

University of Windsor Scholarship at UWindsor

OSSA Conference Archive

OSSA 7

Jun 6th, 9:00 AM - Jun 9th, 5:00 PM

Revisiting Aristotle's Topoi

Christopher W. Tindale
Univeristy of Windsor

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholar.uwindsor.ca/ossaarchive>

 Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

Christopher W. Tindale, "Revisiting Aristotle's Topoi" (June 6, 2007). *OSSA Conference Archive*. Paper 141.
<http://scholar.uwindsor.ca/ossaarchive/OSSA7/papersandcommentaries/141>

This Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at Scholarship at UWindsor. It has been accepted for inclusion in OSSA Conference Archive by an authorized administrator of Scholarship at UWindsor. For more information, please contact scholarship@uwindsor.ca.

Revisiting Aristotle's *Topoi*

CHRISTOPHER W. TINDALE

*Department of Philosophy
University of Windsor,
Windsor, Ontario,
Canada N9B 3P4
ctindale@uwindsor.ca*

ABSTRACT: In this paper, I investigate a question in the *Rhetoric* (and *Topics*) surrounding the metaphorical sense of Aristotle's *topos*: one can look to a location for "available means of persuasion," evoking an image of *seeing* (which connects with work on the spectacle in Greek philosophy); or *topoi* are viewed as "general lines of argument." Are they places we go for arguments, or actual lines of arguments? The difference matters, given a propensity to view *topoi* as forerunners of argument schemes.

KEY WORDS: Argumentation schemes, Aristotle, metaphor, *Rhetoric*, *Topics*, *topoi*.

1. INTRODUCTION

The *topos*, as it appears in Aristotle's works on argumentation (principally the *Topics* and the *Rhetoric*) is a notoriously obscure idea.¹ Yet at the same time, it is clearly a central idea, one on which much of the accounts of dialectical and rhetorical reasoning depend. Kennedy (1991:45) infers from the absence of a definition that the meaning must have been obvious to Aristotle's immediate audience (students, we must assume). But little of such obviousness permeates the principal treatments of the *Topics* and the *Rhetoric*. Nor is it even clear that these two works understand the *topoi* in the same way (Braet, 2005:67): for one thing, the goals of the two works are quite different, with the *Topics* suggesting a handbook for procedures to succeed in dialectical exchanges or games (likely reflecting the activities of the Academy), and the *Rhetoric* proposing means for persuasion of an audience.

More recently, there has been a definite trend in the treatments of argumentation theorists to judge the *topos* as a forerunner of the argumentation scheme (Kienpointner, 1986; Braet, 2005; Rubinnelli, 2006). This marks a shift from a range of treatments that wrestled with the metaphor of 'place' and what was suggested by it (Miller, 2000; Leff, 1983; Kennedy, 1991). In this paper, I want to address this debate by reflecting again on the texts that gave rise to it. In particular, I want to pose and then answer in the affirmative the following question: is something lost if we cede the debate to the argumentation scheme side?

The current instantiation of the debate would seem to reflect an ongoing disagreement borne of distinct ways of translating '*topos*'. *Topos* literally means "place" and, given the generality which Aristotle often has in mind, is frequently translated as

¹ Kennedy (1991:45), Miller (2000:132), Braet (2005:66) and Rubinelli (2006:269) are some of the more recent treatments that concur in lamenting the absence of a definition.

“commonplace.” Such a metaphor refers to a location or space in art where a speaker can look for “available means of persuasion” (Kennedy, 1991). This evokes powerful visual imagery that is characteristic of Aristotle’s understanding of rhetoric, while at the same time capturing the way we move from the private to the public, from an interior “seeing” to an exterior “speaking.” A speaker will often *see* the available means of persuasion. Kennedy, for example, translates “seeing” for *theoresai*, or theory. But, by contrast, we have Rhys Roberts’ well-known translation of *topoi* as “general lines of argument.” From this stems an understanding of *topos* as a proposition or even an argument. And Kennedy himself, in a note on the *Rhetoric* settles on “strategies of argument as discussed in 2.23” (1991:45). On this understanding, a *topos* is not so much the place we go as the actual procedure or strategy that we find and utilize.

In a preliminary way, we can note that each reading finds support in the Aristotelian texts. At the beginning of Book VIII of the *Topics*, the dialectician is entreated to choose the *topos* (place) from which he must make his attack, and is then told that such *topoi* have been delineated in the earlier books. Here the *topoi* appear as a ground or source for the argument. In Book I, chapter 2 of the *Rhetoric* a distinction is made between species and the *topoi* from which they are taken, where by species Aristotle means the premises specific to each genus and by *topoi* those premises common to all. Here, *topoi* appear as the familiar “lines of argument.”

2. ARGUMENTATION SCHEMES

As noted, it is this second reading that is finding popularity among argumentation theorists. In fact, Sara Rubinelli’s recent discussion of *topi* (and *loci*) explicitly leaves aside “occurrences where *topos* appears...with the meaning of ‘area’ or ‘position’,” (2006:254) to focus on those that support the argumentation-scheme reading. And she presents this in very modern terms: “Another sense of *topos* in ancient rhetoric is that of ‘scheme of argument’. More specifically, a *topos* indicates a procedure for establishing or refuting propositions on which standpoints are adopted. In this perspective, a *topos* is essentially composed of a law, or general principle, with a probative function, and an instruction working as a searching formula” (255-56).

In many ways the work of scholars like Rubinelli and Braet, the latter of whom connects his thesis to the theories of van Eemeren & Grootendorst and Kienpointner, can be seen as attempts to flesh out what some other theorists have left indistinct. Van Eemeren & Grootendorst (1992:98) speak of the “quintessence of the argumentation scheme” being expressed in the *topos*, and elsewhere (2004:5) refer to the argumentation scheme “resting” on the *topos*. Neither remark would commit them to the position that *topoi* are argumentation schemes. Garrsen (2001), who has done considerable work on argumentation schemes, takes the discussion a little further. He holds that the “classical concept of “topos” corresponds to the argument schemes in modern approaches to argumentation” (82). But while he seems to connect the sense of “location” evoked by the term “*topos*” to classical *lists* of different types of argument (Ibid.), he attributes no more to Aristotle himself than the issuing of general statements or rules that could be used in arguments.

Now, like all interpretations of *topoi*, this one has some ground of speculation to it. And like all interpretations, there is a case to be drawn from the text. The challenge is

always to tell a story that accommodates the range of suggestions at work in Aristotle's writings. Rubinelli does as a good a job as anyone of making the case for the *topos* as a forerunner of the argumentation scheme. She builds an argument for seeing *topoi* as rules for inferential processes rather than simply the subject matters of arguments. Like Braet (2005; 2004) before her, she lays stress on the "if-then" clauses that Aristotle provides. Braet had proposed that the topical principles of the *Rhetoric* can be regarded "as the core of a modern argumentation scheme" (2005:66),² and goes on to cite 2.23.25 and its *topos* "From cause and effect": "if the cause exists, so does the effect; if it does not, there is no effect." Braet could have chosen freely from a range of "if-then" clauses scattered throughout the common *topoi* of chapter 23. Examples: from opposites: "if the war is the cause of present evils, things should be set right by making peace" (2.23.1); from correlatives: "if something is honorably or justly predicated of one who experiences it, it is also of one who does it" (2.23.3); from the more and the less: "If not even the gods know everything, humans can hardly do so" (2.23.4); from "consequences by analogy": "For example, when they tried to force his son who was underage to perform public services because he was tall, Iphicrates said that if they deem large boys men, they should vote that small men are boys" (2.23.17); and so on. It is a point of interest that in providing the principle from 2.23.25, Braet chooses to fill in the argument from the "if, then" clause. Thus, the principle "forms the if-then statement in the causal argumentation scheme 'If the cause is present, the effect must occur; well then, the cause is present, therefore the effect will occur'" (2005:66). Aristotle, on the other hand, leaves this form implicit; his stress is on the simple strategy of connecting cause and effect. In separating the form and the scheme, Braet distinguishes the logical validity (form) from the persuasive power (scheme), thus seeing Aristotle as anticipating a modern distinction.³ But given the implicit nature of this move, we might as well see the modern distinction as providing the grounds for an interesting interpretation of Aristotle.

Rubinelli develops Braet's proposal by drawing out at least three ways in which a *topos* is an argumentation scheme, according to the nature of the laws (Braet's principles) found in the *topoi* (2006:256). So, a *topos* may be a scheme based on the nature of the logical predicates. This sense formed the core of the *Topics*, where Aristotle was "pioneering the field of informal logic" (Rubinelli, 2006:257) by distinguishing between definition, genus, property and accident. In each case, Aristotle provides a rule and instructions for how to apply the rule. So a rule (by definition) is that the definition must belong to all the sub-species of the subject, and the instruction is simply to compose an argument that verifies that a proposed definition belongs to the sub-species (258). A second way in which a *topos* can be a scheme of argument is distinguished from the first through an emphasis not on the logical nature of the predicates but comparisons between

² Braet (2005:128) identifies Kienpointner (1992:115) as the sole scholar of argumentation schemes to "correctly" trace the concept to the notion of *topos*. Where he disagrees with Kienpointner is in insisting that there is an earlier tradition than the Aristotelian.

³ Braet takes this much further (76-77), deriving a standpoint from the 'then' part of the clause (or principle), and an argument from the 'if' part, thus producing a "convincing enthymeme." The principle is then an external rule from which the enthymeme draws its persuasive power. In this way, the principle acts like a logical inference rule. (Another reading then allows the principle to be seen as an internal rule.) It is then noted that the interpretation rendered is close to modern analyses of argumentation schemes, and an example is reconstructed accordingly. At each turn, Braet is careful to note the "plausible" or "conceivable" nature of the account which to Aristotle himself would seem anachronistic.

certain relationships. Thus, the “Iphicrates” example to which I drew attention above is of interest to Rubinelli not because of the “if, then” principle it uses, but the analogy between tall boys/men and short boys/men. Further cases are remarked on through Cicero’s use of analogy to extend legal cases in his *Topics*. Cicero, of course, does distinguish *topoi* that are the “peculiar province of the logicians” (XI:53), from earlier cases based on similarity or analogy, but he makes no explicit differentiation between *types* of *topoi* and since his audience is a jurist, all his examples are juridical ones. Still, Rubinelli derives some interesting points from what Aristotle can apparently do with this second kind of *topos*.

As the third and final type that interests her, Rubinelli identifies *topoi* involving “a pattern which leads speakers to focus on interpersonal, emotional and linguistic aspects surrounding the production of arguments, including ways of tailoring certain contents according to the audience, the impact of the contents on the public and/or factors related to the psychology of the speakers and their interlocutors” (262). Factors relating to *ethos* and *pathos*, then, we might imagine, and expect the examples to derive from the *Rhetoric*, which they do.⁴ At *Rhetoric*, Bk II, 23:21, we find: “Another *topos* that is common to both litigants and deliberative speakers is to look at what turns the mind in favor and what turns the mind against something and for what reasons people both act and avoid action. For these are the factors that if present, impel action [but if not present, deter action]” (Kennedy translation). Following earlier suggestions from Braet, we might be inclined to interpret this in light of the “if, then” principle suggested, but Rubinelli is more concerned to draw our attention to the different kind of *strategy* involved.

There is, then, much that is interesting in the argumentation-scheme approach to the *topoi* and the accounts provided are rich with detail (certainly much more than I have been able to show here). But they are all *implicit* accounts and the work involved is largely interpretive and aimed at showing what Aristotle must have understood by a *topos* from the various ways in which he used them. Largely suppressed here, though, is the alternative richness of the “place” metaphor, some sense of which no account of the *topoi* should avoid.

3. METAPHORS OF PLACE

Miller (2000:136) notes that Aristotle’s original metaphor, used in both rhetoric and dialectic, conceived of *topoi* “not as propositions but as sources from which propositions (or terms, in dialectic) may be obtained.” But it is the nature of such “sources” that seems in dispute. Ultimately, she (Miller) will define a *topos* as a “point in semantic space that is particularly rich in connectivity to other significant or highly connected points” (142), which is suggestive, if a little vague. This way of reading *topos* is supported in part by Cicero’s understanding in his own treatment, not so much a commentary on Aristotle’s text (since he is working from memory) as his own presentation of the project:

It is easy to find things that are hidden if the hiding place is pointed out and marked; similarly if we wish to track down some argument we ought to know the places or topics: for that is the name given by Aristotle to the “regions”, as it were, from which arguments are drawn. Accordingly, we may define a topic as

⁴ Along with further interesting examples from Cicero.

the region of an argument, and an argument as a course of reasoning which firmly establishes a matter about which there is some doubt (*Topics*, II:7). Still, there is a note of hesitancy in the “as it were,” and the idea of a region in which topics might “hide” is less than clear. Although at XIV:71, at the end of his presentation of “the rules of invention of arguments,” he remarks that after journeying through investigations of such matters as definition, genus, contradictions, causes, and so on, no region of arguments is left to explore. So this helps us understand the regions as different predicates (related to Rubinelli’s first type of *topoi*), at least in Cicero’s mind.

Missing from these remarks about place is any explicit reference to how we actually inhabit such places and how we might engage what we find there. George Kennedy, who has done extensive work on the *Rhetoric*, corrects this by reminding us of the “visual” nature of Aristotle’s understanding of rhetoric. A speaker will often *see* the available means of persuasion, converting this literal *insight* (how ably our language assists us here to find back some of the obvious connections of which we have lost sight) into verbal communication. In fact, the Greeks in general were struck by the visual metaphors that connect the intelligible to the visible world. Think, for example, how for Plato the good illuminates within the mind in a way similar to the sun’s illumination of the physical world, so that the mind is able to *see* things and their connections; or the way Meno’s slave boy is brought by Socrates to move back and forth between the physical world and the intelligible world by means of a geometrical shape drawn on the ground to which the boy connects the parallel shape in his mind. Andrea Nightingale (2004) considers the role of the spectacle in Greek art and thought. Like the way we view the actors arranged on the theatre’s stage and standing in relation with each other, so we can grasp how ideas are arranged in the mind in similar relations. In fact, the key term here, *theoria*, relates to both, with its etymological connections to theatre and theory. *Theoresai*, in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, translated by Kennedy as “seeing,” thus retains the way in which what is important is grasped first and foremost by the mind.

Given this, it is not surprising that Kennedy would raise questions about Roberts’ alternative translation of *topos* as “general lines of argument,” noting that the grounds for this are not obvious and deserve investigation (1996:173). In a similar way, he sees the visual emphasis at work in the *Topics*. In a discussion that echoes Cicero’s depiction of a journey, he speaks of Aristotle’s method in the *Topics* as “a road, and there are apparently “places” along the road where arguments can be found. Clearly,” Kennedy concludes, “he [Aristotle] thinks of arguments visually and assumes others will understand” (Ibid.).

What does it mean to think of “arguments visually”? The conversion of the visual into the verbal suggests something not just about the way arguers or speakers will view their material, but also the audiences with which they engage. This connects the *topoi* to the power and success of persuasion. Are we persuaded by the strength of a valid argument laid out before us (like Socrates’ diagram)? And if so, how does that work? If arguers have connected places to which they go for arguments, then audiences will have the same places where they can make connections. The conversion from visual to verbal must then be conducted back into the visual. Consigny (1974) and especially Burke (1950) take us a long way toward drawing the appropriate conclusions about this.

Among several interesting suggestions made by Consigny (1974) is that the *topos* must be a specific place where the rhetor thinks and acts. A *topos* has implications not only for the subject matter of an argument, but also for the rhetor and audience because it

is, after all, a rhetorical situation. Such an understanding might have been drawn from Kenneth Burke's remarks on the *topoi*. Burke considers those of the *Rhetoric* to be primarily places of "opinion," in the sense of the audience's opinions with which an arguer or speaker needs to connect. Thus, Aristotle reviews the acts, conditions, personal characteristics, and so forth, that people have specific opinions about (considering some good, others evil, for example). All such opinions are presented as available means of persuasion. Burke also considers another type of *topos* "got by the manipulation of tactical procedures, by following certain rules of thumb for inventing, developing, or transforming an expression by pun-logic, even by specious and sophistical arguments" (1950:57). These are used as vehicles for the materials of opinion, but their status as *topoi* derives from their being distinguished by a formal or procedural element (thus linking them to the discussion of the previous section).

What is of greatest interest here, though, are Burke's suggestions around the purpose of using such *topoi*. Essentially, they enhance collaboration in the argument on the part of the audience. An audience is moved not just by receiving an assertion, but by creatively participating in it. "Thus, you are drawn to the form, not in your capacity as a partisan, but because of some "universal" appeal in it. And this attitude of assent may then be transferred to the matter which happens to be associated with the form" (58). For example, *gradation*, where an argument builds to a conclusion, is a "strongly formal device."⁵ By the time an audience reaches the second stage of the gradation, they will "feel" how it is to develop (we might better say here that they will "see" how it is to develop), and on the level of "purely formal assent" they will collaborate in fulfilling that form and completing the argument. And, we must add, they do this because the *topoi* are universals in the mind;⁶ they are not just places that arguers go, but to which audiences are led to complete reasoning. What seems tenuous in Burke's proposal is the suggestion that the attitude of assent will be transferred to the issue that the form was carrying. The act of completing the argument oneself should contribute to the kind of self-persuasion characteristic of rhetorical argumentation; yet further aspects of persuasion may also be required. But for our purposes the point to be made lies in the availability of common "places" that both arguers and audiences can have recourse to in packing and unpacking argumentative discourse.

A strong candidate for that "internal place" where *topoi* reside would appear to be the memory. This at least is the plausible proposal of Robin Smith (1997) in a discussion that links the treatments of the *Topoi* and *Rhetoric*. "The *topoi* are thus systematically organized in a way that facilitates timely retrieval, a feature essential to any practical method for live debate: it is no use having a large stock of argument forms in memory unless one can also recall the right one at the right time" (xxvii). He refers to mnemonic systems at play during Aristotle's time, which were based on the memorization of actual locations in a specific order: "items to be memorized were then superimposed on these images, making it possible to recall them in sequence" (Ibid.). In Bk VIII, 14, Aristotle

⁵ As Burke describes it, it seems comparable to the quasi-logical arguments presented by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969).

⁶ In this paper, there is no space to explore the related problem of whether the *topoi* are to be read as general or specific. In both the *Topics* and the *Rhetoric*, the *topoi* seem to be given a primary sense as *commonplaces*. In the *Rhetoric* they are contrasted with *idia*, which are specific related to each subject. But *topos* is sometimes used to refer to *idia* (i.e. Bk I, 15), which creates an understandable confusion, see Grimaldi (1980/2006)

explains the need to learn arguments by heart for the most frequent problems we encounter (163^b17). Next, one should be ready with definitions; then deal with problems under which other arguments fall. Here, we learn the starting points or basic premisses, not the arguments:

For just as in geometry it is useful to have gone through exercises with the elements, or as in arithmetic having the multiplication table at your fingertips makes a great difference when figuring a multiple of some other number, so too in the case of arguments are having things at your fingertips when it comes to the starting-points and learning premisses until they are on the tip of your tongue. For just as in the art of remembering, the mere mention of the places [*topoi*] instantly makes us recall the things, so these will make us more apt at reasonings through looking to these defined premisses in order of enumeration. And it is a common premiss rather than an argument which should be committed to memory (163^b25-33).

There is a powerful immediacy being evoked here by Aristotle which may invite us to recall the transfer of assent to which Burke referred. The mere mention of *topoi* instantly makes us recall the things, and this process makes us better reasoners. Having memorized a repertoire of basic premisses (not the large stock of argument forms that Smith referred to in his introduction), we are better able to construct our own arguments and refute those of our opponents (the goals of the *Topics*).

This, however, is the very point at which Rubinelli chooses to challenge the link of the rhetorical use of *topos* to ancient mnemonics. On her reading, two considerations would weaken the interpretation I have just given: First, the passage occurs in book VIII after the point at which Aristotle says he has finished with *topoi*. So here his concern is something else; the nature and use of propositions of which arguments are made, she suggests. Secondly, most of the *topoi* discussed in the *Topics* cannot be easily memorized. In each case there is a level of abstraction that makes it difficult to see how mnemonic exercises could help a speaker (2006:268-69).

Neither point would seem decisive. It is the case that at both the end of book VII and the start of book VIII Aristotle indicates a shift in focus. It's not so much that he has finished with *topoi per se*, but that he has finished enumerating them. That was the task of books II through VII, to set down the variety of sources or "attack-points" (as Smith's translation provides). But he is still essentially dealing with *topoi* insofar as his interest shifts to how they should be arranged and, on our reading, learned. The large number of *topoi* provided here (and the *Rhetoric* will add to this number) present problems for the arguer who must somehow manage this repertoire. Using mnemonic devices, and particularly some based on physical locations, seems particularly apt and helpful. The common premisses at 163^b22-33 function as locations (*topoi*) under which the different arguments fall. Aristotle is here interested in how one remembers them (Cf. Smith commentary, p.159). On the second question, the level of abstraction involved depends to some degree on how exactly we are to understand *topoi*. The interpretations we receive from proponents of the argumentation-scheme approach like Braet and Rubinelli are indeed complex. But if, say, we focus on the principles or rules alone, the accounts would become less complex. Moreover, complexity itself may be seen as a reason *for* adopting some mnemonic device rather than against. The greater the difficulty the more the need. And we should not lose sight of the actual comparison which Aristotle is making in this

passage: “just as in geometry it is useful to have gone through exercises...or as in arithmetic...so too in the case of arguments.” While not admitting of the same level of abstractness, principles of geometry are nevertheless exactly that: abstract. The comparison is compelling.

The foregoing discussion, then, indicates something of what would be lost or overlooked if we fail to give sufficient regard to the metaphoric sense of *topos*.

4. WHAT IS A *TOPOS*?

Topoi do not give us arguments, complete or in outline. There may have been a tradition in the Academy, as Ryle suggests (1968), whereby students adopted standard lines of argument or specific positions on an issue. The various arguments against the Forms, detailed in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* have an aura of such an origin. Students may have trotted out tried and tested arguments against each other in search of the refutation of an opponent, and always striving for that new line that would prove decisive. Indeed, as Miller (2000:137) notes, it is an advance of Aristotle’s understanding of rhetoric that he could think beyond the mere discovery of Plato (for whom everything already *is*) to the invention of the new. But the *Topics* itself does not provide strong support for this Academy-tradition. Instead, we are given more general instructions for finding the materials with which to argue, concentrating on the variety of ways of dealing with the four predicates of property, definition, genus and accident. All arguments begin somewhere, not in the sense of a dispute or conflict that needs resolution, but the decisions regarding how to construct and present the argument. So all arguments will have their source in some *topos*. The argumentation of the *Rhetoric*, with the different goals informing that work, expands on the possible *topoi* to include ones that relate to the concerns of ethos and pathos.

Three examples can assist us to review the range of possibilities and suggest further the nature of the *topoi*:

(i) From the *Topics* (II:4): “there is the *topos* of substituting for a term one that is more familiar, for example, using ‘clear’ instead of ‘exact’ in speaking of a conception.” The reason Aristotle gives for employing such a *topos* is that when a term is more familiar, the thesis is more easily dealt with. The context of the *Topics*, unlike the *Rhetoric*, is the dialectical exercise of either constructing a thesis that an opponent then tries to refute, or destroying the thesis of an opponent. The *topos* of substituting terms is one that is common to both processes, says Aristotle, suggesting perhaps that not only is it prescriptively useful, but descriptively apparent in the exchanges that Aristotle has witnessed. As a *topos*, it is difficult to see it as more than a way to proceed, a route to an end, rather than a scheme to employ. There is no form to “fill in,” as we have seen in some earlier examples. In fact, and this is crucial, we could imagine several argumentation schemes being employed to convey the reasoning once this *topos* had been chosen.

Also, with respect to this *topos* Aristotle makes the rare observation that *topoi* can be fallacious (*ψευδής*) if misapplied (a point relevant to the related debate over whether all fallacies must be arguments). So we might go to the wrong place, and part of the skill of using *topoi* is to match them to the appropriate context.

(ii) From the *Rhetoric* (Bk 2, 23:11-12): “Another [*topos*] is from a [previous] judgment about the same or a similar or opposite matter.” This *topos* has the title “from Authority,” but the kind of authority that seems intended here relates more to the ethos of the example. To illustrate the intent, Aristotle refers to Aristippus replying to a dogmatic Plato that “our companion [Socrates] would have said nothing of the sort.” Again, as a general rule or principle the advice seems to evoke the name of an exemplar familiar to the audience and with whom the audience would feel some association. We could extrapolate from the principle (and the case mentioned) that therefore, Plato should say nothing of the sort because Socrates is the kind of authority who Plato would wish to emulate. One can appreciate from this how a *topos* could be seen to act like a Toulminian warrant (Bird, 1961), linking a premise with a claim. But it does this only if we use it that way, that is, make the extrapolation. All the text requires is that the reader find this tact useful in appropriate situations.

(iii) A third example comes not from Aristotle but Cicero's *Topics* (II :10), and illustrates how *topoi* quickly came to be interpreted: “Sometimes there is an enumeration of parts, and this is handled in the following manner: So-and-So is not a free man unless he has been set free by entry in the census roll, or by touching with a rod, or by will. None of these conditions has been fulfilled, therefore he is not free.” Here, the *topos* is drawn out to show how the argument itself can run. This is the kind of extrapolation now favored by many theorists. But the *topos* itself is the rule, or principle, or “point” (to retain a spatial metaphor), the application of which Cicero then demonstrates. Cicero, too, lamented Aristotle's failure to define this central idea, but he was prepared to define it (hesitatingly, as we saw earlier) as a “region” from which arguments are drawn. In fact, each of the three examples I have cited is remarkable for its *non*-schematic-like appearance. Rather, substitution, example, and enumeration are visually compelling as images. We can see what Aristotle (and then Cicero) had *in mind* in proposing them. We can see this because we are an audience that can *locate* in our own minds the points being identified.

Barbara Warnick (2000), in her comparison of the topical systems of Aristotle and Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, observes of the spatial metaphor that few scholars speculate where the “places” might be, and when they do, they opt for the mind (107). There seems little alternative, unless we are to imagine some handbook of *topoi* which arguers should carry about with them and consult during argumentative exchanges. But Warnick also follows Leff (1983:25) in insisting that for rhetorical argumentation the *topoi* must be relative to an audience and thus the arguer is required to know the “values, presumptions, predispositions, and expectations of the audience” (2000:108). We can agree with this without conceding that these themselves must be *topoi* or features of *topoi*. But they are considerations that would come into play when *choosing topoi*.⁷ The kind of collaboration between arguer and audience, suggested by Burke, and valued in rhetorical argumentation, would require as much. The arguer needs not just to know her own mind, and the *topoi* resident there; but also the mind of her audience and what *topoi* they are likely to recognize and, hence, to be persuaded by the arguments drawn from them. The cognitive environment shared by arguer and audience (and another kind of space!) will be crucial here. Being in a “space,” albeit a mental one, not only locates a

⁷ Just as we might expect the dialectical player of the *Topics* to gauge his opponent and decide which *topoi* to select accordingly.

topos (and renders it locatable), it also *relates* it to other ideas. Such ideas are the cognitive furniture of our mental lives; preconditions for effective argumentation and communication. Thus, knowing one's audience involves not just their beliefs, values, and so on, but what kinds of *topoi* they will recognize and be able to locate in their own mental space. There is value to remembering this, value carried through the metaphor of place essentially attached to the concept of a *topos*; a value threatened if we think only of *topoi* as argumentation schemes.

[link to commentary](#)

REFERENCES

- Bird, O. (1961). The rediscovery of the *Topics*. *Mind*, 70, 534-539.
- Braet, A.C. (2005). The common topic in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*: Precursor of the argumentation scheme. *Argumentation*, 19, 65-83.
- Braet, A.C. (2004). The oldest typology of argumentation schemes. *Argumentation*, 18, 127-148.
- Burke, K. (1950). *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Consigny, S. (1974). Rhetoric and its situations. *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 7, 175-86.
- Eemeren, F.H van & Grootendorst, R. (2004). *A Systematic Theory of Argumentation: The Pragmatic-dialectical Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eemeren, F.H. van & Grootendorst, R. (1992). *Argumentation, Communication, and Fallacies*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Garssen, B. (2001). Argument schemes. In F.H. van Eemeren (Ed.) *Crucial Concepts in Argumentation Theory* (pp. 81-99). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Grimaldi, W.M.A. (1980/2006). *Aristotle, Rhetoric I: A Commentary*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Kennedy, G.A. (1991/2007). *Aristotle On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kienpointner, M. (1992). *Alltaglogik. Struktur und Funktion von Argumentationsmustern*. Stuttgart/Bad Cannstatt, Frommann-Holzboog.
- Kienpointner, M. (1986). Towards a typology of argumentative schemes. In F.H. van Eemeren, *et al.* (Eds.) *Argumentation Across the Lines of Discipline* (pp. 275-287). Dordrecht: Foris.
- Leff, M. (1983). The topics of argumentative invention in Latin rhetorical theory from Cicero to Boethius. *Rhetorica*, 1, 23-44.
- Miller, C.R. (2000). The Aristotelian *topos*: Hunting for novelty. In A.G. Gross & A.E. Walzer (Eds.), *Rereading Aristotle's Rhetoric* (pp. 130-146). Carbondale, ILL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Nightingale, A.W. (2004). *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy: Theoria in its Cultural Context*. Cambridge University Press.
- Perelman, C. & L. Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969). *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*. J. Wilkinson & P. Weaver (Trans.). Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Rubinelli, S. (2006). The ancient argumentative game: τόποι and *loci* in action. *Argumentation*, 20, 253-272.
- Ryle, G. (1968). Dialectic in the Academy. In G.E.L. Owen (Ed.) *Aristotle on Dialectic: The Topics* (pp.69-90) Oxford: The Clarendon Press.
- Warnick, B. (2000). Two systems of invention: The topics in the *Rhetoric* and *The New Rhetoric*. In A.G. Gross & A.E. Walzer (Eds.), *Rereading Aristotle's Rhetoric* (pp. 107-129). Carbondale, ILL: Southern Illinois University Press.