

Reply to Mr. Zaner

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One of the fundamental theses defended by my friend, Henry W. Johnstone, Jr., consists in the assertion that every philosophical discussion is necessarily *ad hominem*, and that it must accordingly limit itself to showing the inconsistency of the opposing thesis. Personally, I believe that this is an extremist position, because it presupposes that the discussion never concerns facts neglected by the philosopher. At the minimum, however, it has the advantage of calling to our attention the fact that as we begin to criticize an author, we do not have the right to take the terms that he uses in a sense different from that in which he *explicitly* defines them, even though the sense in which we do take them is perhaps common and traditional. This is the main way in which I shall reproach Mr. Zaner.

In fact, Mr. Zaner does not take any account of the fact that *in my conception* the techniques of argumentation constitute *a part* of rhetoric, which I explicitly define as "the study of... techniques of non-demonstrative argument, its end being to support judgments and thereby win or reinforce the assent of other minds."¹ Furthermore, the treatise on which Mme Olbrechts and I have collaborated is called *Traité de l'argumentation, la nouvelle rhétorique*, and the English translation, which will be published soon by the Notre Dame University Press, is to be called *The New Rhetoric, a Treatise on Argument*.

Our view entails that *all* argumentation is rhetorical. Hence it does not make sense to wonder, as Mr. Zaner does, whether the philosopher, who argues, is engaged in a rhetorical activity. Perhaps he does not, in the sense that Mr. Zaner seems to give to the word, but he certainly does in the sense we give it.

In fact, for us even an interior deliberation can be considered

¹ *Philosophy, Rhetoric, and Argumentation* (edited by Natanson and Johnstone), University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1965, p. 103.

a particular case of argumentation and hence of rhetoric, and the opposition, insisted on by Mr. Zaner, between convincing and persuading — an opposition that leads him to claim that techniques for convincing fall outside rhetoric — is expressly denied by us, who define the attempt to convince as a particular kind of persuasion — a kind in which the persuasion addresses a universal audience.² It is this case that we characterize as the *appeal to reason*.

In my view, it is impossible to limit the efforts of philosophers to an attitude that is purely reflexive and independent of the reaction of other people. And, surprisingly enough, two authors as rationalistic as Descartes and Kant seem to support me on this point. Descartes, in fact, asserts that

Whenever two men come to opposite decisions about the same matter one of them must certainly be in the wrong, and apparently there is not even one of them in the right; for if the reasoning of the second was sound and clear he would be able so to lay it before the other as finally to succeed in convincing *his* understanding also.³

It follows that to be sure that we are not mistaken in what we take to be "evident," it is necessary for us to submit it to others in order to test its validity, in order to be assured of the fact that it is not illusory.

In the same way, Kant distinguishes persuasion and conviction, which he considers to be two forms of belief:

If the judgment is valid for everyone, provided only he is in possession of reason, its ground is objectively sufficient, and the holding of it to be true is entitled *conviction*. If it has its ground only in the special character of the subject, it is entitled *persuasion*. Persuasion is a mere illusion, because the ground of the judgment, which lies solely in the subject, is regarded as objective. Such a judgment has only private validity, and the holding of it to be true does not allow of being communicated... [Hence] persuasion cannot be subjectively distinguished from conviction. The experiment, however, whereby we test upon the understanding of others whether those grounds of the judgment which are valid for us

² *Ibid.*, p. 137.

³ *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, Rule II.

have the same effect on the reason of others as on our own, is a means, although only a subjective means, not indeed of producing conviction, but of detecting any merely private validity in the judgment, that is, anything in it which is mere persuasion.⁴

It would seem that we are never sure of the rationality of our theses as long as we have not submitted them to the proof of communication and criticism, a proof that cannot be dissociated from rhetoric, in the expanded and non-pejorative sense of this word. Only on this condition can I distinguish between what I believe to be true (faith) and what I know to be true (science).

Let us repeat that in our perspective, the one who is able to convince a universal audience cannot conceal from the audience the techniques of argumentation that he is using, because he is himself a part of this audience.

Nor does anyone have the right to assert that rhetorical discourse is unilateral. This assertion holds for *certain* rhetorical discourses, but not for all, and certainly not for those that interest the philosopher.

Mr. Zaner's statement that in my view the theory of rhetoric is not itself rhetorical is symptomatic of his refusal to accept a conception that expressly says that philosophical argumentation is rhetorical, though belonging to a particular species of rhetoric which aims not to persuade but to convince.

As to Mr. Zaner's assertion that philosophical discourse concerns some datum, that philosophical argumentation is *ad rem*, and is objective rather than rhetorical, I accept his thesis but not the consequence that he draws from it. For anything that one characterizes as a *fact* is indissolubly bound up with its acceptance. I insist that we speak of *fact*, of *objectivity*, only as long as there exists an agreement to accord to the content of a proposition this status of recognized fact; if the status is put to question, the "fact" becomes a "theory," an "opinion," an "hypothesis," or even a simple "illusion."

⁴ *Critique of Pure Reason*, B848-849, Kemp Smith translation.

