The Places of *Inventio*: towards a Rhetorical Approach to the *Topics*

**Victor Ferry, Emmanuelle Danblon**

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The Places of *Inventio*: towards a Rhetorical Approach to the *Topics*

**VICTOR FERRY & EMMANUELLE DANBLON**

The first book of the *Topics* raises hopes of anybody concerned with the education of citizens. Aristotle presents his method as an intellectual training that would not only enhance our ability to reach shared opinions but also to meet others on their ground if we feel the need to make them abandon patently unsound opinions (II, 2, 101a). One might thus expect to find there a recipe for argumentation training that would develop citizenship skills. Unfortunately, the *Topics*’ reader will be soon disappointed.

Indeed, the further one goes in the reading of the *Topics* and the more one might doubt about its usefulness for the practice of discussion on the public place. Aristotle, throughout his treatise, reminds us that the dialectical discussion is a genre in itself, isolated from actual argumentative interactions. In the realm of dialectical discussion, arguers do not have genuine disagreements; they disagree for the sake of exercise (Brunschwig 1967: xii-xiv). In the concluding chapter of the treatise, and perhaps at odds with the optimistic tone of the first pages, Aristotle explicitly excludes potentially conflicting discussions from the scope of his inquiry: “Do not argue with every one, nor practise upon the man in the street: for there are some people with whom any argument is bound to degenerate” (VIII, 14, 164b).

In a time where philosophical schools were flourishing, mastering the rules of dialectical discussion was probably a must requirement for the honest man. Nowadays, the *Topics* rather appear as the manual for a game that nobody is anymore willing or able to play (Brunschwig 1967: ix). However, although Aristotle’s treatise seems to be a relic of ancient times, the willingness to define rules to improve argumentation practices is still of great actuality (Hamblin: 1970; Habermas: 1970; van Eemeren and Grootendorst: 1984; Walton: 1989; van Eemeren, Garssen and Meuffels: 2012). This willingness has been, so far,
stronger than the doubts one might have on the very possibility to adapt a dialectical model of discussion for the solving of genuine disagreements.

We shall argue that such a tension, between hopes and doubts, offers a key to understand still puzzling issues about Aristotle’s works on argumentation and, above all, the nature of the relationship between rhetoric and dialectic (De Pater: 1965; Brunschwig: 1996; Rubinelli 2009: 43-90). As argued by Grimaldi (1980: 2), Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric as a counterpart to dialectic can be understood with regard to a hope to extend the realm rationality to the sphere of genuinely agonistic discussions, that is, democratic institutions. Difficulties that Aristotle encountered in such a project have been studied in detail from a philological perspective. Our approach to this old issue will be rhetorical in its method and anthropological in its purpose.

We will focus on one of the many concepts that are common to the *Topics* and the *Rhetoric*: atopos (literally, out of place). The *Topics* might be described as a method to argue within the places that is, within the borders of what acceptable for human rationality. The dialectician will loose the game if pushed by his/her opponent to support a proposition with illogical consequences: the dialectician would then appear as an atopos, someone that belongs to no place (Goyet 1996: 207). The fact that Aristotle identifies out of place arguments in the *Rhetoric* as well as in the *Topics* might, at first glance, raise a hope: the hope for a criterion to define the borders of rational discussion in the realm of rhetoric. Our study reveals a more complex reality.

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1 Indeed, when proponents of normative approaches to argumentation are criticised for the illusive character of their conception of rational discussion, they will argue that they do not intend to provide realistic accounts of argumentative exchanges. They would insist on the fact that their business is to define standards on which actual argumentative performances could be evaluated. This was, in particular, van Eemeren and Grootendorst’s argument against *The New Rhetoric* (1969), in their famous article “Perelman and the Fallacies” (1995). In their view, *The New Rhetoric* only offers tools to describe arguments and not to evaluate them; anyone concerned with the testing of arguments should assess actual argumentative exchanges with regard to an ideal of how a critical discussion has to be carried out (1995: 129). A recent *Argumentation and Advocacy* forum on Habermas’ ideal of rational discussion offers various illustrations of a same line of argument (Beard: 2012).

2 As Grimaldi states it: “The important fact in this opening is that by correlating rhetoric with dialectic, Aristotle makes the art of rhetoric a rational endeavour, an activity of the intellect, and, consequently, a pursuit that is both reasonable and acceptable to the responsible citizen” (1980: 2).

3 In particular, Aristotle attempt to describe the discursive dimension of rhetorical proof (logos), enthymeme and example, as instances of inductive and deductive reasoning (*Rhet.* I, 2, 1356b) has been subject to intense controversies (Grimaldi: 1956; Wikramanayake: 1961; Lienhard: 1966; Hauser: 1968; Miller & Bee: 1972; Hauser: 1985; Benoit: 1987; Burnyeat: 1996; McAdon: 2004).

4 Anthropological since our article is mainly about a hope: the hope that an inquiry on argumentation (such as the *Topics*) might benefit to democracy. Our article is also about the dark side of this hope: a risk that, by idealising the nature of rational discussion, one would be blind to the variety of the techniques, human and perfectible, that are at our disposal to test arguments.
We identified three different uses in the utterances of *atopos* in Aristotle’s work: a philosophical one, a dialectical one and a rhetorical one. Our claim is that it would be an illusion to believe that the criterion of what is *out of place* can remain the same in those three argumentative contexts.

In the course of his/her inquiry the philosopher, as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca put it, pretends to address a universal audience (1969: 31). When stating that his/her opponent’s thesis is *out of place*, he/she believes that anyone following his/her reasoning will be bound to the same conclusion. The criterion is thus a logical one. In the dialectical discussion, the definition of what is *out of place* depends on the actual agreement of the protagonists of the discussion. In Searle’s words (1964, 1995), the criterion for rationality is a conventional one. Finally, in the realm of rhetoric, it is the arguer’s ability to persuade (and his/her audience ability to be persuaded) that will determine what is *out of place*. As a consequence, the criterion is the force of the argument. The following table sums up the results of our inquiry:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Philosophical inquiry</th>
<th>Dialectical discussion</th>
<th>Rhetorical interaction</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Criterion</strong></td>
<td>Logic</td>
<td>Convention</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Audience</strong></td>
<td>Imagined universal audience</td>
<td>Specialists</td>
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If we have to acknowledge a discontinuity between rhetoric and dialectic, argumentation studies might have to face a crucial dilemma: should we train students to argue within dialectical rules for discussion or should we give them the rhetorical means to defend their conceptions of the borders of rationality?

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5 We shall stress that the issue of the consistency of Aristotle’s philosophical system does not concern us. We are interested in the variety of uses of the word *atopos* within different argumentative contexts.

6 Following Toulmin (1964: 30-35) we shall stress on the distinction between the *force* and the *criteria* in Aristotle’s uses of *out of place*. As Toulmin puts it: “With ‘impossible’ as with ‘good’, the use of the term has a characteristic force, of commending in one case, or rejecting in the other; to command an apple or an action is one thing, to give your reasons for commending it is another; to reject a suggestion as untenable is one thing, to give your reasons for rejecting it is another, however cogent and relevant these reasons may be” (1964: 33).
**ATOPOS WITHIN THE PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY**

Throughout his philosophical inquiries, Aristotle uses *out of place* to point the absurd consequences of a thesis he tries to refute. The following quote from the *Metaphysics* offers a relevant illustration this first kind of use:

There are some who say, as the Megaric school does, that a thing ‘can’ act only when it is acting, and when it is not acting it ‘cannot’ act, e.g. that he who is not building cannot build, but only he who is building, when he is building; and so in all other cases. It is not hard to see the absurdities [*atopa*] that attend this view. (*Meta.*, IX, 3)

We shall first stress on the fact that the criterion used by Aristotle is a logical one: in this context, *out of place* is synonymous with absurd. Such a criterion might, at first glance, be considered as a universal one: the absurdity of the discussed thesis should appear to any reasonable man. Now, it should be clear that, in the course of his philosophical inquiry, Aristotle relies on an *imagined* unanimity. Aristotle does not *have to* take into account the reactions of a real audience. As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca put it (1969: 31), the agreement of the *universal audience* is a matter of right and not of fact. When identifying a proposition as *out of place*, the philosopher might, of course, actually obtain that his/her audience will perceive it as such; but he/she does not need this actual agreement to go further in his/her philosophical inquiry.

Throughout the *Topics*, Aristotle uses *atopos* in the same way than in his philosophical inquiries: *atopos* appears as an objective, logical criterion to discredit a thesis. This is especially clear in VIII, 9, 160b, where Aristotle distinguishes two ways to be out of the *doxa*: (1) by supporting an hypothesis whose consequences are illogical (*atopa*) (i.e. by saying that everything is in motion or by saying that nothing is in motion); (2) by supporting hypotheses that depart from morality (i.e. by saying that it is better to do injustice than to suffer it). In this case, it is clear that being *atopos* is a logical way to depart from admitted opinions as opposed to an ethical way to do so.
Interestingly, there are only a few occurrences of *atopos* (and its derivative forms) in the *Topics* in comparison with Aristotle’s philosophical inquiries. This is, in fact, not really surprising. Indeed, as long as one reasons and argues alone, one is free to drive the challenged thesis out of the borders of rationality. The argumentative situation of the *Topics* is different: Aristotle is concerned with the means that one can use to reason and argue with (against) a real opponent. And contrary to the philosopher’s imagined opponent, a real opponent might always find a way to stay within the places, to rush back into them or to give the impression that he/she never left them. This, of course, raises an important issue: how to determine the borders of the places of *inventio* (i.e., the places from which we might legitimately draw our arguments) since those borders, in the course of an actual interaction, might always be discussed?

**BEING ATOPOS IN THE DIALECTICAL DISCUSSION**

In his *Topics*, Aristotle intends to provide a method for the dialectical discussion: he describes the tools that one might use to test a thesis. In this context, and in order to insure a proper conduct of the discussion, one might expect that the identification of a proposition as *out of place* would have actual consequences for the arguers’ behaviour. The arguer that would be forced to support such a proposition should have to abandon it and, even, to admit his/her defeat. To rephrase it with Searle’s words (1964), the philosopher might be content with establishing “X is out of place”; in the realm of dialectic, the proper conduct of a discussion requires that arguers agree on “One ought not to say X”. In this respect, dialectical discussion is an *institution*, as defined by Searle (1995): by agreeing on dialectical rules, arguers create a new dimension of social reality; a reality in which the proposition “One ought not to say X” can have an actual impact on arguers’ behaviour.

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7 There are only eight occurrences of *atopos* in the *Topics* (109b line 29, 140b line 32, 140b line 35, 141a line 5, 147a line 10, 150a line 7, 150a line 10 and 160b line 18). A comparison with Aristotle’s uses of *atopos* in the course of his philosophical inquiries can be made using the complete edition of Aristotle’s works edited by Jonathan Barnes (1995[1984]). In the *Topics*, Aristotle uses *atopos*, and its derivative forms, only 8 times while the treatise occupies 110 pages of the volume. By comparison, there are 33 occurrences in the 53 pages of the *Magna Moralia* or 24 occurrences in the 138 pages of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. It is easier indeed to qualify a thesis as *out of place* in the course of a philosophical inquiry than to conceive types of *out of place* arguments.

8 Moreover, one might argue that, in the realm of dialectic, there are two pragmatic conditions for an argument to be *de facto out of place*. The first condition is that arguers have a sufficient knowledge of dialectical rules to be able to *perceive* when an argument is *out of place*. The second condition is that arguers are willing to accept their opinions to be considered as *out of place*.
Now, if dialectic is to be described as an institution, it is a *regulative* one, to be distinguished from a *constitutive* one\(^9\): argumentation, as an anthropological practice, existed before its theorization by philosophers. As a consequence, in many cases, arguers’ *natural normativity* (Gilbert: 2007) might very well merge with philosophers’ assessments of arguments. It is however, in our view, highly important to underline the conventional status of what is *out of place* in the realm of dialectic. The risk is, otherwise, to mistake what *is* with what *ought to be*. We shall illustrate this risk by analysing what is probably the most interesting use of *atopos* in the *Topics*.

In the second chapter of the second book, Aristotle uses *atopos* not to disqualify an absurd reasoning but to disqualify an argumentative move:

The rule is convertible for both destructive and constructive purpose; for if, as we proceed with the division, the predicate appears to hold in all or in large number of cases, we may then claim that the other should actually assert it universally, or else bring an objection in what case it is not so; for if he does neither those things, a refusal to assert it will make him look absurd (*atopos phaneītai*). (*Top.* II, 2, 109b)

This quote is, in our view, highly interesting since it illustrates the overlaps between, on the one hand, argumentation as a natural human activity and, on the other hand, argumentation as a conventionally regulated practice. Aristotle describes the case of an arguer that would, by his behaviour, *appear as out of place*. In other words, the criterion is the judgement of an actual audience that would *feel* that there is something wrong with the arguer’s attitude. As a consequence, and contrary to the context of a philosophical inquiry, the criterion according to which the dialectician can be said to be *atopos* has not only to do with *logos*: it has also to do, and perhaps mostly, with *ethos*. It is worth noting that Jacques Brunschwig decided to translate *atopos* by the French word *extravagant\(^{10}\). The French word renders the idea that the opponent is *out of place*. But those places cannot be reduced to logical places. Indeed, it is here a lack of argumentative fair play that will discredit the opponent in the eyes of the audience. There thus seems to be an equivalence between the audience’s feeling about proper argumentation practice and the conventional rules for dialectical discussion (i.e. the proper conduct of a discussion requires that an

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9 As Searle puts it: “Regulative rules regulate activities whose existence is independent from rules; constitutive rules constitute (and also regulate) forms of activities whose existence is logically dependent on the rules” (1964: 55).

arguer *ought to* choose between accepting the opponent proposition or giving reasons for rejecting it)\(^{11}\).

It should be clear, however, that it is only within the framework of an effectively functioning dialectical institution that the identification of an *atopos* behaviour can have an impact on the outcome of a discussion. This brings us to what is probably the fundamental dilemma of dialectic: (1) *de facto*, there can be such thing as an *out of place* argument only if there are rules to ensure that arguers will accept it as *out of place*; (2) the more discussion is regulated by rules and the less the practice of such a discussion might develop transferable skills to real argumentative exchanges.

In the VIII\(^{th}\) book of the *Topics*, Aristotle struggles with this dilemma. Indeed, this book is dedicated to the rules that arguers *should* follow for the dialectical discussion to be a honourable exercise. In the course of his inquiry, Aristotle also describes strategies that one might use to take the best over his/her opponent. In other words, Aristotle tries to conciliate realistic training for actual argumentative situations with his views about a proper dialectical exchange\(^{12}\). The following quote illustrates this twofold nature of Aristotle’s inquiry: “against any one who is ready to try all means in order to seem not to be beaten, it is indeed fair to try all means of bringing about one’s conclusion: but it is not good form” (VIII, 14, 164b). In this quote, Aristotle clearly alternates between two points of view: the point of view of a craftsman and the point of view of a philosopher. As a craftsman, concerned with the functioning of a *techne*, Aristotle describes what arguers *can* do (arguers have the choice to try all means not to be beaten). As a philosopher, he can recommend what arguers *ought to* do. In doing so, he seems to rely on the criterion of the intellectual benefits of arguing in a proper way.

Now, the problem is that a clear distinction between those two points of view only offers a partial solution to the dilemma of dialectic. Indeed, the question remains: how to argue with those who do not respect our rules? When we face such a dilemma, and its pessimistic consequences for the whole project to serve

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11 This is precisely the kind of rules that the tenants of the pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation refer to in order to sanction fallacies beyond a standard treatment of fallacies (van Eemeren and Grootendorst: 1995).

12 One might perceive here an echo with the project of *strategic maneuvering* as defined by van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2006: 383): “Strategic maneuvering refers to the efforts arguers make in argumentative discourse to reconcile aiming for rhetorical effectiveness with maintaining dialectical standards of reasonableness”. We shall argue, however, that the whole project to bridge the gap between rhetoric and dialectic undermines the irreducibly conventional nature of the criterion to determine what is *out of place* in the dialectical discussion.
democracy by argumentation training, it is tempting to hope that there might be equivalence between what is right and what we perceive as right.

In an ultimate move to overcome the dilemma of dialectic, the pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation attempted to prove empirically that arguers have a spontaneous sense of their dialectical duties (van Eemeren, Garssen and Meuffels: 2012). In this perspective, the rules for the proper conduct of dialectical discussion are not only desirable: they are realistic. In our view, it is, on the contrary, of upmost importance to clearly distinguish the point of view of the philosopher (and the legitimate hopes he might have to establish universal criteria to determine what is out of place) and the point of view of the craftsman (i.e. the observation of argumentative practices). Indeed, learning what people ought to do is one thing; learning to feel what to do in a given situation is another. If rhetoric, were to be conceived in terms of its resemblance with dialectic, the risk is to end up with argumentation training that would not suit real life.

**BEING ATOPOS IN THE REALM OF RHETORIC**

In a famous article, Jacques Brunschwig offered a colourful illustration of the difference between dialectic and rhetoric. Dialectic, as he puts it, is “a greenhouse flower that grows and flourishes in the protected atmosphere of the school”. Rhetoric, on the other hand, “is a plant growing in the open air of the city and the public places” (1996: 51). It is worth stressing the “protected atmosphere” of the dialectical discussion. Indeed, as long as discussion is an intellectual exercise, arguers might be willing to agree on rules and even to respect them in the argumentative exchange: there would be no challenge, and no pleasure, to play a game without rules. For the sake of exercise, an arguer might accept his/her defeat if he/she is pushed, by his opponent, to sustain an opinion that his/patently out of place. Moreover, considering the nature of dialectical problems, protagonists are not discussing matters that might have direct consequences for them. In this context, it might be easier to focus on the sole issue of the soundness of arguments.

In the realm of rhetoric, that is, within democratic institutions (Kock: 2009), citizens argue to defend their views on what is right (forensic genre), useful (deliberative genre) or good (epideictic genre). In these contexts, the outcome of a discussion might have a real impact on the arguers’ lives and on the ruling of the cities they live in. One might therefore expect that the criterion of what

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13 Such as: “Can we say that an animal that walks on two feet is a definition of man or not?” (Top. I, 4, 101b).
is *out of place* would go beyond a sole matter of logical soundness. In the realm of rhetoric, what is *out of place* might become synonymous with what one considers as incompatible with the good functioning of the city; the *atopos* might be blamed as the one that does not belong to the place (Goyet 1996: 207-209).

Aristotle’s uses of *atopos* in the *Rhetoric* correlate the idea of a different nature of the *common places* (i.e., the borders of rationality) once we leave the protected atmosphere of dialectical discussion. While throughout the *Topics* the criterion of what is *out of place* is a logical one (with the notable exception of Top. II, 2, 109b), it seems that Aristotle has a more ethical criterion in mind in the *Rhetoric*\(^\text{14}\). Here is an instance of this ethical dimension:

Another way is to answer the calumny by the calumny: it would be absurd (*atopon gar*) to trust who does not deserve trust. (*Rhet.*, III, 15, 1416a).

We shall first stress on the fact that Aristotle does not hesitate to consider as patently irrational (*out of place*) what could be described as an *ethical* mistake (trusting someone who does not deserve it). The use of *atopos* in this context might be interpreted with regard to Aristotle’s optimism about human nature. In the same way that “men have a sufficient natural instinct for what is true” (*Rhet.*, I, 1355a) men would have a natural instinct for ethic. The one who commits an ethical mistake would therefore put him/herself *out of place*, that is, at odd with normal uses of human reason.

One should however keep in mind that Aristotle is not here concerned with distinguishing good from bad arguments: this would be mistaking the point of view of a moral philosopher with the point of view of a craftsman. Indeed, since Aristotle, intends to describe a *techne*, he most of the time adopts an *amoral* perspective. In the above quote, he provides the reason why a strategy (to answer the calumny by the calumny) *works*: it would be absurd to trust who does not deserve trust. One should however not too hastily conclude that his treatise is nothing more than training to persuade by all means and that rhetoric, to be morally acceptable, should be *framed* by dialectic. Indeed, a genuinely rhetorical conception of the places of *inventio* might have an interesting pedagogical value.

When Aristotle states that “it would be absurd (*atopon gar*) to trust who does not deserve trust”, he relies on a feeling about the normal behaviour of an honest man. Of course, the fact that political leaders compete by means of calumny, and gather camps of supporters around them, might give the impression that the

\(^{14}\) As in the *Topics*, there are only a few occurrences of *atopos* in the *Rhetoric*: 1355a line 39, 1376b line 17, 1377a line 28, 1398a line 2, 1398a line 12, 1401a line 32, 1416a line 27, 1419a line 2.
city is deeply divided. But the rhetorical places of *inventio* are here to remind us that, as human beings, we are persuaded by the same kinds of arguments: it would be absurd to trust who does not deserve trust.

Answering the calumny by the calumny. Any political campaign offers new illustrations of this strategy. This informs us on the timelessness nature of the rhetorical places of *inventio*: *ad hominem* arguments work because, as humans, we share a feeling of how a truthful *ethos* should look like. From a normative perspective, it might be argued that one *ought not* to use it. But the reality is that, in the realm of rhetoric, one might not loose the battle because he/she is *atopos*: one might rather become *atopos* because he/she lost the battle15. The problem is, therefore, not how to civilize rhetoric by applying dialectical rules to it. The problem is rather to insure that, in the heart of a *deep disagreement* (Fogelin: 1985), citizens are equipped to perceive that they share *common places* with their opponents, that is, a common humanity.

CONCLUSION: RHETORIC AS AN ART TO EXERCISE HUMANITY

To conclude, we shall go back to our starting point and draw the consequences from our study for the training of citizenship skills.

The past decades witnessed rather pessimistic developments about the very idea that one might give students the means to evaluate arguments. Robert Fogelin, in his “Logic of Deep Disagreements” notably stated: “We can insist that not every disagreement is deep, that even with deep disagreements, people

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15 In this respect, another use of *atopos* in the rhetoric is highly interesting. It occurs as Aristotle gives instances of lines of arguments based on considerations of time. As an illustration, Aristotle reproduces an argument that could have been used to convince the Thebans to let Philip pass through their territory into Attica: “if he had insisted on this before he helped them against the Phocians, they would have promised to do it. It is monstrous (*atopon*), therefore, that just because he threw away his advantage then, and trusted their honour, they should not let him pass through now” (*Rhet.*, II, 23, 1398a). The argument’s structure is rather sophisticated since it entails a fiction: the situation under discussion is judged according to a fictional past in which Philip would have asked a favour after helping the Thebans. In other words, it is with regard to a rhetorical construction that the Thebans potential decision can be said to be *out of place*. It is worth stressing on Whys Robert’s choice to translate *atopos* into “monstrous”. This highlights the fact that *atopos* is here used as a rhetorical means to make the audience *feel* what is ethical. Indeed, when we leave “the protected atmosphere of the school” rhetoric might be the only available tool to share our *feeling* of what is right and to try to convert it, in the audience’s mind, into a *willingness* to act accordingly. In the realm of rhetoric, *universal audience* cannot be of any help if conceived as what is rational *de jure* (Tindale 2006: 461-462). *Universal audience*, that is, the consciousness of what is right in a concrete case, might *arise* in the audience mind by an appropriate use of *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*. This is the reason of rhetoric (Danblon: 2013b).
can argue well or badly. In the end, however, we should tell the truth: there are disagreements, sometimes on important issues, which by their nature, are not subject to rational resolution” (1985: 7). In line with Fogelin’s conclusion, Marc Angenot dedicated a whole study to the *Dialogue of the Deaf* (2008). Breaking with the normative tradition, Angenot carefully described the reasons why most important philosophical and political controversies cannot be rationally solved. The whole idea that there are *common places* to be found thus appears as a gentle illusion. A rhetorical approach to the *topics* might offer a less pessimistic perspective.

In our view, the real illusion would be to consider that a philosophical conception of rationality (i.e. a rationality defined outside of a rhetorical interaction) should guide the citizens. Indeed, the risk would be to end up with citizens trained to perceive actual arguments only in terms of deviation from an ideal (Ferry: 2012)\(^\text{16}\). Worst than that: we might end up with citizens that would not even be able to *perceive* the necessarily imperfect means by which their citizen mates try to persuade them\(^\text{17}\). The rhetorical approach to argumentation might prevent this risk. Such an approach should, in our view, assume two theoretical options.

The first one is to follow William Grimaldi on his humanistic interpretation of Aristotle’s conception of rhetorical proof. According to Grimaldi, the originality of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* was to provide a theory of proof *produced by* and *addressed to* complete human beings, that is, beings of emotion, reason and character (1980: 350). This rhetorical conception of proof looses all its interest if one tries by all means to understand it with regard to a logical conception of proof (i.e., by conceiving *logos* as the rational heart of the rhetorical proof, optionally coated with some *ethos* and *pathos*)\(^\text{18}\). In doing so, one would reduce the purpose of a theory of proof to the assessment of arguments. The benefits of a humanistic conception of proof lie elsewhere: by learning to observe *logos*,

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\(^{16}\) Fogelin was aware of this risk: “I think that the chief danger of adopting a deductive model for all reasoning – even as an ideal – is that it yields sceptical consequences. The demand that in an acceptable argument the conclusion must be entailed by exceptionless premises yields the consequence that virtually all of those everyday arguments which seem perfectly adequate are, in fact, no good […] If students become convinced that they can always find something wrong with any (non-trivial) argument presented to them, then the distinction between good arguments and bad arguments is subverted, and the whole enterprise of arguing seems to lose its point” (1985: 2).

\(^{17}\) In other words, the risk, in reducing rationally to logic, and in neglecting the rationality of *ethos* and *pathos*, is to train anaesthetic citizens (Heller-Roazen: 2007).

\(^{18}\) Antoine Braet (1992) notably advocated for such a view.
ethos and pathos in argumentative interactions we might learn to know our fellow men\textsuperscript{19}.

The second option is to conceive rhetorical training as an exercise of empathy\textsuperscript{20}. Charles Kimber Pearce explored it in a working paper entitled “‘Dissoi Logoi’ and Rhetorical Invention: Contradictory Arguments for Contemporary Pedagogy” (1994). He was convinced that the practice of dissoi logoi (i.e. an exercise in which a student has to argue successively for opposite, and even contradictory views on a same issue) would offer the best training for arguing in a democracy. As he puts it: “Unrestricted by the rule of non-contradiction, students are better equipped to recognize the merits of an honourable opposition.” (1994: 6; See also Danblon 2013a: 127-169). We shall stress on the idea that such a rhetorical exercise might train “the students to recognize the merits of an honourable opposition”. This is probably the genuine purpose of a rhetorical approach to the Topics: embodying the opponent point of view, walking around in his/her places.

Such a rhetorical approach to the places of inventio might best insure, in accordance the hope expressed by Aristotle (Top., II, 2, 101a), that we have all means to meet other people on their ground.

Université Libre de Bruxelles

\textsuperscript{19} Such was the very purpose of the study of argumentation according to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca: «C’est la délibération qui distingue l’homme de l’automate. Cette délibération porte essentiellement sur ce qui est l’œuvre de l’homme, sur les valeurs et les normes qu’il a créées, et que la discussion permet de promouvoir. L’étude des procédés de cette discussion peut développer dans l’homme la conscience des techniques intellectuelles dont se servent tous ceux qui élaborent sa culture». (Perelman et Olbrechts-Tyteca 1989 [1950]: 102-103)

\textsuperscript{20} In his postdoctoral project, “Exercising Empathy: Rhetorics of Others’ Points of Views”, thanks to the support of the Wiener-Anspach Foundation, Victor Ferry tests rhetorical exercises as means to cultivate citizens’ skills for empathy.
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