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Abstract: In "Three Perspectives on Argument," Wenzel argued that scholars should orient their research around the well-known triad of rhetorical, dialectical, and logical perspectives on argument. Despite the success of this triad in orienting pluralistic research, Wentzel nonetheless maintained that an "eventual synthesis" of the three perspectives was both possible and desirable. In this paper I reconsider Wenzel's idea by asking what might be preventing such a synthesis today. I argue that one obstacle is a common *philosophical* assumption about rhetoric that opposes *assertion* to *persuasion*, truth to effectiveness. Following Barbara Cassin, I challenge this assumption and consider how rhetoric might be thought in terms of *performance*. In the first part of the paper I discuss Wenzel's account of the triad and touch on a number of criticisms of the rhetorical approach that follow Wenzel's characterization of it. Second, I turn to Cassin to help bring out the historical context of this characterization which I aim to challenge within argumentation theory. Finally, I argue for a way that we might reconcile epistemic- and audience-based concerns within the new rhetoric framework of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca.

Keywords: Adherence, assertion, Cassin, epideictic, performance**,** Perelman, persuasion**,** philosophy, rhetoric, Wenzel

1. Introduction

In his landmark essay "Three Perspectives on Argument," Joseph W. Wenzel argued that scholars should orient their research around what is now the well-known triad of rhetorical, dialectical, and logical perspectives on argument. The lasting influence of this essay is apparent not only from the near universal adoption of this terminology among argumentation theorists, but also in the overwhelming attention that has since been given to the dialectical approach—which Wenzel had argued was the only perspective that could submit theses to "critical testing". Despite the success of Wenzel's triad in orienting pluralistic research, he nonetheless maintained that an "eventual synthesis" of the perspectives was both possible and desirable.

In this paper I want to reconsider Wenzel's idea by asking what might be preventing such a synthesis today. What I will argue is that one obstacle is a common *philosophical* assumption about rhetoric as it is commonly understood within argumentation theory. This assumption is that rhetoric is concerned with adapting arguments to be *effective* rather than their validity or truth content. The problem with this assumption is that it creates un unbridgeable gap between epistemic and rhetorical concerns, which I argue need not be the case. As many of the points I develop in this paper require further elaboration, my aim is simply to raise enough doubt about the conventional framing of this opposition to encourage further reflection.

In the first part of the paper I discuss Wenzel's account of the distinction between logical dialectical, and rhetorical approaches to argument, and then touch on a number of criticisms of the rhetorical approach that follow Wenzel's characterization of it. In the following section, I turn to the work of Barbara Cassin to help bring out the historical context of this characterization which long pre-dates Wenzel and which I aim to challenge within argumentation theory. Building on this discussion, I then return to argumentation theory where I argue for a way that

we might reconcile epistemic- and audience-based concerns by following Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca.

2. Wenzel's three perspectives and the reception of rhetoric

A good starting point for any discussion of rhetoric in argumentation theory is Wenzel's "Perspectives on Argument," the *locus classicus*—as Ralph Johnson has called it—for "the view that argumentation may be approached from different perspectives" (Johnson, 2009). As is well known, Wenzel argues that the three perspectives on argumentation each focus on a different aspect of the overall phenomenon of "argumentation": where the logical perspective approaches argument as a *product*, the dialectical approaches it as a *procedure*, and the rhetorical as a social *process* (Wenzel, 1992, p. 124). While many today would contest the continued accuracy of Wenzel's characterization of these three approaches, few would deny that this text has been a longstanding theoretical cornerstone of argumentation theory, and for this reason has had a considerable influence on the way that scholars understand the scope of their own research.

Let us briefly revisit Wenzel's original motivation for his "system" and see how it stands up today. Wenzel gives four main reasons for the utility of his distinction.[1] First, in view of the proliferation of studies on argumentation, Wenzel thought that the three perspectives could serve as a principle to organize scholarship (p. 136). In this respect, his approach has proved to be tremendously helpful. Second, Wenzel thought that by opening up the perspectives from which argumentation could be analyzed, over time a more complete picture of argumentation would emerge. On this point as well Wenzel seems to have been correct. Third, Wenzel hoped that the inclusion of the dialectical perspective would help put it on equal footing among the then dominant rhetorical and logical perspectives (p. 140). As the remarkable success of dialectical approaches will be of no surprise to anyone familiar with contemporary argumentation theory, here too Wenzel seems to have been right on the mark.

For all this, it is on the fourth of Wenzel's reasons that I want to focus. The fourth reason that Wenzel gives is that by carefully distinguishing the three perspectives on argument it is easier to prevent or eliminate "pseudo-problems" that arise in the literature (p. 136). While the distinction may have performed this task for a time, I would submit that Wenzel's version of the distinction on this point has run its course.

The biggest drawback of the continued use of the product, procedure, and process distinction to distinguish between competing approaches is that it perpetuates a number of assumptions about the nature of argumentation. What I want to explore here is an assumption that can be found in Wenzel but is in fact much older—and I would argue is in fact part of argumentation theory's inheritance from the history of philosophy. This assumption is the idea that rhetoric is essentially concerned with "*adapting* discourse effectively to particular auditors" (p. 125, emphasis mine).

Let us look at a few criticisms of rhetoric within argumentation theory that follow Wenzel's characterization. First, consider the epistemological theory of argument advocated by Christoph Lumer, who criticizes rhetorical approaches for failing to establish any specific "truth conditions" other than convincing an audience (Lumer, 2005, p. 237). For Lumer, this failure is decisive precisely because his theory holds that "the standard function of argument" is "to lead the argument's addressee to a (rationally) justified belief" (p. 213). Since Lumer understands

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[1] I do not follow the order in which Wenzel gives these reasons.

rhetoric to be concerned only with communicating *effectively* to audiences, he concludes that rhetorical approaches must, at some point, neglect the "standard function" of argument by elevating effectiveness above truth. In a similar way, John Biro and Harvey Siegel criticize rhetorical approaches for neglecting epistemic goodness altogether. For Biro and Siegel, as far as rhetoric is concerned a good argument can only be distinguished from a bad one on the basis of whether or not "it advances the arguer's position" (Biro & Siegel, 2006, p. 91-101). Thus conceived, there are no external criteria by which rhetoric could coherently refuse to adopt certain strategies if it advanced the arguer's position. What these critics share—other than that they all advocate an 'objective epistemic theory' of argument—is that they view rhetorical concerns as having no bearing on the validity and truth of a particular argument. The reason for this is that they both understand rhetoric to be concerned with the *efficaciousness of arguments*, rather than their truth.

Similar criticisms of rhetoric can also be found in approaches more sympathetic to rhetorical concerns. J. Anthony Blair, for example, concedes the importance of rhetorical analyses for understanding relevant contextual information that would not be immediately available from a spectator or analyst's point of view (Blair, 2012, p. 98). However, he continues, from the perspective of the real addressee of an argument, what must ultimately be assessed are "the logical and dialectical merits of the case made." From another angle, in the pragma-dialectical approach—which purports to bridge the gap between the rhetorical and the dialectical—rhetoric is explicitly understood to be concerned with the "potential effectiveness" of arguments (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2006, p. 381-392). Where for pragma-dialectics an argument's reasonableness is decided by the satisfaction of dialectical criteria within a critical discussion, for Blair it is logic that always has the final say.

Despite the many differences among the authors mentioned above, a common view of what matters to rhetoric can be discerned. From the point of view of an engaged participant, rhetoric is concerned with understanding one's audience for the purpose of arguing *effectively* to that audience. From the spectator's point of view, rhetorical analysis is concerned with understanding all the complexities of real argumentative situations in order to understand why a particular argument was (or was not) effective in persuading an actual audience.

What emerges from this way of understanding rhetoric is a tension between two general tendencies. On the one hand, there is a certain philosophical tendency that believes argumentation is about truth; and, on the other hand, there is a tendency that seems more interested in adapting arguments to audiences in such a way that those arguments will be effective in light of the social context in which they are used. Between these two tendencies lies a deep disagreement about a number of complex and longstanding philosophical choices that probably will not, and likely should not, be solved within the field of argumentation studies alone. Instead of wading into these debates on their own terms, I want to come at this problem from a different angle. What I will argue is that this way of framing the problem assumes a *philosophical orientation toward language* that pigeonholes rhetoric into adopting an orientation toward language that is not its own. In doing so this conventional way of understanding rhetorical approaches creates an unnecessary opposition between rhetorical and epistemic concerns. In what follows I turn to the work of Barbara Cassin whose work can help argumentation theorists diagnose some of the causes of this well-worn dichotomy.

3. Epideixis, apodeixis, and the philosophical eclipse of rhetoric

A good part of Barbara Cassin's work consists of challenging the standard philosophical narrative about rhetoric that philosophy has inherited from Plato. As the Platonic story goes, rhetoric is a skill or technique applied to language that attempts to win the favour of audiences by speaking *to* them rather than about things as they really are. Philosophers, on the other hand, are less concerned with how a particular audience will receive arguments, as what really matters for the philosopher is the validity of arguments and the truth of their premises and conclusions. To the extent that argumentation theory inherits its conceptual resources from the history of philosophy, it should come as no surprise that the basic opposition at the heart of this story should find its way into argumentation theory. To see where this tension comes from and how it relates to argumentation theory, I will first provide a brief sketch of Cassin's "sophistic" counter-history of philosophy.

Cassin builds her case primarily on the work of Edward Schiappa, who argues that it was Plato himself who coined the term "rhetoric" [*rhêtorikê*], rather than the Sophists (Schiappa, 1990). According to Schiappa, there is no known use of the term "rhetoric" before Plato's *Gorgias*, which is believed to have been written around 385[BC]. While the term "*rhetor*" was widely used to refer to a person who gave public speeches, turning this practice into "*rhetoric*", a craft or technique of speaking, appears to be Plato's invention. Instead, Cassin points out, the sophists themselves refer only to their use of *logos* and not a specific technique called "rhetoric." What has happened then, Cassin continues, is that a particular philosophical way of understanding *logos,* of understanding language, reason, and argument, has been made to conceal others. As Cassin explains:

> My claim is that rhetoric is a philosophical invention, an attempt to tame *logos*, in particular, the Sophist's *logos* and its effects. The creation of rhetoric by philosophy is itself the very first "rhetorical turn"… [This] matters because the strength of *logos* has been made to vanish, caught and subsumed under rhetoric. And rhetoric itself has been made to vanish as soon as it is born. (Cassin, 2014, p. 76)

What Cassin is getting at here is that our understanding of rhetoric as a particular technique is born out of a philosophical maneuver that circumscribes *the* legitimate use of *logos*. Through this invention Plato establishes the now conventional opposition between philosophical speech, or speech that asserts *what is* (i.e. ontology), and rhetorical speech, which is concerned less with the way things are than it is with speaking to please others or win their favour.

What Cassin ultimately wants to do is to step outside of this opposition and rehabilitate what she calls "sophistics" [*la sophistique*], a countermodel to the standard philosophical narrative about *logos*. According to Cassin, what is lost in this narrative is an understanding of *logos* as being first and foremost *performative* [*logos epideiktikos*]*,* rather than *assertive* [*logos apophantikos*] (p. 195). For Cassin, what is important about the notion of performance (*epideixis*), is that it confronts philosophy with the "third dimension" of language that has been hidden by the opposition:

> Counting two is what philosophy has habituated us to. When one speaks, one can either "speak of" or "speak to"… "To speak of," to unveil, to describe, to demonstrate, is of the major register of philosophy… "To speak to," to persuade, to have an effect on the other, is of the register of rhetoric. From the point of view of *philosophia perennis*, there is no third dimension of language. (p. 194)

According to Cassin, the standard philosophical narrative about rhetoric involves an understanding of language in terms of two axes. Where the first axis is concerned with the relation between what a speaker says and the world (philosophy), the second axis is concerned with the relation between a speaker and his or her audience (rhetoric). The first axis concerns the "speaking *of*" relation and the second concerns the "speaking *to*" relation. Against the perennial opposition of these two axes, Cassin is trying to develop a notion of *epideixis* prior to the way that it has been interpreted philosophically. For Cassin, unlike Aristotle and Perelman,[2] *epideixis* or performance is

> the rhetorical genre par excellence, but in excess of rhetoric philosophically assigned to its place: *epideixis* does not describe in terms of truth nor simply produces an effect of persuasion, but it carries out [*effectue*] with felicity what I call a world effect [*effet-monde*]. (Cassin, 2018, p. 96, Trans. mine)

This "world effect", for Cassin, neither purports to propositionally describe the world as it "really is," nor effect any kind of persuasion in an audience. Instead, what Cassin means by *epideixis* is rather something like a showing of something, a showing of oneself before others, in public. What is important about this performative level of speech is that it is *prior* to the analytical seperation of assertions from their speakers, their audiences, and the exigencies of the situations from which they emerge.

Above all, what Cassin shows is why the predominant philosophical orientation toward language in argumentation theory is so hostile to rhetoric. What I want to show here is that this does not have to be the case if we look at the problem from a different angle. By taking this into account, we can avoid conflating two senses of the term "*effective*." In the first sense, at the level of what Cassin calls "speaking to," "effective" refers to the persuasive outcome of speech on a living, empirical audience. This is the sense of the term used by Wenzel and others to characterize rhetorical approaches to argument. In the second sense of what Cassin calls a "world effect", the performance of speech is *effective* to the extent that it is a form of social action that modifies, to some degree, the situation from which it emerges. We can thus imagine a weak argument being *ineffective* in the first sense while at the same time being *effective* in the second, such as when, for example, an arguer suffers a loss of credibility through the use of inappropriate language. Although the argument did not *work*, so to speak, it nonetheless produced real effects.

4. Assertion, persuasion, performance

I now want to explore some of the consequences of Cassin's account in light of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's rhetorical approach to argumentation. As we have seen, Cassin argues that philosophers typically understand the incompatibility of the philosophical and the rhetorical in

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[2] I challenge this reading of Perelman (and Olbrechts-Tyteca) below.

terms of two axes of language, what she called the axes of "speaking of" and "speaking to." Since it is typically only the first axis—the traditional axis of philosophy—that admits of being true or false, rhetoric is relegated to a place detached from the world and from truth. By stepping outside of this opposition, however, Cassin draws our attention to a "third dimension" of *logos* beneath the two axes. As we saw, this *epideictic* dimension of language was neither that of assertion nor of persuasion but of *performance*, a performance that realizes what she called a "world effect."[3] How are we to understand this in light of the particular concerns of argumentation theory?

Although Cassin identifies Perelman as one of the "contemporary theoreticians of rhetoric" who remain implicated in the "philosophical" way of thinking about rhetoric, to a certain extent I think that both Cassin and Perelman are pushing in the same direction. As I have argued elsewhere, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's project involves a radical rethinking of the epideictic genre of rhetoric as it is found in Aristotle (Scott, 2020, p. 30-31). In *The Realm of Rhetoric,* Perelman explains that instead of thinking about *epideixis* as but one of three rhetorical genres it should be understood as part and parcel of the act of arguing itself (Perelman, 1982, p. 20). Recalling that the epideictic genre was traditionally understood to be concerned with praise or blame, Perelman sees that at a certain level *all* arguments function in this way below the surface. Beneath the *content* of a particular argument, all argumentation aims to "praise or blame" at the level of *form*, i.e., as a form of social action: through the act of arguing particular values are either selected and emphasized, or ignored and downplayed, within the broader horizon of values. By shifting attention toward this essential feature Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca invite us to think about argumentation as a form of *social action*, rather than solely as a vehicle for communicating that which can be true or false.

Although not always consistent in doing so, it seems to me that this perspectival shift is why Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca are compelled to introduce new concepts and categories when it might not otherwise be clear why they are needed. As they explain in the introduction to *The New Rhetoric,* what they claim to be interested in are "*argumentative structures*, the analysis of which must precede all experimental tests of…effectiveness" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 9, emphasis mine). Here we can see that what interests Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca is not simply a set of techniques that enable effective persuasion, but rather the basic structures of argumentation itself.

To take one example let us consider the difference between the concepts of "persuasion" and "adherence" in their work. In doing so, let us keep in mind the above distinction between the two different senses of the term "effective" brought out by Cassin's analysis. Where "persuasion" refers to the way in which an argument does or does not achieve "validity for a particular audience," Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca introduce the term "adherence" to describe an essential structure of argumentation.[4] While adherence may appear at first glance to be a synonym for persuasion, adherence is in fact something constitutive of argumentation. Unlike persuasion, adherence does not refer to that which is won or secured by arguing effectively; rather, adherence is something always already present in an argumentative situation. To put this

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[3] Cassin develops this point through a reading of J.L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (Austin, 1975). While I have not explained her departure from Austin here, it may be helpful to note that Cassin's understanding of *epideixis* is closest to what Austin calls "illocution." The major difference is that Cassin's broader project is to think linguistic performance (illocutionary) *outside* the "regime" of *apophansis* (locutionary).

[4] It is worth recalling that the term "persuasion" (or "conviction", which is contrasted with persuasion) appears nowhere in Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's definition of argumentation. In every instance that they define the object of their theory of argumentation the term "adherence" is used.

another way: if argumentation is fundamentally a kind of social action, the goal or aim of that action, irrespective of any arguer's particular motives, is to intensify, diminish, or modify adherence. Notice the difference here: while persuasion is but one possible goal of argumentation, acting upon adherence is its *telos*. Sometimes we argue to persuade our interlocutor, sometimes we argue to develop our own position further, and so on. Irrespective of any of these particular goals, all arguers and audiences adhere to a particular set values, intellectual beliefs, and affective attachments to some degree of intensity at any given time; and it is this set of variables that Perelman calls "adherence". Furthermore, this is why argumentation for Perelman is not so much about installing our own beliefs into the audience as it is about a "transfer of adherence" within the audience that pre-exists the argumentative situation entirely (Perelman, 1982, p. 21).

What Wenzel's characterization of rhetorical approaches leaves out is rhetoric's concern with the *effectiveness* of argumentation at the *epideictic* level, i.e., at the level of an argument understood as a practice or as a form of social action. And it is in this sense and to this extent, I would argue, that rhetorical approaches are primarily concerned with audiences.

5. Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to show that a common *philosophical* assumption about the meaning of rhetoric in argumentation theory leads to an unsurpassable divide between epistemic- and audience-based concerns. By shifting the terms of this conflict from *apodeixis* to *epideixis* through my reading of Cassin, I argued that rhetoric can and should be understood beyond the opposition of "speaking of" and "speaking to." When it is conceived only in terms of the latter, rhetoric cannot but appear as suspicious to philosophy for neglecting the assertive axis of language, the traditional locus of truth. Although rhetoric may also have something to say about arguing effectively in one sense of the term, I have tried to show that this is not the only sense of the term "effective" that is of interest to rhetoric. When analyzed as a form of action, or as performance (*epideixis*), as is also the case in Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's work, rhetoric can investigate the ways that argumentation acts upon the persons, places, objects, and values that populate any argumentative situation. Unlike persuasive effects, these "world effects", as Cassin calls them, cannot simply be contrasted with assertion and therefore be taken to neglect the world; for in a very real sense it is through the *performance of argument* that the world we inhabit is created, sustained, and modified by these very effects. Understood rhetorically, argument is thus one of the ways in which we do things with words.

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