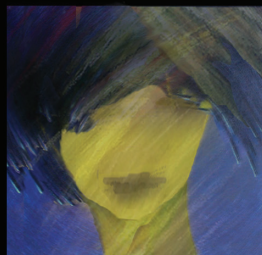


RHETORIC AND ARGUMENTATION IN THE BEGINNING OF THE XXIst CENTURY

EDITED BY

Henrique Jales Ribeiro



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• COIMBRA 2009

COORDENAÇÃO EDITORIAL
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Email: imprensauc@ci.uc.pt
URL: http://www.uc.pt/imprensa_uc
Vendas online: <http://siglv.uc.pt/imprensa/>

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ISBN
978-989-8074-77-5

DEPÓSITO LEGAL
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OBRA PUBLICADA COM A COLABORAÇÃO DE:

FCT Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia

MINISTÉRIO DA CIÊNCIA, TECNOLOGIA E ENSINO SUPERIOR Portugal



Programa Operacional Ciência e Inovação 2010
MINISTÉRIO DA CIÊNCIA, TECNOLOGIA E ENSINO SUPERIOR

UNIDADE I&D | LINGUAGEM, INTERPRETAÇÃO E FILOSOFIA

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CHAPTER 2

PERELMAN AND TOULMIN AS PHILOSOPHERS: ON THE INALIENABLE CONNECTION BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY, RHETORIC AND ARGUMENTATION

Henrique Jales Ribeiro*

ABSTRACT: My main motivation is to try to show that it makes sense today to re-read *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, of Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, and *The Uses of Argument*, of Stephen Toulmin, in light of their fundamental suggestion: that any purely technical notion of argumentation that lacks “philosophical foundations” in the widest sense of the expression, making it neutral theoretically speaking, would be necessarily limited and insufficient to fully understand it.

The publication of a treatise devoted to argumentation and this subject’s connection with the ancient Greek rhetoric and dialectic constitutes a break *with a concept of reason and reasoning due to Descartes which has set its mark on Western philosophy for the last three centuries.*

C. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation.*

An argument is like an organism. It has both a gross, anatomical structure and a finer, as-it-were psychological one. When set out explicitly in all its detail, it may occupy a number of printed pages or take perhaps a quarter of an hour to deliver (...). But within each paragraph, when one gets down to the level of individual sentences, a finer structure can be recognised (...).

S. Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument.*

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I. PHILOSOPHY, RHETORIC AND ARGUMENTATION

We all know that Perelman and Toulmin were philosophers, but within this domain they were also argumentation theorists. Each produced a theory of argumentation in the context of his philosophy; both had a strong influence on contemporary rhetoric and argumentation theory in general, as all the vast historiography in this area confirms. But what are we talking about when we say that a particular argumentation theory was produced in the realm of philosophical thinking? Of course, not all philosophy leads to this kind of theory; actually, most contemporary theories of argumentation definitely have a philosophical background and relatively strong philosophical presuppositions. But it cannot be said that they fundamentally arise from philosophy, in the sense that philosophy will come in the first place, and to some extent as a foundation of argumentation theory, from the theoretical and methodological point of view. This is why the specialized literature sometimes keeps a special chapter for “philosophical approaches of argumentation” as distinct from those discussing argumentation theories as such (see Eemeren, Grootendorst and Henkemans 1996: 341-345). What kinds of relations can we establish, particularly for these two philosophers, between philosophy and argumentation? What is it that is philosophy in them, in the historical and conceptual meaning of the word, and what is it that is argumentation theory? Or can we just say that the philosophies of Perelman and Toulmin are in themselves, and for one reason or another, argumentation theories?

The problem is obviously more complicated when we are not only defining the boundaries between philosophy and argumentation theory, but also specifying the relations, conceptually speaking, between philosophy, rhetoric and argumentation. Not all rhetoric implies a connection between logic and philosophy, or a more or less important association with them; therefore, not all rhetoric is presented as philosophical or even admits having philosophical presuppositions, in the widest sense of the term “presuppositions”; not all rhetoric can be interpreted as an argumentation theory. However, it was just really as a sort of “applied logic”, not only as philosophy and argumentation theory, that rhetoric was presented in *Traité de l'argumentation: La nouvelle rhétorique* by Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca. I will suggest later on that these connections between philosophy, rhetoric and argumentation are also present, from another perspective, in *The Uses of Argument*. At any rate, a long tradition in the matter which, in the interpretation of Perelman and those who followed him, goes back to the renaissance and modern Cartesian rationalism, places rhetoric and philosophy in clear conflict (see Ifsseling 1976; Grassi 2001; Meyer 1989; Meyer, Carrilho and Timmermans 1999). This tendency was marked in the 2nd half of the 19th century and, more particularly, in the first half of the 20th century in American universities, when speech communication came onto the scene. A recent book edited by Gerard A. Hauser, *Philosophy and Rhetoric in Dialogue: Redrawing their Intellectual Landscape*, sets forth – with a certain bewilderment for philosophers interested in rhetoric – this problematic relation between rhetoric and philosophy, as proposed by Henri Johnstone Jr – a well-known American argumentation theorist, with whom Perelman collaborated in the United States (cf. Hauser 2006: 1-14).

So what relation is there, not just between philosophy and argumentation theory, but, more generally, between philosophy, rhetoric and argumentation?

In regard to these questions, let me quote one of Toulmin's latest philosophical papers which served as an introduction to the magnificent conference entitled *Arguing on the Toulmin Model*, held at McMaster University in 2005. It has recently been edited by David Hitchcock and Bart Verheij in the conference proceedings (Hitchcock and Verheij 2006). Ending his communication, after highlighting some historical presuppositions of his philosophy, especially the crucial influence of Wittgenstein's *Philosophische Untersuchungen* on its development, Toulmin noted, with some interest:

So, I welcome this occasion for a creative and constructive discussion of all these issues: in particular, the relationship between what there is left for us under the heading of "philosophy", and what you yourselves are engaged in doing under the heading of "the analysis of argumentation". Are these purely distinct activities, or are they ones which blend into one another at the margin? This for me is the central question with which we are, and will continue to be, concerned for the rest of this week, and I look forward very much to hearing what you have to say about it. (p. 29)

I would like to call your attention to the rhetorical nature of Toulmin's question: in his view this is essentially not to do with identifying the McMaster University conference agenda either with the philosophy (or, as he said, with "what is left of it") or with the theory (or "analysis") of argumentation as such; it is to do with suggesting that it is not possible to talk about one without, necessarily, talking about the other. It is especially to do with suggesting that, if it is true that "what is left of philosophy" in the early 21st century can be assimilated into rhetoric and argumentation, the foundations of these, their fundamental presuppositions, are "in what is left of philosophy" as such. And so "what is left of philosophy" and the "analysis of argumentation" will be identified not so much in relation to form but, above all, in relation to their objects or matters. At any rate, such identification is only relevant in terms of the "foundationalist" suggestion or presupposition that I mentioned and to which I shall come back later. This connection is clear in Toulmin's books, since *The Uses of Argument*: when he writes or is invited to speak on rhetoric and argumentation (see Toulmin 1994: 19-30), it is above all "philosophy" or "what is left of it" that concerns him (sometimes clearly disregarding the analysis of that argumentation model that he himself proposes in that book). Should philosophers and argumentation theorists consider as books on rhetoric and argumentation theory not only this 1958 work, where the connection is obvious, but all the others, too, like *Foresight and Understanding*, *Human Understanding, Knowing and Acting*, *The Return to Cosmology*, *The Abuse of Casuistry*, and especially the latest ones, like *Cosmopolis* and *Return to Reason*? Should we also include in this, or as a preliminary to it, that is, preliminary to rhetoric and argumentation, *An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics* and *Philosophy of Science*? Not surprisingly, it is as rhetoric and argumentation theory, that some authorised historiography interprets the thinking of Toulmin generally (see Scott 1999; and Foss, Foss and Trapp 2002: 117-153). What are we talking about when we talk about rhetoric and argumentation theory in relation to this philosopher? What is the demarcation line between these and philosophy? Whatever the answer to these questions, the essential link between philosophy, rhetoric and argumentation that I have been alluding to, warns us of the

limitations of a viewpoint about argumentation theory that would basically reduce it to a theory of argument, and so to a purely technical or formal undertaking. From this standpoint, it is interesting to see that of the two dozen or more papers published in the conference proceedings, edited by Hitchcock, very few take as subject the philosophical framework of Toulmin's argumentation model.

Problems of the kind I have just outlined are particularly pertinent when philosophers like Perelman and Toulmin, and their argumentation theories, are studied and interpreted by those specialists in this last domain, which today is often called "argumentation theories". The expression seems to relate to a neutral field where the theoretical bases will be found for the study of argumentation common to a wide range of approaches (linguistic, literary, sociological, and so on), not necessarily coming from philosophy. This field and the tasks of argumentation theory are defined as follows in *Fundamentals of Argumentation Theory*: "Argumentation theorists are, broadly speaking, interested in the problems involved in the production, analysis, and evaluation of argumentative discourse. In studying these problems, they view argumentative discourse in the light of the actual circumstances in which it takes place. In examining argumentative discourse, many argumentation theorists therefore start from a unifying perspective on reasoned discourse which is to provide a general framework for studying the interplay of pragmatic factors." (Eemeren, Grootendorst, Henkemans *et al.* 1996: 12) If this definition does not fall into the fallacy of *petitio principii*, identifying in a circular fashion the task of the "argumentation theorists" with the study of the "argumentative discourse", it is obviously necessary to establish what is meant by this last concept ("argumentative discourse"). And this is done next: "When communicating with each other by means of reasoned discourse, people observe, as a rule, certain standards that ensure that their communication can serve its purpose." (*ib.*) The standards mentioned, starting with the so-called "Principle of Communication", are taken as presupposed, to some extent, and carefully presented in the "Introduction" of the book. It seems clear from this analysis that the task of argumentation theory is not so much a reflection on the philosophical, epistemological and other foundations of the standards in question in light of a "unifying perspective on reasoned discourse", or, as I would say, of a theory on rationality and communication, but more pragmatically, in its justification and application via a theory of what we call "argument", that is, in other words, an argument theory. In principle this is the fundamental objective of the entire argumentation theory: "The soundness criteria [of argumentation], as the authors say, are valid criteria in a pragmatic sense." (p. 21) If a particular philosophical theory on argumentation, for instance, does not lead to an argument theory, it is legitimate to suppose that it will not have the required interest for argumentation theory. Or, at least, that it will not have the same interest as a theory that does not have philosophical foundations or partly forgoes them.

This relation between argumentation theory and argument theory can be taken even further, leading to the complete reduction of the first to the second. In *Manifest Rationality: A Pragmatic Theory of Argument*, R. Johnson observes in relation to this that he is not really concerned with an argumentation theory that is at issue in an interdisciplinary approach to argumentation like that (I would add) which is developed in *Fundamentals of Argumentation Theory*, and which involves "logic, rhetoric, speech communication, composition, psychology and so on" (Johnson 2000: 30), functioning

as a “wider descriptor”, but, rather, with a theory which, like the first one, studies the practice of argumentation in its “normative, empirical, and conceptual dimensions”, but whose objective is, more precisely, “the product of that practice: the argument itself” (p. 31). A “theory of argumentation”, from this point of view, is fundamentally a “theory of argument” (see Johnson 1996: 103ff).

This rather lengthy digression on the relation that philosophy has with rhetoric and argumentation theory of the present day is meant to clarify some aspects of its complex and problematic character, and (above all) to introduce the basic perspective in which I shall talk about the “inalienable relation between philosophy, rhetoric and argumentation” as proposed by Perelman and Toulmin. I am going to suggest that, based partly on the distinctions I have just considered, it was fundamentally as philosophers and not simply as argumentation theorists that these two authors talked about argumentation. What they propose in their main works, that is, respectively, in *Traité de l'argumentation: La nouvelle rhétorique* and *The Uses of Argument*, is, in the first instance, a philosophical approach to rationality or human reason, which is expressed, in fact, in both cases, in an argumentation theory, but cannot be reduced to it and, far less, to an argument theory. It is an approach in which a whole set of presuppositions of a really metaphysical nature – some of which are often obvious or unarguable – is essential. In particular: how is it and why is it that there is argumentation in every day language? What are the relations between argumentation and the problem of meaning in that language, or in what is supposed to be part of it? To what extent does philosophy, presenting itself as argumentation theory, fall under its jurisdiction, and what are the consequences of this for defining its status? What more or less essential role, from this standpoint, does it play in today's world? Consideration of these questions reveals an interesting series of parallels between the two authors, scarcely noted, in my view, by the specialized literature.

My path will be this: first, I want to explain how far Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca argumentation theory was presented, in the first place, as a theory on reason and on rationality in general, and not just or simply as an argument theory; I will call your attention to three basic epistemological and metaphysical presuppositions of *La nouvelle rhétorique*; then, I shall apply the results of this study to the study of Toulmin's argumentation theory, considered from a philosophical perspective, and, in particular, that of *The Uses of Argument*, shedding a new light (I hope), not so much on the differences, but, more especially, on the similarities between the two great philosophers.

II. RATIONALITY *VERSUS* ARGUMENTATION IN PERELMAN: ON THE IDEA OF AN EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE ARGUMENTATIVE REASON

Let me resume the argument that I have just outlined, in relation to the *Traité de l'argumentation: La nouvelle rhétorique*: the argumentation theory is essentially treated in this book as a theory on rationality, that is, as a theory on reason and of the critique of reason. It is precisely with such a theory, in this case, with the one that Perelman would later call “logic of value judgments” or of the “reasonable” (see Perelman 1989: 197ff) – in contrast to a logic of the “rational” or of the traditional

conception of rationality configured by formal logic and the Cartesian tradition in philosophy until now – that the argumentation theory as such is identified (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 2008: 1ff; see Laughlin 1986; Eubanks 1986: 77-78). The same kind of identification happens expressly in the philosophy of Toulmin, especially after *The Uses of Argument* (see Toulmin 1994; see Eemeren and Grootendorst 1993: 266), but it is already underlying the argument theory set forth in this book (Toulmin 1991: 234; 1976: 123ff), which was published, as you will recall, at the same time as that of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca. The core objective of these two authors is not simply to present an argumentation theory in the sense that it could be reduced to a set of techniques or, in the final analysis, to an argument theory, even though the title (“*Traité de l’argumentation*”) could lead one to infer the opposite. Perelman has been always very clear about this issue until his last works (see Perelman 1989a; see Maneli 1993). This link between argumentation theory and a theory of rationality is, moreover, emphasized in the very first paragraph of *La nouvelle rhétorique*, in a sentence that was deliberately underscored by the authors and deserves to remain, as the rest has done, for posterity: “The publication of a treatise devoted to argumentation and this subject’s connection with the ancient Greek rhetoric and dialectic constitutes a break with a concept of reason and reasoning due to Descartes which has set its mark on Western philosophy for the last three centuries.” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 2008: 1) The aim of the authors, against the tradition of philosophy and of the history of rhetoric in particular, is to show the essentially rhetorical and argumentative nature of rationality in general, explaining and analysing the epistemological and metaphysical conditions that are, in general, the basis of the exercise of reason through argumentation (see Gross 2003: 2-30). These two aspects I have just outlined: critique of reason in history, or the way rationality has been understood throughout history, and analysis of the epistemological and metaphysical conditions of argumentation, are indissociable. We have to say something about them, especially about the second, because I had these in mind when I spoke earlier about the “metaphysical presuppositions” of the argumentation theory.

Starting with the first: the critique of reason in history. This seems to be presented as a critique of the history of rhetoric in the wider scope of the history of philosophy; but it is not only that, in fact. The thesis of *La nouvelle rhétorique* is well known and can be summarized as follows: rhetoric, as a philosophical subject, died in the contemporary era, after prolonged agony caused by the domination throughout the history of western thought, since the 17th century, of Cartesian rationalism, whose paradigm in the first half of the 20th century is formal logic (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 2008: 1ff). We can find this thesis in virtually the same terms in *The Uses of Argument* (see Toulmin 1991: 1ff, 248-251). In the book by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca and particularly in Perelman’s other works (see Perelman 2008: 1ff; 1989: 209ff; 1970: 171ff), this thesis is explored systematically, almost to the point of exhaustion, and the theory on the history of rhetoric appears as a theory on reason itself: what is meant by the progressive agony of rhetoric in history, since Descartes, is basically the reduction of rationality to deduction and demonstration, that is, to its purely formal aspects, to the detriment of the idea that reason is also practice, and that man’s action, no less than his understanding of the world through science, is also rational. Toulmin would agree with all that I have just said, as I have

been suggesting. The fundamental consequence of this situation in the modern age is that the Cartesian ideal of rationality banishes to the sphere of the “irrational” a vast and important field of application of reason, which is precisely what, in different ways, *La nouvelle rhétorique* and *The Uses of Argument*, claim as the field of rhetoric and argumentation theory (see Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 2008: 2-3, 47; Perelman 1989: 255; Toulmin 1991: 253ff; 1976: 123ff). As I started by saying, the two authors contrast their new conception of rationality with the traditional one through the opposition between what they call a “logic of the rational”, belonging to the Cartesian ideal of rationality, and a “logic of the reasonable”, which, according to them, characterizes that field or that new theoretical continent that they had just discovered. It’s very clear, in both of them, that the demarcation of the object of rhetoric and argumentation theories presupposes a broad critique of reason in history and, especially, in the history of philosophy.

I would like to look briefly now at what I have called “the epistemological and metaphysical conditions of argumentation” in *La nouvelle rhétorique*. These conditions undoubtedly belong to the field of argumentation as such, and as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca saw it, not because they stem from an analysis of argumentation or a theory of argument, but because they relate first to philosophy, and a theory on (and of) rationality in particular, or what we may call an “epistemology of argumentative reason”. For example, as we find in the “Introduction” of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca book, it is impossible to understand what argumentation is unless we take the view that it is happening in the context of the use of current language in such or in such situation, and that it is just in that context that it should be studied, and not in any other domain at all, like the human mind, that is of interest to the psychologist (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 2008: 8ff). This is a basic condition, fundamental to the argumentation theory of *La nouvelle rhétorique*, which is sometimes completely overlooked in the literature. Indeed, it is a presupposition not only of this theory, but of each and every argumentation theory, like the one Toulmin gives us in *The Uses of Argument* (see Toulmin 1991: 210ff). At any rate, against the “philosophies of rhetoric” of their era – based overwhelmingly on the rhetorical impact of the literary art – and in keeping with the “linguistic direction” that R. Rorty talks about in *The Linguistic Turn*, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca emphasizes it particularly in *La nouvelle rhétorique*, presuming, quite rightly, that the actuality and modernity of the book they had just published relied heavily on it.

Another example of epistemological and metaphysical condition of argumentation is the idea according to which argumentation cannot be understood if we do not start by understanding that meaning only exists in everyday language and in a specific context (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 2008: 123ff). That meaning only exists in context, as *La nouvelle rhétorique* stresses over and over again, means that the meaning of a word or sentence should not be ascribed to the human mind nor to reality but to the complex interaction between these two factors through the use of language in a given situation in which argumentation is taking place. Everything that overflows the use of language is not relevant to an argumentation theory as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca conceived it, though it may be important for other domains, like psychology and ontology. This is a fundamental philosophical thesis of the book which, once again, is along the lines of the holism in terms of meaning that the authors of the

“linguistic turn” upheld at the time. As Toulmin said in the same year of *La nouvelle rhétorique*, and both the theories of the “English ordinary language philosophy”, by Austin, Ryle and others (who Perelman knew well), and of Wittgenstein in his *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, were also saying, meaning arises basically from the use of everyday language itself in a certain context or situation.

This thesis has consequences of considerable relevance to argumentation theory. It implies that meaning in everyday language is essentially ambiguous, vague or imprecise by nature (see Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 2008: 130ff; Perelman 1989: 124ff) and that the ideal of mathematical logic in the first half of the 20th century, which consisted of offering a theory of meaning based on a formalization of current language, was wholly unfounded. (I shall return to this link later on, with particular reference to Toulmin, where we actually find this very same fundamental thesis.) Note that in *La nouvelle rhétorique*, in contrast to the theory of rhetoric of the time, such as that given us by I. A. Richards in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, vagueness of meaning is not a more or less contingent matter arising from the interdependence of the words in a discourse (which that author calls “the interanimation of words”) [see Richards 1965: 47ff], whose damaging effects we can tackle by means of some rhetorical criterion or another, but is a essential condition of the use of language in context, which has important philosophical consequences for argumentation theory. One of these is that, if we want to understand how argumentation takes place in the exercise of reason, we do not have to examine, of course, one by one, the contexts in which this happens, but we should, instead, offer what we can call a “typology” of the fundamental contexts, and especially a “topology” of reason itself in argumentation, which functions heuristically as an instrument of its interpretation (see Perelman 1989: 216ff). It is in light of such topology that we should, in my interpretation, understand the concept of auditorium in *La nouvelle rhétorique*, whose philosophical connections, as we know, Perelman had studied in *Rhétorique et philosophie: Pour une théorie de l’argumentation en philosophie* (Perelman 1952: 21ff). The auditorium is not, as in the rhetorical tradition, simply the target or set of targets of a particular discourse; so it is not the “assembly” configured in space and time of this or that mode, which has to be persuaded and convinced by a series of techniques (though it is partly this); it is a construction built up by reason which is the basis of argumentation inasmuch as whoever argues, even before the argumentative interaction has taken place, anticipates, projecting the beliefs, convictions and values of whoever is targeted in this or that context (see Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 2008: 19ff). In short, it is a “construct” of the fabric of reason, where whoever is arguing, whoever or whatever is the target of their argumentation and, of course, the subject of the argumentation are conceptually involved. Perelman has stressed this thesis in regard to the notions of “act and person” (Perelman 1952: 49ff), and “temporality”, as essential features of argumentation (Perelman 1970: 11ff). Whence the need for argumentation theory of a typology of the main contexts in which such construction occurs (singular or particular auditorium, universal auditorium, and the variations between them), and, above all, for an analysis of the conceptual form that that construction assumes in these contexts, or for what I have called a “topology of argumentative reason”. The concept of “presence” in Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, whose Kantian connections through Piaget and “Gestalttheory” are quite obvious, belongs to such a topology (Perelman and

Olbrechts-Tyteca 2008: 115ff; Perelman 2008: 35ff; see Arnold 1986: 37-38; compare Toulmin 1991: 211), which is only intelligible if we take argumentation essentially as a projection and construction of reason itself in context, in the same sense that Kant, in his *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*, had tried to understand what he called the “constitutive” use of concepts or categories of our understanding. The whole of the first part of *La nouvelle rhétorique* (“The Starting Point of Argumentation”) is, from the standpoint of an analogy with Kant, an inquiry into the structural elements that are the basis of the “empirical” use of reason through argumentation. It is evident that, if we understand the auditorium of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca strictly in the social sense of the expression, like their American readers did in the 1970s (Johnstone 1978: 105; see Golden and Pilotta [ed.] 1984: 14ff); and if we identify the person who argues simply with the ordinary man and not with the man who is the agent of reason and of rationality, then the door remains open for every equivocation and confusion, especially for the reduction of *La nouvelle rhétorique* to an ingenious compendium of techniques, with a bit of philosophy in the middle.

A third epistemological and metaphysical presupposition of argumentation, closely related to the previous one, is that meaning in everyday language does not only exist in context, but fundamentally arises from the argumentative use of reason or of rationality in general (see Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 2008: 187ff). There is meaning only where there is argumentation, that is, where human reason seeks to justify, through the agency of language, what is supposed to be its object in the sphere of action and human knowledge. This is an absolutely essential point in which, once again, the consonance between *La nouvelle rhétorique* and *The Uses of Argument* is clear, especially the agreement between the two respective authors against the philosophies current at the time, including not only formal logic and its followers (devotees of the kind of reason they both call the “more geometric” reason), but also Wittgenstein and the so-called “English ordinary language philosophy”. (I am talking time after time about the analytical philosophy in the 1950s, with particular reference to Perelman, because it is known that this philosopher knew it quite well and had a collaborative relationship, even one of friendship, with some of its followers, such as A. J. Ayer.) If, for formal logic, meaning is exhausted in purely formal relations between the concepts that characterize the axiomatic-deductive systems, and, in the final analysis, in the appeal for more or less ultimate proof on which, in the Cartesian manner, the acceptance of the axioms will be sustained, for Wittgenstein and the English philosophers from Oxford, in stark contrast, it only occurs in context, through the use of language, and it is expressed by our actions or behaviours (as Wittgenstein argues in *Philosophische Untersuchungen* and Ryle had already argued in *The Concept of Mind* [see Ryle 1949: 112ff]). A theory of meaning as such is impossible for them; they see it more as a refined description as possible of that use, as J. Austin thought, or, as Ryle maintained, of its “logic”, that is, of the categories inherent to it (Ryle 1966), so that we can finally understand in what meaning in everyday language consists of. In any case, these philosophers see argumentation as being foreign to the use of language. Somewhat surprisingly for us today, we do not find the simple idea of justification of an argument in their works (see Austin 1966). Certainly some of their theories, like those of Ryle in his book *Dilemmas*, can be read and interpreted from the angle of argumentation (see Ryle 1956: 5ff). But, in general, for the English ordinary language

philosophers, as for Wittgenstein, it is not argumentation, far less its theory, that is at issue; basically, as in Ryle's "disputes", it is the description and analysis of the process of interaction and sharing of meaning through language. All this leads to the more or less obvious conclusion that Quine (1962) expressly drew at the end of the 1950s in a lecture eloquently entitled "Le mythe de la signification", to an audience which included Perelman: meaning is a myth. The fundamental consequence of a research whose aim had been to arrive at a theory of meaning, for analytical philosophy itself generally, was, paradoxically, that there was no such thing as meaning. Now, it is with this outcome as the backdrop, that we should today read both *La nouvelle rhétorique* and *The Uses of Argument*. Meaning only occurs when we argue, that is, when we offer reasons to justify a claim, or claims, or when we challenge, seeking justification, those that are presented to us. It ought not to be sought either in the world or in the mind of man but in this justificatory activity of reason. This absolutely capital thesis means, in contrast to the idea of the end of philosophy – current at the end of the 20th century and particularly in analytical philosophy –, that philosophy is still possible, despite everything, with the discovery of this new continent of reason which is what we call "argumentation theory".

III. RATIONALITY *VERSUS* ARGUMENTATION IN TOULMIN: ON THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF DEFINING ARGUMENTATION

I started this paper by suggesting that argumentation theory is, for Toulmin, essentially a theory on rationality. It is a theory on reason and its criticism to the extent that reason expresses itself, through the agency of language, in human action and knowledge, and its criticisms allow us to understand it as being, by excellence, rhetorical and argumentative. By associating argumentation theory so closely with a wider philosophical theory on rationality I am trying to say that the two are indissociable in Toulmin's thought, and that it is only possible to understand the first through the second. Considering the current distinctions between argumentation theory and the theory of argument as such, I really want to say that, if the theory on rationality led Toulmin to an argumentation theory, then this, looked at historically and understood properly, was far from necessarily taking him to a "theory of argumentation" in the sense that R. Johnson understood the concept, for example, to the theories of argument given us in *The Uses of Argument* and, twenty years later, in *Introduction to Reasoning*. I would dare to say, in fact, that it is in default of Toulmin's true philosophical thought that we speak today, as happened in the McMaster conference, about "Toulmin model of argumentation", *in the technical, formal sense of the concept*.

But let me explain the comparison that I began by drawing between argumentation theory and the theory on rationality. Ethics, the history and philosophy of science, the history of philosophy, all have, in Toulmin's conception, the importance that is well-known and, for some, difficult to reconcile with his argumentation theory, because they provide the framework for the critique of reason that I referred to, disclosing the nature and boundaries of reason from the standpoint of rhetoric and argumentation. So this critique shows that the study of reason, when taken in its

many diverse manifestations throughout history, fundamentally belongs to rhetoric and argumentation. It particularly shows that reason, in its aim to know the world through science or to regulate human actions through ethics, primarily exposes and reveals itself and not whatever that is outside of it and which ought to be explained or understood. The singular nature of its own conceptual schemes of representation and intelligibility of human knowledge and action are thereby brought to light. The temptation of trying to take reason beyond these schemes and their projections and of getting to reality in itself is both inevitable and recurrent. But it is an illusion or, rather, according to Toulmin, it is a half-illusion. We can always understand something about reality, looking for reason, for the multiplicity of its uses and practices, for the various ways these schemes capture reality. The theories are maps, networks, which, when taken in themselves, tell us little or nothing about the world, but when compared or contrasted with one another, “show us” something about it (Toulmin 1950: 195ff; 1953: 105ff). According to Toulmin, this is what Wittgenstein was teaching in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and *Philosophische Untersuchungen* (Toulmin 1953: 88-89; see Toulmin 1994). And it was largely this that he himself started to do in *An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics*, with regard to ethics, in *Philosophy of Science*, with regard to science, in *The Uses of Argument*, with regard to the distinction between “analytic” and “substantial” arguments, and mainly, the notion of “field-dependence of our standards” concerning this last sort of arguments (Toulmin 1991: 36ff); or, more interestingly perhaps, in the trilogy of works he wrote with June Goodfield on the history and philosophy of science (*The Fabric of the Heavens*, *The Architecture of Matter*, *The Discovery of Time* [Toulmin 1962, 1962a, 1965]). In fact, Toulmin has even applied this kind of hermeneutics to Wittgenstein himself in the book he wrote with Alan Janik, called *Wittgenstein’s Vienna* (see Toulmin 1974). It is in these schemes, that is to say, in reason itself, that, according to Toulmin, we should look for the rhetoric essence of reason, not in the matter that reason ascribes to itself in the world, whatever it may be. This thesis is paradoxical when interpreted in the context of the history of philosophy; because rhetoric has always been interpreted, and it is thus that Perelman interprets it, as a way (not necessarily expressed through a set of techniques or schemes, as happens apparently with the Belgian philosopher) for a speaker or writer to gain the support of an auditorium concerning the claims he is making in his discourse on a particular subject (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 2008: 13ff). Here, in Toulmin, these three basic elements (who is speaking, what he/she is speaking about and the target of the discourse) are reduced to reason itself in its aim to achieve or arrive at something that should be outside it, but which is in fact an intrinsic part of it. What is essential, however, is that the attempt to convince and persuade continues to function as a presupposition of the exercise of reason and of its illusions: when the illusion is dissipated by Toulmin’s critique that the subject or matter of reason is not something outside it, reason is finally confronted with itself, in Perelmanian terms, as being before a purely virtual auditorium. This is the situation which, by nature and definition, makes reason essentially rhetorical.

We have here a topic where the relation between Toulmin and Perelman seems to be obvious for me: the interpretation of the critic of reason, made by Toulmin, from the standpoint of Perelman’s conception of auditorium. It is a controversial topic

since we know that the Belgian philosopher, in his time, expressly argued that the argumentation theory upheld by the English one allowed no place for the notion of auditorium (Perelman 1984: 195).

Everything that I have said, however, is only one part of Toulmin's views on rhetoric and argumentation. It shows that reason is rhetoric, but not that it may be argumentative. The semantic relativism implied by the critique of reason, to which I ascribed a rhetorical dimension, belongs to a conception of the problem of meaning in everyday language essentially holistic, which is quite clear in the philosopher's early works: *An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics*, *Philosophy of Science* and *Foresight and Understanding*. This holism means that there is only meaning in the empirical contexts of the use of language, not in any ideal context, divorced from human experience, like that which is offered by the formal logic of Toulmin's time, and whose most important reference is without doubt Bertrand Russell's idea of a "logically perfect language" (see Russell 1986: 197-198). More precisely, from the semantic point of view, the claim that meaning comes from the use of language in context, that the "English ordinary language philosophy" and the *Philosophische Untersuchungen* of Wittgenstein subscribes to in the early 1950s, *when interpreted from the standpoint of a theory on rationality*, means that there is only meaning in everyday language through argumentation in context, or through the uses of argumentation in context. Whence, two problems and two fundamental directions of Toulmin's research, closely connected since his earliest works. How far can rationality be interpreted as being essentially argumentative, that is, how far can an argumentation *theory* be conceived – considering that such a theory, by definition, must always be unifying – if argumentation, together with meaning, always arises in context and the philosopher cannot ignore this ideal context of meaning and argumentation that belongs to formal logic? (This is the problem that the philosopher particularly discusses in *The Uses of Argument* [see Toulmin 1991: 146ff.]) Maybe the desideratum of an *argumentation theory* (an expression that is basically a *contradictio in adjecto*) can be satisfied not merely in the perspective of argumentation, but mainly in that of rationality in general. Can these conceptual schemes – that I started talking about with regard to the critique of reason in ethics, in history and philosophy of science and in history of philosophy –, be analysed, and the way they variously capture reality be interpreted, reducing this interpretation to paradigms or schemes that are more general and comprehensive than those that underlie them? Toulmin, as I suggested earlier, was already undertaking this task to a certain extent, in a progressive and systematic fashion, from his first works, starting with *An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics*, where, in relation to ethics, we find for the first time an outline of the three fundamental models of rationality, which eventually culminated nearly twenty six years later in the well-known distinction, of *Knowing and Acting*, between the "geometric", "common sense" and "critical" models (see Toulmin 1950: 19-60). A few words must now be said about them.

The idea is not to analyse each of them in detail here, obviously, but to compare them. The first point to note is that they are not merely theoretical models of rationality, but as is shown in *Human Understanding*, they progressively embody the historical, social and cultural development of Western civilisation, from ancient Greece to the present day. Seen from this theoretical viewpoint, they are essentially ways of

justifying reason in its relation to human knowledge and action. It is by this route, that of justification, that they are models of argumentation.

The geometric model, whose history runs from Plato and Euclid to contemporary formal logic, via Descartes and modern rationalism in general, emptied reason of all its content, reducing it to the purely formal skeleton of the relations between propositions. As Toulmin says, with this model, “‘arguments’ were abstracted from ‘arguing’, ‘logic’ was differentiated from ‘rhetoric’, and ‘formal structure’ was separated from ‘substantive’ function.” (Toulmin 1976: 86). Toulmin criticizes this model in *The Uses of Argument*, where he shows its manifest inability to explain the use of reason in human action, comparing it, first of all, with his own argumentation model (which has taken his name), and finally, with the many diverse logics, lacking any unifying paradigm, of his “substantial arguments” (Toulmin 1991: 94ff, 211ff). It was a theory of these logics that the “English ordinary language philosophy” of Austin and Ryle, and the *Philosophische Untersuchungen* of Wittgenstein, seemed to uphold. I have pointed out earlier in this paper that Perelman, too, compares the geometric or formal model of reason with argumentation in his book *Traité de l’argumentation: La nouvelle rhétorique*, published in the same year as Toulmin’s work. He, like Toulmin, saw that model as a denial of the use of language in context, and ascribes the same origin and development in the history of philosophy and – particularly – of rhetoric to it as Toulmin does. And Perelman, too, with his concept of auditorium, seems to fall into a relativism similar to that of the “field-dependent” arguments of *The Uses of Argument* (see Eemeren, Grootendorst, Henkemans *et al.* 1996: 123; Hitchcock 2006: 71ff). More generally, I repeat, what we find in this book and in Perelman’s, in 1958, it is an opposition between the logic of the “rational”, configured by the geometric model of argumentation, and the logic of the “reasonable”, that is, the logic of human action and argumentation in context.

Against this geometric or formal model, Toulmin tells us in *Knowing and Acting* about two alternative argumentation models, the “common sense” or “anthropological” model, which will be underlying modern rationality in general after Hume and Kant, and the “critical” or “transcendental” model, which is presented as a possible unifying concept of reason in our era – the era that few years later, in *Return to Cosmology*, he came to call it, after F. Lyotard, “post-modern” (Toulmin 1982: 217ff). The common sense model sees the reason and argumentation, from the point of view of both knowledge and action, as being embodied in communities, that is to say, in groups socially organized in terms of the same interests (Toulmin 1976: 160ff). Following Kuhn (1962), Toulmin sees them as institutionally accommodated by rules of functioning, subject to their own traditions and directed by common objectives. Argumentation ceases to be a question of “formal proof” or “formal validity”, as in the geometric model, to become a problem of justifying the procedures inherent to the activities shared by the same community. It is in that context that the assessment of argumentation takes place, as Toulmin observes in *Knowing and Acting* (Toulmin 1976: 164ff) and he had suggested in *The Uses of Argument*, in forms very much like those that take place in the courts (see Toulmin 1976: 164ff; 1991: 42-43). However, of course, these “justificatory activities” (Toulmin 1976: 164) to which I have referred do not go any deeper than the anthropological domain itself; they do not offer a real foundation for reason nor argumentation. This creates the need for an approach which focuses on

the “preconditions of human reason” in general, like the one which is presented by the critical model, i.e. an approach that focuses on the ultimate or final metaphysical conditions which make it possible (Toulmin 1976: 220ff). Toulmin is not very clear on this matter, and the fact that he is making philosophical suppositions about it in *Knowing and Acting* is obvious. One of his suggestions regarding the characteristics of this approach is that the communities in question in the common sense model can be seen, for the most part, as the “language games” which are incorporated in the “forms of life” about which Wittgenstein writes in *Philosophische Untersuchungen*. As he says, if Wittgenstein had attempted to present a “generalized anthropology”, describing and analysing “the basic structures of (our) activity and behaviour” in those “forms of life”, in his case, he is interested, more exactly, in a “general ‘transcendental account of human life in the world’” (Toulmin 1976: 244). However, he subsequently concludes that the manner in which such an explanation is given “is still unclear”.

So it seems obvious that, despite Toulmin’s manifest preference for the critical model, this model does not manage to achieve, from the standpoint of a unifying theory of rationality, a true metaphysical framework for those justificatory activities of argumentation in its several contexts that belong to the common sense model; this common framework was precisely the main advantage of the geometric or formal model. In other words, the critical model does not manage to overcome neither the scepticism to which the geometric model leads nor the relativism of the common sense model. This situation brought Toulmin to a real impasse and, finally, as he suggests, to the impossibility of defining argumentation and to get a unifying theory of it and of rationality in general. A definition of argumentation would require, as a precondition, tackling all the roles played by arguments in the exercise of reason in human life; and this is not within our reach (Toulmin 1976: 272-273). As he says:

A comprehensive account of the part that “arguments” play in the “rational” aspects of human life must therefore mention *all* those features of the natural world, of our own mental equipment, and of our interchanges with the world, which must be as they are in order for “rational arguing” to be possible at all. (p. 273)

In practice, this conclusion means that it is not possible to develop an argumentation theory based on a theory on rationality as such, – an ambition that Toulmin has cherished, to some extent, since *The Uses of Argument* (see Toulmin 1991: 211-252). And this, indeed, is what the philosopher’s subsequent works show, up to *Cosmopolis* and *Return to Reason*. Nevertheless, that does not mean that it might not be possible for him, afterwards, to deduce implications of the development of his theory of rationality for his theory of argumentation.

In *Knowing and Acting*, from this point of view, Toulmin promises this sort of development on the level of what he had called, in *Human Understanding: The Collective Use and Evolution of Concepts*, a “collective approach to the philosophy of action”. This approach will inquire how the aims of collective human action during the course of history, from science to philosophy, have been configured according to the concepts belonging to each era or under their “standards of rationality”, and, so understood, how they determine the more or less rational character of individual human action (Toulmin 1976: 298ff). This was just what he did in the above-mentioned book, confronting

his thought with the problem of the incommensurability between theories that had been raised by Kuhn and Popper (see Popper 1994; Kuhn 1962, 1977; Toulmin 1977: 478ff; and Harris 2005: 7ff), and looking for an impartial perspective of rationality that would overcome both absolutism and foundationalism, and, as he puts it, “the threats or temptations of relativism” (Toulmin 1976: 178). Ecology, and what has been called “Toulmin evolutionary model”, emerges in the final chapter of that book with the precise aim of being such a conquering perspective. But, surprisingly, that model seems to disproportionately eliminate relativism and the idea of incommensurability that has accompanied it since *The Uses of Argument* (incommensurability between argumentation contexts, incommensurability between paradigms and theories), as the holistic appeal to the ecologist idea of “whole” in *Return to Cosmology*, six years after *Knowing and Acting*, shows and confirms (see Toulmin 1982: 237ff). It is far from being clear, therefore, what kind of solution Toulmin finally proposes in order to overcome both absolutism or foundationalism and relativism. We could ask: precisely what is it that is wrong with “relativism”, in the philosophical, social, cultural and political sense of the concept? Will it not be, to some extent, a great advantage in regard to the defence of the ideal of an open and dialoguing rationality, to the defence of the temporal as opposed to the timeless, of the local and partial as opposed to the global, that is to say, to the defense of a critical reason as opposed to the dogmatism of formal reason? Has this defence not always been the hidden agenda of Toulmin’s philosophy? This is what he tells us, using other words, in *Cosmopolis* (see Toulmin 1992: 175ff) and *Return to Reason* (Toulmin 2001:190-214). Toulmin, as you know, called the postscript of this last book “Living with Uncertainty”.

IV. ON THE NEED FOR A UNIFIED CONCEPT OF REASON AS THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION FOR ARGUMENTATION THEORY (FINAL REMARKS)

Throughout the present paper, I have attempted to defend the thesis that Perelman’s and Toulmin’s argumentation theories must be fundamentally understood as theories on rationality and of rationality, and that they undergo a wide critique of reason in the history of philosophy, particularly, as in the case of *La nouvelle rhétorique*, in the history of rhetoric. The conceptions of these two authors about argumentation are based on philosophical presuppositions or foundations without which, as I have suggested, they would be practically unintelligible. It is indeed impossible to understand them fully if we think of argumentation theory simply as an interdisciplinary field, and, conceptually speaking, as a more or less neutral domain with regard to the various specialized approaches which contribute to it. This does not mean, of course, that the readings provided by this field are not legitimate and pertinent. From my point of view, it means that these readings are, in a sense, narrow and incomplete; and I believe that I have presented this thesis with the required clarity concerning, for example, the impossibility of reaching a final definition of what argumentation is, according to Toulmin, or the concept of auditorium and the idea of an epistemology of argumentative reason in Perelman.

On the other hand, I have presented and analysed a series of fundamental aspects in which the argumentation theories of Perelman and Toulmin, interpreted as theories

on rationality, are essentially in agreement. In both these theories, the delimitation of the field of the respective subject rests upon identical epistemological and metaphysical presuppositions about ordinary language, making the core of philosophical research very similar, especially in contrast with analytical philosophy of the first half of the twentieth century. In particular, the theory of meaning, which analytical philosophers searched for without avail – finally concluding that it was not possible –, appears essentially in both *La nouvelle rhétorique* and *The Uses of Argument*, as an argumentation theory, and as a way through which it is possible to continue doing philosophy after the repeated announcements of its death, for example, by Wittgenstein in *Tractatus* and *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, and by the “English ordinary language philosophy”. Furthermore, and fundamentally, the argumentation theories of both philosophers are based on the same distinction between two essential types of rationality, and, to a certain extent, on the same need to surpass them with a unifying concept of reason: on the one hand, scientific rationality, of a Cartesian nature, configured by contemporary formal logic, which was the cause of the disappearance of rhetoric as a philosophical discipline for many centuries, and which led to an achronic, closed and decontextualised vision of reason; on the other, an argumentative and critical rationality which will cover the wide spectrum of human action and man’s superior interests in society, implying a temporal, open and contextual reason, of which a completely reformulated rhetoric, with new foundations, will be the model by excellence. With special emphasis on Toulmin’s last philosophy, I suggested that the possibility of a unifying concept of reason is not so much a question of presenting a paradigm of rationality and argumentation completely new, but, rather, of presenting a synthesis between scientific rationality and argumentative rationality.

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