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Reply to my Commentator - Gilardoni

Andrea Gilardoni

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Reply to my Commentator

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I thank Professor Carlos for her important remarks. As can be seen, *the first and the central problem* with which we have to deal in analysing the history of the usage of the anonymous text known as *The Protocols* is how to distinguish between an argumentative and a manipulative attitude.

Our study represents a proposal: We can effectively use pragma-dialectics to distinguish and to find what is unsound in some arguments on the basis of a dialectical perspective which takes into account the speech acts we perform in the different stages of a (reconstructed) discussion. But as the analysis of the speeches performed by President Obama shows, the distinction is not discrete. We have rather a continuum, in which there are two (ideal) extremes: on one side, the model of the critical discussion, on the other, manipulation.

If we interpret this distinction on the basis of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's distinction between the propagandist and the educator, this could imply that the difference is only in the acquired authority, in the recognized expertise. What strikes is that this is exactly the position of, for instance, the Holocaust deniers (and among them of the users of the Protocols), who claim that there is a conspiracy against them, and that this conspiracy comes from the "Holocaust-School." In Italy, they use to define themselves the "Revisionistic-School" and the "official" historian the "Exterminationists." It is easy to see how this position requires that one agrees or not in advance. It can also be interpreted as a struggle to conquer respect and acknowledgement as historians or academics, which is something that so far they failed to obtain.

The second weak point can be explained as follows: to accuse someone to be a conspiracy-theorist is a common practice in nowadays politics. That is true, but the problem is that sometimes conspiracies do exist. We have indeed some good reasons to believe that the Al-Qaeda conspiracy did exist. The problem is then how to distinguish a real from an invented one. But in order to answer this important question we do not need new theories or methods; we only need to be skilled historians and be able to decipher documents; we need to check their authenticity with the *already existent* methods. If we can't prove the conspiracy or if we do not want to admit it, the others are not obliged to accept our views. Maybe this is the case with Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Hating the Bush administration doesn't prove that the US government committed the crime.

The third and the real problem is therefore: How can we *convince other people* of the soundness of the scientific method? First, I would say, we have to teach it. If somebody does not want to apply it, we can probably do nothing about it, but we can help

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people and students to be able to recognize when this method is only simulated. That is not so difficult. I speak here as a teacher in the secondary school. (This is the educator's attitude.) The most important challenge is then: *how to convince*. This is a classical problem for rhetoricians. I would answer, that the solution could be found in a research which deals with the role of emotions in argumentation. Following the suggestions of Nussbaum, Damasio and Walton, emotions are not obstacles to correct argumentation or critical thinking. They are *per se* arguments and thoughts. What we need is a better understanding of how they function and better criteria to evaluate if they are used correctly or not. Maybe we need a new definition of correctness and fallacy. On this basis, I think, an answer to the last question posed by Professor Carlos could be found.

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