Should logos be opposed to ethos? Commentary on Adelino Cattani's 'Persuading and convincing'

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1. Introduction

Adelino Cattani's conceptual analyses are aimed at developing a normative account of convincing as opposed to a theory of persuading. The Author builds his main line of argument upon the definitions of *persuading* (understood as an activity concentrated mainly on a speaker) and *convincing* (which is claimed to be "centred chiefly on the addressee and focused on one's capacity of being convinced and of evaluating rationally"; see p. 1). Due to putting an emphasis on how convincing *should be understood*, the paper may be interpreted as an attempt towards providing its normative take. Cattani claims that convincing, as opposed to persuading, is

> a communication activity aimed at causing objective changes in someone's belief set, whereas persuading is related to speaker's techniques employed in influencing an audience. In this commentary, I will concentrate on issues related to the lexical analysis (section 2), the differences between logic and rhetoric (section 3), and those between logos and ethos (section 4). I will claim that the proposed method of lexical analysis does not have to exclude combining logic with rhetoric. More specifically, I will argue that the Aristotelian roots of understanding the communicative role of ethos may provide us with good arguments in favour of treating logic with rhetoric as legitimate components of the theory of rational and reasonable convincing.

2. Lexical Analysis

The approach presented in the paper may be interpreted as a normative take on conviction and persuasion. I am generally in favour of the approach that consists of analysing carefully the relations between the concepts the understanding of which is crucial to building elements of a theory of rational conviction – which is one of the main goals of Cattani's paper. These concepts have been arranged in the paper using the following pairs of notions: logic – rhetoric, convincing – persuading, and polemics – dialogue.

Cattani's approach consists of giving "lexical evidence for a difference" between the key notions in English and in Italian (see, e.g., p. 3). This approach is claimed to be helpful in determining boundaries between logic and rhetoric, convincing and persuading, and dialogue and polemic. I agree that the careful analysis of the origins of the key notions may turn out to be helpful in capturing main differences, however, the question arises: are lexical analyses that point to some linguistically interesting differences between notions rather an inspiration for building the conceptual framework than a solution for the robust theory of convincing?

A sample of this kind of lexical analysis can be found on p. 3: "Why do we lack of a lexicographic entry indicating the antonym of the act of 'convincing'? This anomaly tells us a lot, and it is equally noteworthy that it does not exist the antonym of the verb 'to dedicate,' which should hypothetically sound like **to dis-dedicate*." The lack of the antonym

is claimed to constitute an evidence for distinguishing convincing from persuading". I would agree that it may be some argument in favour of using the term 'convincing' to denote rational communication activities as distinguished from persuasion, but I would not say that it should constitute a foundation for the fully fledged theory of convincing.

3. Logic and rhetoric

The important point of departure for Cattani's theory of convincing is table on page 1 which points to 'the positive and the negative traits' of rhetoric. My impression is that this table also contains two different notions of rhetoric, namely: (i) rhetoric understood as an art of pure persuasion where goals other than persuading the audience do not basically matter in terms of successful communication; and (ii) rhetoric conceived as the art of rational persuasion undertook by means of speaker's genuine *ethos* (the character of the speaker), strong and valid *logos* (correct reasoning), and adequate *pathos* (evoking proper emotions of an audience). Whereas some of the expressions from the first column of the table, by emphasising traits such as 'vacuous speech' or 'manipulation' clearly refer to the first notion (rhetoric as pure art of persuasion), a term *vir bonus dicendi peritus* ("a good man skilled in the art of speaking"), by pointing the speaker's moral traits, refers to the second notion because the reference to the speaker's character (*vir bonus*).

While referring to differences between rhetoric and logic, Cattani states: "we tend to keep distance from *rhetoric*, especially from *rhetorical moves* in favour of *logical rules*. In logical terms, we prefer to speak of 'rules', while in rhetorical terms we prefer to speak of 'moves.'. Logical rules are clear and universally approved, while rhetorical moves are questionable and debatable" (p. 2). I agree that the distinction between rules and moves may tell us something interesting about logically and rhetorically driven argumentation. But, as a comparison, let us observe that designing dialogue protocols (e.g., Hamblin, 1970; Walton & Krabbe, 1995) are about the reasonableness of *dialogue moves*. In an analogous way, we can speak of the rationality of *rhetorical moves*.

For instance, if a given rhetorical figure, such as synecdoche which consists of substituting a whole for a part or vice versa (see, e.g., Fahnestock, 2011, pp. 101-102), may be a fair rhetorical tool used in order to emphasise the logos-related aspects of the speech by pointing to the most important part of the whole which could, for instance, constitute the core of one's argument. Hence, mentioning rhetorical moves in the broader context of logos (as means that are not directly related to logos but which may emphasise the line of argument) does not seem to constitute an ultimate evidence for opposing rhetoric and logic. In a similar manner, we could point out some other figures of speech that are uses to emphasise logos. In other words, if we understand a rhetorical speech holistically, we may see that logos is not always separable from, e.g., ethos. This argument could serve as one against advocating the establishment of sharp boundaries between logic and rhetoric.

However, apart from some clearly positive and negative traits of rhetoric that have been incorporated in the same table (p. 1), there are some other traits that do not seem to emphasise neither the 'negative' nor the 'positive' flavour of rhetoric. If we take, for example, traits such as 'practice of persuasion' and 'discursive technique' from the first column of the table (containing the negative traits of rhetoric), they seem to be rather neutral. A similar observation could seem to be true for the term 'practice of persuasion', unless one defines persuasion in a purely negative way and thus associates it with manipulative techniques.

4. Logos and ethos

Cattani also sketches a boundary between logic and rhetoric by means of ethical concepts: "Since 'good' means basically 'honest' and 'logic,' we should determine if ethic and logic on one hand, and rhetoric on the other hand, are in conflict; if conviction and persuasion are really such different things; if the apology of dialogue (which seems to get along with logic) and the apology of polemic (which seems to get along with rhetoric) may coexist" (p. 3). This proposal seems to be opposed to from the Aristotelian account of rhetoric given in Book 1 of his *On Rhetoric* (Aristotle, 1991). Of course, logic has been long opposed to rhetoric, but given Cattani's task of providing the foundations for a theory of rational convincing, the Aristotelian take could be possibly incorporated into his account. In other words, in my view there is no contradiction between establishing such a theory, and, at the same time, making use of Aristotle's insights into the relation between logos and ethos. For instance, this relation is not only about logos being an indispensable element of the rhetorical speech, which seems to be just a starting point for further considerations.

It might be here worth emphasising that the characteristics of ethos components, namely practical wisdom (*phronesis*), moral virtue (*arete*), and good will (*eunoia*) distinguished in *On Rhetoric* (Aristotle, 1991, pp. 112-113), also seems to be an argument against defining rhetoric as opposed to logic. When describing the lack of practical wisdom, Aristotle claims that "for either through lack of practical sense they [speakers] do not form opinions rightly" (p. 112). This example claim may show that despite of the fact that *phronesis* is a component of ethos, it may be claimed to be indirectly related to logos, as the practical knowledge constituting *phronesis* can also contain the knowledge of the rules of inference which constitute the core of logos. Being sympathetic to Cattani's lexical approach discussed in section 2, I think it does not have to incorporate the treatment of logos and ethos as mutually exclusive concepts.

Despite the above issues regarding the relation between logos and ethos along with some concerns about confronting main concepts, a further systematic inquiry employing the lexical analysis outlined in the paper may lead to an elaboration on detailed characteristics of rational convincing.

Acknowledgements

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