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Two Conceptions of Rhetoric and their Role in Argumentation Theory

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ABSTRACT: I make a distinction between a traditional conception of Rhetoric as a corpus of practical knowledge to improve persuasive abilities, and a more contemporary conception of Rhetoric as a hermeneutic discipline for dealing with communicative activities as a means of influence. I argue that the key difference between both conceptions is whether or not they deal with the rhetorical properties of discourses as a matter of speakers' intentions.

KEYWORDS: argumentation, argumentation theory, speaker's meaning, rhetoric, rhetorical act, rhetorical effect, rhetorical import, rhetorical intention, rhetorical object.

1. INTRODUCTION

My goal in this paper is to show that there is a rhetorical dimension to every communicative activity for which Rhetoric provides tools to interpret and also to evaluate. I aim to offer a distinction between speaker's meaning, rhetorical meaning and rhetorical import that it is grounded on two conceptions of Rhetoric, namely a traditional conception that sees the discipline as a corpus of practical knowledge to improve persuasive abilities, and a more contemporary conception that sees it as a hermeneutic discipline for dealing with communicative activities as a means of influence. I will contend that the key difference between both conceptions is whether they deal with the rhetorical properties of discourses as a matter of speakers' intentions. Departing from these ideas, I will argue that in the case of argumentative communication, its rhetorical dimension provides not only criteria for understanding particular argumentative activities, but also certain normative conditions for it. Particularly, I will try to show that, whether we think of the rhetorical in one or another way, there are three roles that Rhetoric is to play in the normative study of argumentation: 1) to enable its interpretation, 2) to enable the appraisal of its rhetorical value and 3) to enable the appraisal of its argumentative value.

The proposal of looking at rhetoric as a framework for the interpretation of argumentation as an activity whose external rationality is to be accounted for in terms of the rhetorical intentions of its performer aligns itself with certain contemporary ideas on

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linguistic pragmatics, like G. Leech's (1983), D. Sperber and D. Wilson (1990) or M. Dascal and A. Gross (1999). These authors' motivation to embrace a rhetorical perspective is a common dissatisfaction with the shortcomings of the traditional conception of sentence meaning in terms of speaker's meaning. Yet, their positions respecting the role of rhetoric within linguistic pragmatics are very different from each other; and, in principle, they are not exclusively concerned with argumentation. My account of the role of Rhetoric within Argumentation Theory will be grounded on a general conception of rhetoric as "an art of interpretation" (Dascal and Gross 1999, p. 107), but I only aim at providing some general ideas and distinctions.

2. TWO CONCEPTIONS OF RHETORIC

Traditionally, the contraposition between the sophists and Socrates or Plato was understood as the contraposition between Rhetoric and Dialectic, conceived respectively as a discipline accomplishing a merely instrumental interest in discourse and communication versus a theoretical discipline concerned with methodological questions. It was a commonplace to oppose sophists' and philosopher's perspectives on *logos* by saying that, instead of philosophers' commitment with truth, sophists had a commitment with their clients, to whom they trained in speech techniques as a means to flourish in a social context that had risen the art of discourse as the means *par excellence* in politics, and even as an spectacle on its own.

Thus, the traditional conception viewed the rhetorical dimension of communication as a matter of the goals that a subject may want to achieve by talking or writing—goals that may include, but are not necessarily reduced to, being properly understood. On this account, Rhetoric was seen, at its best, as "the art of persuasion," and I say "at its best" because the traditional depreciatory connotations of Rhetoric and the rhetorical would be precisely related to its ability to develop skills for the satisfaction of speaker's intentions, regardless of their legitimacy—for example, for developing speaker's ability for saying nothing looking as if they were saying something sound, or for twisting the meaning of the words in order to confuse their audiences efficiently. Such is at least the stereotyped view beyond expressions like "this is mere rhetoric."

In contrast with this conception of Rhetoric as "the art of persuasion," from the second half of the twentieth century, a new conception has been developed that seeks to characterize the rhetorical not as a matter of the intentions that we may want to satisfy by speaking or writing, but as a matter of communication's causal power of influence on individuals. This new conception has broadened the scope of the discipline and has attributed it new functions. Following it, nowadays institutions—like art, religion, science, politics, etc.—images, speeches, rituals, films, advertisements, or even music, are analyzed as rhetorical objects, and considering the sort of treatment that they get within such a perspective, authors like J. Wenzel has contended that Rhetoric, "as a broad field seeks to understand all the uses of "symbolic inducement"" (Wenzel, 1998). According to this conception, Rhetoric would be, mainly, a tool for the interpretation of communication as a means of influence.

Certainly, even if we adopt the traditional intentionalist conception, we can take rhetorical analyses to play an interpretative function. Such idea underlies, for example, Pragma-dialectics' proposal for the integration of a rhetorical perspective in Argumentation Theory: by assuming that arguers want to solve their difference of

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opinion in their own favour, we can interpret their performances as strategic manoeuvres for each one making her own way.

However, I think the contemporary conception points at a deeper view of the rhetorical. According to it, the persuasive intentions of individuals are but one of the elements determining the rhetorical properties of their communicative acts: unintentionally, and even unexpectedly to speaker themselves, any piece of communication would have a variety of rhetorical properties due to the sort of effects it is to produce in its addressees. That is why contemporary rhetoricians have insistently pointed out that communication is not only a means to convey information, but also, and above all, a means of influence. Such a power of communication would be a matter of humans tendency to be affected by symbols, meanings and other material and structural features constituting communicative acts, like the tone of the voice, mood, gestures, etc of the speaker, the colours, shapes, angles, etc of the images chosen to convey a certain message, the connotations of the words and other symbolic elements, the timing and rhythm, the situation at stake, and so many more. All these elements can be seen as causally effective on individuals' reactions to communicative activities. It is this kind of causal effectiveness of communication what I propose to name its *rhetorical dimension*.

3. SPEAKER'S MEANING, RHETORICAL MEANING AND RHETORICAL IMPORT

If you tell me that you're hungry and I say that I have some cookies and milk, you will understand, given the adequate context, that I am inviting you to have cookies and milk. This is what Grice called the *speaker's meaning* of an utterance. Grice progressively refined his definition of speaker's meaning, but the core idea is that it is the meaning brought about by the recognition of the communicative intention of the speaker, this recognition being possible thanks to the way she has displayed her utterance in order to enable her addressee to recognize such intention as her communicative intention, given the features of the context that are salient for both speaker and addressee.

Consider now a slight variation in our example: if I tell you that I have some milk and cookies that I made myself this morning, you will also understand that I am inviting you to have milk and cookies (that are handmade), but the import of my offer might, in particular circumstances, seem stronger than a mere invitation. You could take that what I am offering you is more than merely satisfying your hunger—right the opposite of what you would take if I had told you that I have some milk and a couple of stale cookies. However, in order to take my invitation that way, it is not necessary that you attribute to me the intention of saying such a thing; rather, it is enough with your preference for handmade cookies. Such a preference is something that I, the speaker, may know or ignore. Let us suppose that I know it but you ignore that I know it. In that case, your preference cannot play a role in the game of recognizing communicative intentions that speaker's meaning consists in. I may have the intention of making you to come to believe that you are more than merely invited to satisfy your hunger. But as long as it is not mutually evident for both you and me that handmade cookies are better than mere cookies, my offering handmade cookies cannot be a means to make explicit my intention of saying that you are more than invited to satisfy your hunger. Thus, my intention of conveying such a thing cannot be said to be a communicative intention, but rather something like a *rhetorical intention*: it is not the intention that you have to recognize in

order to understand me, but the intention that would be satisfied if you come to believe that you are more than merely invited to satisfy your hunger. Consequently, instead of bringing about the interpreter's meaning of my utterance, this intention would bring about what we may call its *rhetorical meaning*, i.e. the sort of *rhetorical effect* that I want to cause on you.

The rhetorical analysis of a performance—that is, its interpretation as a rhetorical device—enables us to understand or discover the sort of rhetorical effect that it is to produce in its audience. But at this point, we can also distinguish between a conception of rhetorical analysis understood as an interpretation of the rhetorical intentions of the speaker, and a conception of rhetorical analysis understood as an elucidation of its causal effects. As proposed above, the former would bring about the rhetorical meaning of the utterance, i.e. the sort of rhetorical effect that it is *meant* to produce on its addressee, which is a matter of the rhetorical intentions of the speaker. Contrastingly, the latter would bring about what we may call its *rhetorical import*, i.e. the sort of rhetorical effect that it is likely to produce in its addressee. The rhetorical import of a piece of communication is a matter of communication's causal power of influence on individuals, given what they believe, desire, hope, like, dislike, etc. And, it is not necessarily intentional: in our example above, the rhetorical analysis will determine the rhetorical effect that my telling you that I have some milk and handmade cookies is to produce in you, regardless of whether I know that you love handmade cookies. This import is not necessarily a belief¹ that I, the speaker, want to induce on you, but the belief that my words are to produce on you, regardless of my intentions. In other words, an analysis of the rhetorical import of an utterance does not focus in “discovering” the rhetorical intentions of the speaker but in determining certain causal properties of her utterance.

The rhetorical import of a piece of communication is to be distinguished from any kind of intentional meaning—speaker's and rhetorical meaning being species of it. For it does not consist in the recognition of certain intentions that we may want to satisfy by speaking or writing—like communicative or rhetorical intentions—but on the way a particular piece of communication is to affect to its addressee, whether or not it was produced with that intention. The intentional meaning of a piece of communication only becomes available through its interpretation as a means to satisfy certain intentions of the speaker, like the communicative intentions that bring about the speaker's meaning of an utterance, and the rhetorical intentions that bring about its rhetorical meaning.

However, for an utterance to have a given speaker's meaning, the addressee has to be able to recognize the communicative intentions of the speaker, whereas for this utterance to have either a rhetorical meaning or a rhetorical import it is not necessary that the addressee is able to discover it. Actually, in many cases, it is quite the opposite. For if the belief that the speaker aims to induce becomes too evident for the addressee, then it may happen either that the addressee identifies this belief as the speaker's meaning of the performance, or that the addressee becomes able to recognize the distance between its rhetorical meaning or import and the meaning that the speaker is making explicit by it — i.e. its speaker's meaning. In the latter case, we may think that discovering the rhetorical

¹ The rhetorical dimension of communication is only one part its perlocutionary power. We can think of perlocutionary effects as a matter of communication's ability to produce a variety of effects in addressees; but I think we should restrict the concept of *rhetorical effect* to beliefs and related dispositions. Thus, frightening would not be a rhetorical effect, whereas conveying that someone is dangerous could be.

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meaning or import of a piece of communication—i.e. interpreting it as a rhetorical device—may be a way to immunize ourselves against its power of influence.

4. RHETORICAL POWER, RHETORICAL ACTS AND RHETORICAL OBJECTS

I would like to make some further distinctions and propose some more labels. Aiming at being understood is a rhetorical intention, so that being understood can be said to be a rhetorical effect, it is something that we get from our addressees by speaking or writing. Consequently, every successful communicative act would have some kind of rhetorical effect on its addressee, if only because communication is more than mere enunciation: by successfully communicating something, we achieve at least the minimal interaction of being understood, i.e. of generating a belief about our communicative intentions. Communicative acts are produced with at least this rhetorical intention; and in succeeding, they achieve at least this minimal rhetorical effect.

However, not every communicative act is able to produce a belief beyond the mere understanding of its speaker's meaning, i.e. beyond the recognition of the communicative intention of the speaker. Thus, if a communicative act is able to induce beliefs that go beyond the mere recognition of the communicative intentions of the speaker, we would say that it has a certain *rhetorical power*. The simplest type of rhetorical power that a communicative act may have is the ability to make believe its content. Thus, if you understand that I've got some milk and handmade cookies but you don't believe it, all that I did was to convey my intention of saying that I've got some milk and handmade cookies. I made myself being understood, I produced a rhetorical effect, but I did not get any further rhetorical achievement. I propose to name *rhetorical acts* to any communicative acts aimed at having rhetorical effects on their addressees other than the mere understanding of their speakers' meaning—that is, aimed at inducing in the addressee some beliefs on the world rather than on the corresponding speakers' communicative intentions.

Now, whether we think of the rhetorical as a matter of rhetorical intentions or not, we can think that Rhetoric is not necessarily concerned with verbal discourse². But, as we are going to see, the non-intentional view of the rhetorical would further imply that, apart from rhetorical acts, there are different objects that can be analysed from a rhetorical perspective—including objects that have not been produced with a (specific) rhetorical intention, like the planning of a city or a wedding ritual. However, not any object that can induce a belief on us would be a *rhetorical object*: for an object to have a rhetorical import, it has to be seen as a sign, i.e. as an object standing for something else. Thus, in principle, a big mountain or a bottle rack would lack any rhetorical import, but they can be presented as signs and it is in this way that we can analyse what would its rhetorical import consist in³.

In principle, to analyse the rhetorical import of a given rhetorical object is to determine the beliefs that this object is to cause in its addressee because of the way it has

² In this sense, my talking about speakers and listeners does not aim to restrict communication just to *oral* communication. Here, 'speaker' stands for 'producer of the performance' and 'listener' aims to include any kind of spectator too.

³ Actually, when Duchamp used the bottle rack as a sign, he didn't use just the bottle rack, but the bottle rack in a museum: the whole sign is the bottle rack in a peculiar place, i.e. a place implying that it should be seen as a work of art.

been displayed, the context in which it has been displayed, and the characteristics of its addressees. However, it is important to stress that, as it has been defined, this import is not determined by its actual effects on its addressees, but by its causal powers, i.e. by its ability to produce certain effects. Certainly, this is something that depends on the characteristics of particular individuals: not every person is bounded to react in the same way when offered handmade cookies, for example. But we can also gather the rhetorical import of a given object by considering certain empirical regularities in the beliefs that individuals are going to entertain when facing certain features of the rhetorical object⁴. For example, we can suppose that people prefer handmade cookies, that they associate certain colours, sounds, smells, etc with certain objects or properties, that they prefer to be treated as polite, sensible, etc., that they have some limitations of different resources, and so many more.

The possibility of making sense of certain communicative properties of a performance by considering the sort of effects its elements would *normally* produce enables us to take some of its characteristics—like its being scary, funny, sad, clear, boring, convincing, etc.—as independent, both from the addressee’s actual reactions, and also from the performer’s actual intentions. I think this is an important gain. For example, sometimes, the badness of a movie, a play, a painting, etc. appears as a mismatch between the perceived rhetorical intentions of the author and the rhetorical import of his work—whether or not such work is actually able to achieve, in particular cases here and there, the desired reaction⁵. Thus, I contend, the rhetorical import of a rhetorical object is tied to this object because we can make sense of its elements as causes that would *normally* produce the corresponding belief.

5. THE RHETORICAL DIMENSION OF ARGUMENTATION

The remaining of this paper will be devoted, specifically, to the rhetorical dimension of argumentation. Argumentation is a communicative activity that plays two basic roles, both of them fundamental to humans as rational and social beings. On the one hand, argumentation is a tool for knowledge because it is the way we justify our beliefs and claims: in giving reasons for a claim, we try to show that it is correct in a certain sense, that it is not up to our audience to accept it or not. Argumentation can be seen as an attempt to justify our claims, in the sense of “showing them to be correct.” On the other hand, argumentation is also a tool for the interplay between individuals, a mechanism with causal powers: it is not only that we place a commitment on our addressees to accept the claims for which we afford good reasons, but also that, by means of them, we can manage to *cause* some beliefs in them, we can get to persuade them of our claims. Argumentation can also be seen as an attempt to produce “rational persuasion,” that is, persuasion prompted by reasons.

⁴ In this respect, a big issue within our account would be to determine who is the subject whose behaviour counts for determining the rhetorical import of a performance. However, I think the answer to this question should be left opened, for it will depend on the sort of rhetorical properties we are interested in characterizing. Thus, we may either establish a “general subject,” or consider different subjects, depending, for example, on the expected audiences of each performance. We can think of individuals or groups, also we can take a feminist approach and demand gender considerations, etc.

⁵ Consider, for example, Ed Woods’ intended scary movies, where such mismatches are so evident that they are able to bring about a sort of “second order” rhetorical import.

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Let us name *prompters* the variety of signs—like marks, gestures, sounds, images, etc. that are causally effective in producing the rhetorical effect of a given rhetorical act or object. There are different types of prompters. Particularly, in argumentative communication, we have two types of prompters: we have *reasons*, that is, propositions—expressed by words, images, gestures, etc.—put forward as true that in virtue of a *motivation to infer* produce the rhetorical effect of what we are going to name *indirectly judging*. Actually, to be prompted by reasons and motivations to infer is what makes of any rhetorical act an argumentative act—whether verbal, visual, etc.

The above distinction between speaker's and rhetorical meaning proves to be crucial for explaining the difference between facing argumentation as a persuasive device and facing it as a justificatory device. For, in principle, we are not entitled to ground it on a consideration of two different intentions on the speaker's side, i.e. that of persuading and that of justifying: such an explanation would be confusing as both intentions can be perfectly compatible to each other. As argued in Bermejo-Luque (2009a) and (2009b) justifying is the constitutive goal of argumentation, but that of persuading is also its most characteristic goal: in argumentation the speaker usually aims at persuading, a perlocutionary achievement, by means of justifying, an illocutionary achievement.

In Bermejo-Luque (2006), I pointed out that argumentation can produce two very different kinds of responses by its addressees: on the one side, it may prompt the assessment of the reasons adduced for supporting the target claim; on the other side, it may prompt a belief in the target claim. That is, argumentation may be faced both, and separately, as a justificatory device having normative properties and as a persuasive device having causal properties. Let me deal with this proposal in some detail by briefly characterizing an “act of arguing.”

I think of an act of arguing as an act of putting forward a claim as a reason for another claim. Thus, both the reason and the target claim would be constitutive elements of any act of arguing. Additionally, the means by which a given claim becomes a reason for another claim would be an implicit inference claim saying that if (the reason), then (the target claim). It is because we can attribute to the speaker this implicit claim that we can count her mere act of putting forward a couple of claims as a full-fledged act of arguing. In my view, an act of arguing is a complex speech act, i.e. a speech act consisting of an act of adducing and an act of concluding. This speech act would be, constitutively, an attempt at showing a target claim to be (theoretically) correct.

When we face an act of arguing as a justificatory device, we deal with its inference claim as the *warrant* of the corresponding argument—an argument being the semantic representation of the inferential structure that lies behind the act of arguing. If the act of arguing is a good one, i.e. if it justifies its conclusion, it is, among other things, because its warrant is a theoretically correct claim. Contrastingly, when we face argumentation as a persuasive device—or in Pinto's words, as “an invitation to inference” (Pinto 2001, p. 36)—we deal with its inference claim as a *motivation to infer*. If the act of arguing persuades us, it is because we are actually motivated to infer as invited by the speaker: we come to believe the reason and the implicit inference claim that she makes, which, given their respective contents, is tantamount to coming to believe the target claim of the act of arguing inferentially. That way of coming to belief is what I name *indirectly judging*. At any rate, the act of arguing *motivates* our inferring; that is, it happens to have causal powers on us, as it actually causes our indirect judgement, which is a judgement of the form “*claim since reason*.”

It is because inference claims may function in these two ways, i.e. either as warrants or as motivations to infer, that acts of arguing can serve either for justifying our claims or for persuading our addressees of them.⁶ But it is important to keep both functions conceptually separate if we want to make sense not only of the idea that argumentations which are good from the point of view of their justificatory power may be weak as persuasive tools and vice versa, but also of the idea that we may be rationally persuaded of a claim, that is, persuaded by the reasons offered in its support, and this claim not been actually justified by these reasons.

Seeing argumentation as a persuasive device is seeing it as a means to induce indirect judgements, i.e. judgements prompted by a reasons and a motivation to infer. Indirect judgements would then constitute the intended rhetorical effect of our acts of arguing as rhetorical acts, that is to say, as means to induce beliefs on the world, rather than beliefs on the arguer's communicative intentions. By facing argumentation as a persuasive device, the listener comes to indirectly judge that things are as stated by the speaker. In doing so, the listener is not "interpreting," in the sense of "recognizing the speaker's meaning of the argumentative act"; rather, she is just "understanding," in the sense of "being adequately responsive to stimuli." As argued above, such understanding does not necessarily require recognizing the speaker's intention of inducing an indirect judgement, or recognizing the communicative intention of saying that the reasons show that the conclusion is correct. Rather, it is in virtue of coming to believe the speaker's reason and her implicit inference claim that the listener comes to indirectly judge that things are as stated by the speaker.

On the contrary, if, in confronted with a piece of argumentation, we come to evaluate the weight of the reasons offered for the conclusion, then we are facing argumentation as a justificatory device, and in doing so, what we do is to interpret and deal with its speaker's meaning. That meaning would convey the speaker's intention of communicating that the reasons she has offered show that her conclusion is correct. By facing a piece of argumentation as a justificatory device, we interpret the speaker as meaning that she believes that the reasons she has offered are good reasons for the claim. And as long as we take this meaning just as the communicative intention of the speaker, but not as something that we believe ourselves, we alien the speaker's argumentative act from its rhetorical force, as defined above.

6. RHETORICAL CONDITIONS FOR ARGUMENT EVALUATION. PART I: *RHETORICAL VALUE*

In arguing, speakers convey their communicative intention of showing a target claim to be correct, and most of the times, they also try to satisfy their rhetorical intention of inducing an indirect judgement, i.e. a judgment prompted by reasons. The latter attempt is what we may call an attempt at rationally persuading, i.e. at persuading by reasons.

In my view, speakers' ability to satisfy their rhetorical intentions is something to be determined by Rhetoric as traditionally understood, i.e. as an instrumental discipline consisting of a set of rules for better accomplishing rhetorical goals.

⁶ Thus, I contend that in the particular cases that we get persuaded by considering that the argumentation offered manages to justify its claim, we use a further inference claim as a motivation, namely, that if the argumentation offered for p justifies p , then p .

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From Aristotle, traditional Rhetoric acknowledges three types of resources for bringing about rhetorical effects: the properties of discourse itself (*logos*), the way in which the speaker presents herself (*ethos*) and the capacity of sounding out and connect with the emotions of the addressees (*pathos*). Rhetorical devices are designed to exploit these resources in order to bring about the intended effects. Thus, respecting the features of the discourse, rhetorical effectiveness may be increased by the adequate disposition of words and sentences, or by the *poietic* virtues of the performance, like the use of metaphors, alliterations, hyperbatons, etc. Respecting the features of the speaker, a speaker may increase her rhetorical effectiveness by raising a feeling of confidence or empathy in her addressees. To that end, she may use irony, litotes; also, she may try to exhibit certain virtues like sincerity, sympathy, responsibility, honesty, etc. which would prompt a favourable attitude towards her views. Finally, respecting the features of the addressees, the speaker may pursue their emotions by the use of hyperboles, euphemisms, prejudiced language, etc. According to our definition, all these strategies are by their own further rhetorical acts, as they are intended to prompt beliefs and attitudes that go beyond the mere recognition of the speaker's meaning—like when well trained speakers make the compulsory opening joke so that their audiences can come to believe that they are easygoing people, or smart enough for dealing with ordinary things, or that they have acquaintance with things their audiences are interested in, etc.

Regarding argumentation, whose intended effect is the production of indirect judgements, a speaker may display any of these devices in order to make her addressee to come to believe the reason and the implicit inference claim that she has offered so as to make the addressee to make the indirect judgements that constitutes the rhetorical meaning of her argumentative, rhetorical act. Thus, any argumentative discourse can be packed of further rhetorical devices displayed to favour the acceptance of the reasons as prompters for indirectly judging, and of their corresponding warrants as motivations to infer. And obviously, they are not argumentative acts by their own, but features of the corresponding argumentative acts, as Pragma-dialectics has shown by the analysis of several examples of strategic manoeuvring.

At any rate, arguers usually have rhetorical intentions that should be taken into account, and not only for interpretative purposes: such rhetorical intentions will render instrumentally rational/irrational speakers' ways of displaying their performances. Thus, it is the traditional conception of Rhetoric as an instrumental discipline for accomplishing rhetorical abilities what would underlie what we may call the concept of *rhetorical value* of a rhetorical act, whether argumentative or not. This value is a measure of the instrumental power of a rhetorical act towards the end of satisfying the rhetorical intentions of the speaker⁷.

⁷ In my view, the use of instrumental criteria to appraise discourses or the rationality of a speaker's way of displaying her performances given her rhetorical intentions would belong to a general account of practical rationality having communicative rationality as a particular case.

7. RHETORICAL CONDITIONS FOR ARGUMENT EVALUATION. PART II:
JUSTIFICATORY VALUE

However, I think this is not all the story about the role of Rhetoric within Argumentation Theory. Now I would like to show that Rhetoric does not only have a bearing in determining the rhetorical value of argumentation. In fact, we also need Rhetoric for determining the justificatory value of argumentation. But in this case, it will be Rhetoric understood as a hermeneutic tool what it is to make the work.

Justifying is showing a target claim to be correct. Thus, for an act of arguing to justify its target claim, two conditions have to be met: on the one hand, the actual correctness of the target claim, and on other, the goodness of the argumentative act as a *means for showing* such a thing. A normative model for argumentation as a justificatory device will then consists of semantic conditions determining whether a target claim is correct and also of pragmatic conditions determining how good an act of arguing is a means for showing. Such pragmatic conditions address the rhetorical dimension of argumentation, as long as being a good means for showing is a matter of how well an act of arguing plays at making salient to an addressee that a target claim is correct. In this sense, the act of arguing has to be instrumental in producing a certain cognitive state in individuals, so that its value as a means for showing would depend on its having certain features that would be causally effective in bringing about this goal. The rhetorical properties of an act of arguing that make of it a good means for showing would then be the subset of its communicative properties that determine whether this act of arguing is a means to fulfil its constitutive goal—namely, to show a target claim to be correct. So, which are these rhetorical normative conditions of argumentation?

In “Logic and Conversation” H. P. Grice (1975) argued that talk exchanges are not a mere “succession of disconnected remarks,” but rather full-fledged activities that are rational inasmuch they are goal-oriented. Each particular exchange has its own purpose, but in general, the possibility of achieving communicative purposes would depend, according to Grice, on the existence of a Cooperative Principle prescribing to

make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged (1975, p. 45).

The Cooperative Principle would establish general conditions for a talk exchange being pragmatically adequate, in the sense of being “efficiently informative”—which is, according to Grice, the primary purpose of any talk exchange. My contention is that such informative efficiency in communication mirrors the quality of a speech act as an act of showing. Thus, I propose to adopt Grice’s Cooperative Principle as a standard to determine the value of a speech act as a means for showing.

Noticeably, as it is well known, under the assumption that speakers are always maximally efficient in conveying their meanings, Grice takes the Cooperative Principle as constitutive of meaning. On the contrary, our proposal is to use the Principle as regulative, as a standard for rational communication—or, our proposal goes, as a set of general conditions for an act of arguing being a good means for showing. How can such normative shift be accounted for?

In principle, we can only question the rationality of a speaker’s performance as a means to achieve certain communicative goal if we can determine this goal independently

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of taking each movement as a means to achieve it. But in Grice's view, the interpretation of an utterance is a matter of recognizing the speaker's communicative intentions by assuming that the utterance is a good way to satisfying them—given the assumption that the speaker is being faithful to the Cooperative Principle. That is the sense in which communicative intentions are constitutive of the speaker's meaning. According to this, in order to take Grice's Cooperative Principle as an account of the pragmatic value of argumentation as a communicative act, we should be able to make a distinction between the communicative intentions of a speaker—which, in general, determine the interpretation of her communicative acts—and her argumentative goal—which would determine the pragmatic value of her argumentative acts in terms of their suitability as a means to accomplish it.

In assuming that the constitutive goal of argumentation is to show a target claim to be correct, I contend that any performance that cannot be interpreted as aiming at this goal is to be dismissed as argumentation. So, can we really determine that a given performance is argumentation without already assuming that it is a good way to satisfy the communicative intention of showing a target claim to be correct? Yes, precisely, because we have defined the illocutionary act complex of arguing as an *attempt* at showing a target claim to be correct. The communicative intention that satisfies any performance that is an argumentative act is the intention of being recognized as an attempt to show a target claim to be correct. Actually, that is why we would be also able to recognize bad argumentation as argumentation. In contrast, its pragmatic value *qua argumentation* would be a measure of its achievements respecting this pragmatic argumentative goal. At this point, we are no more talking about the rhetorical meaning, but of the rhetorical import of the act of arguing: it is not a matter of whether the speaker succeeds in showing that her target claim is correct, but rather of whether her act of arguing is able to show such a thing. From a pragmatic point of view, a *good* act of arguing is an act of showing. Consequently, we can take the Cooperative Principle constitutively determining the meaning of the act of arguing as a regulative principle regarding the goodness of this act of arguing as an act of showing. In this sense, the Cooperative Principle would happen to be a set of regulative conditions sanctioning the pragmatic rationality, the instrumental adequacy, of the act of arguing as a means for showing.

Thus, once we determine that a given performance is an attempt at showing a target claim to be correct, we can consider how good it is as a means to achieve this goal. In other words, that is how it is possible to adopt Grice's Cooperative Principle as a set of regulative conditions sanctioning the pragmatic rationality of argumentative acts. The Cooperative Principle and its maxims would be indeed constitutive of a talk exchange whose purpose is to argue, and by reference to this principle, we would be entitled to make any required pragmatic implicatures that would restore its rationality as an attempt at showing a target claim to be correct. But respecting the argumentative goal of this talk exchange, the principle would be regulative, that is, it would give us a measure of the instrumental value of this act respecting the goal of showing a target claim to be correct.

The regulative use of the Cooperative Principle would be grounded on the assumption that acts of arguing—whose interpretation may depend on the Cooperative Principle as constitutive of meaning—can also be evaluated as acts of showing. Or in other words, that we can determine their rhetorical import, the sort of effect they are to produce in their addressees, independently of the speakers' rhetorical intentions. On this

account, the violation of the cooperative conditions would result in more or less serious failures in being efficiently informative—that is, in “showing,” under the assumption that there is just an internal constrain for “showing something,” namely, to be “efficiently informative.” As Grice puts it, being efficiently informative would be the primary purpose of any talk exchange, and that would explain the generality of these conditions.

On this account, and considering Grice’s characterization of the Cooperative Principle, an act of arguing will only succeed in showing that a target claim is correct if it is *relevant* respecting that goal, if it is *quantitatively* and *qualitatively* adequately informative and *clear* enough to be understood. Thus, argumentation being irrelevant, quantitatively or qualitatively inadequate, or unclear will fail to show what it was aimed to show. Thus, it will be pragmatically flawed, it will not succeed in showing a target claim to be correct, that is, its rhetorical import will not be such a thing, and therefore, it will be bad argumentation.

On the other hand, as Grice himself acknowledges, there may be different sorts of other maxims operative in different types of talk exchanges, so that we should leave open the possibility of drawing additional conditions for “correctly showing” within particular argumentative frameworks. For example, forensic debate and jurisprudence are talk exchanges procedurally regulated to the effect of arranging different sorts of circumstantial constrains. The Cooperative Principle—as a standard for the pragmatic appraisal of argumentation—just settles general conditions for a talk exchange being pragmatically adequate, in the sense of “efficiently informative.” But additional conditions may be necessary in order to deal with the pragmatic appraisal of argumentation in contexts where external constrains, like the distribution of time or the maximization of resources, do also determine what counts as “being a good act of showing.”

8. ARGUMENTATION AND OTHER TYPES OF RHETORICAL OBJECTS

In the last two sections, I have focused on the rhetorical dimension of argumentation as a persuasive device; that is, on argumentation as a rhetorical, intentional act. On this account, acts of arguing are attempts at inducing indirect judgements by inducing a belief in the reason offered and in the implicit inference claim as a motivation to infer. Consequently, their rhetorical meaning is something like “*c* given that *r*”; such is the indirect judgement that the speaker aims to induce, what constitutes her rhetorical intention. Now, I would like to finish this summary account of the role of Rhetoric within Argumentation Theory by broadening the conception of argumentation so as to include other type of rhetorical objects able to prompt indirect judgements. Or in other words, I would like to offer some ideas about different objects that, despite lacking rhetorical meanings, have rhetorical imports that are indirect judgements. This reflection is aimed at deepen in the idea that there is argumentation other than verbal: my aim is to show that we can also think of non-intentionally produced argumentation. For example, I think we can see most death rituals as having the rhetorical import of making believers to indirectly judge that their body is unimportant, since we relatively easily get rid of it while we pray and care for the soul.

To my mind, the difficulty to see that there can be non-intentional argumentation is that we usually think of reasons as assertions. But the truth is that any representation able to trigger the listener’s motivation to infer can be interpreted as argumentation.

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However, I would not like to seem to imply that any rhetorical object is argumentative: not every rhetorical import is an indirect judgement, that is, a judgement prompted by reasons. On the contrary, I think it is important to notice that there are rhetorical objects that cannot count as argumentative. Think of the famous frosty bottle of Coca-cola. Its rhetorical meaning is something like “Coca-cola is refreshing.” The photograph may prompt a belief in that sense, and the corresponding attitude, but not by means of reasons. The image of the bottle aims at inducing a direct rather than an indirect judgement: the prompter of the belief that Coca-cola is refreshing, which is the rhetorical import of this advertisement is the frost covering the bottle. But its role is rather to excite a feeling of coolness associated with this drink rather than showing that coca-cola is refreshing *since* this bottle has frost. Such a judgement is highly implausible, whereas the advertisement can be seen as one of the most successful through history.

But, how is it possible that a judgement prompted by an image does not count as an indirect judgement? After all, inference motivations seem to be nothing but explicitations of particular inference steps; thus, why not the step from any prompter to any judgement? The reason is simple: we cannot say that someone is inferring if we are unable to regard the plausibility of the motivation by ourselves or, at least, have good reasons to attribute such a belief to the subject that it is supposed to be inferring. That is the difference between attributing an inference and attributing an association of ideas, for example: to recognize something as an inference involves taking its prompter as a reason, not just as the cause of a belief. And this, in turn, involves identifying a suitable belief that might license the step from reason to belief. It is in virtue of this belief, i.e. the motivation to infer, that the prompter of a judgement becomes a reason for that judgement. In this sense, the main difference between reasons and other types of prompters is that reasons belong to an illocutionary realm, as they function as reasons independently of the way they are perceived by the addressee—i.e. as far as we, the interpreters, are able to point at the corresponding warrant. On the contrary, other types of prompters just belong to a perlocutionary realm: they can only function as prompters as far as they are perceived in such and such way, that is, as far as they are efficient indeed to cause a belief.

In the last resort, that is the reason why the rhetorical effect of non-argumentative rhetorical objects is a direct rather than an indirect judgement. For such directness happens to be advantageous in many circumstances: examples of rhetorical effects prompted by appeals to sex or other pleasures, to pride or vanity, etc. are frequent in advertisements. According to this analysis, although many of these examples can be reconstructed as argumentation going from the alleged qualities of the product to claims like “it is exactly what you need,” “you would love having one,” “your happiness depends on having it,” etc, these qualities are not usually presented as reasons for these claims, but rather as stimuli to produce the corresponding beliefs. The inexistence of argumentation in this type of symbolic inducements, i.e. of the slightest attempt at justifying the claim that would correspond to the judgement to be induced, would explain why they happen to be so effective even though addresses are usually quite conscious that hardly any of them is cogent enough as argumentation.

But this is not the only difference between argumentation and other types of symbolic inducements. Many times, in symbolic inducements like this sort of advertisements, and in political propaganda, in rituals, etc. it is hardly possible to point at any positive belief to be induced, but just to a general or vague attitude towards a product

or institution.⁸ Argumentation brings about its rhetorical effects via beliefs, whereas other types of prompters may cause different kinds of dispositions, not even doxastic ones. Thus, we should not confuse the prompter of any rhetorical object with the eventual reason that would justify the belief that constitutes its rhetorical import. There are rhetorical acts there are not argumentative: they do not promote indirect judgements because they cannot be interpreted as attempts at justifying a claim by a reason, that is to say, nothing in them counts as a reason to believe a claim. Additionally, there are rhetorical acts aimed at producing different kinds of dispositions other than beliefs. In argumentation, we achieve persuasion by means of reasons that eventually would justify the intended indirect judgement indeed. The attempt of persuading by reasons is what makes the difference between argumentation and other types of rhetorical devices, understood as ‘performances of symbolic inducement’. Accordingly, the pragmatic characterization of an act of arguing connects the idea of persuasion as the goal that renders externally rational the act of arguing, with the idea of justification as the means by which this goal is to be reached.

9. CONCLUSION

Wenzel’s definition that “Rhetoric, as a broad field seeks to understand all the uses of “symbolic inducement”” would stress the analytic character of Rhetoric as a discipline whose goal is the interpretation of certain type of objects that are able to produce rhetorical effects. Yet, this view clearly contrasts with the traditional conception of Rhetoric as an instrumental discipline whose goal is to improve the efficiency of communication as a means of influence. Taking into account these alternative conceptions of Rhetoric, in dealing with the rhetorical dimension of argumentation, it seems that we can take two very different perspectives. If we adopt the traditional view, we can contend that, on the one hand, from a descriptive point of view, the rhetorical intentions of arguers have a bearing on the way we should interpret their acts of arguing. In this sense, a rhetorical perspective for the interpretation of argumentative discourse will recognize not only a communicative but also a persuasive intention in order to make sense of particular practices of arguing and their real scope and meaning. On the other hand, from an evaluative point of view, Rhetoric would provide criteria to determine the rhetorical value of argumentation in terms of its ability or success in persuading an intended audience. Contrastingly, if we think of the rhetorical as not necessarily intentional, we will rather think of Rhetoric as a hermeneutic tool. I have argued that this view of the rhetorical underlies not only the possibility of dealing not only with rhetorical acts, but rather with rhetorical objects, in general, and thus, with their rhetorical import, as independent of any rhetorical intention. Additionally, it would be such a view of the rhetorical what would provide criteria for the appraisal of argumentation as an attempt at showing a target claim to be correct.

To sum up, Rhetoric would play a crucial role within Argumentation Theory, not only because it is a means for its interpretation, but also because it provides normative conditions for it, both as a persuasive and as a justificatory device.

⁸ In point of fact, sometimes we can consider that the argumentative appearance of a discourse is just a rhetorical device aimed at inducing certain disposition regarding the rationality of the assertions involved.

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[Link to commentary](#)

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