

May 15th, 9:00 AM - May 17th, 5:00 PM

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# **THE TOPICS IN CLASSICAL AND MODERN THEORIES OF ARGUMENTATION**

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## *Abstract:*

The purpose is to discuss some of the results and problems presented by the study of the topics between Aristotle's work and the treatment of them by Perelman and his followers. For instance, the method whereby classical and modern rhetorical theorists connect figurative language with techniques of persuasion, consists in proposing that there exists a restricted number of "universal" argumentative strategies. Until the Renaissance, text producers and receivers shared a common knowledge of such argumentative procedures. In the twentieth century, Perelman and others have re-conceived the topics making up the "New Rhetoric's" argumentative function, as comparison of the two systems reveals.

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Begin with a story. Make it autobiographical, incorporate the topic of modesty and we have the beginnings of a *captatio*. As procatalepsis, however, I warn you that mine may prove a cautionary tale.

Once upon a time a young scholar looking for truth fell by mischance into literary criticism. Seeking certainty, or at least a method having more than traditional usage to recommend it, he decided to examine the mechanisms of literary language to see what results they might yield. Searching for methodological tools, he apprenticed himself to a magician who promised that in Stylistics lay the way. Discovering, however, that evaluation of linguistic ornamentation did not offer the answers he needed, he looked around again. In a dark wood, he fell in with a band of jugglers, who called themselves Structuralists and who declared that certainty lay in the reduction of complex problems to binary oppositions and to a few primary forms from which all others would certainly be deduced, when they could find the time to publish their final results. Always hopeful, he launched into the theories of genre and narrative they espoused, learning much, but usually disappointed by the disproportion between the complicated nature of the theory adumbrated and the fairly simple character of the results achieved from its application to specific texts. (One of the things he had learned by this time was, by the way, that at a time of reducing University enrolments in the Arts, it was not wise to declare that the texts he was working on were indeed "literary". That adjective tended to be replaced by the epithet, "useless", by administrators or, indeed, by anyone else who had suffered from a "literary" education.)

Tired and blasé by now, he came across ancient rhetoric, which looked promising and he was preparing to investigate it more closely, when he attended one of those colloquia which form the jousting—places at which the champions of the various literary methods or theories display their prowess. There he was accosted and promised logical rigour by a semiotician, who rubbished rhetoric as merely literary criticism under another name, adding that, anyway, its jargon was impossible. The semiotician declared that in the examination of the dance of the bees, or in close attention to the mating practices of spiders, or, even, in the vestimentary sign-systems of humans resides the most scientific way of preparing oneself to analyse literature. It was simply a matter, the sign-

master said, of creating a rigorous logic of actantial configuration, a logical square of semantic oppositions, and of building a meta-linguistic bathyscape capable of descending to the appropriate "level" of signification. Once these minor task were accomplished, or even before, the happy few would achieve incontrovertible results. Worried a little by the semiotician's confidence and obvious reluctance to enter into debate about the metaphors he was using, the by now not-so-young scholar was finally disconcerted when he found the scientific investigators he so respected carving up conventional disciplines prior to colonising them. In his own case, however, being neither a cultural nationalist nor a propagandist for post-modernity or post-colonialism, he left them to it. As it happened, he had discovered at long last what it was that interested him and what it was he wanted to investigate.

In his first slight contacts with rhetoric, he had confused it with stylistics, because what passed for rhetoric in the post-Romantic age in which he lived was what the Classical, medieval, and non-Ramist Renaissance rhetors had called the *elocutio*, the theoretical taxonomy of tropes and figures. Always more interested in the means by which texts communicate what used to be called "ideas", or intellectual concepts, he discovered, only at this late date that, in fact, rhetoric's primary purpose was to persuade, rather than simply to move or delight. He discovered this fact in a curious way, one which illustrates perfectly the ancient maxim, "When all else fails, read the instructions". What he did, was to read the *Rhetoric* of Aristotle, which, in comparison with the theories of discourse production and reception to which he had been exposed up to that point, seemed to offer the authority, verifiability and persuasiveness that he had been seeking. He was determined, however, not to slide back into the study only of the tropes and figures, so he gave special attention to the argumentative forms called topics. It is the purpose of this paper to discuss some of the results and problems presented by the study of the topics between Aristotle's eight books on the subject and the discussion of them in the twentieth century by Chaim Perelman and his followers. Such an ambitious project will necessarily involve a degree of schematisation and over-simplification for which I apologize in advance.

Since my first problem concerns the meaning of the word "Topic", I will need to foreground the topic of etymology. As a non-reader of Greek, I must rely, for the material on which to base my own arguments, upon translations into English, French or *à la rigueur*, Latin, of the primary texts. I am not alone in this, I realise, but it does cause certain problems. We are all familiar, I'm sure, with the meaning of the Greek word, *topoi*, which the *Oxford English Dictionary*, not usually a very reliable source for the definition of rhetorical terms, defines by reference to the, I quote: "title of a work by Aristotle, lit[erally]. matters concerning commonplaces". C.C.J. Webb, author of the *OED*'s entry on "topic", goes on:

The use of "*topos*" for a class of considerations which would serve as a place in which a rhetorician might look for suggestions in treating his theme goes back to Isocrates. By Aristotle *topos* was generally appropriated to classes of considerations of a general character, *common* to many kinds of subjects, the use of which was open to anyone dealing with his subject as a rhetorician or dialectician, not with scientific knowledge with a view to scientific demonstration. Such were more fully described as *kolnoi topoi*, *loci communes*, commonplaces. Aristotle's treatise on *probable* (as distinguished from *demonstrative*) reasoning, which started from such general considerations and dispensed with special knowledge, was referred to as *ta topika*; and such general considerations and arguments based thereon as were treated of in that work were called *topic axioms*, *topic arguments*, or simply *topics*; sometimes with more, sometimes with less emphasis on the general character of such arguments.<sup>1</sup>

So far so bad, then. Does the confusion, that I read in the definition just quoted come down to this? Topics, to which Aristotle devoted the eight books already mentioned, are more general than *topoi*, of which he lists

twenty-eight in chapter 23 of *Rhetoric II*? Richard Lanham seems to think so:

The commonplace, [he writes], is the general term for, or at least overlaps the device Aristotle defined more narrowly, and placed specifically in the definition of Invention [...]. Thus, *loci*, properly speaking, has two overlapping meanings: commonplace observations, and common sources of arguments. Collections of rhetorical commonplaces, of whatever sort, have always been surveys, as Kenneth Burke writes in blending the two meanings, "of the things that people generally consider persuasive, and of methods that have persuasive effects" (*Rhetoric of Motives*, p. 580). [2](#)

Comparison of the Aristotelian list of the Categories with that of the Topics establishes various similarities, dissimilarities, and anomalies. The ten "categories of predication", as listed by Aristotle are: "What a thing is, Quantity, Quality, Relation, Place, Time, Position, State, Activity, Passivity."[3](#) Whereas, the general topics of the *Inventio* include: definition, division, similitude, dissimilitude, adjuncts, cause, effect, etymology, inflexions, etc.

No wonder Trebathius, Cicero's lawyer-friend, had difficulty grasping the subtleties of the topics. He asked Cicero for an explanation and it is to Cicero's list of 17 topics that modern commentators usually turn when considering the topics of argumentation. I shall return to Cicero's 16 topics intrinsic to the speech, which subsume Aristotle's "artificial" proofs, and one extrinsic, or "inartificial" topic, testimony, in a moment. The reason I am retracing my steps is that I have not yet looked at Aristotle's treatment of topics/or *topoi* in the *Rhetoric* itself.

Aristotle's enumeration of twenty-eight lines of argument on which enthymemes, demonstrative and refutative, can be based occurs in chapter 23 of *Rhetoric II*, as I've said. The second book is devoted to pragmatic matters, offering, for example, Aristotle's theory of *pathos* (emotional appeals, and his advice to rhetors on how to exploit them before various audiences. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that his twenty-eight valid topics include specific lines like the following: restatement of a contention in opposite terms; synonymic redefinition; correlative ideas; *a fortiori*; argument from past circumstances; accusation turned against the accuser; strategic definition; wordplay; logical division; induction from parallel cases; argument from authority, from precedent, from a previous verdict; the contention argued part by part; argument from good, bad, or logical consequences; concession; causality; the application of an opponent's earlier decision to a later case, to his disadvantage; argument from possible, general or plausible motive; from "true" improbability; from the opponent's inaccuracies and self-contradictions; refutation of slander as "mistaken" or "misinformed"; the argument that effect proves cause and vice versa; argument from "trustful" (i.e., non-adversarial ignorance); from the inconsistency of asserted action; from previous mistakes which defend, or explain present ones; and onomastic wordplay. The list displays, despite the incoherencies introduced by abbreviation, both the links it retains to the arguments outlined in the *Topics*, and the diversity which indicates that the common places represent, as Lanham puts it, a category "so large as to prohibit enumeration." [4](#) This impression is confirmed by chapter 24 of *Rhetoric II*, in which Aristotle offers ten invalid topics or fallacies. They include: hasty conclusion, illogical wordplay, overstatement or hasty generalisation, emotive (e.g. indignant) language, abuse of a single, unrepresentative example, confusion of accident and essence, argument from false cause, *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, ignorance of crucial circumstances, confusion of general and particular, proving the improbable probable, and vice versa. Although the revelation of the fallacious character of the devices listed is in itself useful, it does not seem to be either exhaustive or systematic. But such a criticism betrays only, perhaps, the kind of utopian belief in the easily circumscribed and analysed nature of heterogeneous data characteristic of reductionisms, ancient and modern.

When Cicero responded to Trebathius's request for a gloss on the Aristotelian *Topics*, he began by explaining as follows the desirability of enumerating the possible lines of argument. He also explained their methodological

function and defined their pragmatic character:

Every systematic treatment of argumentation has two branches, one concerned with invention of arguments and the other with judgement of their validity; [...]. A comparison may help: it is easy to find things that are hidden if the hiding place is pointed out and marked; similarly, if we wish to track down some argument we ought to know the places or topics: for that is the name given by Aristotle to the "regions", as it were, from which arguments are drawn. Accordingly, we may define a topic as the region of an argument, and an argument as a course of reasoning which firmly establishes a matter about which there is some doubt. [5](#)

Clearly, the theory of argumentative invention here depends upon a systematic mapping of the territory to be exploited. I am sorry for the metaphor, but, as you can see, this spatial analogy dominates the presentation of arguments in the Classical period. This has led at various times to discoveries of new or unexplored argumentative fields. The relationships of such "places" with the known rhetorical "world" have often been treated as problematic. As has been frequently pointed out in the history of rhetoric, taxonomy is no substitute for theory.

The taxonomical urge in rhetorical argumentation produced its most strikingly diverse results in Renaissance Europe. We are fortunate in possessing several exhaustive treatments of argumentation as it affected theories of composition and reception current in, for example, Elizabethan Britain. Indeed, the tradition of non-Ramist rhetorical analysis which has flourished in Anglo-Saxon countries in the twentieth century owes much to scholars, American in the main, like William Crane, Allan Gilbert, Rosemond Tuve, T.W. Baldwin, Miriam Joseph and W.S. Howell. [6](#) Such scholars retained the Aristotelian view of rhetoric which saw argumentation as central to persuasion. Whereas Ramus and his followers saw the functions of *movere* and *delectare* as sufficient to explain effects produced by the *elocutio*, non-Ramist scholars saw in the rhetorical domains of *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos* arsenals of devices, both argumentative and tropological or figurative which authors and readers ignored at their peril.

The always complex and controversial relationships between literary genres, narrative, lyric, dramatic, and discursive genres, judicial, deliberative, epideictic offered two solutions, depending on the views of rhetoric upon which they were thought to depend. If rhetoric is merely elocutionary, novels, poems and plays may be thought to consist merely of tropes and figures. If they are considered to be discourses which make ethical, logical, and emotional appeals in order to persuade readers or spectators of the ideas, norms or attitudes which they embody, then analysis of their argumentative techniques is considered not merely desirable, but indispensable. What the post-Romantic age found controversial in such a theory, naturally, was its application, and I would like to spend a few moments explaining some of the problems involved in basing a theory of persuasion applicable to literary texts upon Cicero's 17 topics.

The 17 Ciceronian topics were divided, you will remember, into 16 intrinsic and 1 extrinsic. Cicero recapitulates his list in the *Topics*, as follows:

This is the end of the rules for the invention of arguments, so that if you have journeyed through definition, partition, etymology, conjugates, genus, species, similarity, difference, contraries, adjuncts, consequents, antecedents, contradictions, causes, effects, and comparison of things greater, less and equal, no region of [intrinsic] arguments remains to be explored. [... The extrinsic] form of argumentation, that is said not to be subject to the rules of art, depends on testimony. For our present purpose we define testimony as everything that is brought in from some external circumstance in order to win conviction. [7](#)

The general theory of composition and reading which Tudor logicians and rhetors like Thomas Blundeville, Angel Day, Dudley Fenner, Abraham Fraunce, John Hoskyns, Ralph Lever, Henry Peacham, George Puttenham, Richard Sherry, Thomas Wilson and others derived from the Ciceronian topics is outlined in, among other works, Miriam Joseph's account of the theory and its accompanying application to the plays of Shakespeare. Let me give a few examples of literary argumentation in order to document my contention that an understanding of the close links between Aristotelian dialectic and rhetorical figures makes possible a general theory of composition and reception. I will take my examples from Shakespeare and Victor Hugo.

The topic of logical definition, for example, lends itself to rhetorical, strategic or prescriptive manipulation. In addition, the figure of systrophe piles together many definitions of one thing. So Macbeth employs systrophe to define sleep:

Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care,  
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,  
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,  
Chief nourisher in life's feast. (2.2.37)

And the narrator of *Les Misérables* echoes Marius's prejudices against convicts in the following prescriptive definition:

[...] c'était un forçat; c'est-à-dire l'être qui, dans l'échelle sociale, n'a même pas de place, étant au-dessous du dernier échelon. Après le dernier des hommes vient le forçat. Le forçat n'est plus, pour ainsi dire, le semblable des vivants. La loi l'a destitué de toute la quantité d'humanité qu'elle peut ôter à un homme. [8](#)

Division is the source of several figures including synecdoche, merismus, enumeration, epigrammatic summary and disjunctive propositions like, for instance, that of Antony: "These strong Egyptian fetters must I break/Or lose myself in dotage" (*Anthony & Cleopatra*, 1.2.120).

The topic separating subject and adjuncts, a person and his or her clothing, for instance, produces both plot devices and figures of amplification. The latter may detail circumstances, or distribute to each subject the adjunct which a given interpretative community believes appropriate. It is also the source of encomion, as when Hamlet exclaims, "What a piece of work is a man!" (2.2.315), before going on to list human characteristics he believes admirable. Antonomasia and periphrasis substitute a common noun for a proper name or an adjunct for a subject. In *Notre-Dame de Paris*, for example, the narrator substitutes the expressions <<notre philosophe>>, <<le sourd>>, and <<l'homme noir>> to désignate respectively Pierre Gringoire, Quasimodo, and Claude Frolo. [9](#)

Contraries and contradictories produce conflict and dramatic foils. Again Hamlet:

I'll be your foil, Laertes. In mine ignorance  
Your skill shall, like a star i' the darkest night  
Stick fiery off indeed. (5.2.226)

Victor Hugo's well-known fondness for antithesis exploits this topic. In *Han d'Islande*, for example, the hero, Ordener, declares his passion thus to Éthel: <<J'irai avec joie à l'échafaud pour toi; j'irais avec horreur à l'autel pour toute autre femme>>[10](#). Litotes, by which a speaker denies the subject's contrary or contradictory, figures

this topic too. Gloucester, for instance, in *King Lear*, says of Edgar: "Let him fly far, Not in this land shall he remain uncaught" (2.1.58).

The topic of analogy, source of figures of similitude and comparison like metaphor, simile, parable, fable, and so on produces arguments frequently more striking than persuasive. Sebastian says of Gonzalo in *The Tempest*: "Look, he's winding up the watch of his wit; by and by it will strike" (2.1.12). And the narrator of *Les Misérables* says of Gavroche, the street-urchin: <<Paris a un enfant et la forêt a un oiseau; l'oiseau s'appelle le moineau; l'enfant s'appelle le gamin>>[11](#) .

Arguments from the greater, the equal, and the less produce rhetorical figures of exaggeration and extenuation, and effects like climax and bathos, hyperbole and meiosis. Coriolanus uses the latter in dismissing the citizens: "Go get you home, you fragments!" (*Cor.* 1.1.226).

Cause and effect produce many literary arguments. The Renaissance logicians mention four principal causes: the efficient, material, formal, and final. All four are evident in the following enumeration of the tools used by Gilliatt in *Les Travailleurs de la mer* to salvage the engine of the wrecked ship, la Durande:

Il avait pour combustible l'épave, l'eau pour moteur, le vent pour souffleur, une pierre pour enclume, pour art son instinct, pour puissance sa volonté. [12](#)

Metalepsis attributes to a present effect a remote cause. Thus Hamlet:

To what base uses we may return, Horatio! Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander till he find it stopping a bung-hole? [...] Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth into dust; the dust is earth; of earth we make loam; and why of that loam (whereto he was converted) might they not stop a beer barrel?" (5.1.223-35).

Argument from conjugates, that is, from words having the same derivation, involves polyptoton, puns, syllepsis and so on. The argumentative function of polyptotes can be seen clearly in its following axiomatic usage in Hugo's *l'Homme qui rit*: "Se sentant innocent, il [Gwynplaine] consentait. Pas une plainte. L'irréprochable ne reproche pas." [13](#) Etymology, another aspect of the argument from names produces results both scientific and popular. Pericles addresses his daughter thus, for example: "My gentle Marina-whom/For she was born at sea, I have named so-" (3.3.12). But the best-known of such arguments is Juliet's remark to Romeo:

Tis but thy name that is my enemy. [...]  
O be some other name!  
What's in a name? That which we call a rose  
By any other name would smell as sweet. (*Romeo & Juliet*, 2.2.38-44)

Captious arguments depending upon paronomasia and antanaclasis abound in literary texts, as you are well aware.

These few examples will, I hope, have shown that the theory of composition and reception explained by the Tudor logicians and rhetors asserts the logical links between argumentation and ornamentation. Rosemund Tuve explains and justifies the theory as follows, finding in it a theoretical paradigm opposed to Romantic theories of pure inspiration or to the Surrealist cult of the unconscious in art.

In drawing a relation between Invention in logic and the process of poetic invention which produced

(among other things) images, I do not wish to imply that there was no difference between the two or that the Elizabethans thought there was none. [...] What happens rather is that writers trained for years in finding matter for persuasive, demonstrative, expository, or disputative discourse, by the means of playing the mind down certain prescribed paths, do not forget this useful process when they turn to the "finding" of ways to shape poetic subjects.

Invention, the finding or figuring out of what one was going to say of a subject, was one of the two divisions treated in both logic and rhetoric (*Inventio, Dispositio*). [...] Invention was no slave's labour. In both logic and rhetoric this division of *Inventio* was that in which the faculty of imagination was thought to be most active. [14](#)

So the sixteenth century possessed a coherent theory of logic and poetics. So what? you ask. Things have changed and writers in many cases are no longer "trained for years in finding matter for persuasive, demonstrative, expository, or disputative discourse". Do they still produce arguments instinctively, without, as it were, prior knowledge of the *Inventio*? The answers to this question form the final section of my paper.

The first of these would simply point to the extremely elaborate character of the Renaissance theory of argumentative poetics from which an equally elaborate poetic practice followed. Anyone who has attended a Shakespeare play will vouch for the complications of the language used. Perhaps modern authors and readers do have a less extensive knowledge of and a less intensive exposure to argumentation, but that is not to say, however, that they have abandoned argumentation. To support my thesis, I need only adapt Dumarsais's remark concerning the tropes to include argumentation.

J'ai pris souvent plaisir, [...], à entendre des paysans s'entretenir avec des figures de discours si variées, si vives, si éloignées du vulgaire, que j'avais honte d'avoir pendant si longtemps étudié l'éloquence, puisque je voyais en eux une certaine rhétorique de nature beaucoup plus persuasive et plus éloquente que toutes nos rhétoriques artificielles. En effet, je suis persuadé qu'il se fait plus de figures en un seul jour de marché à la halle, qu'il ne s'en fait en plusieurs jours d'assemblées académiques. [15](#)

If figures were appropriate to publicise the merchandise, certainly arguments were necessary to establish agreement on price.

In opposition to this pro-instinctive view of rhetorical discourse is the interest in the academic study of argumentation to which colloquia like this one testify. That the argumentative aspect of the reception of literary texts still possesses qualified practitioners should not be doubted. The academic critic certainly is nowadays "trained for years in finding matter for persuasive, demonstrative, expository, or disputative discourse". The effect of this training has been to produce, among similar results in other disciplines, the renewal of interest in argumentation both in literary and non-literary texts with which we are all familiar.

I will say little about another post-Renaissance development in the study of argumentation, because, in such a colloquium as this, the topic has no doubt been treated by specialists in the subject. I refer to the considerable development of the Ciceronian topic of testimony which, in the 17th century, became one of the bases of the Cartesian scientific method. Evidence, data, the experimental method, statistics, all of these empirical proofs, proclaiming themselves extrinsic to the discourse, parade their apparent independence of argumentation. Except, that is, in the exordium and peroration of such discourses.



Any survey of the study of argumentation which claims to refer to the twentieth century must include a consideration of Perelman's work. What does he have to say about the topics? In his *Traité de l'argumentation*, in which he offers a "new rhetoric of value judgements", Perelman begins his treatment of the Topics by repeating the distinction Aristotle made between demonstration and dialectic, between "scientific" deduction based on "true" premises and argumentation dependent upon the verisimilitude deriving from an appeal to opinions held by the public addressed. However, as he says, Perelman preferred to study rhetorical argumentation rather than scientific demonstration, because: <<*c'est en fonction d'un auditoire que se développe toute argumentation*>>[16](#) . This crucial statement, which replaces demonstration within an epistemology of the probable-because-previously-accepted, reveals the secondary character of the so-called "extrinsic" proof. Although extrinsic to the particular discourse under way, the axioms underlying demonstration take their authority from the body of precedents serving as presuppositions to the discourse of any interpretative community, be it scientific or not. This at any rate is how I read the following statement by Perelman concerning the commonality of topic-axioms in rhetoric and dialectic: (p. 62).

One may wonder whether the existence among Aristotle's works of two treatises devoted to argumentation, the *Topics* and the *Rhetoric*, the one referring to the theoretical discussion of theses, the other taking account of particular audiences, has not favoured the traditional distinction between [discourses] which act upon the understanding and those which act upon the will. We believe that the distinction, which presents the former [type of discourse] as being entirely impersonal and atemporal, and the second as being wholly irrational, is founded upon error and leads to an impasse. The error consists in seeing mankind as constituted of faculties completely separate the one from the other. The impasse consists in removing from action founded upon choice any rational justification, and so to render absurd the exercise of human freedom of choice. [17](#)

Perelman's taxonomy of Topics appears, at first glance, to have reduced Cicero's 17 to 6:

[...] we will call topics only premisses of a general nature which allow the foundation of values and hierarchies and which Aristotle studies under the topic of accident. These topics constitute the most general, often underlying premisses which intervene to justify the greater part of the choices we make. [18](#)

He goes on to say, like Lanham, that an exhaustive enumeration of topics would not usefully aid a general understanding of argumentation. However, the universal audience will, he believes respond to the 6 topics he presents:

What interests us is the means by which all audiences, of whatever nature, are led to take account of places, which we group under a few general headings: topics of quantity, quality, order, existent, essence, person. [19](#)

He then defines the six topics in the order listed.

The topic of quantity is understood to be constituted of those "common places which assert that something is of greater value than something else for reasons of quantity". He adds that "most frequently, the topic of quantity constitutes a major premise which is understood but not stated." [20](#) In contrast, Perelman states, the "topoi of quality appear in argumentation and are the most clearly apprehended, when the virtue of number is contested." [21](#) Topoi of order assert the superiority of anterior over posterior, as in the case of "cause, principles, and aim or purpose" [22](#) over effect, fact, or result. Topoi of the existent assert the superiority of what exists, or is real, over

what is possible, or impossible. As to the *topoi* of essence, Perelman, writing at a period in which Existentialism had foregrounded axioms relating to essence and existence, begins by a negative definition in order to distinguish his axiom from those current in other contemporary discourses.

We understand by the topic of essence, not the metaphysical attitude which would assert the superiority of an essence over each of its manifestations [*<<incarnations>>*]—and which is based on a *topos* of order—but the fact of according superior value to individuals as characteristic representatives of the essence in question. It consists in making a comparison between concrete individuals: thus we straight away attribute value to a rabbit which presents all of a rabbit's qualities; such a one will be, in our eyes a "fine rabbit." [23](#)

Finally, the *topoi* derived from the value of a person are, according to Perelman, "bound to his dignity, merit [and] autonomy." [24](#) He adds that these six topics "could be completed by others whose meaning is more limited." [25](#)
















Even a superficial examination like this one reveals the relationships between the topics of Aristotle, Cicero and Perelman. Let me just add, in closing, a word on another Perelmanian taxonomy, that of the "argumentative techniques" which he presented in 1977 in *L'Empire rhétorique*. In that work, he offered, as he says, three kinds of *liaison* which "make possible the transference onto the conclusion of the acceptance accorded [by the audience] to the premisses"[26](#) of a process of argumentation. The three types are: firstly, quasi-logical arguments, second, those "based on the structure of the real", and third, "those on which this structure is based". Quasi-logical arguments are "those understood by confronting them with formal reasoning, mathematical or scientific in character."[27](#) However, he adds the following corollary: "But a quasi-logical argument differs from a formal deduction because of the fact that it always presupposes an approval of theses of a non-formal nature, which alone make possible the application of the argument in question."[28](#) Significantly, as an example of a quasi-logical argument, Perelman cites the argument from division, one of the Ciceronian topics.


Arguments based on the structure of the real exploit "the *liaisons* existing between elements of the real." [29](#) Among such arguments, he cites causality, which combines the Ciceronian topics of cause and effect. Finally, he defines arguments serving to found "the structure of reality". They are "those which, from a particular known case allow the establishment of a precedent, a model, or a general rule, such arguments include the model and the example." [30](#) Quite clearly, this "category"[31](#) corresponds to Aristotle's topic of analogy, just as it seems to me the argumentative technique which Perelman names "dissociation" includes the topic of dissimilitude or contraries and contradictories.


*<<Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose>>*? Perhaps. If we reject the notion of evolution in the history of literature, as we most certainly do, we may equally well do so in the history of thought, or more specifically, argumentation. In my view, at least, the history of the topics from Aristotle to Perelman possesses a sufficient number of constants to justify my applying to the analysis of literary texts the set of topics, dialectical, quasi-logical and rhetorical which further systematization ought better to clarify.


## Notes


1. *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1971). 


2. Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1968, p. 110. 
3. Aristotle, *Categories* 4. 1b1 25- 2a1 4., in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, edited by Jonathan Barnes, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984, I, p. 4. 
4. Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1969), p. 110. 
5. Cicero, *De Inventione, De Optimo genere oratorum, Topica* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1976), II. 6, 7-8, p. 387. 
6. For the relevant bibliographical references, see Sister Miriam Joseph, *Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language*, New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, 1947, and Thomas A. Conley, *Rhetoric in the European Tradition*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1990. 
7. Cicero, *Topics, op. cit.*, XVIII, 71; XIX, 73, pp. 438, 439. 
8. V. Hugo, *MIS*. in *OC XI*, 967. 
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