is imminent. I am not yet persuaded, however, of the terms they propose to put in the pre-nuptial agreement.

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