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Debate for Better or Worse: Hostility in Public Debate

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> Well, now, sir, I put it to yo', being a parson, and having been in th' preaching line, and having had to try and bring folk o'er to what yo' thought was a right way o' thinking – did yo' begin by calling 'em fools and such like, or didn't yo' rather give such kind words at first, to make 'em ready for to listen and be convinced, if they could; and in yo'r preaching, did yo' stop every now and then, and say, half to them and half to yo'rsel', "But yo're such pack of fools, that I've a strong notion it's no use my trying to put sense into yo'?"
>
> *Elizabeth Gaskell: North and South, chapter 28*

Many regard *debate* as a genre that is by nature hostile, a kind of public quarrel between adversaries who attack each other and seek victory by any means. In this view, debate is disdained as a second-rate format for making decisions in the public sphere.

The purpose of this article is to challenge such a view of debate. Instead, I look at debate as a potentially rational form of communication that is a hallmark of political argument in a democratic society. In particular, I will discuss the relation between debate on the one hand and *discussion* or *critical dialogue* on the other, and argue that we should abandon the view of debate as an intrinsically inferior form of argumentation than discussion.

The Central Place of Debate in Rhetoric

The discipline of rhetoric is predominantly seen as concerned with *set speeches*—well-prepared addresses delivered by a speaker within an allotted length of time. Classical rhetoric is generally regarded as a study of communication entirely devoted to *oratio* as its subject matter—as distinct from *sermo*, which refers to spontaneous quotidian discourse, and philosophical *dialogue*, as dealt with by dialectics.[1] The entire conceptual system of classical rhetoric, its traditional system, reflects the attachment of the discipline to oratory: The five *rhetorices partes*, the subdisciplines of rhetoric, are derived from the five stages of the speaker's task, just as the classical five-part speech outline is based on practical forensic speeches, etc.

In the course of time, rhetoric has widened its field of activity, including many other text types and communication situations than oral one-way communication.[2] Modern rhetoric defines itself, in various formulations and interpretations, in continuity with the classical notion of *persuasio*, and rhetoric has become a widely ramified discipline encompassing all kinds of communication that are persuasive or involve a persuasive component. In Denmark, Jørgen Fafner has spoken for such a modern, comprehensive rhetoric: "Whenever we wish to present a matter to our fellow human beings and involve them in it, there is … a rhetorical

1. Quintilian, II.xx.7: "Itaque cum duo sint genera orationis, altera perpetua, quae rhetorice dicitur, altera concisa, quae dialectice … " (Consequently, since there are two kinds of speech, the continuous which is called rhetoric, and the concise which is called dialectic…); XII.x.43: "Nam mihi aliam quondam videtur habere naturam sermo vulgaris, aliam viri eloquentis oratio" (For the common language of every day seems to me to be of a different character from the style of an eloquent speaker.) (The Loeb translation by Butler.) Cf. Pinborg 1963, 7.
2. In the Middle Ages, for example, rhetoric was transplanted and became a purely written practice in the art of letter-writing, *ars dictaminis* (cf. Fafner 1982, 150ff.). The expansion of the domain of rhetoric from the traditional doctrine of *oratio* is also in evidence, for example, in Perelman's "New Rhetoric", which is primarily based on written texts and makes clear that even philosophical texts are subject to rhetorical principles and employs rhetorical forms of argument—cf. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969.

and hence a purposeful (intentional) situation" (Fafner 1977, 45). The definition of rhetoric as purposeful speech and writing posits rhetoric as a general communication discipline, a doctrine of exposition that applies to texts of any kind, regardless of channel, genre and form of interaction.

However, the theoretical and epistemological considerations regarding the scope and ubiquity of rhetoric in real-life communication do not change the fact that speeches are still of central significance in modern rhetoric. Fafner arrives at his comprehensive definition of rhetoric by distinguishing between *persuasio* in a *broad* and a *narrow* sense (1977, 38ff.). He finds it most natural to reserve the term *persuasio* for the narrow conception, and substitutes the broad sense of the term with the notion of intentionality. This implies a new interpretation which is also an *expansion* of the classical demarcation of rhetoric; but there is no displacement of how the foundation of the discipline is seen. At its center we find communication that is persuasive in the narrow sense of the word, i.e., situations where a sender, by means of persuasion seeks to resolve a *divergence of opinion*. Centered around this core we find texts and communicative forms that are more or less persuasive, with gradual transitions between them; at the outer rim there is communication which is non-persuasive but intentional, i.e., where the intention may be, for example, to explain a given matter without the interlocutor holding an opposing opinion.

Thus, in the spectrum of rhetorical texts political speeches, now as before, are the epitome of rhetorical address. The core concept of the discipline, *persuasion*, is fully in evidence here and may be studied with regard to all the traditional subsections of the discipline.[3]

The extent to which rhetoric is equated with set speeches means that there is a tendency to forget the speech genre *debate*, despite its being just as narrowly persuasive. This bias is also evident

3. That political speeches may be regarded as the dominant "high rhetorical" genre is also evident in the numerous analyses of past and present speeches that account for a great deal of the academic literature and curricula in rhetoric. Likewise, public speaking is a favored form of practical activity in the curricula.

in the way classical rhetoric is seen as a doctrine of *oratio* and one-way communication, where one speaker addresses a crowd of listeners. This view of classical rhetoric is based on a very superficial view. In fact rhetorical address was nearly always embedded in a context of actual debate. It holds for political as well as forensic speeches that they were inserted in a process of *speech—counter speech*; on civil cases this pattern was even duplicated to indictment – defense – reply – rejoinder (Hansen 1969, 18). Among the literary speeches in Thucydides we find paired speeches that illustrate political debate as it unfolded in the popular assembly. However, we mostly only have one of the classical debate speeches preserved (this is the case, for example, of the forensic speeches of Lysias), and this has probably contributed to the widespread view that associates rhetoric with monological persuasion.

That we should as a rule see speeches as embedded in a debate frame is particularly evident in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. In his three first chapters about the nature and status of rhetoric as a discipline, he gives priority to the *political* genre, not the forensic, which the textbooks of his time are far too preoccupied with, since political oratory "is a nobler business, and fitter for a citizen, than that which concerns the relations of private citizens" (1354). Like dialectics, rhetoric "draws opposite conclusions" (1355a), but unlike dialectic, rhetoric is concerned with *political decision processes in public assemblies* where ordinary citizens meet: "The duty of rhetoric is to deal with such matters as we deliberate upon without arts or systems to guide us, in the hearing of persons who cannot take in at a glance a complicated argument, or follow a long chain of reasoning. The subjects of our deliberation are such as seem to present us with alternative possibilities" (1357a). The conception of rhetoric that underlies Aristotle's view of the rhetorical audience is debatable, but the point of these pronouncements is to underscore rhetoric's nature as doctrine concerned with decisions on moot public issues, based on the principle that an issue always has (at least) two sides. The rhetorical text always relates to an opposing view, where one opinion confronts the other; the underlying idea is that decisions

must be made on the basis of partial pleas that are tested and weighed against each other. This is implied by the term chosen for political rhetoric: the *deliberative* genre (Gr. *genos symbouleutikon*, Lat. *genus deliberativum*). Political rhetoric is a *debating* activity in this broad sense of the word, whether practiced in a formal debate situation where opponents take turns speaking, or in one-way communication where the speaker relates to an absent opponent or to listeners holding opposing views, regardless of whether the address be oral or written.

Debate As a Speech Genre

Today we use the word debate as an umbrella term for argumentative texts of multiple kinds. We tend to talk about contributions to *public debate* whether we refer to an editorial in a newspaper, a book review, an investigative TV documentary about Greenpeace or a citizen's speech at a townhall meeting. Some scholarly textbooks consider such artefacts to belong to the *debate* genre in the same broad sense.[4]

The term has a narrower meaning when applied to *debate as a speech genre*—that is to say, a *formalized* or *moderated* debate. This is a traditional text type characteristic of political argument in Western democracies, with roots in the Athenian popular assemblies (as noted above). In our time this genre is typical of legislation in parliaments and of more open forms in townhall-type debates, in particular during election campaigns.

In a parallel process, debate has been developed and institutionalized in education, particularly in Britain and the US, where debate contests are common in schools and colleges. Here, the genre is called *educational debate*, or—somewhat confusingly—*forensic debate*, that is, debates patterned after court proceedings, even if their subject matter is political: the claim in thedse debates is a policy proposal which the two opposite sides

4. Togeby 1977, 118-119, uses this term in his taxonomy of texts, distinguishing *debating* texts from *informative* and *regulatory* texts.

then argue for or against (*policy advocacy*).[5] In accordance with a set of predetermined rules a 'winner' is then named by a panel or an arbiter, often the teacher of the class.

The traditions of public political debate and of academic competitive debating build on a shared basic situation. The constitutive features of what we might call the *forensic debate format* may be stated based on Jeffery J. Auer's description of the elements of the debate genre. He offers the following definition involving five generally accepted criteria, all evolved in the American debate tradition:

> *A debate is (1) a confrontation, (2) in equal and adequate time, (3) of matched contestants, (4) on a stated proposition, (5) to gain an audience decision.* Each of these elements is essential if we are to have a true debate (Auer 1962, 146).

Auer's definition contains the minimal requirements for a good debate, hence it is *prescriptive*. Normativity is evident in criteria 2 and 3 with their requirements for "adequate" time and "matched" contestants. If we disregard these, we can transform it to the following *descriptive* definition of the speech genre 'forensic debate': *A debate is 1) a confrontation 2) according to certain formal rules 3) of parties arguing for divergent standpoints 4) on a given theme 5) to gain an audience decision.*

This compressed definition calls for some comments regarding the individual points.

On (1): The forensic *confrontation* implies that a debate always has a disagreement as its starting point and involves a clash of the opposite views that exist regarding an issue. This point always implies that the disagreeing parties are able, to a certain extent, to address each other, for example by scrutinizing the opponent's arguments and answering attacks.

On (2): The confrontation typically involves two *parties*, each of which may consist of a single debater or a team, and where

5. Sproule 1980, 363-364: "*Forensic debate* is customarily defined as a situation of dispute in which two sides argue the merits of a stated proposition: one side supporting the proposition, the other opposing it."

each party argues for its own proposition regarding the issue. More parties than two may also be involved.

On (3): The *formal rules* primarily concern the administration of the right to speak. At the least, a predetermined distribution of speaking time is required, preferably equal time, as emphasized in Auer's criteria. This implies that a debate will always need to have a *moderator* who administers the right to speak and enforces any further formal rules that may apply, for example that a debater must answer if the opponent has the right to question him. Also, debaters may be subjected to directions regarding their actual arguments, such as a prohibition against introducing irrelevant content, etc.

On (4): Prototypical debates have one theme, called the *proposition* or *resolution*, stated in a way that both parties know and have accepted. Competitive college debates have elaborate rules for the formulation of the debate proposition, as well as with regard to the roles assigned to the debaters and their turn taking. (See, e.g., Goodwin 1982, 61-66.) In public debates the theme will often be a broad topic, divided into subsidiary issues. The theme will typically be advocative, i.e., it will concern *what to do*. Whether or not the theme is stated in advocative terms, it has a directive purpose, and the argumentation is aimed at societal practice. The nature of the theme brings us to the next point:

On (5): On closer inspection, the description of the purpose of the debate involves two constitutive features: The argumentation by the debaters is addressed to a *decision*-making *audience*. The speakers are not meant to persuade each other; instead, both seek to gain adherence to their standpoints regarding the issue at hand from the listening third party, the audience. The decision aimed at may take the form of a direct manifestation (e.g., a vote taken in the audience), or it may consist in auditors making up their minds about the issue—with the practical consequences such a resolution may be expected to have.

As perhaps the most famous example of the tradition of public debates in modern times we may point to the *Lincoln-Douglas debates*, described in David Zarefsky's work (1990) that bears the telling subtitle *In the Crucible of Public debate*. These seven

debates were held in various venues in Illinois during the campaign for the election to the US Senate in 1858. The overall topic was slavery in the territories; each debates lasted three hours and drew audiences of 15,000-20,000 people—outdoors, on the prairie! Zarefsky shows, in his painstaking argument analysis, that the glorification the debates have enjoyed in posterity is partly undeserved. Both debaters made use of wild accusations (conspiracy arguments), and the debates were not a simple showdown between good and evil. But Zarefsky also finds much in them to emulate. In conclusion, he says, among other things: "They provide a valuable lesson in the 'micromanagement' of value conflicts under which public argument is meaningful and successful. They illustrate successful patterns of argument and refutation" (1990, 244).

TV: A Modern Debate Forum

In Denmark there is not a strong tradition for the use of forensic-style debate as a pedagogical practice. Also, owing to the dwindling membership of political parties during the last decades and a failing interest in campaign rallies, the townhall-style debate has lost its former importance. But forensic-style debate has had a renaissance in the electronic media, first radio and now above all TV.

The great variety of existing TV debate programs and the numerous experiments with the format and execution of debates show that the genre is alive and being adapted to the medium. TV debates based on the forensic concept may be divided in two main groups, which I will call the *simple* and the *complex* debate.

In *simple* debates there are just two debaters and a moderator. The issue is usually one of topical interest covered by the media. These programs are relatively short (15-30 minutes), and there are typically few rules. The journalist stays in the background and has the primary function of seeing to it that the debaters get about equal talking time, as well as intervening when they talk over each

other, and occasionally asking questions when an aspect of the issue seems to have been exhausted.

Complex debates are large-format events involving several debaters, inserted video clips and interviews, statistical information, questions from viewers, etc. They tend to be longer (usually 45-60 minutes). In this category we may distinguish between programs following a strict journalistic plan where moderators see to it that debaters' argumentation stays on topic, and more traditional debate formats that follow many of the principles known from competitive educational debates; such debates are highly formalized, but debaters still have free reins regarding how to fill the frames (cf. Jørgensen et al. 1994, 341ff.).

The way the debate genre has evolved, in particular because of the influence of TV, has generated widespread concerns regarding the state of democracy (cf. Jørgensen et al. 1994, Ch. 22). There seems to be a great distance between, on the one hand, the ideal of a deliberative activity that involves citizens in a society's concerns, securing a basis for informed decisions through multilateral, thorough argumentation, and on the other hand debates such as actually broadcast on TV. These often seem superficial and aimed at entertainment value, while in-depth argumentation about grave and important political issues has low priority. For example, the veteran journalist Walter Cronkite, interviewed on Danish TV news on August 15, 1993, declared:

> Our use of television for political campaigns has been absolutely disastrous to democracy. Here is this magnificent medium to carry meaningful debate on the serious subjects under consideration by the government to the people, and it is not used in that fashion at all. Our debates are a laugh. They are not debates at all, they are shows.

A similar assessment of the decline of political argumentation caused by TV had already been expressed by J. Jeffery Auer (1962), who, in the volume *The Great Debates* about the Kennedy-Nixon debates in 1960, dismissed these televised debates between presidential candidates, the first of their kind, as "the Counterfeit Debates".

In Denmark, the discussion about the deterioration of political debate on TV has intensified, in particular because of a perceived increase in hostility. 'Mudslinging' became a preferred term during the election campaign of 1994. The use of this word reflects a disenchantment with politics and a widespread dissatisfaction with the quality level of debates, which allegedly makes political argument look like public bickering in a sandbox. The general talk about mudslinging was amplified after the change of government in 1993, where media and politicians themselves, acting together, created a fixation on the persons of the Prime Minister, Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, and the leading figure of the opposition, Uffe Ellemann-Jensen. During the time leading up to the next election campaign a new phenomenon emerged, reflecting the Americanization of political journalism on TV: The major televised debates between these two figures carried suggestive titles like *Summit Meeting* and *Duel*.[6] In particular the latter of these two programs drew reactions deploring the low level of the debate, where the two leaders talked over each other and addressed each other with general contempt to a rare degree.[7]

The trend towards hard-hitting debate may be considered an instantiation of how politics adapts to the TV medium. Seen in that optic, the idea of meaningful deliberative discourse addressed to an active, decision-making public is undermined by the medium's need for spectacular entertainment for a passive audience.[8]

But there is also another way of viewing the matter. It sees the rhetorical model of debate as an illusion, an idealistic masking of a political reality whose very nature involves propaganda and manipulation. The nature of debate is to enforce one's views on the public. The very etymology of the word (derived from French, *débattre*, the core meaning of which is to exchange blows) is

6. Thus the two national channels TV2 on Nov. 9, 1993, and DR on May 18, 1994, respectively.
7. On the general trend in the US toward hostility in politivcal debate, see, e.g., Jamieson 1988, 49.
8. The impact of the media is discussed from various perspectives by Swanson, Bennett, Sigelman, Zarefsky and Gurevitch & Ravoori in their articles from 1992 under the heading *Are Media News Spectacles Perverting Our Political Processes.*

telling according to this view, and when, for example, TV debates tend towards hostility, they simply expose the inherent essence of debate. Let us consider this conception of debate more closely.

Debate Defined as Hostile Argumentation

In descriptions of debate it is common to compare it with the related concept of *discussion*. In ordinary language both words have rather vague denotations and may be used synonymously (Sandersen 1995). We may, for example, use the term a "heated discussion" of something that might as well be called a quarrel, and by a "sober debate" we mean the opposite of a quarrel. We have all heard children ask: "Why are you quarreling?", to which parents will reply: "We are not quarrelling, we are discussing!"

In academic texts there is a distinction between the two terms debate and discussion, which are seen as two main types of argumentative communication, but the two terms may be defined very differently. One widespread view of the relation between them is formulated by the discourse theorist Klaus Kjøller, who offers these stipulative definition in his Danish textbook on argumentation:

> *Discussion* is what we have when the parties are driven by a wish to come to agreement about the truth or about what solution to a problem is best for all those involved. Considerations of power and prestige play no part in a discussion.
>
> By contrast, the purpose in *debate* is to win a contest about who can maintain a pre-conceived standpoint as well as possible, and consequently wiping the floor with the opponent as far as possible; while discussion requires each participant to consider all the arguments advanced with as little prejudice as possible, so that they will often express uncertainty or ignorance and change their standpoints as the discussion unfolds, in debate it will be comparable to a knock-out if a debater yields to the opponent's best arguments (1980, 25-26).

Here, Kjøller lets the main difference between the two concepts depend on the debaters' attitudes toward each other and to the

act of argumentation in which they are involved. Discussion is a peaceful speech act. Debate is hostile. And while discussants are willing to change views, debaters will stand immovably by theirs.

Also note that Kjøller describes debate and discussion as *forms* of argumentation, i.e., ways of arguing, rather than as concepts that refer to different text types and communication situations. Thus, one cannot analyze the communication situation in order to formally determine whether, for example, an argumentative dialogue on TV between two politicians about a major construction project is a debate or a discussion; it depends on how they argue and relate to the situation and to each other.

This, for one thing, makes the definitions somewhat unmanageable for textual analysis. Also, it is a problem that the forms of argumentation are described in terms with different valences, one positive, the other negative. This means that the stipulative definitions will automatically be understood as persuasive definitions: Discussion is *good* argumentation and is viewed in an *idealistic* light, debate is *bad* argumentation and is viewed *realistically*. Given these definitions, it is impossible to discuss in an underhanded way, and equally impossible to debate honestly. I find this position unreasonable; it implies that there is *in principle* no difference between the genres debate and discussion: The argumentation in a debate will have to be evaluated with a yardstick made for discussion and becomes legitimate only if it observes the normative requirements of discussion.

This criticism of Kjøller's definitions rests on the assumption that debate and discussion are concepts referring to communication situations of different kinds, hence with different success criteria and normative standards. Such a distinction has a long scholarly tradition behind it; it leads us back to the classical disciplinary boundary between rhetoric and dialectic. In fact, Kjøller's characterizations of debate and discussion involve elements that point back to the fundamental differences traditionally emphasized, such as quest for 'truth' in the case of discussion and 'contest' in the case of debate.

Debate between Rhetoric and Dialectic

In the classical system of disciplines there is a sharp distinction between the approach to argumentation in rhetoric and dialectic. Rhetoric is typically concerned with political speech in public assemblies, dialectic with philosophical dialogue. As Fafner has it: "Dialectic is essentially the art of arriving at truth dialogically through a series of logical distinctions" (1982, 61, note 1). It is on this basic understanding that dialectic was founded as a discipline by Socrates/Plato and Aristotle. The modern notion of "logic" is usually invoked to explain this definition, but from an Aristotelian point of view that is an oversimplification.[9] The distinctive features that constitute the classical difference between rhetoric and dialectic may be understood as in the following table, drawn from Josef Klein (1991, 356):

9. The explanation offered by Fafner applies if "logic" is taken in roughly the same sense as "informal logic". However, it is downright misleading when Kjørup (1993, 34) identifies the Aristotelian concept of dialectic with "formal logic". Aristotle distinguished between three forms of reasoning. "Aristotle recognizes three levels of reasoning: scientific demonstration (discussed in the *Prior* and *Posterior analytics*), dialectic or the art of discussion by question and answer (discussed in the *Topics*), and rhetoric, the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject. Dialectic and rhetoric both employ for the most part argument from probabilities rather than from certainties and differ in the subjects they cover, in their literary form, and in the fact that rhetoric may also make use of proof by ethos and pathos." (Kennedy 1963, 96). Aristotle's disciplinary boundaries are drawn in a very complicated manner: "Aristotle divided intellectual activity into (1) theoretical sciences, which include mathematics, physics, and theology; (2) practical arts, including politics and ethics; and (3) productive arts, including the fine arts, the crafts, and also medicine. In addition, there are (4) methods or tools (*organa*), applicable to all study but with no distinct subject matter of their own. Logic and dialectic belong in that class … rhetoric is a mixture. It is partly a method (like dialectic) with no necessary subject of its own but partly a practical art derived from ethics and politics on the basis of its conventional uses" (Kennedy 1991, Introduction, 12).

		Domain		
		Rhetoric	*Televised political discussion*	*Dialectic*
Parameter	*Form of address*	Set speeches	Discourse and counter-discourse in quick, often spontaneous turn-taking	
	Communicative configuration	Trialogical		Dialogical
	Addressee	Audience		Interlocutor
	Level of validity	Plausibility/Probability		Truth
	Purpose	Defeat of opponent by persuasion of audience		Consensus with interlocutor through arrival at truth

As is evident from the table, Klein considers political TV debates (which he calls "discussions") to belong, in most respects, to the disciplinary domain of rhetoric. But their assignment to this category relies on the classical disciplinary boundaries. Are they at all valid today?

Applying a modern view of rhetoric, one might well doubt that. Thus, Fafner asserts, under the heading "The dialogical nature of *persuasio*":

> The ancient theory of *persuasio* nearly always assumed a state of one-way communication. It was more concerned with "talking *to*" than "talking *with*". The art of moving in dialogue towards grasping the truth through an unpacking of concepts was a matter for *dialectics*.
>
> The distinction between "rhetoric" and "dialectic" no longer has validity. What newer conceptions of rhetoric assert is precisely that persuasion is a reciprocal process. Whoever want to convince, persuade and move others must be willing to let themselves be convinced, persuaded, moved. Whoever wants to talk must also be able to listen. The persuasion only becomes mutual when the dialogue partners "persuade" each other and jointly reach the truest solutions.
>
> By thus choosing dialogue as the fundamental rhetorical situation we arrive at a concept of greater general applicability than *persuasio*/*peithō*. It is the concept of *pistis* (Lat. *fides*), which may be considered as the goal of *peithō* and at the same time its condition,

> and which therefore is posited by some as the real key notion in rhetoric. … In a broader context it may simply be translated as faith, trust or confidence as a condition for the responsiveness that may pass through all the stages from merely being on speaking terms to a total accord. *Pistis* refers to the necessary conditions—biological, psychological, social and linguistic—for any rhetorical situation (1977, 43).

With this description of the cognitive basis of rhetoric, Fafner posits a rhetoric that is more than a mere effect-oriented persuasion technique or art of manipulation: With the principles of the dialogical nature of *persuasio* and *dialogue as the fundamental rhetorical situation*, rhetoric is placed at a distance from the kind of propagandistic persuasion that is monological and asymmetric.[10]

Fafner does not mean to say that dialogue is always better than speeches because these are easier to abuse. The point is that a speech is only successful when conceived as underlying dialogue between parties who have a free choice, and rhetoric envisages an ideal situation of this kind. The formal feature of interaction is of less importance: Good persuasion may be practiced in one-way communication, just as two-way communication may deteriorate to monologues in disguise, where the parties shout at each other in opposite directions.

When Fafner says that the distinction between rhetoric and dialectic no longer has validity, I understand that as a refutation of a rigoristic distinction between, on the one side, rhetoric as a purely effect-oriented study of persuasion, and on the other a truth-seeking, consensus-oriented dialectic. This implies a call for an opening between the two mutual arch enemies, a recognition that there is a graded spectrum between the two classical disciplines, and for recognizing a continuum of texts and communication situations between the narrowly persuasive speech and the philosophical dialogue.

The revisionist view of the conflict between rhetoric and philosophy is telling for the renaissance of rhetoric that occurred

10. The relation between rhetoric and propaganda is further discussed in Fafner 1985.

in the 20th century.[11] The rapprochement between the disciplines has made itself visible, among other places, in the development of argumentation theory, a field that has manifested itself as an independent domain of research under the influence of Perelman and Toulmin in particular. Scholars from many different fields identify themselves as representing this new argumentation-centered discipline, in particular rhetoricians and informal logicians. Coming from a philosophical background, a new dialectical group of non-formal logicians has emerged. Among these, it is worth mentioning the duo consisting of Frans H. van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst, of the University of Amsterdam, who label their doctrine in argumentation studies *Pragma-Dialectics*, and Douglas Walton, first at University of Winnipeg, then at the University of Windsor, whose approach to the discipline resembles theirs.

Van Eemeren and Grootendorst's Pragma-Dialectics

The text-type that constitutes the subject of van Eemeren and Grootendorst's pragma-dialectics is the *critical discussion*,[12] where the dialogue partners are driven by the shared main purpose of removing a difference of opinion (the recurrent key formulation is 'resolve a difference of opinion', used interchangeably with 'resolve a dispute' or 'conflict').

The authors themselves offer this summarizing description of pragma-dialectics:

> [W]e give shape to the ideal of reasonableness in critical discussion. The dialectical aspect consists of two parties who attempt to resolve a difference of opinion by means of a methodical exchange of moves in a discussion. The pragmatic aspect is represented by the description of the moves in the discussion as speech acts.
>
> In our pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation, we describe argumentation as a complex speech act, the purpose of which is to

11. See, e.g., IJsseling 1976, in particular Ch. 1, "The Rehabilitation of Rhetoric".
12. The following discussion is based on their 1992 book. A briefer account that builds strictly on the book is their article from 1993.

> contribute to the resolution of a difference of opinion, or dispute (1992, 10).

The most pioneering aspect of the argumentation doctrine of van Eemeren and Grootendorst is their theory of fallacies. These are described in pragmatic terms as breaches of the normative rules that apply to critical discussion: "Fallacies are analyzed as such incorrect discussion moves in which a discussion rule has been violated" (1992, 104). Underlying the twenty-six best-known fallacies the authors identify a set of rules for critical discussion. This set they reduce to ten fundamental rules, so that each of the known types of fallacy is a violation of (at least) one of the ten rules regulating what speech acts participants in a critical discussion should do to settle a dispute. For example, the various fallacies belonging under the heading *argumentum ad hominem* are violations of normative rule No. 1: "Parties must not prevent each other from advancing standpoints or from casting doubt on standpoints".

In principle, van Eemeren and Grootendorst take an open stance towards rhetoric and in an Aristotelian spirit they present rhetoric and dialectic as equal doctrines, each with its distinctive characteristics and disciplinary principles. Among other aspects, they emphasize that rhetoric is oriented towards 'audience' and 'persuasiveness', whereas dialectic is similarly oriented towards 'resolution' and 'cogency' (1992,7ff).

Already here we detect a narrow conception of rhetoric which many in the discipline itself would not acquiesce to. The pragma-dialecticians' understanding of rhetoric is perhaps closest to an extreme Neo-Aristotelian view of the discipline which only considers the effect on the actual audience and excludes normative considerations regarding the way the orator tries to achieve the desired effect.[13] Rhetoricians taking a different view would also object to the idea that rhetoric is more oriented towards the audience than to the resulting decision. On the contrary, classical and modern rhetoric agree to emphasize that the rhetorical

13. An example of a Neo-Aristotelian who represents a purely descriptive rhetoric focused on persuasion is Hill 1972.

situation stems from the need for action to solve a problem of urgency.[14] That is also inherent in the very concept of debate.[15]

Further, the pragma-dialecticians' concept of *persuasio* is narrower than what is common in rhetoric in the way it refers to 'persuading' as opposed to 'convincing', whereas most rhetoricians are emphatic that this distinction is misleading.

The pragma-dialecticians connect *persuasio* with emotional 'persuading' or 'talking round', as distinct from rational 'convincing'; this is evident, for example, from the following self-identification vis-à-vis rhetorical argumentation theory: "Dialectification is achieved by treating argumentation as a rational means to convince a critical opponent and not as *mere persuasion*. The dispute should not just be terminated, *no matter how*, but resolved by methodically overcoming the doubts of a rational judge in a well-regulated critical discussion" (1992, 10-11; italics added).

van Eemeren and Grootendorst expressly caution against the risks involved in extending the norms for critical discussion and applying them to other situations than those that can be referred to this text type. They emphasize that the norms expressed in the ten rules for critical discussion can only be applied to situations "where the discussion is actually aimed at resolving a dispute", and as a consequence of this they assert: "The identification of fallacies is therefore always conditional: only given a certain interpretation of the discourse is it justified to maintain the allegation that a fallacy has occurred" (1992, 105). Unfortunately, they only mention the text type debate in passing. This is the case in the following passage, where they seem to violate their own principle that the norms cannot be applied outside critical discussion:

> [V]ery often the protagonist is not really trying to convince the professed antagonist but addresses, over his head, a third party. In a political debate, the target group may, in fact, consist of the television viewers; in a letter to the editor, of the newspaper's readers. Then, there are actually two antagonists: The "official" antagonist and the

14. In modern rhetoric, see in particular Bitzer 1968.

15. See Auer's definition, above p.45

> people who are the real target group. A quasi-dialectical goal is then pursued with regard to the first antagonist, whereas the predominant goal with regard to the second is rhetorical (1992, 42).

Here, van Eemeren and Grootendorst imply that they consider debate as a text type which *pretends* to be a critical discussion, and that debaters thus *ought* to abide by its norms. This is dangerously close to the view of the relation between debate and discussion represented by Kjøller, as discussed above—a view that implies a dismissal of the debate genre as inherently suspect.

Walton's Relativistic Pragma-dialectics and His System of Argumentative Dialogue Types

Walton, too, describes his approach to argumentation as pragma-dialectical, but he applies a broader perspective. While van Eemeren and Grootendorst limit themselves to studying critical discussion, Walton includes other forms of dialogue in his argumentation theory. Its close kinship with van Eemeren and Grootendorst is evident in the following definition: "*Argument* is a social and verbal means of trying to resolve, or at least contend with, a conflict or difference that has arisen or exists between two (or more) parties" (Walton 1992, 187). But by including other types of argumentation dialogue he adds the properties *pluralistic* and *relativistic* to the pragmatic and dialectical approach he shares with van Eemeren and Grootendorst:

> *Argument* is best defined as reasoning directed toward fulfilling an obligation. So conceived, an argument is a path of guided reasoning leading from a dialectical basis, or initial situation of a type of dialogue, toward some goal that is appropriate and characteristic for that type of dialogue. … An argument is correct (good, reasonable, successful) insofar as it fulfills a goal of dialogue and is used rightly and constructively toward that end … What is an appropriate goal for one type of dialogue may not be so for another type of dialogue. Therefore, whether an argument is good or bad depends essentially on the context of dialogue in which it used (1992, 184-185).

Walton's extension of the textual domain to other kinds of dialogue, e.g., debate and negotiation, implies that his argumentation theory overlaps with the domain of rhetoric, whereas van Eemeren and Grootendorst keep rhetoric and dialectic separated. By endorsing the principle that norms vary, dependent of the dialogue type in question, Walton expresses a basic view that he shares with rhetoric. On the whole, he belongs to the group of informal logicians who relativize the boundaries between rhetoric and logic.

The rapprochement to rhetoric is evident, e.g., in Walton's use of the term *persuasion dialogue* as synonymous with *critical discussion*. Thus, he does not share van Eemeren and Grootendorst's tendency to simplify the traditional distinction between rationally convincing dialectic and irrationally persuasive rhetoric; instead, Walton adopts the extended notion of a *persuasion* that encompasses how interlocutors persuade each other in rational conversation.[16]

Walton has presented his system of dialogue types in an early version (Walton 1989, Ch. 1) and in a more detailed and elaborated version in the book from which the above quotations are drawn (1992, Ch. 3 and 4). He defines a series of main types, each of which has its distinctive characteristics, and devotes a large part of his interest to the relation between debate and critical discussion. The basic consideration most relevant to the issue dealt with in the present article is Walton's view of debate as an intermediary type between quarrel and critical discussion. Let us take a closer look at his distinctions.

In his early version, Walton presents the dialogue types and the primary differences between them in the following schematic table (1989, 10):

16. One might say that Walton goes a step further in "rhetoricizing" dialectics by extending the speech act in the verb *to persuade* to critical discussion, whereas van Eemeren and Grootendorst content themselves with the small opening implied in describing the dialogue with the phrase "difference of *opinion*", thereby refraining from making the dialogue a simple question of finding true knowledge.

Dialogue	Initial situation	Method	Goal
Quarrel	Emotional disquiet	Personal attack	"Hit" out at other
Debate	Forensic contest	Verbal victory	Impress audience
Persuasion (critical discussion)	Difference of opinion	Internal and external proof	Persuade other
Inquiry	Lack of proof	Knowledge-based argumentation	Establish proof
Negotiation	Difference of interests	Bargaining	Personal gain
Information-seeking	Lacking information	Questioning	Find information
Action-seeking	Need for action	Issue imperatives	Produce action
Educational	Ignorance	Teaching	Impart knowledge

In accordance with his critical approach to argumentation (1989, 9), Walton places the first three of these dialogue types on a scale in this way:

The private *quarrel* represents the *lowest* level. It is marked by aggressive personal attacks, heated emotional appeals and the wish to win at any price. "The quarrel is no friend of logic and frequently represents argument at its worst" (1989, 4).

Persuasive dialogue (= critical discussion) is located at the *highest* level and represents the norms for rational argumentation (Walton's key concept is "reasonable argument"). This type is characterized by having two participants, each of which tries to persuade the other of his or her standpoint. "The main method of persuasion dialogue is for each participant to prove his own thesis by the rules of inference from the concessions of the other participant" (1989, 5).

Forensic *debate* occupies a position between these two. Because of the formal rules it is "more congenial to logical reasoning than the personal quarrel" (1989, 4), but since the rules will often allow personal attacks and other types of fallacies, and since the purpose is always to win the debate in the judgment of an audience, debate will always tilt toward quarrel.

Here, Walton's distinction between debate and discussion suffers from the same weakness as Kjøller's: Both propose a systematic typology which, however, teeters between applying

a normative and a descriptive criterion. Critical discussion is characterized by the features that distinguish it when it conforms to its ideal, debate, in contrast, by those features that often mark it in practice. This methodological problem comes to the fore when debate is characterized with terms that reveal a negative attitude towards it. Seeking to win a 'verbal victory' and to 'impress' the audience could never be legitimate activities.

The misdirection implied in the terms used in the table for debate and discussion, respectively, becomes apparent when we consider these terms in relation to a typical example of debate such as the Danish TV programs "Town Parliament" analyzed in Jørgensen et al. (1994, 1998). True enough, these televised debates were in fact 'forensic contests' insofar as votes were taken, and the debaters in them did compete to win the audience's adherence. But the issue in each of them might be defined as a 'difference of opinion' with the same justification as in critical discussions. Why should participants in such debates not use the methods of 'internal and external proofs'? And above all: Why reserve the term 'persuade' for critical discussions and degrade the debater's purpose with the word 'impress'?

This last example of biased terminology is corrected in Walton's later version of the dialogue types, which also has other modifications (1992, 95). There, they are described as follows (I reproduce only the part of his table covering the three text types at issue here):

Types of dialogue	Initial situation	Individual goal of participants	Collective goal of dialogue	Benefits
Persuasion	Difference of opinion	Persuade other party	Resolve difference of opinion	Understand position
Debate	Adversarial contest	Persuade third party	Air strongest arguments for both sides	Spread
Quarrel	Personal conflict	Verbally hit out and humiliate opponent	Reveal deeper conflict	Vent emotions

Walton's typology of dialogue types allows for combining them in two ways that matter for the evaluative assessment of the argumentation. One of the ways to combine them is the dialogue *shift*. In practice, a pure dialogue type is the exception rather than

the rule, and the parties will tend to wander from one dialogue type to another. For example, a dialogue between the two parties in a divorce may begin as a negotiation about child custody and then move into a critical discussion about which parent is best qualified to administer custody, seen from the child's viewpoint. In Walton's pragmatic optic, dialogue shifts may be either good or bad. That depends primarily on whether the parties consent to the shift. Thus it will be illegitimate if one party jumps from critical discussion to quarrel when the other is not in agreement with it.

The other way to combine dialogue types is to *blend* them. Here, features from two (or more) text types occur simultaneously, resulting in a characteristic mixed form ("mixed dialogue"). Walton's prime example is precisely the dialogue type debate, and that brings us to the crucial point in his perspective that I wish to dispute.

Debate vs. Quarrel

It is not the purpose of this article to dispute that debates often assume a very hostile character and degenerate into quarrels. Rather, my point is that debate has a different purpose from quarrel, and that the debate genre relies on norms and expectations which imply that debates should precisely *not* slide into quarrels. In other words, I dispute that debate is inherently a hostile type of speech act, and that this text type should, because of its inherent nature, push a debater towards quarrel.

Walton emphasizes that the rules for formal forensic debates may restrain tempers. But instead of seeing the rules the way he does: as sporadic attempts to counteract the inner nature of debate, I see them as expressing the underlying norms of the genre. That is, the rules reflect the existence of a generally accepted ideal that debates should not be quarrels, not even the informal ones.

The notion of debate as an inherently hostile speech act builds on its competitive element and on the addressee configuration, and it is here that we find the crux of the issue. The reasoning in both Kjøller and Walton is that the hostility follows from the

debaters' one-sidedness or partisanship and from their contest for the audience's adherence.

Thus, when Kjøller says that the purpose of debate is "to win a contest about maintaining one's pre-conceived standpoint as well as possible, and *consequently* wiping the floor with the opponent" (cf. above p.50), I see that as a piece of fallacious reasoning—one which, however, also marks Walton's much more elaborate and nuanced discussion.

This reasoning rests on the assumption that hostility is an effective means of persuasion *vis-à-vis* the third party, the audience. This is a dubious assumption. It may be in place in certain situations where the audience is particularly motivated in regard to the issue, in particular if the audience holds an attitude of hate towards the opponent or seeks a scapegoat. After demagogues like Hitler and Goebbels there is no denying that rhetoric reflecting 'the beast within' is effective under certain social conditions. But disregarding situations where the audience is particularly susceptible to hostility, much seems to suggest that hostility has a negative effect on observers. The study of the "Town Parliament" debates (Jørgensen et al. 1994, 1998) points in that direction. Although only one single statistically significant result can be cited in support,[17] the probable conclusion is that hostility will weaken a debater's chances of winning adherence, and the few winning debaters who have an overall 'eristic' profile arguably won despite their hostility, not because of it (1994, 316ff).

This conclusion is supported by other empirical studies. For example, Infante et al. (1992) show that audiences are highly sensitive to debaters' hostile attacks on their opponents, and that the debaters who begin a hostile exchange decrease their credibility with the audience and get fewer persuasive arguments attributed to them.

Theoretical considerations, too, provide reasons to maintain a conceptual distinction between quarrel and debate. Walton, by considering debate as a transitional form between quarrel and

17. 1994, 151: Debaters employing very hostile arguments invoking the notion of a "coup" do significantly worse than those who don't.

critical discussion, assumes a graded spectrum of rationally argumentative text types, but in doing that, he overlooks the distinctive feature that marks some text types as *persuasive by nature*—a decisive feature in my view. This objection requires a clarification of the concepts of *argumentation* and *persuasive* argumentation.

Modern argumentation theory has no unequivocal concept of argumentation. One relatively narrow definition is offered by Perelman, who adopts the traditional distinction between *argumentatio* and *demonstratio*. The term argumentation is here used about rhetorical argumentation theory, i.e., persuasive argumentation aiming at winning adherence with an audience, whereas *demonstratio* refers to formal logic and aims at reasoning *more geometrico*—i.e., presenting compelling proof (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, Introduction, 1-10).

This distinction differs from contemporary ordinary language, in which the word argumentation covers both domains and all forms of communication where reasoning is used. Most definitions follow what Willard calls *the Claim-Reason Complex* (1989, 77), and they focus on the presence of arguments consisting of a claim by the sender, in connection with an explicit or implicit reason. Willard himself might then be cited as an argumentation theorist who takes an even more encompassing view. His broad definition goes as follows: “argument is a kind of interaction in which two or more people maintain what they construe to be incompatible positions” (1989, 42). This definition includes all communication that originates in disagreement, for example also an all-and-out quarrel where participants express their emotions without giving any reasons.

It is debatable whether such a broad definition is practical; but the question is irrelevant in regard to debate, which is precisely an argumentative text type involving reasons. In most cases quarrels will be argumentation to some extent in the sense that some reasons for claims will be given, but the text type does not require it. In other words, argumentation consisting in a combination of claims and reasons is constitutive for debate, but not for quarrel.

However, my crucial objection to Walton is that *debate is essentially persuasive*, whereas quarrel is not. In debate, there is argument with the purpose of winning adherence to a standpoint from the intended addressees; in a quarrel the purpose is something else. A quarrel, as Walton himself lays out the differences, is marked by the participants' need for emotional release. The purer the quarrel, the more the emotive language function will dominate, the more it is an act of affect, i.e., the motive is the release of affect, not influencing someone else's affect. That is why private quarrels between two persons belong to the domain of psychology rather than to argumentations theory (Walton 1992, 123). A quarrel may indirectly aim to regulate action, but it is significant that the argumentation which makes it possible to have the other person change behavior may only begin when the air is cleared in the proper quarrel. This means, in Walton's terminology, that a dialogue shift occurs, from quarrel to negotiation or persuasive dialogue.

In contrast, debate typically aims directly at regulating action and is persuasively argumentative. The whole point of debate is, through argument and counterarguments, to obtain the adherence of the audience to one or the other decision, advocated for by the participants. The emotive language function is only activated to the extent that it may promote adherence.[18] Emotions may carry one away, but uncontrolled affect will as a rule be experienced as alien to the act of debating and have a negative effect. If one spouse in a quarrel bursts into tears out of anger, it may make a deep impression and cause the other to see the problem; if a debater reacts in the same way, there is a grave risk that it will make the audience laugh.

This ties in with another difference: The purely personal quarrel belongs in the private sphere, behind closed doors. Debate, on the other hand, is a *public* text type because of its indirect reception, where the listening audience is the primary addressee. In that regard, the line is rather to be drawn between debate on one side

18. By this I obviously do not mean that emotive appeals in the form of ethos or pathos are not characteristic of debate. I am merely pointing out the fundamental difference between pure affect release and intentionally expressive utterances.

and quarrel and critical discussion on the other. While critical discussion is not private in the sense of being intimate, the fact remains that it is closed around the two interlocutors and the norms they agree on. Debate differs, with the term drawn from Klein's description (above p.53), from the other two text types by the 'trialogical' configuration of the parties involved in the communication.[19] There can, of course, be quarrels and critical discussions to which others attend as audiences, but in such cases they are mere onlookers without any influence on the communication. In debate, by contrast, the silent audience is an active partner in the interaction. Its presence is constitutive for the text type, and consequently the role of the addressees must determine the kind of communication in which the debaters are to engage.

Debate and Critical Discussion

Having addressed the pragma-dialectical approach, we may now return to the issue of the traditional distinction between rhetorical debate and the dialectical discussion. Which of the distinctive differences noted by Klein in the table shown above (p.53) are valid in a modern context?

The difference between set *speeches* filling a given time slot and spontaneous exchange of *remarks* is no longer crucial. On the whole, the former is more prevalent in debate and the second in discussion, but debate—not least on TV, as noted by Klein—often

19. Klein has drawn the term from Dieckmann (1981), who says, in a section on "Öffentlich-insitutionelle Kommunikation als trialogische Kommunikation": "Der zuschauende oder zuhörende Dritte ist konstitutiv nicht nur für das Interview, sondern für jedes Sprechen in den Massenmedien, das intern als Zweier- oder Gruppengespräch (Rundgespräche, Pro und Contra, Frühschoppen etc.) organisiert ist. Das, was er sagt, hat nicht nur faktisch verschiedene Hörer, sondern ist oft auch intentional doppelt addressiert" (218). As far as the term "trialogical" is concerned, it makes good sense when used to characterize the configuration of persons; as a term for a type of communication, however, it is less obvious, since a "monologue" and a "dialogue" are texts with one, respectively two, talking participants, and a "trialogue" should then, on this logic, have three.

trades in brief, spontaneous exchanges. And conversely it is possible to conduct a critical discussion in sequences of speeches.

In contrast, the criterion of *trialogical vs. dialogical* configuration is a fundamental difference between debate and discussion. It connects with the next criterion.

Likewise, the difference between the *audience* as addressees in debate and the interlocutor in discussion is crucial.

In regard to the relevant criterion of validity, it is not possible to maintain a clearcut difference with *plausibility/probability* as a mark of debate, vs. *truth* for discussion. In debate, plausibility and probability constitute a more central dimension than truth, but plausibility and probability are in fact recognized as characteristic validity criteria in critical discussion as well, even if truth is seen as the highest ideal in pragma-dialectics and the hardest to attain.[20] The acceptance of plausibility and probability is implied by the key concept of 'reasonable argument'. It is significant that the words "Plausible Argument" occur in the title of Walton's 1992 book. Pragma-dialectical doctrine is not wedded to truth in an objective, absolute sense of the term.

To say that the goal in debate is *victory* over the opponent through persuasion of the audience, whereas in discussion the goal is consensus with the opponent through the discovery of *truth*, is, as the previous points make clear, an oversimplification. The description holds in a broad way, but as noted the concept of truth in discussion is complex, and reserving the concept of *persuasio* for debate is too narrowing.

Debate and Discussion as Counterparts

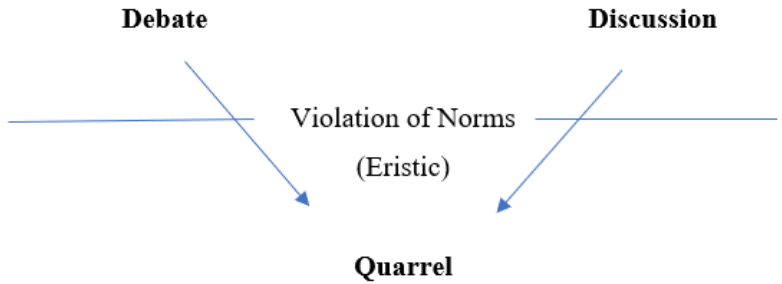
In place of Walton's systematic table I propose a typology that draws a line between quarrel on the one hand and on the other hand the two persuasive types of argumentation: debate and critical discussion. This way, they would both have a status as potentially rational forms of decision making, but they rely on different norms

20. In his respect, pragma-dialectics is in better alignment with Aristotle than with Klein's more Platonic view, cf. note 16 above.

for legitimate and good argumentation. For both, there is a norm to the effect that they should not degenerate into quarrels. This way, debate is raised from the intermediary position it occupies in Walton, and in theory it becomes an equal counterpart of discussion, while quarrel is situated at a lower level as a contrasting type. In its natural setting, the quarrel may have a positive value, and in that case it serves very different purposes having to do with personal relations and psychological mechanisms. But in relation to debate and discussion it constitutes a negative standard and represents the epitome of irrationality.

This description of the types remedies a lopsidedness in Walton's system. By making debate a semi-eristic form of communication because it often degenerates into quarrel in real life, he overlooks the fact that so does discussion. Anyone who has witnessed, for example, public discussions of dissertations in academia will have to admit that even in scholarly discussion, ideal critics easily morph into aggressors who allow themselves the most vicious attacks and appear on the whole mainly concerned about 'impressing' those present. If nothing else, the whole literature on fallacies testifies clearly to the fact that discussion cannot be acquitted of this vice.

The relation between the three types may be conveyed visually in this figure:



The figure places the two types of rational/reasonable argumentation, debate and discussion, on a par and the quarrel as

the normative contrast to both. The arrows indicate that arguers who employ eristic/hostile argumentation violate the norms of debate as well as discussion and turn both types into quarrel.

Debate: between Opposition and Consensus

As noted, it is basically the notions of a debater's partisan and fixed position that cause Kjøller and Walton to consider debate as an inherently hostile interaction. In a follow-up discussion, Walton presents a more nuanced view than in the account given above. On the one hand he asserts that "by its nature political debate is always on the verge of becoming a group quarrel or negotiation", but on the other hand he concedes that it is "only when these contained types of dialogue are 'out of control' that the argumentation in the speech event becomes subject to normative censure as fallacious, biased, etc." (1992, 154). He makes it clear that both debate and discussion build on the principle of opposition, as both involve an adversarial element, and that in this context "tactical moves to get the best of your opponent" are not inherently bad (1992, 156). This leads to a distinction between good (admissible, constructive) and bad (unacceptable, obstructive) bias—a paper-thin boundary line that is overstepped when debaters obstinately maintain their positions and are unwilling to be persuaded of the opposing view. Regarding critical discussion, Walton says:

> To say that a participant in an argument is obstructively or harmfully biased is to say that for him, the argument is never really open to the risk of loss. He always sees it only from the viewpoint of his own position, which he will not retract or modify significantly. And therefore, this type of biased arguer will never concede defeat. The fault is what we could call *hardened bias* (1992, 157).

Walton then transfers this observation to debate: Since debaters maintain their positions and attempt to persuade the audience, but not each other, they are seen as engaged in a hostile obstructive clash. In my view, the error in this reasoning about the inherent hostility of debate consists in the following:

On the one hand, Walton says that bias in debate is not necessarily a negative thing. On the other hand, it necessarily ends up being a negative thing because debaters by definition have the task of arguing for their own standpoint without letting the opponent move them in regard to the claim at issue. This line of thinking implies that one can only perform constructive opposition by stepping out of the role one has been assigned by the debate concept. Debaters who suddenly declare themselves persuaded by their opponents break the expectation defined by the genre. It is of course thinkable that debaters are in fact persuaded and change views *after* the debate. But if this happens *during* the debate, the speech situation collapses and is no longer debate. Thus, Walton ‘s requirement to a debater who wants to qualify as non-hostile forces that debater to step out of the role as debater and switch to critical discussion. This leaves no room for a non-hostile debate that is qualitatively different from a discussion. Hence Walton’s reasoning leads to the unreasonable position that in order to debate legitimately, one should honor the requirements for critical discussion, as laid out above (pp. 60&61).

This implication disregards the fundamental difference between debate and discussion in regard to their respective addressees. The trialogical configuration of debates implies that the norms for how debaters relate to each other are different from the norms that apply in discussion, where the dialogue partners try to persuade each other, and where the goal is *consensus*. But the rules regulating a conversation for two who seek to reach agreement cannot be applied to debate. Whether the addressee is the public audience or the opponent matters for what norms for legitimate argumentation will apply. In a discussion, where the participants seek to persuade each other and thus reach consensus, dialogue would be pointless if participants were unwilling to let themselves be persuaded by arguments according to rules that both recognize. In debate, by contrast, such unwillingness would not render the dialogue pointless. The purpose is not that the debaters should reach agreement; they each should present their standpoints in such a way that third parties can make a decision for one or the other

standpoint. Accordingly, it is not a part of the 'contract' that debaters should be willing to change views on the claim at issue.

On this understanding, debate is not in principle more hostile than discussion. They are legitimate, but different text types, both used for conflict resolution. Both are based on the idea of *opposition* as a constructive factor and operate on the principle that a basis for decision-making can be obtained by pitting standpoint against standpoint. The difference is found in purpose and in the constitution of the addressee:

In *critical discussion* the purpose of having the participants oppose each other is that they themselves should develop new insights and make qualified decisions. Thus, it is preferable that one participant persuades the other, whose original standpoint is then retracted, or both may have to move towards the other. Since the communication is a closed event only involving the two arguers, the removal of all doubt is the best possible result, and a realistically attainable one. And as the parties are driven by the wish to reach the resolution closest to the truth together, it may be satisfactory that they refrain from a decision if the uncertainty is too great.

In *debate* the participants oppose each other in order that a third party should find new insight and make a qualified decision. The two debaters represent opposite sides of the issue and are not expected to let themselves be persuaded by the opponent. Since debate is public and addressed to a heterogeneous group of addressees, it has no aspirations to reach a solution in full agreement. And as the point of departure in debate is generally a more or less pressing current issue which requires a resolution within a limited time span, it is satisfactory that a decision is adopted even in a case of great uncertainty.

This lets us see debate and discussion as two systems of rationality with different functions. Critical discussion is characteristic of situations of an academic sort and may be practiced in other situations where two persons choose to

cooperate in accordance with the relevant rules.[21] If the participants have the authority to decide on an issue, critical discussion may also be an important element in social decision-making. While critical discussion may typically be practiced where the goal is *insight*, the point of departure for debate is the need for *action*.[22] Although debate issues *may* be treated in discussion form in accordance with pragma-dialectical rules, debate is the predominant, natural political text type in democracies, where decisions are made in public, and where citizens are active in civic life.

The Normative Obligations of the Debater

If our approach to debate is a normative one as just outlined, what expectations could one then have of the good debater, and what requirements can one make of to a debate if it is to be fair? In what follows, I will try to partly answer this large question by unpacking the speech act of debating and by describing the attitude and mindset characteristic of a constructive debater.

The first, obvious requirement follows from the fact that debate is, in its essence, an *argumentative* text. Argumentation is what van Eemeren and Grootendorst call a *complex* speech act.[23] While the illocution in simple speech acts may be determined by means of the performative formula, that is not the case for the speech act of arguing. For example, one can determine whether the utterance *I'm coming tomorrow* counts as a promise by inserting the verb for that speech act: *I hereby* promise *that* … ; but the same operation cannot be done with the verb *argue*. This is because the speech act of arguing is complex by involving not only a *claim* to some effect—i.e., it proposes a standpoint to which one seeks

21. Cf. van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992, 40): "Scientific discussions are perhaps the closest we ever come to approaching the ideal model of critical discussion."
22. Cf. Goodnight 1993, where the tie to action is emphasized as characteristic of rhetoric, as distinct from dialectic. Thus, rhetorical argumentation is defined as "informed action" (334).
23. The authors build upon Austin's and Searle's speech act theories, respectively.

adherence—but also another speech act, for example an assertive or an expressive one, which *justifies* the standpoint.

In a typical debate, as in a critical discussion, one undertakes the obligation to represent one of two opposite standpoints regarding the issue, but there is a fundamental difference between the tasks of the debater and the discussant. The partners in a critical discission must, as the term makes clear, primarily be *critical* and scrutinize each other's arguments on the assumption that if the opponent can find no *faults* with the argument, then it is a *good* argument which the other must accept. In debate, by contrast, it is not a sufficient criterion that the opponent cannot find weaknesses in the opponent's argumentation.[24] Even if the opponent can find no objections against the piece of reasoning, it may still be a weak argument, lacking all power to persuade the audience. The critical balancing of the arguments advanced rests with the audience rather than the two debaters, who obviously cannot hope to persuade each other, and the good argument is thus one that *weighs heavily* with the audience, i.e., that argument among those advanced that makes them accept one of the two standpoints—or consider doing it. This addition implies that the good debater is not just characterized as the one who persuades fully and completely, but also the one who is able to gain a hearing with the opponent's adherents and make them seriously consider the opposite standpoint.

In debate, critical assessment of the opponent's arguments is thus of second priority. The debater's first obligation is to marshal those arguments that speak most strongly for one of the two standpoints, while the opponent does the same for the opposite standpoint, and it is then up to the audience to do the balancing and assess, when all is considered, which debater has the strongest arguments. This description of the norm for what sort of reasons are required from the good debater aligns directly with Aristotle's definition of rhetoric as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (*Rhetoric*, 1355b). The scope of this definition, as I understand it, appears from Aristotle's important demarcation of the function of rhetoric as "not simply

24. Cf. Jørgensen et al. 1994, 374.

to succeed in persuading, but rather to discover the persuasive facts in each case" (1355b). The good debater does not seek the greatest possible effect measured by the amount of adherence in the audience, won at any price and with any means. The good debater is to offer the best arguments for one of the standpoints on the issue, but of course that does not exempt the debater from following general communicative norms, such as not saying something against one's better knowledge.

This brings us to an understanding of debate that does not inherently assign an illegitimate role to the debater. The task is to advance the best arguments for one's own standpoint and by subjecting oneself to testing through opposition to persuade the audience of what one considers to be the rightest solution regarding the issue. Even if debaters defend their main claims to the very end, this is not an expression of illegitimate recalcitrance or irrational partisanship. It is, however, irrational partisanship if debaters totally reject everything the opponent says, if they are unwilling to budge or make concessions in regard to some of the supporting arguments, and if they generally fail to recognize their opponents' right to have another opinion on the issue. This is precisely the difference between good debaters, who defend their standpoints as well as they can, with respect for their opponents, and bad debaters, who descend into hostility.

To argue is in itself a *face-threatening* act.[25] It follows that the same also applies to debate, and even more so because the whole idea of debate is a confrontation of parties who remain in disagreement.[26] Since debaters are cast in a role where each threatens the other's face, it follows, in the first place, that the face threat is not illegitimate in this particular communication situation,[27] and in the second place, that debaters must accept the

25. This concept is drawn from Goffman's theory of *face* and *facework*, see Goffman 1955.

26. Cf. Jørgensen et al. 1994, 121-123.

27. Cf. Kleinau 1982, 228, on the basic qualities that characterize the ideal debater in academic training debates: "The debater must be responsible for clashing, which is the principal ingredient of great debate … Our ideal judge should severely penalize either team for failure to clash on the key issues."

risk of suffering a loss of face. Debaters should not prop up each other or consolidate each other's self-esteem; they enter a fair fight and should live with the defeats that may follow. But a fair fight also implies that there are low blows, and this sets the bad debater apart from the good.

Hostile debate may be characterized as follows:

> debate where incivility markers do not serve the principle of efficiency, but are superfluous in relation to the *issue* and the illumination of the disagreement. The hostile debater's attacks are *personal*. Hostile debaters seek divergence and will if possible widen the gulf between themselves and their opponents. The aim is to 'own' the opponent. They signal lack of respect for their opponents and their views. They not only behave in a *face-threatening* way, but are openly trying to make their opponents suffer *loss of face* (Jørgensen et al. 1994, 122-123).

This description reflects a balance that good debaters must strike: They do not argue to make their opponents lose face; they are only face-threatening to the extent necessary to uncover the essential disagreement and explain why their own standpoint is the best solution.

In given circumstances, it may in principle be legitimate to actually attack the other person in a debate. For example, debaters are perhaps well-nigh morally obliged to warn against their opponent's sinister motives when harboring a reasonable suspicion that these are relevant in the matter (Jørgensen et al., 1994, 147-150). This is not tantamount to saying that debate requires hostility, and it does not cancel a norm saying that debaters should desist from personal attacks if at all possible, and that they should not quarrel but argue with mutual respect.

The difference between hostile and good debaters is apparent in, among other things, which of each other's argument they choose to rebut. Hostile debaters, who see the act of debating as a contest in "doing best", will jump upon those arguments from the other side that are easiest to "slam", that is, usually the weakest. In contrast, the good debater, who engages in the interaction in order to persuade others, will focus on the opponent's best arguments,

which are normally also the hardest to rebut. Doing this may not only be expected to be the most effective strategy; it also aligns with the norm that in debate, as in discussion, the strongest argument prevails.

This requirement for good debaters points to yet another quality which reflects mutual respect. Good debaters recognize that their opponents have certain good arguments on their side. They do not pretend to be 100 % right, but concede that the opponent, too, is right about something. They do not, as for instance the Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, according to press reports, did in a debate in 1994 before the referendum about Norwegian membership of the EU, claim that they can see no arguments at all for the opposite view. In that case, the act of debating would be totally meaningless. Space must always be given for a remaining doubt; as a rule, 100 % certainty that a decision is the right one is impossible. Pretending otherwise is false.

Hostility and The Rhetorical Debate Audience

If debaters endeavor to live up to the normative requirements just discussed, then the difference between how debate and discussion are conducted will not be miles apart, such as, e.g., Kjøller's description suggests. The requirements call for a rational attitude in debaters, different from the irrational attitude typical of debates as contests in 'doing best' and 'owning' each other. If, at this point, we turn our attention to the third party involved in debates, the audience, and reflect on the addressee configuration, we shall likewise see that the concept of debate does not in itself invite hostility or irrational argumentation.

Since public debates in a forensic format confront two parties who advocate for opposite standpoints, they are based on a principle of simplification that reduces an issue to an either-or relation. This simplification may promote tendencies to polarization that lead away from the idea of rationality and towards a propensity to see things in black and white and engage in trench

warfare.[28] But on closer inspection, the dichotomy intrinsic to debates is counterbalanced by the nature of the public audience for whose benefit they are staged in the first place. The audience, as we know, is precisely heterogeneous. This is true not only of townhall debates, where the actual audience is a fairly small crowd, whereas the intended audience potentially encompasses all citizens—it is also true of TV debates, whose mass audiences are a much larger share of the population. For one thing, a public debate audience is heterogeneous because it is composed of all kinds of citizens (considered politically, socially, etc.). But it is also heterogenous in the sense that relatively few of those addressed place themselves completely in one or the other camp in the debate. Most will feel torn between the two standpoints and lean to one of the sides with a smaller or larger remnant of doubt.

Using terms reflecting the partisan standpoint of debaters, we may divide the public debate audience into the following groups (with gradual transitions between them): the supporters, the undecided, the opponents. The first and last of these groups may be subdivided into immovable and movable supporters, respectively opponents. The undecided may be divided into the 'active' ones, i.e., those who really feel in doubt because they endorse arguments from both sides or lack a sufficient basis for the decision, and the 'passive' ones, i.e., those who haven't made up their minds because they are unengaged in the issue.

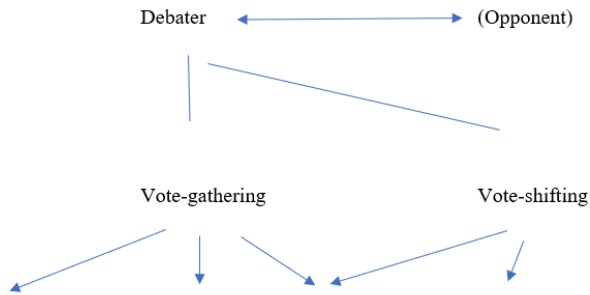
Of all these, only the *middle groups* constitute the *rhetorical debate audience*, as it is wasted effort to address the immovable supporters and opponents. Debaters may then choose to focus on these persuasive tasks: to hold on to the supporters that the

28. Cf. Jamieson on the modern decline in light of the great political orators in the golden age of rhetoric: "These speeches engaged the ideas of the opposing sides in a way that moved the argument forward. When the bulk of the available evidence favored one side, such speeches helped the audiences towards consensus. By contrast, contemporary political discourse tends to reduce the universe to two sides—one good, one evil—when in fact there may be four or five sides, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. After drawing simplistic and often false dichotomies, contemporary speech tends to canonize one side and anathematize the other" (1988, 11).

opponent is trying to shift; to draw some of the undecided over to their own side; to shift opponents.

Similarly, we may distinguish between winning adherence by either holding on to and mobilizing one's supporters, or by persuading opponents. The first strategy may be called *vote-gathering* rhetoric, the second *vote-shifting* (Jørgensen et al. 1994, Ch. 21; 1998, 295-297). Vote-gathering rhetoric appeals to supporters and to passive undecided individuals whose views are in harmony with the debater's. Vote-shifting appeals to opponents and active undecided individuals.

The persuasive functions and addressee configuration in debates may be illustrated as follows (bold type is used for the different categories of the rhetorical debate audience):



Immovable supporters / **Movable supporters** / **Undecided** / **Movable opponents** / Immovable opponents

Optimally persuasive debaters are those who practice both vote-gathering and vote-shifting rhetoric and who manage to combine strategies belonging to both forms. However, the two forms will often pull in opposite directions: What has a positive effect on supporters, will affect opponents negatively. This in particular is true of hostility. It can only be expected to play well with the immovable supporter who is blind and deaf to the opposite view—and possibly with the passive undecided. With the majority of the rhetorical audience, hostility risks having a negative effect, partly because the eristic debater, by being hostile towards the opponent, demonstrates contempt for arguments that the unpersuaded audience member might endorse.

The most critical addressee, we may assume, will be the responsive opponent, since such an opponent would also react most negatively to hostility. If debaters were to select one of the groups as their primary addressees for persuasion, they ought definitely to focus on movable opponents. This is because a vote won from the opponent's camp, when compared to a vote won from among the undecided, counts double (Jørgensen et al. 1994, 330; 1998, 295). Precisely because hostility is most ineffective with this group, and at the same time is only effective with the least movable of the supporters and some of the undecided, the calculation is simple: In so far as the aim is to increase adherence to a decision in the public, it will as a rule be unwise to bet on vote-gathering hostility instead of honoring the rational requirement to argue with respect for each other, without attacks on the person.

The concept of debate which, on the basis of these considerations, favors vote-shifting rhetoric, is thus self-regulating in such a way that a wish to be efficient does not set aside norms of good argumentation.

The Noble Art of Debate

Democracy thrives in the field of tension between dissensus and consensus. On the one hand, disagreement is respected as a fundamental condition, on the other hand the largest possible agreement on decisions is aimed for. The concept of debate reflects both sides of this basic and essential idea. The aim is not to eradicate disagreement or set aside all doubt, but to achieve as much agreement as possible on decisions that obtrude themselves, and through confrontation of disagreeing parties supply the public with arguments that, when weighed against each other, secure the best possible decision.

This ideal rests on the idea of rational political argumentation and on a view of rhetoric as a discipline that Thomas Goodnight has made himself a spokesman for with the phrase "a responsible rhetoric". He identifies such a rhetoric as a worthy counterpart to the new dialectics with the following words:

> [I]f we conceptualize rhetorical argument as the situated discourse of a public forum produced when a community addresses matters of common urgency and undertakes informed action, then … *a responsible rhetoric* may yet emerge. Such a rhetoric would take discourse ethics as its informing dialectic, by resituating the rhetor as one who is obligated both to speak and listen effectively in the service of a cause *and* also to hold open, even reinforce, communicative reason. In such rhetorical practice, the speaker is not viewed as merely the source of a single message intended to coerce audience …, but one voice among many in a moment of public controversy (Goodnight 1993, 333).

This kind of rhetoric cannot be enacted by debaters who view debate as a hostile encounter. It presupposes—in Fafner's understanding of the concept—*pistis*.[29] Goodnight arrives at the same insight using the equivalent term *shared ethos*:

> [I]nformed consensus can be achieved only if there is enough confidence for at least two parties to take the risk of being wrong when acting together … Reasoning that strengthens communicative bonds affirms or creates shared ethos, a mutual respect that emerges from the communicative relationship between interlocutors. Fallacious reasoning, to the contrary, reduces respect and so impedes the situated requirements of making a consensus. If a public forum is filled with fraudulent attacks on the person, then the good will necessary to continue to adjudicate separate questions erodes … effective rhetorical address is regulated by the *ethos* obligations of a community of interlocutors (Goodnight 1993, 338-339).

Thus, eristic is properly considered an enemy of debate, not—as in Walton's conception—its permanent companion.

But why are debaters then so hostile as is often the case? Considering the distance between a normative theory of debate, such as this article insists on, and practical reality, which under the influence of mass media seems to evolve towards ever stronger aggressiveness, are the beautiful thoughts about responsible rhetoric and good debate then anything but empty idealism?

29. See the quote above, pp. 53&54.

As for the 'why' question, my answer is that the propensity to hostility is to be attributed to psychological rather than rhetorical reasons. Debaters turn hostile because they feel threatened, are deeply involved, are cantankerous, etc. Of course, some also believe that they win adherence this way, and in certain situations they do; but the persuasive advantage in hostility is limited and short-lived.

As for the 'idealism' question, my answer is that ethical requirements and norms of good communication are rarely honored fully in practice, but nevertheless they are really existing phenomena in language users. Even if ever so many debaters stumble and repeatedly demonstrate the human quarrelsomeness, the idea is still alive that a political debate should not be a quarrel.

The actual existence of such a norm in Danish citizens' minds is suggested by a poll done by the Gallup organization during the election campaign of 1994. It showed that 62 % agreed that "the mutual criticism that politicians subject each other to … is primarily attempts to throw mud at each other and put each other in a bad light", whereas 24 % agreed that it "reflects a natural exacerbation of the parties' views". 57 % agreed, 40 % disagreed that election campaigns could take place without such mudslinging. A massive 77 % "would prefer for politicians to avoid mudslinging", whereas 18 % "would not do without the mudslinging" (the newspaper *Berlingske Tidende*, September 14, 1994). The use of the leading term 'mudslinging' leads one to ask whether this study presents an honest picture of the voters' preferences regarding what they see and hear on TV, and what they allow to influence them; but the numbers still show that most Danes believe that political debate ought not to be mudslinging, and that the politicians betray an ideal when they aim to put each other in a bad light.

The fact remains that in language norms and usage mutually influence each other. If debates in the media continue a development that drains the concept of debate of its constructive meaning and overemphasize the element of confrontation, this is a serious threat to democracy. Hence the issue of how to define debate theoretically is not purely academic. With a normative

debate theory one can at least shout against the wind—and that, in any event, is better than saying nothing. But if we who are engaged in argumentation theory identify debate with quarrel, as Walton and others have done, we may as well say the game is over for TV democracy. This way, the unwelcome development is seen as a natural consequence of the nature of debate, and it will be useless to design debate programs on TV to provide frames for deliberative argumentation. This article offers a basis for believing that it is still worth a try.

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