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Douglas Walton
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Introduction

What initially led me to start work on this project was the observation that the examples of fallacies and questionable argument tactics studied in textbooks of informal logic often featured examples of advertisements and political arguments of the kind that have to do with elections or with public policies. Many of them are media arguments from sources such as political speeches, commercial ads, or Internet blogs. Such arguments are especially interesting when it is evident that they were used – for example, in ads – as rhetorically effective techniques to persuade a mass audience. Formerly (and often still), such arguments tended to be classified in logic as fallacious. But more and more they are now seen as fallible (but slippery) heuristics useful to reach a tentative conclusion under conditions of uncertainty, but subject to critical questioning. The theory put forward in this book strikes a judicious balance between analyzing them as fallible but basically reasonable arguments in some cases, and criticizing them as fallacious arguments used as tactics to unfairly get the best of an opponent or deceive a mass audience in other cases.

More specifically, the kinds of arguments considered throughout the book are ones often used in various communication media, including written texts, television, and the Internet, to attempt to persuade an audience to do something or accept something as true. A broad variety of such arguments are analyzed, but they prominently include political arguments and appeals, especially as used in electoral campaigns, encompassing persuasion attempts in which politicians, corporations, or advocacy groups put forward arguments using mass media and the Internet. They also include staged public debates in legislatures and parliaments and arguments found in commercial ads, in news reports or editorials

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in newspapers and magazines, and in written transcripts of television broadcasts and other media programs. They include any specimens of argumentation that have appeared in the various mass media and can be taken to try to influence a mass audience in some way. The aim of such an argument is typically to get action or to change public opinion on an issue, although other goals can be involved as well. The problem is to unlock the mystery of how persuasion works in such arguments using a dialogue model.

Despite a large body of experimental work in the social sciences that has studied the persuasive effectiveness of messages, for example, we still have very little precise understanding of exactly what persuasion is and how it works in mass media. As O'Keefe (2001, p. 575) put it, "Persuasion has been one of the great continuing mysteries of rhetoric and related disciplines." This book dissipates some of the mystery by building on recent work in argumentation theory and multi-agent systems in artificial intelligence (AI). These fields have developed new tools that have been applied to argumentation, leading to the development of new argumentation technologies, but one of the problems has been to extend them to argumentation of a kind that has traditionally been studied in rhetoric and speech communication.

The contemporary field of argumentation derives from three different disciplinary roots: logic, dialectic, and rhetoric. Logic is the science of reasoning. Dialectic is the study of two parties reasoning together with each other by argument and objection. Rhetoric is the use of argument to persuade.[1] Each has been somewhat suspicious of the claims advanced by the others, reflecting a tension going back to the ancient origins of all three fields. Rhetoric especially has been suspect, seen by philosophers as a sham and a deception, trading on the biases of audiences and not advancing claims that demand to be taken seriously. Philosophy has long been at war with rhetoric, since the time of Plato. Plato said that rhetoric is used by Sophists, is based only on appearances, and is used to persuade audiences by arguments that are fallacious. According to Plato, the Sophist has no regard for the truth of the matter, and can make the worse argument look better, or the better argument look worse, by tricky arguments. Philosophy, in contrast, on the Platonic theory, can take us to the fixed and unchanging truth of a matter being discussed by means of a method he called dialectic. Rhetoric produces only belief, which is

[1] These are superficial initial definitions for the beginner, subject to considerable refinement as the book proceeds. They are controversial and very much at issue.

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constantly changing, while philosophy yields knowledge. The word "dialectic" (in this special sense) derives from the ancient Greek term for conversation, *dialectikos*, evoking the Platonic dialogues. Both Plato and Aristotle saw dialectic as a highly important method of rational discussion.[2] Plato couldn't really make up his mind what dialectic was, but by showing his paradigm exponent of it, Socrates, practicing it in his dialogues, gave examples of it at work. Later, Aristotle tried to redress Plato's antagonistic view of the relationship between rhetoric and dialectic by inventing formal logic, trying to reconcile rhetoric with a field he called dialectic. He defined dialectic as a way of criticizing popularly accepted opinions by finding contradictions and logical weaknesses in them and by considering arguments on both sides of a contested issue. But dialectic died out after some attempts to revive it in the Middle Ages.[3] The outcome, which has persisted for over two millennia, is that philosophy and rhetoric are still at war.

Recent developments demand a new look into this conflict. Because of the need to devise systems for electronic communication on the Internet, computing is moving more and more to a model of argumentation as a dialogue between rational agents. Current technologies of artificial intelligence are now widely based on the possibility of communications among entities that can act, reason, ask questions, and exchange information. For example, you might have an agent that filters out your E-mail messages, deletes some, and marks others with a high priority. Or you might have an agent that searches around the Net, collects certain kinds of information, and then processes it in a format you can use for some purpose. To collect this information, the agent will have to ask questions of other agents. Goal-directed communication between agents, or among groups of agents engaged in projects that require teamwork, is more and more important for many applications in electronic commerce and information retrieval. These developments provide an argumentation technology that offers new insight into mass media argumentation through an interlocking of dialectic and rhetoric.

In this book it is argued that rhetorical and dialectical argumentation need to be fitted together as complementary fields integrating two main tasks, the invention of arguments and their critical evaluation. The main

[2] But the term, in its Greek meaning, is likely to be unfamiliar to the majority of present-day readers, who are most likely to associate it with (quite different) Marxist-Hegelian notions.

[3] In modern times, Marxist-Hegelian theorists took over the term, signaling its death.

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rhetorical task is to devise new arguments that can be used to persuade an audience to come to accept a viewpoint it has doubts about, based on what are taken to be its commitments and values. The main dialectical task is to judge which arguments are stronger and which are weaker (or even fallacious) by appealing to structures based on forms of argument and procedural rules that specify conditions for appropriate uses of an argument. It is argued in this book that even though these two goals are inherently different in theory, in practice they are closely connected. The reason is that audiences generally tend to be persuaded by arguments that are fallible (defeasible, to use the current term), and can sometimes be highly deceptive and even fallacious, but if used rightly, are inherently reasonable. Such defeasible arguments are very common, for example, in politics, where situations are highly complex, and a decision has to be made under conditions of uncertainty and lack of knowledge. In showing us how to use and judge such arguments, rhetoric and dialectic can combine to be a powerful force in the new argumentation technology that is emerging, especially in a democracy.

Whereas rhetorical and dialectical arguments are usually seen as very different, this book shows how they are both built on the same underlying structures of argumentation. Both are built on argumentation schemes, or stereotypical forms of argument. Both are built on the cognitive structure of the speech act of rational persuasion, requiring a dialogue format in which a message sender (called the "proponent" in this book) uses an argument to try to overcome the doubt expressed by another agent (called the "respondent") she is communicating with. To do this successfully, the proponent has to understand "where the respondent is coming from." She has to make some estimate of what premises he accepts or can be persuaded to accept as the dialogue proceeds.

The book shows that the tool of simulative reasoning is the means needed for this purpose, in both dialectic and rhetoric. It explains what arguers do in rhetorical situations: they imagine a dialogue to establish the initial position of the audience, and they then work within that framework to persuade the audience through dialectically secured claims. This works just like a dialogue except that the audience can't respond to the arguer's questions, so he or she must anticipate and account for what the audience would say. However, modifying the notion of dialogue so that it can accommodate simulative reasoning of this sort requires a complex and careful process of adaptation. The treatment of arguments based on definitions or on a variety of other different kinds of evidence – studied in the middle chapters of the book – identifies some of the ways in which

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this is done. The book shows how simulative reasoning can be captured in a dialogue model of argumentation that integrates reasoning used in dialectical and rhetorical argumentation, explaining how each component is needed to understand what is really going on in mass media argumentation.

The dialogue model has recently been adopted in multi-agent computing, and one can see why, because automated agents are used in communication on the Internet for purposes such as electronic commerce. The way argumentation is presented on the Internet fits the dialogue format in a way that is evident to all of us as users. The dissemination of news and information is becoming less centralized, and with this fragmentation we are continually returning to a "conversational" model of communication and information exchange. For example, it is not just that news networks such as CNN report the results of daily, Internet-based, opinion polls from their viewers. They now include blogs as a regular segment of their newscasts in recognition that an increasing portion of the population is seeking their information from this type of source. Yet the medium of a blog is inherently interactive. It is a kind of "online diary," usually of a single individual, which allows comments and feedback from the readers of the blog. Just as readers can immediately engage with the material on the blog as they read it, the author of the blog, through her continued updates, is able to respond to her interlocutors as individuals. The central task undertaken in this book is to apply this conversational model to media argumentation by integrating rhetorical and dialectical factors in the model.

Media argumentation is a powerful force in our lives. From political speeches to TV commercials to war propaganda, it can appeal to emotions that mobilize political action, influence public opinion, market products, and even enable a dictator to stay in power. If we could study this kind of argumentation using precise models of a kind that are clear enough to build into implemented computing systems, we might be in a much better position to deal with it in an intelligent and balanced way. But there are certain central mechanisms of media argumentation that are still not well enough understood. This book presents a new theory that displays its key structural components and shows how they fit together. The evidence in the case studies and analyses lead to the formulation of a new system to model the structure of rhetorical argumentation, which I call the Persuasion System. This system, along with the other tools and structural components deployed and refined through the case studies, reveal that media arguments have precisely definable characteristics of their own

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that make them a distinctive use of argumentation with a dialectical structure and rhetorical trajectory fitted together in a dialogue framework. By seeing how they work in typical and in problematic cases of mass media persuasion, fresh light is thrown on important and influential techniques of argumentation in the communication media. Each chapter presents solutions to problems central to understanding, analyzing, and criticizing media argumentation.

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1

Logic, Dialectic, and Rhetoric

The three fields of logic, rhetoric, and dialectic are all about arguments, as Aristotle showed, but each takes a different viewpoint on them.[1] Logic is the science of reasoning that studies formal inferential links between sets of propositions designated as premises and conclusion of an argument. Dialectic, usually taken to be a branch of logic, analyzes arguments given in a text of discourse, including fallacious arguments, evaluating them as weak or strong by examining criticisms of them (Kapp 1942; Walton 1998b; Finocchiaro 2005, ch. 13). Rhetoric studies persuasive arguments based on the beliefs, commitments, or values of the target audience to be persuaded (Kennedy 1963; Tindale 1999, 2004; Jacobs 2000). However, the long history of the relationship between logic and rhetoric has been an antagonistic one, characterized by strife and sniping on both sides, beginning with Plato's attack on the Sophists on the basis that they took fees to teach argumentation skills.[2] This attack on rhetoric is visible in many places in Plato's dialogues (Krabbe 2000, p. 206).[3] Aristotle took a balanced view of what he saw as a close relationship between rhetoric and dialectic, but an opposition between the two subjects remained (Hohmann 2000, p. 223). Aristotle thought of dialectic

[1] The first sentence of the *Rhetoric* (1354a1) is: "Rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectic." Aristotle saw both arts as about persuasion (*Rhetoric*, 1354a13–1354a14). See Kennedy 1991, 1994).

[2] The ancient history of dialectic as a branch of logic is well described by Kapp (1942), while that of rhetoric as a subject designed for persuasion is equally well described by Kennedy (1963).

[3] In the *Georgias* (463a–463d), Socrates denounced rhetoric as nothing more than "flattery" (*kolakeia*).

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as "a rather pure and theoretically sound method aimed at a cooperative search for cognitive truth" (Hohmann 2000, p. 223),[4] and hence by comparison, rhetoric still had negative implications that are still present.

The aim of rhetorical argumentation seems to make it subjective, because it needs to persuade by picking premises that represent the values of the specific audience (Johnstone 1981; Tindale 2004), values that can vary from one group to another. To do this successfully, the proponent has to understand "where the audience is coming from." Using a fictional example from *Star Trek*, featuring Klingons, Ferengi, and Vulcans, this chapter shows how dialectic also needs to base arguments on premises that represent the values of the specific audience or respondent to whom the argument is addressed. Another goal of this chapter is to introduce the reader to some new tools of argumentation theory, such as argument diagramming and argumentation schemes, forms of argument representing stereotypical types of reasoning used in everyday conversational interactions. Thus this chapter will show how dialectical argumentation, especially as it is being refashioned by recent developments of argumentation technology in AI, has become a much better developed branch of logic, which has moved more into a rapprochement with rhetoric. This chapter will take the first steps toward achieving the ultimate goal of displaying the key structural components of rhetorical argumentation, and will show how they fit together with logical and dialectical approaches to argumentation. What used to be called dialectic, and is coming to be so called again, has often been called informal logic in recent years. Informal logic has a special viewpoint, setting it apart from the much better developed field of formal logic.

1. The Viewpoint of Informal Logic

When it comes to studying arguments, there are two points of view, or ways of analyzing and evaluating an argument, that need to be distinguished. First, you can study the argument empirically to try to judge what effect it had, or will be likely to have, on an audience. This viewpoint would seem to be one that would fit the kind of approach and methods of the social sciences. The other point of view is logical. You can classify the

[4] Aristotle portrayed rhetoric as "a seriously tainted and practically compromised knack serving a competitive quest for persuasive success" by contrasting it with the purely intellectual subject of dialectic (Hohmann 2000, p. 223), which studies reasoning supporting or criticizing an argument.

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argument as being of a particular type. By means of such a classification, you show the given argument to be an instance of some abstract form of argument. Then you can analyze it by finding missing assumptions it is based on. Then you can determine whether the argument is correct or incorrect (valid or invalid, reasonable or fallacious). In other words, you can evaluate it according to the normative standards of correctness that this type of argument is supposed to meet. It has been thought, since the end of the nineteenth century, that these two tasks were entirely independent from each other and that they should be carefully separated and never mixed in together. But recently, the feeling has been that this separation is not as clean as was once thought (Johnson 2000).

The following thumbnail sketch of the history of logic will amplify this point. Aristotle's syllogistic, along with the Stoic logic of propositions, developed into the science of deductive logic, which, in the twentieth century, became mathematical logic. On the other hand, Aristotle's practical logic – which comprised the study of "sophistical refutations" or fallacies, which comes under the heading of "dialectical reasoning," in which two parties reason with each other – fell into obscurity and neglect. Something approximating a resurrection of it was attempted in the nineteenth century, most notably, when idealist philosophers wrote about so-called laws of thought. With the ascendancy of formal (mathematical) logic, however, the whole idealist vision of laws of thought was repudiated, and called psychologism – a pejorative term, as then used in logic. A sharp separation was made between how people actually think (psychologically) and how they ought to think (logically) if they are to be rational.

Now to return from this thumbnail sketch, it can be seen why in logic there is thought to be a sharp separation between the empirical and normative viewpoints. Recent developments, however, have started to indicate that this separation is not as clean or sharp as it was thought to be. One recent development is the return to the quest, originating in Aristotle's older logic of the *Topics* and *On Sophistical Refutations*, of studying informal fallacies. It has been found that to study the fallacies with any hope of success, attention must be paid to realistic cases in which arguments are used for various conversational purposes in different contexts. Such an approach requires getting beyond simplistic one-liner examples of fallacies and looking at individual cases in some detail on their merits. Needless to say, such a pragmatic case-oriented approach to realistic argumentation introduces something of an empirical component. While the abstract form of the argument (the so-called argumentation scheme)

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is still very important, one also has to look seriously at how an argument has been used for some conversational purpose (supposedly, from what can be judged from the given text of discourse). The pragmatic study of arguments used in a given case is no longer purely formal and abstract. It has become contextual. Much depends on how you interpret a given text of discourse as expressing an argument or some other speech act. This pragmatic approach seems to make the traditional separation of abstract form and contextual content much more difficult to maintain.

This pragmatic approach to taking actual cases seriously is characteristic of the schools of thought now called informal logic and argumentation theory. The general theoretical approach can be described briefly as follows. The goals are the identification, analysis, and evaluation of argumentation. The field of argumentation is centrally concerned with arguments, but must also take account of related things, such as explanations and the asking of questions, that are not themselves arguments but nevertheless occur in an important way in sequences of argumentation. The ultimate goal is to evaluate arguments – that is, to judge in a given instance of its use how strong or weak an argument is and to judge whether the premises support the conclusions as good reasons for accepting them (Johnson 2000; Finochiarro 2005; Vorobej 2006).

The typical kind of case dealt with is one in which an argument of some sort has supposedly been put forward in a text of discourse in a given case. In this typical kind of case, the proponent is not around to defend her argument. The argument is expressed in some fairly short text of discourse presented in the logic classroom. The source of the text is known. It may be a magazine or newspaper article, a book, a transcript of a political speech, a transcript of a legal case, or any sort of text of discourse that appears to contain an interesting argument of some sort. The critics, usually a professor and a group of students, then undertake the task of identifying, analyzing, and evaluating the argument. Usually, an argument is selected because it fits the format of one of the famous informal fallacies. However, such arguments can be quite reasonable in many instances and are by no means necessarily fallacious. The game is to try to judge, in a given case, how the given argument, as far as it can be analyzed and pinned down, should be evaluated – is it fallacious, or just weak in certain respects and not so badly off that it should be called fallacious? Or is it reasonable – that is, should it be judged to be basically correct from a structural point of view, even though it may have parts that are missing or that are not very well backed up, as far as can be judged from what is known from the given text of discourse and

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