

Andrea Gilardoni, *Logica e argomentazione. Un prontuario (Logic and argumentation. A handbook)*. Milano: Mimesis Edizioni, 3rd edition, 2008, 472 pp., ISBN 978-88-8483-735-6 (paperback), € 25.00.

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Since Plato's days, most logicians had a phobia of rhetoric. The opposition rhetoric/logic or argumentation/demonstration (respectively their instruments) gives expression to a fundamental cultural opposition which separates a family of ideas such as truth, science, certainty, demonstration (with which demonstrative logic is identified) from falsehood, opinion, mere probability, plausibility, appearance, fallibility (with which rhetorical argumentation is associated).

Until half a century ago, rhetoric and logic seemed at first sight to belong to two different universes. Speaking of rhetoric generally aroused either a defensive reaction, as if directed against an enemy, or an attitude of superiority, as if directed towards a miserable thing. In contrast, speaking of logic excites feelings of safety and respectability. Owing to this radical revision of the concept of rhetoric –which currently designates a mode of insincere and bombastic speech, that is, a type of artificial, declamatory or highly wrought language–, roughly onwards from the middle of the 20th century until today, the term also indicates a “rationale of informative and suasive discourse” (Bryant 1953, 401) or “a permanent subjunctive mental mode” (Struever 1970, 155) or even “all of language, in its realisation as discourse” (Valesio 1980, 7).

However, it seems not entirely true to say that, once a logical proof can be obtained, rhetoric is no longer required. For example, rhetoric can produce

true understanding not only by deceptive emotions, but by “taking us through layers of implications to show us that, though uncertain, a statement may be provisionally accepted because of its premise” (Meredith 1966, 25). On this basis, Meredith provides an interesting reevaluation of rhetoric: He affirms that the opposition between science and rhetoric in terms of certainty vs. probability is owed to a fundamental misconception of the very nature of science. Also scientists must admit that science, whether or not it requires rhetoric, always has to do with the probable and improbable, while certainty is the domain of theology.

What misleads is the confusion between the persuasive aspect and the explicative feature of rhetoric: Rhetoric is less an art of persuading the listener in order that he/she may accept as true some statements which are logically inconsistent, than an art of lucid exposition, an art and an act which are part of logic and of scientific demonstration. For Meredith, to demonstrate means to explain a phenomenon, but also to explain this explanation to someone else (The latter task is called “exposition”). “[T]hose who have profound and vital things to say will often abandon prose altogether and exploit the freedom of poetry. Scientists communicating with one another do essentially the same, but their poetry is mathematics” (*ibid.*, 24).

If we want to free ourselves from the suspicion that this is a “modernist” thesis, we could quote a passage from the first chapter of the first book of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*. There, it is said that some men are persuaded not by the arguments of science, but by the common notions (*Rhetoric* I, 1, 1355 a). The exemplar Aristotelian definition of rhetoric as “an ability, in each case, to see the available means of persuasion” (*Rhetoric*, I, 1, 1355 b 27: G. A. Kennedy 1991 transl.) is an example of a definition which determines the nature of the *definiendum*. And it is worth to point out that Aristotle tries to model and to found his rhetorical theory on logic, as long as he can. One possible conclusion is that “the same intelligent man uses different logics in different situations, maintaining a rational consistent behaviour” (Dalla Chiara Scabia 1974, 114).

Until the first half of past century, the general attitude of contemporary Italian culture towards rhetoric was, with very few exceptions, characterized by its literary conception, its insufficient theoretical reflection on it, and a lack of original contributions. Today, there is a need and a demand for logic and for argumentation. In 2009, an informal society of Italian scholars from

different fields of research who take an interest in logic and in argumentation and who promote the theory and the practice of argumentation has been constituted, called *Ergo* (<http://www2.unipr.it/~itates68>). One of its members, Andrea Gilardoni, the Italian translator of books by Frans van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst such as *Leren argumenteren met Vader en Zoon, En Spoedcursus in twintig lessen* (1996) and *A systematic theory of argumentation* (2004), recently published a new, namely the third edition of *Logica e argomentazione. Un prontuario (Logic and argumentation. A handbook)*. It is a complete reference of almost 500 pages which successfully combines logic and rhetoric, demonstrative and argumentative proof. The book comprises a more traditional part on classical deductive, on formal logic, on inductive logic, on syllogism and its rules, and a more original part on the use and abuse of statistics, on identifying unexpressed premises and on different kinds of inference, on good definition and especially on fallacies, including application-exercises on speech acts as well as a glossary.

This handbook is an excellent didactic survey and a collection of rules and formulae for free reasoning, with clear examples and useful exercises, a course book that an Italian student of logical argumentation and “argumentative logic” needs to have, also in order to skim it when necessary. We can find in it a sort of healthful and restorative recovery of the Medieval *Logica Maior*, that is the logic whose task is not merely to grant the rigour of its own formal ‘logos’, but to verify, to substantiate and possibly also to ensure the truth of its propositional contents, which *Logica Minor* of necessity does not take into account.

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