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Philosophy & Rhetoric 5 (1972)

Arguers As Lovers

Wayne Brockriede

One introductory premise you must grant me if you are to assent to any of the rest of this essay is that one necessary ingredient for developing a theory or philosophy of argument is the arguer himself. I mean something more than a mere recognition that it is people, after all, who manipulate evidence and claims and follow the rules of transforming premises into conclusions. I maintain that the nature of the people who argue, in all their humanness, is itself an inherent variable in understanding, evaluating, and predicting the processes and outcomes of an argument.

When the logician proclaims triumphantly, as a result of the way he orders his premises, that Socrates is mortal, he does not need to know anything about himself or his respondents (except that they are "rational" and will follow the rules) to know the conclusion is entailed by the premises. But when an arguer maintains a philosophic position, a scientific theory, or a political policy—in short, any substantive proposition—the arguer's response may be influenced by who he is, who the arguer is, and what their relationship is. Perhaps as good a way as any to distinguish the study of logic from the study of argument is to understand that logicians can safely ignore the influence of people on the transaction; arguers cannot.

Such a premise is not often enough taken into account by students of argument. One can easily read many of the landmark studies of argument, for example Bishop Whately's *Elements of Rhetoric*, as well as most twentieth-century textbooks on argumentation, without any need to consider who the arguers are or how they relate to one another. That people are doing the arguing, of course, is assumed throughout, but when the writer on argument gets to his primary business of classifying and explicating evidence, forms of reasoning, fallacies, modes of refutation, and the like, people become irrelevant. One some-

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times reads an explicit statement that this state of affairs is desirable, to avoid falling into the pit of a debasing psychological analysis. Why debasing? What is debasing about realizing that one of the proper studies of any human transaction is a psychological analysis of the people who are doing the transacting?

Among contemporary philosophers who recognize the central role of the arguer are Henry W. Johnstone, Jr. and Maurice Natanson. Natanson's statement in this regard is especially pointed:

Since arguments don't argue themselves, the arguer . . . must be located. Where is he situated? . . . Clearly, the paradigm case for the location of the arguer is our finding him in the process of arguing with another person. . . . To argue, I am indeed compelled to seek out my interlocutor. The arguer assumes his role in at least a dyadic situation.¹

My focus in this essay is on the arguer. I do not deny that a study of logic, of propositions, of symbols, of linguistic analysis, of the formats in which arguments are presented, and of the situations in which they occur should be included in any comprehensive study of argument. I say only that the arguer is also important and that the relationships among the people who argue may afford one useful way of classifying argumentative transactions. I shall look at three stances arguers may take in relation to other arguers, and I shall look at them from the points of view of their attitudes toward one another, their intentions toward one another, and the consequences of those attitudes and intentions for the act itself. The metaphor on which my classification is based is a sexual one.²

One stance may be characterized by the word *rape*. That rape is an apt analogy for many communicative events not ordinarily thought of as argument seems clear enough. Some communicators are not primarily interested in gaining assent to warrantable claims. Instead, they function through power, through an ability to apply psychic and physical sanctions, through rewards and especially punishments, through commands and threats.

People may also attempt to coerce through argument, and sometimes they may succeed. Many argumentative transactions can justly be viewed as rape. Arguers can have the rapist's attitude toward other people, arguers can have an intent to rape, and the argumentative act itself can constitute rape. The argumentative rapist views the relationship as a unilateral one. His attitude toward coarguers is to see them either as objects or as

inferior human beings. So the rapist's intent in a transaction with such people is to manipulate the objects or to violate the victims. The rapist wants to gain or to maintain a position of superiority—whether on the intellectual front of making his case prevail or on the interpersonal front of putting the other person down.

One of the forms argumentative rape may take is for an arguer to structure the situation so he has more power than others. When a poor person's advocate has too little human and material resources to meet the power of the state or the power of a corporation lawyer, the "have-not" has been raped by the "have." When an editor of a letters-to-an-editor column consistently puts letters advocating his position on a controversy in the top left-hand corner of the column where they are most likely to be read and those advocating other positions in the lower right-hand corner where they are least likely to be read, the result is argumentative rape. Perhaps the ultimate instance of this form of rape is censorship, either overt or subtle. The person with too little power to resist censorship has his argument silenced. In any of these situations, he who is not permitted to present his argument or he who is not allowed to present it in the form of his choice has been raped.

But even some argumentative situations structured in game-like ways to give each person an equal opportunity to argue may be termed rape. The adversary system in all its glory manifests rape when one adversary sees another as an object or as an inferior being and when he intends to destroy that opponent. Such a relationship often exists in the courtroom, in a political campaign, in many small-group deliberations, in many business meetings of organizations, and in many legislative chambers. Another place to find the rapist's attitudes and intentions in the adversary situation is the intercollegiate debate. The language is symptomatic: "We killed them last round." "We destroyed them." "We cut them down." In all such situations the rapist's attitude toward coarguers is contempt, his intent is to victimize, and the act itself, given one other ingredient, is rape.

That other ingredient concerns the role of the victim. A coarguer may take any of several stances when confronted with the argument of a would-be rapist. He can be a willing victim, accepting as legitimate the rapist's contempt toward him. Indeed, his own self-contempt may be so great that he may seem to invite the attack and at times even almost to compel it. Or

he can be an unwilling victim, rejecting the contempt and fighting as hard as he can to repel the attack, but eventually lacking the power to prevent it. In either situation, the act of rape is consummated. Or he can win the fight by having enough power to defend himself. Or he can, himself, have the attitude and intent of a rapist, and the outcome may depend on which would-be rapist has the greater power. Or, finally, he may somehow transform the situation into something other than rape by changing the attitudes and intentions of the would-be rapist.

A second stance may be characterized by the word *seduction*. Whereas the rapist conquers by force of argument, the seducer operates through charm or deceit. The seducer's attitude toward coarguers is similar to that of the rapist. He, too, sees the relationship as unilateral. Although he may not be contemptuous of his prey, he is indifferent to the identity and integrity of the other person. Whereas the intent of the rapist is to force assent, the seducer tries to charm or trick his victim into assent.

What characterizes argumentative seduction? One form is fallacies. Such devices as ignoring the question, begging the question, the red herring, appeals to ignorance or to prejudice all aim at securing assent through seductive discourse that only appears to establish warrantable claims. Misuses of evidence also imply the attitudes and intentions of seduction. Such practices as withholding information, quoting out of context, misquoting an authority or a witness, misrepresenting a factual situation, drawing unwarranted conclusions from evidence also seek assent through seductive uses of argument. Many of rhetoric's hallowed categories, even when functioning with no conscious attempt to deceive, may have seductive effects. The *pathos* and *ethos* of a discourse, the image of the arguer, his style, and his delivery may bedazzle a coarguer into giving his assent in a manner quite analogous to the act of seduction. In any of these instances, the seducing arguer has lulled his respondent into lowering his guard through the argumentative equivalent of soft lights.

Seducers are especially plentiful in politics and advertising, although not all politicians and not all advertisers are seducers. In much political discourse and in much advertising copy, though, the form is argument and the goal is assent—not free assent, however, but the tricked assent of seduction. The Johnson Administration's arguments to justify having sent U. S. troops into the Dominican Republic is an instructive instance

of a political use of seductive argument. One can, no doubt, think of many advertisements that fall into the category of argument by seduction.

The attitude of the would-be seducer is indifference to the humanness of the other person. That is, the seducer tries to eliminate or limit his coarguer's most distinctively human power, the right to choose with an understanding of the consequences and implications of available options. The intent of the would-be seducer is to win by beguilement. Whether the seduction is consummated, though, also depends on the role of the presumed victim. A coarguer may take any of several stances when confronted with the argument of a would-be seducer. He can be a willing victim, accepting as legitimate the seducer's indifference, perhaps even inviting or almost compelling the seduction. Or he can be an unwilling victim, trying hard to discover the tricks of the seducer but lacking the ability to do so. In either situation, seduction is consummated. Or he can win the contest by having enough critical skills to discover and reject the ploys of the seducer. Or he can, himself, have the attitudes and intentions of a seducer, and the argument might then best be characterized as reciprocal seduction. Or, finally, he can transform the situation into something other than seduction by changing the attitudes and intentions of the would-be seducer.

A third argumentative stance may be characterized by the word *love*. Lovers differ radically from rapists and seducers in their attitudes toward coarguers. Whereas the rapist and seducer see a unilateral relationship toward the victim, the lover and seducer look at the other person as an object or as a victim, the lover looks at the other person as a person.

Lovers also differ radically from rapists and seducers in their intentions. Whereas the rapist and seducer seek to establish a position of superior power, the lover wants power parity. Whereas the rapist and seducer argue against an adversary or an opponent, the lover argues with his peer and is willing to risk his very self in his attempt to establish a bilateral relationship. Put another way, the lover-arguer cares enough about what he is arguing about to feel the tensions of risking his self, but he cares enough about his coarguers to avoid the fanaticism that might induce him to commit rape or seduction.

Perhaps in its pure form, argumentative love is a rare commodity, but it is not a null category. Lovers and friends can

show the attitudes and intentions of love in intimate dialogue. The stance of love is also at least an ideal in two other kinds of argument.

One of these is philosophic argument. The kind of argument Johnstone and Natanson discuss could be called argument with love. Perhaps the etymology of the word "philosopher" is significant. Because a philosopher is a lover of wisdom, perhaps he is also a lover of other people who seek it.

Several characteristics Johnstone and Natanson identify as necessary for philosophic argument are also necessary for argument with love. One of these is that the philosopher asks for free assent to propositions. He is not content to force assent or to gain it through trickery. As Johnstone puts it:

No philosopher worthy of the name would wish to secure assent to his position through techniques concealed from his audience. One reason for this is that it would be impossible for him to evaluate such assent philosophically.³

No lover worthy of the name would wish to secure assent through argument unless that assent were knowingly and freely given.

A related characteristic is that a philosophic arguer wants to have only those points of view prevail that can do so in the face of the most stringent criticism possible. Johnstone, again, makes this point strikingly:

No philosophic purpose is served when a point of view prevails only because its author has silenced criticism of it through the use of techniques that are effective because they are concealed from the critics.⁴

The philosophic arguer, and other arguers in the lover paradigm, want their existential truths established in an open environment.

Another characteristic is the philosopher's recognition that his arguments transcend intellectual propositions to reach his very selfhood. Natanson develops this position:

When I truly risk myself in arguing I open myself to the viable possibility that the consequence of an argument may be to make me see something of the structure of my immediate world. . . . When an argument hurts me, cuts me, or cleanses and liberates me it is not because a par-

ticular . . . segment of my world view is shaken up or jured free but because I am wounded or enlivened—I in my particularity.⁵

Natanson's philosopher and other lovers cannot argue with others without risking self and without engaging the self of the other person. As Natanson continues,

Risk is established when . . . his immediate life of feeling and sensibility is challenged and made open to challenge. Argumentation involves the constitution of that total world of which the formation of arguments is but a surface part.⁶

The ideal philosopher argues with love. He asks for free assent, advancing arguments openly and asking for open criticism. He risks his own self and asks for that same risk from coarguers. He seeks a bilateral relationship with human beings.

Argument with love is at least an ideal of a second kind of argument, scientific argument. If one views science as infallible, the idea that scientists argue at all is a strange one. That concept implies that scientists merely discover Truth and then explicate it for their inferiors. Since the respondent is presumed to have no choice but to accept that Truth, such a relationship implies the forced assent of rape. Warren Weaver has a different view of science:

If one looks deeply within [science], . . . instead of finally reaching permanence and perfection, what does one find? He finds unresolved and apparently unresolvable disagreement among scientists concerning the relationship of scientific thought to reality. . . . He finds that the explanations of science have utility, but that they do in sober fact not explain. He finds the old external appearance of inevitability completely vanished, for he discovers a charming capriciousness in all the individual events. . . . For those who have been deluded . . . into thinking of science as a relentless, all-conquering intellectual force, armed with finality and perfection, the limitations treated here would have to be considered as damaging imperfections. . . . I do not myself think of them as unpleasant imperfections, but rather as the blemishes which make our mistress all the more endearing.⁷

Weaver concludes his essay by urging that we bring

science back into life as a human enterprise, an enterprise that has at its core the uncertainty, the flexibility, the subjectivity, the sweet unreasonableness, the dependence upon creativity and faith which permit it, when properly understood, to take its place as a friendly and understanding companion to all the rest of life.⁸

I interpret these statements as putting science within the realm of argument but outside the realm of rape. If science deals with matters that are fundamentally uncertain, the scientist must argue his position but cannot appropriately demand acquiescence.

But the scientist-arguer also must place himself outside the realm of seduction. To paraphrase Johnstone, "No scientist worthy of the name would wish to secure assent to his position through techniques concealed from his audience." Like the philosopher, the scientist also seeks free assent and is open in his arguments. As he designs a research project, the scientist takes pains to give his claims every chance of being proved wrong. He employs a rigorous procedure of collecting data, and he exposes that procedure to the criticism of others. He makes inferences by means of warrants colleagues are willing to accept, and he makes the steps in his reasoning process visible for all to see. He addresses other scientists not as a superior being to inferiors, but as peer to peer. In using an open way of arguing he makes an implicit invitation for criticism. His relationship with his colleagues is bilateral.

Not all philosophers and not all scientists, of course, are lovers. But when they best serve the functions of philosophy and science, they argue as lovers.

Four concluding observations may be useful. First, these classes of argumentative transactions are neither all-inclusive nor mutually exclusive. Someone may want to pursue the sexual metaphor and investigate the implications for argumentation of such stances as romance, infatuation, prostitution, and masturbation. Some situations, no doubt, have elements of all three of the paradigms considered in this essay; an arguer may have some of the impulses of a lover and also some of the tendencies of a seducer or rapist. Furthermore, the situation may not be what it appears to be. The arguer may appear to be a rapist in using a strategy of confrontation and yet be a lover in his desire for the respondent to make a free choice in the decision with

which he is existentially confronted. Finally, one party in a transaction may see a situation as fitting one paradigm, while another person may see it as another. What seems love to one person may seem seduction or rape to another.

Second, one rather curious, apparent conclusion to be drawn from the examples I have used is that people who are engaged in metacommunication, in talking about communication, whether they be philosophers or scientists, can behave as lovers, but people engaged in the processes of decision-making and persuasion, e.g., politicians and advertisers, must either rape or seduce. Put another way, the question is this: Must rhetorical argumentation, as opposed to meta-argument, necessarily be relegated to nonlovers? When power is the dominant concern of the arguers, whether the power of an idea or interpersonal power, are rape and seduction probable if not inevitable?

Third, all three stances may be used to work out the "truth" of a situation. Robert L. Scott argues persuasively that

truth is not prior and immutable but is contingent. Insofar as we can say that there is truth in human affairs, it is in time; it can be the result of a process of interaction at a given moment. Thus rhetoric may be viewed not as a matter of giving effectiveness to truth but of creating truth.⁹

If truth is "epistemic," as Scott argues that it is, then it emerges out of the transaction of the arguers. How one arguer relates to others is an important variable. The epistemic truth of a transaction may be determined unilaterally by the argument of force-achieved bilaterally through the free assent of lovers.

Fourth, argument has another function as important as any intellectual creation of the "truth" of a situation, and that is the personal function of influencing the fulfillment and growth of the selves of the people in the transaction. Natananson underscores the importance of the personal function of argument:

The philosopher is trying to uncover something about himself. Philosophical activity is self-discovery. Philosophical reports, spoken or written, are self-reports first, arguments later. . . . Even if the argument is chronologically first, its probing is a matter of uncovering its original intent in relationship to the self that intended it. The self that seeks an alter ego, the philosopher who looks for an interlocutor, the teacher in quest of his student—all are

involved in a primary situation in which rhetoric and philosophy are integral.¹⁰

Only the lover can achieve this personal goal of argument. Neither the rapist nor the seducer invests his self in the argument. Professor Johnstone explains why:

The command, the subliminal suggestion, the hypnotic pass, avoid the risk of dealing with the self. The cajoler, the advertiser, and the hypnotist not only operate on the basis that "nobody is at home" in the body of the interlocutor but also that they are not even "at home" themselves. One who wheedles instead of arguing does not himself quite deserve to be treated as a person, and neither does one who secures the assent of another when the latter has his guard down or is looking the other way.¹¹

Only those argumentative transactions in which all parties have their selves engaged can result in a fully human interaction. The rapist and the seducer neither respect themselves as risk-taking, choice-making beings, nor do they attribute these human capacities to their coarguers. What Douglas Ehninger says can be the consequence of an argument is available only to lovers:

To enter upon argument with a full understanding of the commitments which as a method it entails is to experience that alchemic moment of transformation in which . . . , in the language of Buber, the *Ich-Es* is replaced by the *Ich-Du*; when the "other," no longer regarded as an "object" to be manipulated, is endowed with those qualities of "freedom" and "responsibility" that change the "individual" as "thing" into the "person" as "not-thing."¹²

Since only lovers risk selves, only lovers can grow, and only lovers can together achieve a genuine interaction.

NOTES

¹ "The Claims of Immediacy," in *Philosophy, Rhetoric and Argumentation*, ed. Maurice Natanson and Henry W. Johnstone, Jr. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1965), pp. 10-11.

² Although I arrived independently at the rape-seduction-love paradigms of relationships among arguers, one of my colleagues, Ronald J. Burnett, reminded me that this distinction had been made earlier and used in a similar place: Oscar L. Brownstein in the introduction to his analysis of "Plato's *Plaedru*: Dialectic as the Genuine Art of Speaking," *O/S*, LI (December 1965), 394-395. Indeed, the three speeches by Socrates aptly illustrate the

three kinds of interpersonal relations among arguers discussed in the remainder of this essay.

³ "Persuasion and Validity in Philosophy," in *Philosophy, Rhetoric and Argumentation*, p. 141.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ "The Claims of Immediacy," pp. 15-16.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁷ "The Imperfections of Science," in *Science: Method and Meaning*, ed. Samuel Rappaport and Helen Wright (New York: Washington Square Press, 1964), p. 80.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁹ "On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic," *Central States Speech Journal*, XVIII (February 1967), 13.

¹⁰ "Rhetoric and Philosophical Argumentation," in *Philosophy, Rhetoric and Argumentation*, p. 158.

¹¹ "Some Reflections on Argumentation," in *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹² "Argument as Method: Its Nature, Its Limitations and Its Use," *Speech Monographs*, XXXVIII (June 1970), 100-110.