TOWARD A LOGIC OF GOOD REASONS

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As the title of this essay implies, I propose to take up several problems attendant on the development of a systematic scheme by which “good reasons” can be assessed in any given instance of rhetorical discourse or transaction. As the title also implies, I do not promise to resolve these problems. They have, after all, bedeviled philosophers and rhetoricians since at least the time of Plato. Among contemporary philosophers, the most useful work has been done by Toulmin, Perelman, and Gottlieb. Foremost among modern rhetoricians who have tackled the problems of “good reasons” are Wallace and Booth. I am also indebted to the work of Eubanks and Baker, Ehniger, Mr. Fisher is Professor of Speech Communication, University of Southern California. An earlier version of this essay was presented at the Speech Communication Association convention in December of 1977 in Washington, D.C.

1 Stephen Edelson Toulmin, An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1950).

Assumptions

A number of assumptions underlie this project. First is a conviction that the most indispensable need in contemporary rhetoric is a scheme by which values can be identified and their implications critically considered. This conviction derives from the belief that rhetorical communication is as laden with values as it is with what we usually call reasons. Humans as rhetorical beings are as much valuing as they are reasoning animals. I am also convinced that value judgments are inevitable, that they are not irrational, that consensus about them

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will never be realized, and that no analytically grounded hierarchy of values will ever claim universal adherence. (This final point will be developed further later in the essay.) Finally, I believe that rhetoricians have an obligation to inform students and to raise the consciousness of citizens about the nature and functions of values as we have informed them about the nature and functions of reasons. As Cronkhite has observed: "[T]he best antidote for a sophistic rhetor is a sophisticated rhetoree, and we had best get at the business of providing such an antidote."\(^{10}\)

THE MEANING OF "LOGIC"

The first problem to be dealt with is the meaning of "logic" in the expression "logic of 'good reasons'." By logic, I do not refer to the study of the principles or structures that constitute a concept or an activity, as in the "logic of the humanities" or the "logic of legal controversy." Nor do I mean a formal system, such as a deontic logic that seeks to reveal the structures of reasoning about matters of permission and obligation. The general inappropriateness of formal logic to rhetorical reasoning has been well demonstrated by Toulmin\(^ {11}\) and Perelman.\(^ {12}\) I use "logic" rather to designate a systematic set of procedures designed to aid in the analysis and assessment of elements of reasoning in rhetorical interactions. The procedures I offer consist of a series of criterial questions meant to reveal the role of values in practical reasoning and to provide a basis on which one can begin to assess them. The scheme is thus an adjunct to existing "logics" used in the study of rhetorical reasoning. It is an informal (noncategorical) system, coordinate with the kind of logic that dominates argumentation texts—the classification of types of reasoning (sign, causal, analogical, etc.) with appropriate tests. The "logic of 'good reasons'" will be formed by the incorporation of the criterial considerations of values into such logical schemes.

A RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF "GOOD REASONS"

The second problem is defining "good reasons." The nature of this problem can be seen clearly through an examination of the concepts of "good reasons" offered by Wallace and Booth. It should be noted at the outset that their views are circular. How this is so will be demonstrated. My complaint about the concepts is not that they are circular, but that they are too narrowly constructed. My intent is not to contradict them, but to expand them; for any evaluative system is circular. Evaluation inherently involves tautology. For example, if we say a good essay is logical, it follows that an essay cannot be good and not logical. Thus, my concern is not to avoid circularity; it is to increase the diameter of the circle that contains "good reasons."\(^ {13}\) The circle will be expanded by broadening the concept of "good reasons" to allow more instances of reasons and values to find their place within it, and clear criteria will be

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\(^{11}\) Stephen Edelston Toulmin, The Uses of Argument (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1958), "Introduction."


supplied for their assessment. The result should be a more useful circle.

Wallace took the position that "One could do worse than characterize rhetoric as the art of finding and effectively presenting good reasons."14 "A good reason," he wrote, "is a statement offered in support of an ought proposition or of a value-judgment." And "good reasons" he defined as "a number of statements, consistent with each other, in support of an ought proposition or of a value-judgment."15 In other words, a reason is good if it is tied to a value and a value is reasonable if it is tied to a reason. Given this view, there is no way to distinguish the merits of competing good reasons and the view ignores the possibility that values may be reasons and that reasons affirm values in and of themselves.

In *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*, Booth writes that he will "be pursuing . . . the art of discovering good reasons, finding what really warrants assent because any reasonable person ought to be persuaded by what has been said."16 Although I think Booth's inquiry is learned and useful, I cannot find in the remaining pages of his book any clearer concept of good reasons than what he suggests in this statement. He seems to be saying that good reasons are what good people affirm and that reasonable people know what is good. This is, of course, a circular view, like that of Wallace, which makes it impossible to judge between the good reasons of conflicting good persons. An advantage of Booth's approach is that one can contemplate the possibility of finding good reasons in art and literature as well as in the usual forms of rhetorical communication. But how to assess them is the difficulty. It is not very helpful to know that "A satisfactory account of good reasons in any one domain of life would necessarily require a sizable book," or that "The repertory of good reasons could never be constructed by any one person, since it would include all good discourse about the grounds of valid discourse in any subject."17

To remedy the difficulties in the views of Wallace and Booth, I propose that good reasons be conceived as those elements that provide warrants for accepting or adhering to the advice fostered by any form of communication that can be considered rhetorical.18 By warrant, I mean that which authorizes, sanctions, or justifies belief, attitude, or action—these being the usual forms of rhetorical advice. Given this conception of good reasons, it seems to me that a person can isolate and begin to weigh them, to compare and contrast them. The concept requires a rethinking of argumentative forms, so that they include all modes of communication, not just those that have clear-cut inferential structures. The concept also opens a way to get at the rhetorical components of literature, film, and drama. Indeed, I think that a next step in pursuing the nature and functions of good reasons is to identify the modes of warrant in diverse kinds of communication, the ways, for instance, that narration, character, action, scene, and music induce audiences to think, feel, or behave as an author intends.

**The Logic of Good Reasons**

I shall return to the difference be-

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14 Wallace, p. 248.
15 Ibid., p. 247.
16 Booth, p. xiv.
17 Ibid., p. 143.
18 The use of the term "good reasons" does not imply that every element of rhetorical interaction that warrants a belief, attitude, or action—any "good reason"—is as good as any other. It only signifies that whatever is taken as a basis for adopting a rhetorical message is inextricably bound to a value—to a conception of the "good."
between my conception of good reasons and those of Wallace and Booth shortly. Before I do, however, it is necessary to consider the third problem in this project—the design and implementation of a logic of good reasons. The present scheme of logic, a logic of reasons, is the heart of courses and texts in argumentation, and focuses on the soundness of reasoning in public or problem-solving discourse. Whether in a course or textbook, the pattern is to explore the role of argument in society, the nature of argumentative controversy, the formulation of propositions, the analysis of cases, the responsibilities of arguers, and the definitions of such terms as argument, claim, warrant, evidence, proof, presumption, burden of proof, and fallacy. But these are the means, not the end of the instruction. The aim is to instill the arts involved in “acting rationally,” to implant habits of perception and procedure that inform the preparation, presentation, and evaluation of argumentative communication. My concern in this project is the evaluative habit, the set of criterial questions that one is supposed to internalize so that one can ascertain the weight of reason in any given message, including one's own.

Five components may be identified in the present logic of reasons. First, one considers whether the statements in a message that purport to be “facts” are indeed “facts”; that is, confirmed by consensus or reliable, competent witnesses. Second, one tries to determine whether relevant “facts” have been omitted and whether those that have been offered are in some way distorted or taken out of context. Third, one recognizes and assesses the various patterns of reasoning, using mainly standards from informal logic. Fourth, one assesses the relevance of individual arguments in a message to the decision it concerns, whether these arguments are not only sound, but are also all the arguments that should be considered in the case, and whether the arguments have been distorted or misrepresented in some way. Fifth, armed with the knowledge that forensic issues are those of “fact,” definition, justification, and procedure, and that deliberative decision-making centers on questions of policy and problem-solving—that is, reasons for and against change and the wisdom of particular proposals—one makes a judgment as to whether the message directly addresses the “real” issues in the case; whether, in other words, it deals with the questions on which the whole matter turns or should turn.

The components needed to transform the logic of reasons into a logic of good reasons are fivefold. First is the question of fact: What are the implicit and explicit values embedded in a message? Second is the question of relevance: Are the values appropriate to the nature of the decision that the message bears upon? Included in this question is a concern for omitted, distorted, and misrepresented values. Third is the question of consequence: What would be the effects of adhering to the values in regard to one's concept of oneself, to one's behavior, to one's relationships with others and society, and to the process of rhetorical transaction? Inherent in this question are such concerns as Ehninger's criterion of moral obligation, Eubanks and Baker's distinction between civilizing and brutalizing values, and Wals...
lace's delineation of democratic values. Fourth is the question of consistency: Are the values confirmed or validated in one's personal experience, in the lives or statements of others whom one admires and respects, and/or in a conception of the best audience that one can conceive? Implied in these standards are McKerrow's notion of the self as the validating agent in argumentative interactions, Booth's concept of "weighty witnesses," and Perelman's suggestion of a "universal audience." Fifth is the question of transcendent issue: Even if a prima facie case exists or a burden of proof has been established, are the values the message offers those that, in the estimation of the critic, constitute the ideal basis for human conduct? This is clearly the paramount issue that confronts those responsible for decisions that impinge on the nature, quality, and the continued existence of human life, especially in the fields of biology and weapons technology and employment. Transcendent values are present in more ordinary cases but they are rarely a matter of dispute. They concern ultimate values, are generally taken for granted by the arguer, and, when brought to the surface, reveal one's most fundamental commitments. Their role in argument is shown in Figure 1 and will be discussed in what follows.

IMPLEMENTATION

These criterial questions can be used to implement a logic of good reasons in three ways. First, they can be added to the criterial questions of the logic of reasons. Second, they can be infused with the tests of different types of reasoning: example, analogy, sign, cause, definition, and authority. Insofar as each of these types of reasoning involves values, the criterial questions of fact, relevance, consequence, and consistency are pertinent; and the criterial question of transcendent issue is germane when the critic weighs the whole message to determine if it addresses those matters on which the decision should turn. Third, the criterial questions can be applied in Toulmin's model of argument. There may be other ways to implement a logic of good reasons, but these are the ones that I think are most promising for now.

However the considerations of fact, relevance, consistency, coherence, and transcendent issue are incorporated into current logical schemes, it is important that they be recognized as a system; each element depends on each other. Although essentially a descriptive system designed for use by individuals, it indicates norms, and the judgment the measures call for requires that one consider one's relations with others. Because norms and values are social constructs, socially derived and maintained, one cannot assess them without at least the implicit involvement of others. As John Donne would remind us, persons are not islands unto themselves.

The difference between my conception of good reasons and those of Wallace and Booth should now be evident. My quarrel with them is that, given their conceptions of good reasons, to identify a good reason is at the same time to assess it; that is, in Wallace's view the value of a value is that it is tied to a reason, and in Booth's view the value of a value resides in who expresses it. The definition I offer says that a good reason

23 McKerrow, pp. 139-41.
24 Booth, p. 121.
values enter an argument and the function they perform—to determine the argument's outcome. With this sort of display, the embedded values are revealed and the questions of relevance, consistency, consequence, and transcendent issue can be raised and answered. To determine the relevance of a value, one must know the "facts" of the matter and the nature and functions of values.28

28 To gain knowledge about the nature and functions of values, I would recommend the following: for a psychological perspective,
With such knowledge, one should be able to discern whether the values in the message are appropriate to the case: The same act of intellection that tells one if the evidence given in support of a claim authorizes that claim also tells one whether a value is appropriate to it. It was by this sort of knowledge and thinking that I identified the relevant values in Figure 1. My assumption is that anyone with even modest intelligence could perform the same feat. To apply the tests of consistency, consequence, and transcendent issue, one need know oneself and those whom one regards as expert or best qualified to know or judge in the given case. The final judgment of what to believe or do is thus made by inspection of "facts," values, self, and society; it is inevitably an intersubjective and pragmatic decision. What is more, it is a rational one.

Figure 1 is also designed to show that no hierarchy of values exists to resolve the conflict of transcendent values. Although it may be possible to find persons who are unalterably committed either to duty to country or to moral conscience (religious conviction/reverence for life) no matter the situation, I believe that individual Americans hold both values and that context determines which will be salient. It is not unreasonable, for instance, that a person—not necessarily a militarist—who was convinced by administration arguments that national pride was at stake in Vietnam would take a position based on the duty-to-country value. Nor would it be unreasonable for a person—not necessarily a pacifist—who was persuaded by the war's opponents that America's profession of reverence for life was at stake would take a position grounded on the moral-conscience value.

A critical point to be made here is that duty to country and duty to one's moral conscience are context-specific values; that is, they arise only in particular decisional situations. Some other values, it seems, are general and apply in all decision-making situations. In other words, some values appear to be field-dependent—appropriate to only certain subject matters—and some are field-invariant, having to do with the necessary constituents of communicative acts. Beyond the physical requirements of communicants who share some commonality in symbol systems, human communication relies on some degree of trust, a willingness to participate in the process, a belief in the desirability of the interaction, and an interest in (or expectation of) the attainment and/or advancement of some truth. Some invariance in values is indicated by the fact that some members of all known cultures have found it possible to communicate with some members of other cultures that they have encountered. In addition to these cross-cultural values, one may propose other specified invariant values underlying communicative interactions in given cultures—for example, respect for the dignity and worth of the individual in the United States. In the case of the argument displayed in Figure 1, adherence to respect for the dignity and worth of the individual would make dialogue-dispute possible between those


who disagreed. It would have the additional effects of opening the way for persuasion, maintaining the participants' sense of worthwhileness, and furthering the likelihood of real community among those concerned about the argument.

Hierarchies of Values

A logic of good reasons is not a mechanism for resolving disputes over values, transcendent or otherwise. Like the logic of reasons, it provides measures for assessing elements in reasoning. The purpose of a logic of good reasons is to offer a scheme to generate a sense of what is good as well as what is reasonable as a fundamental part of the educational system, to insure that people are conscious of the values they adhere to and would promote in rhetorical transactions, and to inform their consciousness without dictating what they should believe.

On the other hand, I would want the user of a logic of good reasons not only to know the nature and functions of values generally, but also to be familiar with the hierarchies of values that are available. I am especially impressed with the hierarchy outlined by the geneticist Hermann J. Muller. He has proposed survival and extension of humankind as the most primitive of values and the promotion of intelligence, the making for cooperative behavior, the gratification of curiosity in the pursuit of truth for its own sake, the fulfillment of love, and the freedom to achieve, create, and explore as the highest values.28

As much as I admire these values, they do not represent necessary norms by which values in a particular instance can be ranked. As I noted at the outset of this essay, I do not believe an analytically grounded hierarchical system of value-rules is achievable. The possibility of field-invariant values does not contradict this point. Such values would appear to be those necessary for rhetorical exchange to take place—the "givens" of give and take in reasoned interactions. These values do not determine the reasons put forth or the conclusions reached in a situation; they do determine, however, the viability of those reasons and conclusions, and the possibility of further interactions. The ranking of values suggested by Muller suffers from the inevitable problems of all such orderings: First, the application of the values they contain depends on time, place, topic, and culture; and, second, the idea of a binding system of values denies Burke's distinction that establishes that humans are creative ethical beings. He wrote: "Action involves character, which involves choice... Though the concept of sheer 'motion' is non-ethical, 'action' implies the ethical (the human personality)."29 Because, in other words, humans are not identical one with another, because they are free choice makers—whether through perversity or divine inspiration—they are not likely to be bound by "perfect" constructs—except of their own making.

At the risk of belaboring the point, one final potential source of an analytical hierarchy of values should be examined. Extending his study of early cognitive development, Jean Piaget investigated children's acquisition of moral character.30 He and his followers even-

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tually observed eleven different aspects in the child's learning of moral judgments, leading him to postulate a natural progression in the growth of humans from an authoritarian to a democratic ethic. Later investigations, however, do not support this conclusion.\textsuperscript{31} The best that can be said of Piaget's work is that it suggests "the possibility of uncovering basic trends in the development of moral judgment."\textsuperscript{32} We may hope that such trends are discovered, but we should not expect such discovery to result in an ordering of values that will be a necessary feature of human reasoning and decision-making.

\textbf{Conclusion}

I have intended in this paper to push the development of a logic of good reasons one step further, but there are many steps to be taken. Some remaining problems are theoretical—to untangle the relationships among values grounded in self, society, and ideal audiences; to examine the idea that values are field-dependent or field-invariant; to work out, if possible, rules that would guide reasoning about values; to establish a concept of rationality that accounts for a logic of good reasons. Some other remaining problems are empirical—to determine the values of particular segments of society; to explore further the relationships among values, beliefs, attitudes, and behavior; to investigate the process by which values become salient in given decision-making situations. And still other remaining problems are matters of using the logic of good reasons in criticism and the classroom. We can hope that progress will be made on all of these problems in the near future.

Since the time of Francis Bacon, knowledge has been conceived largely as power over people and things. In my judgment, we have lost a sense of wisdom. To regain it, I think, we need to reaffirm the place of value as a component of knowledge—and that, too, is a function of a logic of good reasons.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 400.