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DISCUSSION

REPLY TO HENRY W. JOHNSTONE, JR.¹

First of all, I want to thank Mr. Johnstone very sincerely for having, through his discussion, made known to the readers of this Review, some of our ideas on argumentation. Contacts between philosophical circles speaking different languages are not frequent enough and every opportunity to multiply them should be welcomed. It would be unfortunate if such opportunities should raise misunderstandings, for which we ourselves might involuntarily be at least partially responsible.

For instance, I know that Mr. Johnstone himself is fundamentally interested in philosophical argumentation—as may be seen from the articles he has published recently.² As far as we are concerned, our main interest is in the construction of a philosophical theory of argumentation and in the elaboration of a treatise dealing with argumentation in general. The subtitle, of our book *Rhétorique et Philosophie* seems, however, to have lent itself to a misunderstanding: "Pour une théorie de l'argumentation en philosophie," was intended to show that our contention was that a place should be given, in philosophy, to a theory of argumentation. It is true that in my article "De la preuve en philosophie," I pointed out that philosophy itself cannot be adequately understood without reference to a theory of argumentation, but this contention is only a particular application of our general thesis.

Fundamentally our thesis stresses the opposition between (formal) demonstration and argumentation. It expresses our disappointment arising from the observation that logic is nowadays reduced to the study of formal reasoning, and that so far as the Aristotelian distinction between analytical and dialectical proofs is concerned, the whole field of dialectical reasoning has been neglected. We feel that this narrowing of the field of logic is disastrous for the methodology of the human sciences, for law and for all branches of philosophy. Our purpose is thus a general one and we think that to say, as Mr. Johnstone does, that our main task is "to explore the principles and important ramifications of the art of allaying philosophical doubts and hesitations" (p. 245) is to restrict it

¹ See "A New Theory of Philosophical Argumentation," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. XV (1954), pp. 244-252.

² „Philosophy and Argumentum ad Hominem," *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XLIX (1952), pp. 489-498. "The Methods of Philosophical Polemic," *Methodos*, (1953), pp. 131-140. "The Nature of Philosophical Controversy," *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. LI (1954), pp. 294-300.

unduly: we certainly are interested in this problem, but only as a special case of a general theory of argumentation.

Besides, we have nowhere identified the subject of our investigation with the study of the epideictic or panegyric kind of discourse (p. 245), since our theory has a very general scope. What we claim is that light can be shed on the nature and function of epideictic discourse by showing that argumentation like all persuasive discourse, is directed towards increasing the intensity of adherence to certain theses, that this intensity can always be increased, and that, because of this feature, arguments aiming at adherence are different from proofs directed toward truth: this should make it possible to understand in what fashion a logic of value judgments, conceivable only within the framework of a theory of argumentation, will differ from a logic concerned with the truth of propositions.

This much being said, we come back to the main point in the discussion of Mr. Johnstone, which bears on our divergent conceptions of philosophical argumentation. For Mr. Johnstone, the latter is fundamentally *ad hominem*; it is critical and dialectical, and for this reason local, neither having value for everybody nor even claiming universal assent: so science and philosophy would essentially differ from each other.

We, for our part, are easily induced to acknowledge that criticism in philosophical matters is often *ad hominem* but not necessarily so. We believe in the possibility of external criticism, with reference to generally admitted theses, which are explicitly or implicitly in opposition to those of the philosopher. Curiously enough it happens to be this conception that Mr. Johnstone himself adopts for his own account, when he opposes to rhetoric, defined in our terms, the dialectic of Aristotle as "a line of inquiry whereby we shall be able to reason from opinions that are generally accepted about every problem propounded to us." (p. 251) This means that our own conception is really akin to dialectical argumentation, as understood by Aristotle, and which the latter opposes to Mr. Johnstone's type of *ad hominem* argumentation. Aristotle would rather have characterized this as examinational or critical.³

In our view, philosophical argumentation, especially when it is constructive—we must stress the fact that Mr. Johnstone's conception disregards the techniques used by a philosopher in developing his own system—is dialectical in the sense of Aristotle. It starts from generally accepted propositions. But what are these, if not propositions accepted by the universality of reasonable minds, as the philosopher conceives this universality? In this sense we say that for a philosopher it is not

³ *De Sophisticis Elenchis*, 165b 1-5.

enough to persuade some particular audience—that would be merely *ad hominem*—but he claims to convince an universal audience: his argumentation is not *ad rem*—this characterization makes no sense—but *ad humanitatem*. It is true that every philosopher may have a different vision of such an audience—and on this point psychology and sociology of knowledge may properly intervene—but we are faced with a philosophical argument only when the reasonings advanced at least *claim* to be valid for everybody. This should enable us to understand without the incredulity expressed by Mr. Johnstone (p. 250), why the author himself must be included among the members of such an audience.

How then, asks Mr. Johnstone, can we distinguish philosophy from science? Properly, through the part played in philosophy by argumentation. The use of conventionally admitted experimental and deductive techniques, reduces, in science, the room for argumentation. It is only when it is a question of hypotheses, or of the appreciation of facts outside the technical field, that scientific and philosophical argumentation tend to blend. In philosophy, one does not try to establish facts but one argues them, in such a way, however, as to claim that this kind of reasoning should be admitted by everyone. Were it not for this claim, it would be difficult to distinguish the philosophical discourse, from the political, legal or theological one.

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