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# Harmony in Diversity. On the (Possible) Existence of ‘The Canadian School of Argumentation’

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**Abstract:** By looking at the birth and evolution of the informal logic movement, and by clarifying which kind of relations in a diversity we need in order to understand what “school” means, we would like to consider the hypothesis that there is something which could be called ‘The Canadian School of Argumentation’ or, at least, of a Canadian tradition amongst those that make up the greater field of the study of argumentation.

**Keywords:** ‘Canadian School of Argumentation’, informal logic, rhetoric, School of thought, visual & multimodal-argumentation, rhetoric, university

## 1. Introduction

In this paper, I would like to consider the hypothesis that there is something which could be called ‘the Canadian school of argumentation’ or, at least, that it could exist a Canadian tradition amongst those that make up the greater field of the study of argumentation. From this point of view, my aim is to try to answer to the questions if there existed a certain kind of approach to argumentation and logic developed coherently by Canadian scholars or, at least, a certain way of studying and analyzing argument which would permit some sort of uniform definition for the experts actively studying in this field.

In order to reach this aim, the second section of the paper will be devoted to remember how and why, in Canada, a particular way of approaching and developing logic and argumentation arose (Section 2). By doing this, it will be possible to take note of the fact that the existence of a ‘Canadian approach to argument’ (or, better to say: the existence of a certain kind of ‘Canadian school of thought’) is denied by A. Blair (2019), who can be considered a pioneer of that tradition. Nevertheless, I will try to show that it could be possible to find pros and cons of the existence of a certain kind of ‘school of argument’ which can be called ‘Canadian’ (Section 3). This will offer me the possibility to take into account the existence of an internal debate inside this movement (Section 4) and so, maybe, the opportunity to speak of different kinds of Informal Logics (Section 5). Then, in order to search for more good arguments in support of my hypothesis, I will try to understand what “school” means, with some help from philosophy and its history (Section 6). In the last section I will summarize my arguments in support of my view (Section 7).

## 2. An insight into Informal Logic Movement

In this context I can assume that it is not immediately necessary to spend any words to remember *what* Informal Logic is (to this aim it could be sufficient to recall, among others, Groarke, 2020); rather, it seems to me more useful to remember *how*, *when* and *why* this movement was born, and mainly *who* were its pioneers.

It is well known that in Canada, more precisely in Ontario, in Windsor, there is a research center – the Center for Research in Reasoning, Argumentation and Rhetoric (CRRAR) – founded

in 2006. This centre was the result of an important branch of study which goes by the name ‘Informal Logic’, which began at Windsor, and was established in part to continue that tradition. This field’s beginnings and developments are recorded by J. Anthony Blair. He writes about the studies and research developed by him and Johnson in the early '70s; of the difficulties encountered in publishing *Logical Self-Defense* – their volume that expressed “the possibility of a departure from old-fashioned approaches” (Blair, 2019, p. 42) to logic – and how, in 1978, the first Symposium on Informal Logic was held in Windsor – even if “there was no source of literature on informal logic” (Blair, 2019, pp. 46-47). This Symposium was followed, in 1980, by a first international conference, and then, only three years later, by the second, which led to the creation of the Association for Informal Logic and Critical Thinking (AILACT) and, in 1984, to *Informal Logic* journal. In 1984, Blair and other Canadians, like David Hitchcock, took part in a meeting organized in New York by the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association: during that conference they met Frans van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst. As Blair remembers,

We told them about informal logic and they told us about their new theory, which they called “Pragma-dialectics” and the newly published monograph in which they presented it ... Soon after our meeting in New York, van Eemeren and Grootendorst asked me if I would serve on the board of a new society they were forming, which they had christened the International Society for the Study of Argumentation (ISSA), and which was going to sponsor an international argumentation conference in Amsterdam the following spring, in June 1986. (Blair, 2019, pp. 53-54)

Three year later, in 1987 “a new journal, to be called *Argumentation*” (Blair, 2019, p. 55) was born and one project and meeting after another led to the radical transformation of the world of argumentation. “In the mid-1970s both Scriven in the U.S.A. and Johnson and Blair in Canada had trouble finding textbook reviewers among their colleagues who would recommend informal logic manuscripts to publishers. A decade later dozens of new informal logic textbooks were competing for adoption” (Blair, 2019, p. 58). And already with “the second ISSA conference in Amsterdam in 1990, an international community of scholarship had been formed” (Blair, 2019, p. 58).

From his side, Johnson, like Blair, remembers the beginning of the informal logic movement, which started “more than 30 years ago” (Johnson 2019, p. 177) with the criticism of what he “baptized FDL (Formal Deductive Logic)” (Johnson 2019, p. 177), being surprised of the “number of *gaps* between the theory and argumentative practice” (Johnson 2019, p. 178):

In real life arguments have various purposes; but no mention of purpose in FDL. In real life arguments, we often have to go with premises that are not known to be true (Hamblin); no provision for that in FDL. In real life, good arguments often fall short of validity; no provision for that in FDL. In real life, there are good arguments for and good arguments against a particular proposition or proposal (Hamblin); no provision for that in FDL. In real life, good arguments typically confront objections and other dialectical material; but no mention of that in FDL. (Johnson 2019, p. 178)

The rejection of FDL led to the development of a new theory that Johnson and Blair termed “informal logic” (Johnson 2019, p. 178). This development was assisted, in the early and mid 80s, by two developments: “a connection between our project and the critical thinking movement in North America [...] and the many different initiatives outside of logic, among them

the pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation, and the broad international and multidisciplinary community working on argumentation theory” (Johnson 2019, p. 178). In this context, Johnson remembers, a “theory of argument that gives proper credit to arguments which, if not sound, are yet good, or good enough, and to arguments in which the arguer acknowledges and comes to terms with what I call dialectical obligations” (Johnson 2019, p. 179) was developed.

### **3. First arguments in favour of and against the existence of a ‘Canadian School of Argumentation’**

But in all this, in view of the role played in the development of the theory of argumentation by the Canadians, “*is there any basis in any of this for what might be dubbed “the Canadian hypothesis?” Is there some role that is distinctively Canadian or citizenship aside, a result of factors from Canada that played an integral part in the emergence of this field?”* (Blair, 2019, p. 59). Blair gives his own authoritative negative answer as follows:

*Johnson and I did get support from our university as well as from a small conference fund from the federal government administered by a national research-funding council, but I assume that other countries had similar funding available. Given the entrepreneurial promotion of the pragma-dialectical theory by the Dutch and the readiness for change in the American speech communication community, it seems likely that argumentation would have developed as a field without participation of Canadian pioneers such as Woods and Walton, Govier, Hitchcock, Gilbert, and Johnson and Blair. Canadians got on board partly because of the Windsor conferences, and because the *Informal Logic* journal cornered the philosophy side of the market as the journal of record for philosophically-oriented theorizing early on. Perhaps I am too close to see it, but I must confess to an inability to recognize anything distinctively Canadian about our contributions.* (Blair, 2019, p. 59)

I will try to consider these arguments in a while. But, immediately, I would like to quote John Woods, who is himself “part of the Canadian story” (Woods, 2019, p. 63, footnote 2): in one of his essays, he speaks, for example, of a “Canadian influence on theories of argument [that] to a dominant extent, flow from their contributions to informal logic in the aftermath of Charles Hamblin's call to arms in 1970 for the restoration of the fallacies project to the research programmes of logical theory” (Woods, 2019, p. 62). And, embellishing Blair's story, Woods recalls

the umbrella under which the Windsor conferences are staged is OSSA, the Ontario Society for the Study of Argumentation, in emulation of the earlier example of ISSA, the International Society for the Study of Argumentation, established in Amsterdam as the organizational, congregational and publication centre of pragma-dialectical approach to argument. The name “ISSA” has two virtues which “OSSA” lacks. It is earlier, and it is accurate. OSSA's active membership is as far-flung as ISSA's, and there is nothing noticeably Ontarian about the logics contrived by OSSA. A foundational work for the Canadians was published by an Englishman [i.e. Toulmin] who in due course would become an OSSA star. (Woods, 2019, pp. 64-65)

Woods makes express reference to the “Windsor approach to formal logic” (Woods 2019, p. 65), or rather, informal logic, characterized by the fact that “formal logics – certainly those of

the 1970s – were mainly about deductive reasoning, whereas most of the best of human reasoning is deductively invalid. Seen this way formal logics simply miss most of the target set by informal logicians” (Woods, 2019, pp. 65-66). Therefore,

for a good many of Canada’s theorists of argument and reasoning the only point of contact with formal modelling is by way of what is mistakenly called the “translation” rules for mapping natural language arguments to their logical forms in a formal language L – usually that of first-order classical logic. In its standard understanding, translation preserves meanings or at least approximations to them. While natural languages brim with meanings, formal “languages” have none at all. It is not possible to order a hamburger in L or simply to say what your name is. (Woods, 2019, p. 67)

So, Woods refers to a “Canadian influence on theories of argument,” to the “Windsor approach to formal logic,” and to a group of “Canada’s theorists of argument and reasoning” (Woods 2019, pp. 64; 65; 67). He speaks about “Canadian informalists” (Woods, 2019, p. 64) or of an “informal logic sector of Canadian approaches to the theory of argument” (Woods, 2019, p. 88) and notes “that there is, as far as I can see, little concurrent inclination to denounce the popularity of formal semantics in analytical philosophy, which is home turf of Canada’s informal logicians” (Woods, 2019, p. 77). On the other hand, “in the years closely following Hamblin, perhaps Canada’s most internationally recognized contribution to the theory of argument lay in fallacy theory” (Woods, 2019, p. 93).

It seems to me that, by speaking in this way, Woods allows the possibility of referring to the Canadians as a group (which he does) and tracing, among them, some common characteristics: the most relevant of which is perhaps that “everyone in the Canadian informal logic community was educated in the analytic tradition. For many of them, perhaps a hefty majority, doing philosophy analytically is simply the preferred way of doing it” (Woods, 2019, p. 71).

The accounts of Blair, Johnson and Woods are a useful prod and starting point in an attempt to understand the nature of Canadian approaches to the study of argumentation. Another part of the story is tied to the rise of the Ontario Society for the Study of Argumentation. As Woods points out, it was inspired by ISSA, but in a way that was securely rooted in Ontario. As one of the attendees of the first conference (Leo Groarke) remembers: “Someone, I believe it was Michael Gilbert, sent around an e-mail that said something like: ‘There are ten or twelve of us going to ISSA from Ontario. We are all going to make presentations and listen to our European colleagues, and won’t have time to listen to each other. So why don’t we supplement it with a conference at home, in Ontario, where we can listen to each other?’” (Puppo, 2019, p. 12). The end result was the first of eleven OSSA conferences, which proved so popular that they quickly expanded beyond the original vision of a conference for scholars living and working in Ontario.

In embryonic form, this suggests some possible ways to identify and characterize a ‘Canadian’ approach to the study of argumentation. It included, obviously, a geographic context (first Ontario, then Canada) and a community of scholars who share a common background: as philosophers in Canadian philosophy departments. One can reasonably expect a certain way of doing philosophy that binds these scholars and makes them recognizable, together with some basic themes expressed in their research. At the same time, one of the most interesting features of this particular community is the extent to which its members move in different directions from a starting point that includes little more than the philosophers’ traditional view that arguments are sets of propositions made up of premises and a conclusion and an interest in the attempt to apply

this to natural language (“informal”) argument. As Woods suggests, some members of the community embrace fallacy theory, though others reject it. Some retain a pronounced commitment to formal logic, others are notable for the extent to which they reject it. In the long run some informal logicians are heavily influenced by other trends in argumentation theory (notably rhetoric and pragma-dialectics). And some ultimately reject the model of rationality which they began with (which emphasizes language and a rejection of emotion).

It is in this line that we can find several critical discussions on key aspects of the traditional approach to logic, proposed, debated and analyzed by many scholars who are part of CRARR and OSSA. But here it is worth returning to the opinion of Blair which expressed, I remember, a negative point of view about the possibility of recognizing “anything distinctively Canadian about our contributions” (Blair, 2019, p. 59). At this point, I guess, it seems possible to affirm sufficient clues to sustain the idea that there is, fundamentally, a certain tradition of thought or approach among the ‘Canadians’: that of informal logic and of the analytical approach to philosophy, with a particular way of looking at argumentation and reasoning, and a geographical context which spurred them to share – and often to debate – their respective points of view. This is not to say that only Canadian scholars have developed the informal logic orientation or that only Canadians are involved in its study: but it does seem that this tradition exists and that it was born and was developed in Canada, with a notable connection to Windsor.

Of course, the existence of an informal logic tradition might seem tenuous and peculiar, because we will also see that it contains no shortage of disagreements and contrasts. We will talk about this soon enough, but it may already be clear that the Canadian school of argumentation is, to the extent that it is a school, quite different from the way we usually understand other schools. It is useful to compare pragma-dialectics, which not only has a central seat of origin, but above all is recognized by a founder that has generated a series of pupils working on common themes, who have developed the theory by applying it to various fields of knowledge (excluding some differences that naturally exist between the different developments of pragma-dialectics). In the case of Canadian argumentation scholarship, the situation is largely different: yes, there is a seat (Windsor), but the commonality of the scholars who work there, assuming that there is one, is defined by the themes they work on and from the approach they use; certainly not from the presence of a common ‘master’ or ‘founder’. Insofar as this does not exist, one might argue that there is no basic element that would allow us to recognize the existence of a school.

#### **4. An internal debate**

We will return to these considerations later. For the moment it may be said that elements of commonality have emerged (geographical connections, a common field of study and common training), even if they concern a knowledge in constant evolution. That evolution continues, for example, with Ralph Johnson’s work on one of the contributions he made to informal logic in his analysis of the Dialectical Tier, which is part of a common view on argument, what I think can be called the ‘Canadian view’.

Part of that rethinking took the form of proposing that dealing with one’s dialectical obligations is an essential component of the very idea of argument, robustly considered. Arguments in the paradigmatic sense require a dialectical tier in which the arguer discharges his or her dialectical obligations: i.e., anticipate objections, deals with alternative positions, etc. That proposal had the following two presuppositions. First, the focus is on the use of argument to achieve rational persuasion. [...]. Sec-

ond, the focus in the first instance is on argument as it expresses itself in texts (such as found in newspaper editorials, journal articles, books etc), as distinguished from an oral argument between two participants, which is what dialogue logics [...] and the pragma-dialectical approach take as their focal point. (This is roughly the distinction between product-driven and process-driven theories). (Johnson 2019, p. 179)

This last quotation raises a potentially problematic point for our analysis: in fact, within informal logic there is a very strong debate, which has touched, among other things, the arguments put forward by Johnson. He himself reminded us: “since I originally proposed that arguments require a dialectical tier, many commentators have weighed in with objections and challenges. Originally Govier; then Leff, Hitchcock, Tindale, Groarke, Hansen, van Rees and Wyatt - to mention just those who have gone on record with objections to that proposal” (Johnson, 2019, p. 176). Johnson answers some of these criticisms in his essay and it is not up to us to judge whether the answer is final or not. In the current discussion the point of note is the disagreement that characterizes the debate.

To the extent that we have found the existence of a certain common tradition of thought among Canadian scholars who practice informal logic, we must also note that there is within it a strong debate, which is characterized by extensive disagreement and different approaches to the same subject. This diversity of vision does not, however, negate the hypothesis that there is a Canadian ‘school.’ No one would deny that there was a school like Plato’s Academy (perhaps the ‘archetype of the school model’) just because those who belonged to it at various times had partly different (and sometimes radically different) views which gave rise to real philosophical debate. Indeed, the existence of such debate shows that there is a certain number of scholars who, arguing among themselves on common themes, prove that a community exists and recognizes itself.

Johnson himself speaks of it when he notes that his “proposal would be seen as a counterpoise to the tendency to broaden the range of argument” (Johnson, 2019, p. 181), on terms expressed by Groarke’s visual argumentation and Gilbert’s multimodal argumentation. As Johnson himself notices,

if we are going to adjust our theories and approaches to include such specimens (which my proposal makes provision for), then it seems to me imperative – as a matter of balance – that we should also adjust in the other direction by also emphasizing the more developed forms of argument – those with a dialectical tier (Johnson, 2019, p. 181).

We should observe how all this indicates that informal logic is a project that is still waiting to be completed, via a collective enterprise that has grown in parallel with the analysis of Douglas Walton who was able (with Krabbe) to develop “Hamblin’s proposal by systematically classifying different types of dialogue representing goal-directed frameworks in which argumentation takes place (Walton, 2019, p. 197). It is a work that “has had applications in many different fields, including artificial intelligence, law, medicine, discourse analysis, linguistics (especially pragmatics) and education. The purpose of this paper is to survey many of these applications to see how they fit with informal logic” (Walton, 2019, p. 197). The analysis conducted by Walton highlights the development (and evolution) of informal logic in a way that underscores its ability to incorporate and extend key notions in a way that is motivated by points

of friction and by mutual understandings – for example, one may see a similar push and pull in (Bailin & Battersby 2019). At the same time, the extent to which informal logic has been extended beyond the narrow view of argument that gave rise to it (that embedded within analytic philosophy) is already evident, for example, in Robert Pinto’s proposal and, mostly, according to us, in the multimodal argumentation of Michael Gilbert, the visual argumentation of Leo Groarke, and the overall re-evaluation of the rhetoric due to Christopher Tindale. Tindale (1999) called attention to the logical, dialectical and rhetorical perspectives, and Pinto reminds us (by offering in a few lines the picture of the different theories we may have) that

within each of these there are a variety of ways in which the perspectives can unfold or develop. Formal and informal logic represent quite different species of “logical” perspective on argument, and themselves divide into varieties of sub-species. The formal dialectic [...], the “controversy-oriented approach to the theory of knowledge” [...], the pragmatic-dialectic approach of the Amsterdam school, and the somewhat different dialogue approach that Walton takes [...] are among the quite different species of dialectical approach. And finally you will find just some of often quite different approaches that may be classed as rhetorical in Aristotle, Cicero, Perelman, Wenzel, Tindale himself, as well as in the design theoretic approach to normative pragmatics inspired by the work of Scott Jacobs and Fred Kauffeld [...]. However, across this broad spectrum of “cultures of theorizing” there appears to be general agreement that arguing involves offering and/or exchanging reasons. My aim in what follows is to outline a general account of reasons - of what it is to have them and of what is required to offer or present them (Pinto, 2019, p. 252).

By doing this, Pinto helps us to better understand what an argument is by putting into question the reason-giving process the role played by the speaker and, mainly, by the hearer. The same concepts of arguments, argumentations, reasons and rational, and normativity (since for him the force of reasons is normative), are disputed and, finally, according to Pinto, it is possible to claim that “the varieties of logical perspective tend to emphasize questions about what is a reason for what” (Pinto 2019, p. 281), while “the value of making dialogue the preferred context for studying argumentation – which might be seen as lying at the heart of dialectical perspectives – is... most clearly seen when we recognize the important effect that undermining and overriding considerations have on the force of reasons” (Pinto, 2019, p. 281). The last perspective, the rhetorical, with his “value of emphasizing the effect of argument on audience” (Pinto, 2019, p. 281) seems to Pinto “quite real” (Pinto, 2019, p. 281). In fact

if an argument fails to persuade an audience, the fault *may* lie in the audience’s failure to accept what they *see* it is reasonable for them to accept, or it may lie in arguer’s failure to make it *manifest* to the audience that it is reasonable for them to accept what the arguer wants them to accept. Adopting a rhetorical perspective requires getting clear about what it will take to get an audience in a proper frame of mind to accept what they’ll be shown it is reasonable to accept, as well as getting clear about what it will take to make it *manifest* to the audience that it is reasonable to accept what the arguer wants them to accept. (Pinto 2019, p. 281)

In our view, such a conclusion could be read as an indication for better understanding the development of informal logic we may find in Gilbert, Groarke and Tindale himself. But, as well known, these are approaches to argumentation which have been criticized by some other informal logicians, such as Johnson, but at the same time they can be considered as a part of the Canadian ‘school’. Not only because of the fact that they are works by Canadian philosophers, but mostly because of the fact that they are a reaction to the shared account of argument that gave rise to informal logic – work which broadens our understanding of argumentation and allows us to better understand its connotations.

### **5. Informal Logic or Informal Logics?**

Looking from overseas, it seems that (to extend the analogy), wanting to cut one or the other branch would risk losing the vital sap of this tree, which finds its peculiar characteristic precisely in its luxuriant being. At the same time, it is absolutely normal for different approaches to be unraveled from the same ‘school,’ eventually even potentially conflicting: this is how the Lyceum was born from the Academy, for example. Considered from this point of view, Aristotelian philosophy is perhaps less antagonistic to Platonic philosophy than many common readings would have us think. Taking note of these kinds of developments and recognizing them can serve to affirm one's own identity: in noting them in the case of informal logic, one can say that the proposal in this essay has been satisfied.

Groarke emphasizes how, in many ways, a growing interest in visual – and multimodal – argument has been driven, “not by contributions to the theory of argument, but by a desire to explain the reality that visuals are important components of many real life acts of arguing” (Groarke 2019, p. 338). The development of the ART approach providing Groarke with an opportunity to reply to Johnson and “his rejection of visual argument” (Groarke, 2019, p. 369) (in keeping with his preference for a narrower conception of argument that excludes visual and multimodal argumentation):

Johnson 2005 has written that: “The ... problem for a theory of visual argument is to deal with the related issue of how to ‘convert’ the visuals [in the original: the images], which are the components of a visual argument, into reasons which can function as premises that are supposed to lead to a conclusion, so that the machinery of informal logic can be applied to the resulting argument.” But the method I propose suggests that it is a mistake to think that we need to ‘convert’ the components of a visual argument into reasons that can function as premises or conclusions. No conversion is necessary. All we need to do is recognize and identify these elements and the ways in which they are used in a particular argument. ... The problem Johnson focuses on is not, this suggests, inherent in visual arguments, but in his and other traditional approaches to argument, which define the key components of an argument in terms of words (either as sentences or as the propositions that sentences refer to). If one assumes this view, then the only way to make room for argument components that are visual is by finding some way to convert them into verbal analogues that can play the role of premise or conclusion. The way to overcome this challenge is not by finding a way to convert visuals, but by giving up on this assumption and adopting a more expansive view of argument. Doing so can help us better recognize the argumentative roles that visuals can, qua visuals, perform. (Groarke 2019, p. 369)

In the study of real life arguing, this seems very sensible and usefully highlights an ongoing evolution: informal logic arising as a ‘heterodox’ development of the traditional approaches to argumentation that remained confined within the narrow logistical boundaries, too far, as we have seen, if our interest is real life argumentation. On this point, exactly on this point, Gilbert and Groarke (and others) have embraced multimodal and visual argumentation and expanded the scope of informal logic beyond approaches to argument which define, as said, the key components of an argument in terms of words. Instead, these contributors to informal logic take a further step forward along the path started by informal logic’s attempt to expand what began as a narrowly defined conception of argument: by doing that, by following Groarke’s indication, we could also better understand and recognize the nature of argument qua argument. In fact, it should not be forgotten how the classical tradition assigned an important role to what, *mutatis mutandis*, could be considered a multimodal or visual aspect of argument: that is, the *actio*. This is a central element that is broadly developed with Cicero and Quintilian: a central element of the ‘rhetorical reticulum’ which plays a key role in their very precise conception of argumentation.

Informal logic’s relationship to rhetoric is the subject of Christopher Tindale’s perspective, who proposes a further expansion of informal logic’s account of argumentation – a repositioning of argumentation that is aligned with rhetoric, in a way that “is closely related to that which can be extracted from Aristotle” (Tindale, 2019, p. 393). To this end, Tindale considers it necessary to overcome, first of all, the “static” concept of argument that lies “behind the way many informal logicians talk about arguments” (Tindale, 2019, p. 375). This confirms the advances of the theories of Toulmin and Johnson, which suggest that informal logic began the more formal models of argument, but the new dialectical tier. “It is this tier that deserves attention because it begins to push in the direction of a more rhetorical conception of argument (without quite reaching it)” (Tindale, 2019, p. 381). Tindale’s essay provides a more detailed discussion of the relationship between rhetoric and informal logic and the debate that arose in response to Johnson’s account of the dialectical tier. In an attempt to understand the relationship between informal logic and other views of argument the important point is his suggestion that Johnson’s resistance to rhetorical elements may depend on the fact that “the conception of rhetoric implicated in these discussions is not as modern as his concept of argument” (Tindale, 2019, p. 382). Seen from this point of view, we can say that informal logic has traveled, so to speak, at ‘two-speeds’: quickly forward toward a more expansive view of argumentation, but at times more slowly, in a way that is reluctant to embrace the broader aspects of argumentation evident in the essays by Gilbert, Groarke and Tindale. Tindale writes:

The definition of informal logic drawn from Blair and Johnson [that] is still very much a logical one. They would judge informal logic to be just that—a logic. By contrast, another informal logician, Douglas Walton, sees informal logic to be essentially dialectical. [...]. [But] it simply means that for Walton an argument will be something that arises in a dialogue. [...] In agreement with what we have seen in the traditional model, an “argument” for Walton is simply “made up of statements called premises and conclusions.” (Tindale 2019, p. 385)

There is no shortage of “suggestions of a more dynamic sense of argument [as we see in Hitchcock’s analysis]. But they are only suggestions” (Tindale, 2019, p. 386). To make suggestions for a more dynamic account of argument something more is required:

it is important to establish rhetoric's relation to informal logic. Like other theories of argument and argumentation, informal logic was developed without any positive engagement with the traditions of rhetoric. Thus, bringing rhetoric into informal logic (or vice versa) is a difficult project because informal logic is already established (Tindale, 2019, p. 390).

In Tindale we can discern an echo of the words of Woods, who recalled how a characteristic feature of the Canadian tradition is a common philosophical training of an analytical type: previously this allowed us to identify a common characteristic among scholars belonging to that tradition. Now we can confirm this, but must also observe how it has been a limit: it is, in fact, precisely because of this analytical training that it was difficult, in the early days of informal logic, to attribute to rhetoric the role in understanding real life arguments that would seem to be its due. As Tindale notes, "philosophically trained informal logicians were likely to be unaware that rhetoric could have anything other than a pejorative sense" (Tindale, 2019, p. 391). More recently the situation seems to be changing:

Recent decades have seen members of the rhetoric and speech communication communities enter into fruitful discussions with those from the informal logic community, discussions that have encouraged a more accurate appreciation of the wider senses "rhetoric" can have, including the positive. ....It is difficult, then, to see the pejorative sense of rhetoric promoted in the work of serious informal logicians. If anything, there is a tendency toward neglect rather than dismissal ...What is still lacking in mainstream informal logic, then, is a full engagement with positive rhetoric, and that might begin with the explicit recognition of a more dynamic conception of "argument." (Tindale, 2019, p. 391)

According to Tindale, the latter could account for the fact that "an argument is alive; it is a message of activated potential. In terms of particularly important Aristotelian terms that capture the way he conceived natural and social objects, an argument is a potentiality (*dunamis*) and two actualities (*energeia*)" (Tindale, 2019, p. 394). Here it is worth noting that this appears connected to a certain idea of logic as *logos* which, by itself, expresses a dynamic concept of logic, typically Aristotelian (strongly opposed by the Megarians and, later, by the Stoics, who instead cultivated precisely the static vision that will then become typical of traditional approaches): Tindale himself underscores this when he observes that "the poetic has a movement, so too must logic itself: logic has a life, and its structures have internal movement. This sense needs to be transported to the study of argumentation" (Tindale, 2019, p. 394).

## **6. What does it mean 'school'? An insight into Jaspers' view and a philosophical-historical example**

As interesting as they are, arguments concerning the study of the possible developments of the theory of argumentation push our gaze beyond the confines of the present essay, which is focused on a different question: the question whether there is a 'Canadian overview on argumentation.' The various minds that make up the variegated universe of informal logic (here only partially represented) have something in common (they spring, one might say, from the same roots) but this is not enough to speak of a tradition of unitary thought. In this regard, Woods expresses some scepticism about the possibility of a 'Canadian brand of logic':

The Canadian brand was never as well-defined and organizationally and doctrinally sustained as the Amsterdam brand. Brands, as we know, come and go, and these two have flourished for decades now. It remains to be seen how well they hold up in the years and decades ahead. Judged from where we are now on the Canadian scene, there are clear signs of where the country's research efforts are likely to be directed. One of them is logical structure of argument and reasoning in legal contexts. Another signals a renewed alliance with cognitive, experimental and social psychology, neurobiology and the other empirical branches of cognitive science. In one of its streams, we see an effort to do for logic what Quine and others have done for epistemology, namely to give it the naturalized form which has been intermittently in play in logic since Bacon, Mill, Husserl, Dewey, and later Toulmin, notwithstanding the intense efforts of Frege and others to make all of logic dance to the tune of mathematics. Also of note are the already mentioned efforts to build alliances with computer science and AI, in a way perhaps of exposing how the mathematics of software engineering might leaven the insights of those whose purpose is the elucidation of human argument on the ground. Also of growing importance is the exposure of human argument-making to the plethora of work already under the belt of theories of defeasible, default and nonmonotonic consequence. Whether any of this outreach will lead to new Canadian brands remains to be seen. Ray Reiter's paper on the logic of default reasoning, was published when he was a member of UBC's mathematics department prior to his departure for the University of Toronto. Although a foundational contribution by a Canadian, no one thinks of default logics as carrying a Canadian brand. In the theory of argument the Canadian brand is, like all brands, a fleeting thing. I foresee no successor to that Canadian throne holding sway for the next forty-seven years. (J. Woods, 2019, pp. 94-96)

Surely it must be granted that a Canadian school of logic in the strong sense does not exist. There is no common school of thought comparable the "Amsterdam brand" (J. Woods, 2019, p. 94) which is "well-defined and organizationally and doctrinally sustained" (J. Woods, 2019, p. 94). At the same time, Woods is speaking of logic in a much broader sense than that which is the focus of the present essay. Here the question is whether informal logic is in some sense a school of thought that can be understood as a Canadian contribution to argumentation theory – itself understood as an attempt to understand real life reasoning. In this regard, it can be said that it is quite easy to identify a group of distinguished Canadian scholars widely recognized for their work in informal logic and argumentation theory; the common origins in philosophy departments and analytic philosophy that have already been noted; a major journal (*Informal Logic*) that has been publishing for forty years; many scholarly books (like those in this series); and countless texts and numerous conferences within a tradition of scholarship that continues in Windsor, in Ontario, and in other provinces. The result is a number of shared issues which are shared even when those within the tradition disagree with and debate one another. At the very least this seems to make possible talk of a shared Canadian spirit in informal logic: as we speak of Italian cuisine or French wines which do not correspond in an exact or precise way to a unique brand, but are nevertheless indicative of a group identity that everyone can recognize.

From this point of view, in order to understand what "school" means in the scientific field, and why it is so common to find schools in university life, it can be useful to remember Karl Jas-

pers' analysis. In one of his essays, by speaking of the idea of university and of the continuity of intellectual traditions we may find in it, Jaspers says:

The continuity of intellectual tradition is represented by "schools of thought." There are two ways in which schools of thought arise. One way is to imitate a master whose work we carry on by extension, adaptation, and analogous achievement. The other way involves an unbroken intellectual tradition, within which the student may be quite as independent as his teacher, since the tradition usually does not center around a single personality but a group. Here we have a school, an intellectual movement which may last through several generations. Students and teachers who here meet one another on the same level benefit by mutual exchange. Competition challenges them to maximum effort. Interest rises in proportion to the response which one's ideas evoke. Competitiveness and envy are transformed into an objective and competitive enthusiasm. Schools of thought grow spontaneously; they cannot be induced or deliberately thought up. If one tries to do so, an artificial, sterile activity results. The influx *en masse* of mediocrity into the learned professions has given rise everywhere to a hothouse culture where either of two things is the rule. Either an external, mechanical method seems easily learned and applied to the point where everyone can "participate", or else a purely formal method of thought together with a limited number of simple axioms can serve as a catchall for just about everything. New ideas usually originate in very small circles. A few people, two, three or four, perhaps in an institute or clinic, are inspired by the exchange of a common group of ideas which foster new common insights and achievements. Such a spirit grows secretly among friends, proves its value through objective accomplishment; and finally becomes a full-fledged intellectual movement. The university as a whole can never be united by such a spirit. That spirit belongs to smaller groups. The university is most alive when such groups communicate with one another. (Jaspers 1949/1959, pp. 66-67)

It seems to me that, by following this analysis, it is possible to find more good arguments to argue in favor of the existence of a 'Canadian school' or argumentation, which main features are typical of the second model of school described by Jaspers: an unbroken intellectual tradition, with independent people, since the tradition usually does not center around a single personality but a group. It can be considered a school also because it grew up spontaneously: for sure the group is bigger than the ideal type described by Jaspers, but (and this is the most important thing) it respects the same rule: people inspired by the same principle, working together in an institute, "inspired by the exchange of a common group of ideas which foster new common insights and achievements. Such a spirit grows secretly among friends, proves its value through objective accomplishment; and finally becomes a full-fledged intellectual movement" (K. Jaspers, 1959, p. 67). This intellectual movement is the *minimum* we may ask in order to find a 'school', which is, at the end, a vague concept, as it is showed by the example of Megarians.

In fact, from this point of view, in an attempt to understand the school issue in an examination of Canadian contributions to informal logic and argumentation theory, it is very useful to look to the 5th-4th century BC Athens, Greece. It is well known that in that period the city experienced

the Sophists' arguments, the Socratic method and, later, the birth and development of the schools of Socrates, which we call "minor" in comparison to Plato. These are the school of asceticism of Antisthenes, which later became "cynical" with Diogenes of Sinope, the Dialectical school of Euclid of Megara and the hedonistic school of Aristippus of Cyrene. All of these men were (with the exception of Diogenes) a few years older than Plato. (Berti, 2010, p. 5. Our translation)

Among these schools' examples, the dialectical school of Euclid of Megara, also referred to as 'Megarians', can help us understand why it is possible to speak today of, a 'Canadian school' or, more correctly, of 'Canadians' with reference to the theory of argumentation. This is for the following reasons.

It is well understood that the Megarian school expresses a philosophical approach similar to the Eleatics and contrary to Aristotle: though a careful reading of the sources does not allow us to confirm without reservation that Euclid of Megara founded a school, it cannot definitively be said to have existed as a school (at least in the terms in which we are used to defining schools).

K. von Fritz has thoroughly criticized the very assumption of the existence of a Megarian school, namely the validity of that perspective of integration between Eleatism and Socratism which he considered instead a later doxographic scheme. [...] The Megarian school, like all the other so-called Socratic schools, is a particular type of school: it is characterized not by a purely theoretical tradition of doctrine (like the Eleatics or the Atomists), nor by a community of scientific research (like the Peripatetic school or the Academ), nor by a strictly dogmatic or all-encompassing concept (such as Stoicism or Epicureanism), but rather by an ideal of education and life skills training for the students, without any precondition for the training of new teachers. [...] This means that when we talk about "school", specifically the minor Socratics, we mean something very different from the Peripatetic, the Stoa and the Garden: there are no compulsory dogmas and well-constructed systems, but only, as K. von Fritz has argued, the aim of "educating and training students for life" (Giannantoni, 1990, pp. 44-45. Our trans.).

Specifically with regard to the 'Megarians':

it is good to understand the meaning of "school": if it is used to designate a stable and lasting educational and scientific organization in which a group of people carries out a common preparatory work, a teaching and learning of knowledge, this term finds this use only in the case of the Platonic Academy, which became the most advanced scientific and cultural institution in the ancient world...; while recent criticism has gained the conviction that the classification in schools of other Socratics is above all the result of the work of schematization systematically made by the authors of successions of philosophers. However, in this case we must observe that the same work of "scholastic" systemization, accomplished by Hellenistic historiography, cannot have appeared on an arbitrary basis and without some connection to the historical reality of the facts. ...What has been said is also significant in clarifying the way in which one speaks of a Megarian "school", whose foundation is attributed from

sources to Euclid. These – who were, undoubtedly, among the most devoted disciples of Socrates ... – had to build around themselves – as indeed the other Socratics – a circle of followers, with the intent to continue, in possible ways, the work of the teacher. Therefore, this also had to be a school of life for life (Montoneri, 1984, pp. 26-27. Our trans.).

And so, “although we speak of the ‘Megarian school’, one of the so-called minor Socratic schools, this classification appears hardly applicable, perhaps even out of place, given that this presumed school does not exist as a solid and unique institution nor do its members profess common and unanimously accepted doctrine” (Pesce & Spinelli, 2006, p. 7218. Our Trans.).

The Megarian school, in the strongest sense of the term, did not exist: and that is why here we referred to it as a ‘school’ (in scare quotes). But there certainly existed a circle of thinkers (including Plato himself) who gathered in Megara (probably around Euclid) after the death of Socrates – that Euclid certainly knew and spent time with together with Plato (see Giannantoni 1990, p. 36; Kneale & Kneale 1962, p. 14) and that was, assuredly, still thriving in the days of Aristotle; the individual philosophers who were part of it were characterized as “being followers of the Eleatism” (Giannantoni, 1990, p. 44. Our translation) and the group, as a whole, was known by the “appellations of ‘eristic’ and ‘dialectical’” (Giannantoni, 1990, p. 46. Our translation).

This suggests that the meaning that Plato and Aristotle attributed to the term *dialecticós* “does not signify belonging to a particular school, but rather the one who practices a certain philosophical or argumentative method” (Giannantoni, 1990, p. 47. Our translation). Likewise, the well-known polemics of Aristotle, laid out in his *Metaphysics*, should be understood in a similar way, since when we speak of the “Megarians” (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E./1908,  $\Theta$  3, 1046b 29) it is very likely that this should be understood as “a doctrinal and non-institutional denomination: [meaning] ‘those who refer to Megarian doctrines’ and not ‘to those who belong to the Megarian school’” (Giannantoni, 1990, p. 49. Our trans.). In effect, the Aristotelian formula “evidently had to allow the contemporaries of the Stagirians to easily identify the group of thinkers who he intended to refer to as representatives of a specific speculative point of view that he criticized” (Montoneri, 1984, p. 27. Our trans.). This point of view is later identified with the appellation “Megarian doctrines” (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E./1908,  $\Theta$  3, 1047a 13).

## 7. Conclusion

This long digression allows us to highlight the important fact that there are, in the history of philosophy, from its very beginnings, many ways to talk about “school,” and that there are different ways to be a school (that in this case, in effect, “to be can be said in many ways”). A school can, for example, be identified, in line with K. Jaspers’ analysis:

- as a solid and unique institution, the members of which profess common and unanimously accepted doctrines and, therefore, as a stable and lasting teaching and scientific organization in which a group of people carries out a common process of preparation, teaching and learning of knowledge, recognizing authority, by experience, seniority or ability, of the founder (or group of founders);

- but also as a circle of scholars who meet with the intent to continue, in possible ways and with an educational ideal, the work of others, with the possibility of identifying some characteristic traits that allow, for each ‘product’, to be identified by its name brand, created and fine-tuned by a single entity;
- or, finally, even as a group of philosophers that can be denoted by a common appellation because they practice a certain philosophical or argumentative method, in the presence of an affective, amicable relationship or in any case, we would say today, with a common link between the components.

A school can be all these things put together or some or only one of them. It is, at the end, a matter of relation between identity and difference, or how different views can be considered as representatives of a same intellectual movement. That is why I said that “school” is a vague concept, but sufficiently precise to allow us, as does the history of philosophy, to recognize different instances (or models) of school. Sometimes it is very easy to identify a school (as it happens, for example, for Plato’s school or for pragma-dialectics), sometimes it is harder (as it is for the ‘Megarians’ or the ‘Canadians’), sometimes a school does not exist (as it can happen with a group of people with a common scientific interest, talking together during ISSA or OSSA Conferences). That group must be more than a clan or random group of people or a community (this is the world used by Blair, 2019, p. 58 to describe ISSA). To exist, it must be recognizable by at least one of the characteristics mentioned here, in keeping with what our philosophical tradition tells us.

With this in mind, we can now give a positive answer to the question which began this essay: in our opinion, and for the reasons we have already stated, one can speak of a ‘Canadian school of argumentation’ because there exists, at the very least, a group of Canadian scholars who practice a certain philosophical method; share common goals (to understand and teach argumentation); read and react to similar texts and ideas; carry out a common process of preparation, teaching and learning of knowledge; work within shared educational and scientific organizations; and are associated with common conferences and research center. The Canadian ‘school’ inevitably deals with works and ideas that constitute a large set of theories that, like the pieces of a mosaic, may not fit together perfectly: but, as figurative arts and music teach us, a possible dissonance does not diminish a fundamental harmony. Opinions we find expressed by people we can easily recognize as part of that group demonstrate different perspectives on common themes, but in a way that reflects their dialogue with each other. These are, basically, opinions expressed by people who work or have worked in the same place (in Windsor, in Ontario, in Canada) and who, as we know, have in some cases become friends: everyone can personally testify. And it is in this very quality that we find, perhaps, the most important confirmation of the existence of a ‘school’. Here there is an echo of Aristotle’s words written in remembrance, in all probability, of the twenty years spent in the Academy of Plato (the first real school), which he attended until the age of 37:

And whatever existence means for each class of men, whatever it is for whose sake they value life, in that they wish to occupy themselves with their friends; and so some drink together, others dice together, others join in athletic exercises and hunting, or in the study of philosophy, each class spending their days together in whatever they love most in life; for since they wish to live with their friends, they do and

share in those things which give them the sense of living together (Aristotle, IV century B.C.E./1999, IX, 12).

“Others join ... in the study of philosophy” that characterizes the life of the Academy, translates in English the Greek term “*sumphilosophousin*”, which carries a most auspicious meaning. Indeed, this is

the first time the verb *sumphilosophein* appears in ancient Greek literature, and appears to indicate the Aristotelian concept of “that in which each man finds his reason for being”, of “that which men want to live for”, that is, of happiness. The greatest happiness, therefore, for philosophers is not only “philosophizing” (*philosophein*), but doing it with (*sun*) friends, something that Aristotle experienced in the Academy, where they “passed the days” doing what they loved “above all others among the things that compose a life.” (Berti, 2010, pp. vii-viii. Our Trans.)

And perhaps this is also true for the experiences that philosophers have made in the course of their lives in the places where they work, together with the people they work with, if they are lucky enough in the choice of their friends: and so it is true for Windsor and for the ‘Canadians,’ whose ‘school’ we hope is, from now on, more easily recognizable.

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