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# Commentary on: Charlotte Jørgensen's "Rhetoric, dialectic, and logic: The triad de-campartmentalized"

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

I had a choice when undertaking this commentary. My first choice, and a very tempting one, was simply to say, "Yes, indeed; good work," and leave it at that. However, the second option was to examine a deeper issue that underlies Jørgensen's arguments. Viz., the role of models and our distrust of them in Argumentation Theory. Since once, when a scholar commenting on me chose the first option, and I confess to having been disappointed, I chose the second.

## 2. SEPARATING THE DISTINCTIONS

In her Essay, Charlotte Jørgensen examines one of the oldest and most venerable distinctions of modern Argumentation Theory: Wenzel's three perspectives. These three perspectives are well known to everyone, and  identified as product, process and procedure. The perspectives, as Wenzel labelled them, are meant to be a useful way to look at varying interests that several groups have in mind when they examine argumentation. It was not, I believe, ever intended that the three undertakings would be considered to be completely separate, but, rather to have distinct emphases.

Product, process and procedure are often loosely traced back to Aristotle's distinction of λόγος (logos), ἦθος (ethos) and πάθος (pathos). These too began as distinctions that evolved into separations, and it seems as if only now with the rise of Argumentation Theory that we are aiming to reintegrate them.  The problem arises when we create a distinction and then forget it is a rough guide, refiy it, and treat it as a clear and unambiguous decription of actual separations existing in nature. A prime example of this is the distinction between male and female. It is very useful for many purposes, but there are, nonetheless, any number of human beings who cannot easliy be placed in one category or another.

We are in the habit, in Argumentation Theory, as in many other disciplines, of creating distinctions in order to make some activity or consideration clear, using them for some time, and then attacking them for being taken too seriously. We do this even when the original distinctions were not intended to be taken as hard and fast divisions. Doing this, changing distinctions into separations, is simply confusing

the model with reality. Just as when in a restaurant one does not consume the menu in order to satisfy hunger, so one does not go into the world, including the argumentative world, to search for the "three perspectives." In short, and not to belabour a point, we *use* models both pedagogically (vide Jørgensen p. 8,) and to help us understand complex realities by simplifying reality.

Consider another distinction that aided our field in its development: Daniel O'Keefe's argument$_1$ and argument$_2$ (O'Keefe, 1977, 1982). This distinction became coin of the realm for at least 15 years before the questions that rose about *the separation* of all arguments into argument$_1$ or argument$_2$ became creaky. While it is not clear just how rigidly O'Keefe intended his distinction to be, the presence of ambiguous or hard cases does not render it useless. But we tend to critique distinctions as if they were separations, and nothing in reality can withstand that test. As a result, what I believe is a useful distinction was lost because it was not a clear separation.

I am also guilty of populating the world with distinctions in my multi-modal argumentation theory. The four modes, logical, emotional, visceral and kisceral are also distinctions and not separations (Gilbert, 1997). I have been at pains to reinforce this by pointing out that there is no such thing as a "pure" emotional or kisceral argument. I have even suggested that some arguments can be construed as mostly in one perspective or another, and that there is no correct answer to what mode an argument is in. Other distinctions, I urge, need to be viewed in the same way. Johnson and Blair's RSA triad – Relevance, Sufficiency and Acceptability – come to mind (Johnson & Blair, 1993). Surely, when analysing the strength of an argument we will not always be absolutely clear which of the three support beams is carrying the weight. The same can also be said of the Pragma-dialectic stages of argument, and many other distinctions designed to heuristically aid us in understanding argument. Like these, Wenzel's three perspectives is not a description of reality, but rather an aid to understanding Argumentation Theory.

## 3. WENZEL'S DISTINCTIONS

I agree with Jørgensen when she says that Johnson is correct in is saying "that there is no such thing as the rhetorical, dialectical, or logical perspective" (3). And also in her assertion that this was not Wenzel's intention. Wenzel tells us that, "The main purpose or this essay is to explicate three distinct but *interrelated* perspectives for the study of argument" (Wenzel, 1979, p. 112 emph. added). So, while distinct, they are interrelated, and moreover, they are the "chief perspectives" (p. 112) and so, *ipso facto*, not the only ones.

If we examine the other terms Wenzel used to describe his perspectives, we find he also refers to them as "constructs," "impulses," and "senses." It is important to note that none of these indicates something that is concrete, stable and clearly divisible. Moreover, it is counter-intuitive to his point to try and select one of the three as paramount, basic or foundational. As Jørgensen states, "I regard the attempt to emphasize one of them as *the* significant distinguishing feature as a wild-goose chase." Because, "… it neglects the intermingling, overlapping nature of the fields and the possibilities for theoretical bridging between them" (Jørgensen, p. 1).

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In order to remove us from this morass of distinctions that are hard to pin down, Blair suggest an alternative. He writes,

> The distinctive difference between speeches and conversations as it relates to arguments is the nature of the relationship, and consequently of the interaction, between the person giving the arguments and the audience to which they are addressed. Conversations are direct interactions between the parties to the conversation. The parties are partners. They respond in turn to one another's contributions to the conversation, rendering it an ongoing series of action-reaction pairs. Speeches, in contrast, are unidirectional rather than directly interactive communications. (Blair, 2012, p. 158)

Unfortunately, This attempt is every bit as leaky as the other vessels it attempts to replace. Blair argues that the distinctions he has critiqued are not clear. But his own runs into issues as well: Can we always determine when a communication is a speech as opposed to a conversation? How many people are required to be in an audience make something a speech? How long must the speaker proceed uninterruptedly? If I invite questions during my presentation does it become a conversation rather than a speech? If I am having a conversation amongst five people and one person holds the floor for five minutes, is that a speech? Consider, finally, a classroom lecture where depending on the engagement of the students the interaction may bounce between speech and conversation and back again.

The point is not that Blair's distinctions are without merit or, even more, without utility, but rather they are every bit as subject to hard cases and ambiguity as every other suggested analysis.

## 4. CONCLUSION

There are many who want to say that there is an essential component to argumentation such that its lack precludes a communicative interaction from being identified an argument. The dialectician wants to insist that in order for something to be an argument it must minimally follow rules, or, perhaps, must be an explicit or implicit claim with a reason. The logician may point to soundness or validity as a necessary condition or argument, and insist that an interaction be translatable into logical language. The rhetorician will end up irritating everyone by claiming that the only requirement for an argument is the *assumption* of disagreement by the participants. The bottom line is that these distinctions between Wenzel's three areas are simply not at all clear, and that rather than work solely in one or the other, we typically segue between them as needs want.

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