Rhetoric as a Technique and a Mode of Truth: Reflections on Chaïm Perelman

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In memoriam: Henry Johnstone, fons et origo.

In one of his many criticisms of *The New Rhetoric*, the philosopher Henry W. Johnstone Jr. complains about its chapter "The Dissociation of Concepts" that "one is never sure whether [Chaïm Perelman is] thinking of rhetoric primarily as a technique or primarily as a mode of truth. One wonders, too, what status [he is] claiming for the book itself" (1978, 99).[1] Since the chapter in question largely concerns philosophical argument, the doubt is very much apropos. But the response to Johnstone's implied question—a response that Johnstone does not think available—is that the correct answer legitimately varies in a systematic way. While in philosophical contexts, and, incidentally, in scientific ones, rhetoric is invariably a mode of truth, in contexts of public address it need not be. To see how this systematic variation might be the case, I will focus, as does Johnstone, on the dissociation of concepts as a test case of the robustness of a rhetoric oriented toward truth. To do so, I must first define dissociation and then come to terms with the way in which concepts are dissociated in public address, in philosophy, and in science. In treating these examples, however, I must be wary. While they will vary systematically according to field, they are not each instances of any general "law" of dissociation. Johnstone is surely right to "doubt whether there is any general logic of dissociation; there is only the logic of each particular dissociation, generated in each case by a particular problem" (99). When I have run through my examples, I can return to Johnstone's question about the status of rhetoric and of Perelman's study of it.

Suppose that, in a campaign for the United States Senate, my opponent says that the central issue is high taxes, not the rise of medical costs, while I say that the central issue is medical costs, not high taxes. Neither of us

Philosophy and Rhetoric, Vol. 33, No. 4, 2000. Copyright © 2000 The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA.

need be engaged in the dissociation of concepts; we may simply be excluding taxes and medical care, respectively, from political matters that deserve our immediate and full attention; we may simply be breaking the link between these issues and those of high political salience. In Perelman's words, "[T]he technique of breaking up a liaison consists . . . in asserting that elements that should remain separated and independent are improperly associated" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 411). Yet, if we think that adequate medical care for all Americans is a moral issue, that it transcends politics, we are dissociating this issue from the category of campaign issues of the ordinary sort, those that deal "merely" with expediency. In the process, we are devaluing matters of mere expediency. Dissociation is a way of taking the argumentative high ground, of putting an issue on a different plane, an act that in this case turns a political race into a moral contest. In Perelman's words, "[T]he dissociation of notions brings about a more or less profound change in the conceptual data that are used as a basis of argument. It is then no more a question of breaking the links that join independent elements, but of modifying the very structure of these elements" (412).

To illustrate this difference, I will use two parallel passages on the same topic: one from Stephen Douglas and the other from Abraham Lincoln, both from the debate between them in Alton, Illinois, on 15 October 1858. In his passage, Douglas stoutly defends states' rights:

> This government was made on the great basis of the sovereignty of the States—the right of each state to regulate its own domestic institutions to suit itself, and that right was conferred with the understanding and expectation that inasmuch as each locality had separate and distinct interests, each state must have different and distinct local and domestic institutions, corresponding to the wants and interests of each locality. Our fathers knew when they made this government that the laws and institutions which were well adapted to the Green Mountains of Vermont were unsuited to the rice plantations of South Carolina. They knew then, as well as we know now, that the laws and institutions which would be adapted to the beautiful prairies of Illinois would not be suited to the mining regions of California. They knew that in a Republic as broad as this, having such a variety of soil, of climate and of interests, there must necessarily be a corresponding variety in the local laws, and policy, and institutions of each State, adapted to its own wants and condition. For these reasons this Union was established on the right of each State to do as it pleased on the subject of slavery, and every other question, negativing the right of every other State to complain, much less interfere with such policy. (Holzer 1994, 327)

In his response, Lincoln agrees with Douglas about most of these matters, but not on the issue of slavery:

> I ask if there is any parallel between these things and the institution of slavery amongst us? I ask if there is any parallel at all between these things? I ask you to consider well if we have any difficulty or quarrel among ourselves about the cranberry laws of Indiana, or the oyster laws of Virginia, or about the timber laws of Maine and New Hampshire, or about the fact that Louisiana produces sugar and we produce flour and not sugar. When have we had quarrels about these things? Never no such thing. On the other hand, when have we had perfect peace in regard to this thing, which I say is an element of discord in the nation? We have sometimes had peace, and when was that? We have had peace whenever the institution of slavery remained quiet where it was, and we have had turmoil and difficulty whenever it has made a struggle to spread out where it was not. I ask, then, if experience does not teach, if it does not speak in thunder tones, that that policy gives peace being returned to, gives promise of peace again. (Holzer 1994, 354)

Has Lincoln simply excluded the right to hold slaves from other states' rights, or has he dissociated states' rights altogether from the right to hold slaves? The former, if you believe as Douglas does that slaveholding can be a right; the latter, if you believe as Lincoln does that slavery is a moral wrong and can never be justified. If human beings really are not property, if Negroes, to use Lincoln's term, are our fellows, then we cannot own them any more than they can own us.

Whether we are breaking the connecting link in this case, or whether, instead, we are dissociating concepts, can be, as Perelman notes, a matter of controversy (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 412). Our choice will depend on whether we see the rights of the states, including the right to own slaves, as independent elements more or less of the same order or whether we see the right to own slaves as an element of a different order entirely.

This is not, as David Zarefsky (1990) correctly points out, a matter of morality versus immorality; rather, it is a matter of a morality such as Douglas's, which is procedural, and one such as Lincoln's, which is substantive. For Douglas, "[T]he real question was who had the power to decide whether to admit the institution into a community"; for Lincoln, "slavery was different [from all other procedurally guaranteed rights] because it involved a fundamental human right that derived from natural law" (225). It is Lincoln who, for rhetorical purposes, reduces Douglas's morality to mere expediency.

In public address, such dissociations can be merely manipulative, a way of concealing truth by deliberately misinforming, misleading, or withholding information from audiences. We can most easily illustrate this use by referring, as does Perelman, to the scene in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* in which Mark Antony gives the eulogy at the funeral of the just-assassinated

Caesar. The speech of the first speaker at the funeral, Brutus, the chief conspirator, is a great success, with the audience expressing views that match those of the conspirators:

> 4 PLEBIAN What does he say of Brutus?
> 3 PLEBIAN He says for Brutus' sake
> He finds himself beholding to us all.
> 4 PLEBIAN 'Twere best he speak no harm of Brutus here!
> 1 PLEBIAN This Caesar was a tyrant.
> 3 PLEBIAN Nay, that's certain:
> We are blest that Rome is rid of him.
> (3.1.58–63)

Clearly, Antony has his task set out for him: in order to inflame the Roman mob against the conspirators, he must show that the *real* character of Caesar was such that the conspirators were murderers, rather than assassins, criminals rather than patriots. He accomplishes his dissociation by means of irony, by seeming to comply with the wishes of the conspirators while, at the same time, undermining the audience's faith in their judgment:

> Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears!
> I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
> The evil that men do lives after them,
> The good is oft interrèd in their bones:
> So let it be with Caesar. The noble Brutus
> Hath told you Caesar was ambitious;
> If it were so, it were a grievous fault,
> And grievously hath Caesar answered it.
> Here under leave of Brutus and the rest—
> For Brutus is an honourable man,
> So are they all, all honourable men—
> Come I to speak at Caesar's funeral.
> (3.2.65–76)

In this exordium, Antony asserts his intention to give a funeral eulogy that, paradoxically, eschews praise for the deceased. To understand the significance of this paradox, we must adopt two perspectives, that of the Roman mob and that of an audience member or reader. For the mob, this disparagement is in accord with Brutus's wishes; for us, it is the beginning of dissociation between assassination and murder. Take, for example, the lines between the dashes, "For Brutus is an honourable man, / So are they all, all honourable men," a series of clauses linked neither syntactically nor semantically to the sentence in which they are embedded. For the mob, this phrase reveals the effort Antony is making to defer to the wishes of the

conspirators; for us, its lack of syntactic and semantic connections with the rest of the sentence, coupled with the "unnecessary" repetition of *honourable*, signals the start of a pattern that will eventually reverse the meaning of that crucial adjective, that will make the actions of Brutus all the more criminal to the mob *because* of his noble birth and honorable pretensions:

> O masters, if I were disposed to stir
> Your hearts and minds to mutiny and rage,
> I should do Brutus wrong and Cassius wrong,
> Who (you all know) are honourable men.
> I will not do them wrong; I rather choose
> To wrong the dead, to wrong myself and you,
> Than I will wrong such honourable men.
> (3.2.113–19)

To the Roman mob, Antony's audience in the play, there is no device in the speech, no irony. For them, Antony is innocently pointing out some obvious facts about his dead friend, facts that, in the aggregate, challenge the judgment of the conspirators. To us, this is irony, a device; to the mob, it is merely plain speaking. If the mob were to perceive what we perceive, they would soundly reject Antony's claims: "[E]verything that promotes perception of a device," Perelman asserts, "will prompt the search for a reality dissociated with it" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 453). The reality is that Antony is contemptuous of the mob, is merely using them. Nevertheless, he is using them in the interest of the truth as he sees it, the truth that Brutus and his co-conspirators are murderers, not assassins.

Of course, as Kenneth Burke (1967) points out, both of Antony's audiences, the Roman mob and the theatergoers, are being manipulated, though in very different ways. To his theatrical audience, Antony's speech unironically reveals a vengeful purpose, a desire to unleash "the dogs of war" against the conspirators (3.1.273). But this does not mean that Antony is entirely free from guile with an audience that has just become unwitting co-conspirators in Caesar's death: Addressing the theatergoers in a soliloquy now entirely of Burke's own devising, Antony says: "You have been made conspirators in a murder. For this transgression, there must be some expiative beast brought up for sacrifice. Such requirements guide us in the mixing of the Brutus recipe, for it is Brutus that must die to absolve you" (334). According to Burke, the ground is laid for this sacrifice by showing that Brutus breaks the bonds of friendship and that the conspirators brush aside the obligations of hospitality. In this way, Burke says, Shakespeare dissociates their actions from the course of justice (1967, 336–37). In this

sense, the funeral oration is doubly manipulative, each manipulation being coincident with the same political purpose on Shakespeare's part: the absolute condemnation of political murder.

To persuade the Roman mob of his candor, Antony insists upon his ineptness as a speaker. Commenting on this section of the speech, Perelman says that "one of the pieces of advice most insistently given by the classical masters of rhetoric was to praise the oratorical skill of one's opponent while concealing or minimalizing one's own" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 454). The idea is to undermine the opponent's credibility by arguing that his rhetorical skills are a device, that he is intent on manipulating rather than convincing:

> I come not, friends, to steal away your hearts.
> I am no orator, as Brutus is,
> But—as you know me all—a plain blunt man
> That love my friend, and that they know full well
> That gave me public leave to speak of him.
> For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,
> Action, nor utterance, nor power of speech
> To stir men's blood. I only speak right on.
> (3.2.207–13)

Although dissociation in political rhetoric can be manipulative, it need not be. My examples of the positive use come from two speeches by Lincoln, the reply to Douglas in the seventh debate at Alton, Illinois, on 15 October 1858 and the Cooper Institute Address of 27 February 1860. At Alton, Lincoln probes beneath the surface of his opponent's doctrine of popular sovereignty, a policy according to which the territories have the right to vote slavery up or down and the federal government has no right to interfere. Douglas professes to be unconcerned about which way the vote goes. This does not reflect Douglas's indifference to slavery; rather, it reflects his support for the westward expansion of the United States, an expansion that Douglas feels the vexed issue of federal jurisdiction over slavery in the territories will continue to undermine. But Lincoln insists that the issue only appears to be political; it really is moral. For Lincoln, skepticism about Douglas's motives is merely a means of revealing the moral tawdriness of his views:

> [Douglas] says he don't care whether [slavery] is voted up or down. Now, I don't care whether that is intended to be expressive of his individual sentiment upon that subject or whether it is intended to be expressive of the national policy that he desires should be carried out; it is alike valuable for my purposes. I can say that a man can logically say that if he sees no wrong in it,

> but he cannot say so logically if he admits that slavery is wrong. No man can say that he does not care if a wrong is voted up or down, he cannot say he is indifferent as to a wrong; but he must have a choice between right or wrong. He says that whatever community desires slavery has a right to it. He can say so logically if it is not a wrong, but if he admits that it is wrong, he cannot logically say that anybody has a right to do wrong. He says upon the score of equality, slaves should be allowed to go into the territories the same as other property. His argument is logical if the properties are alike, but if one is wrong and the other right, then he cannot say that, for there is no equality between the right and the wrong. I say that everything in the Democratic policy, in the shape it takes in legislation, in the Dred Scott decision, in their conversations, everyone carefully excludes the thought that there is anything wrong in it whatever.
>
> That is the real issue! An issue that will continue in this country when these poor tongues of Douglas and myself shall be silent. These are the two principles that are made the eternal struggle between right and wrong. They are the two principles that have stood face to face . . ., one of them asserting the divine right of kings, the same principle that says you work, you toil, you earn bread, and I will eat it. (Holzer 1994, 358–59)

As Zarefsky points out, this degree of eloquence is not typical of the Lincoln-Douglas debates (1990, 179–80). It is an eloquence that is distilled into the final antithesis, a contrast between pronouns. The moral issue of slavery could not be more dramatically presented than by a dissociation that equates “our peculiar institution,” not with procedural rights guaranteed by the Constitution, but simply with the exploitation of one human being solely for the profit of another.

In the Cooper Institute Address, Lincoln adds to the forcefulness of his case against slavery by engaging in a series of powerful dissociations that shifts perspective gradually but inexorably from the political to the moral; Zarefsky makes the excellent point that the historical argument functions as a surrogate for the moral argument (226). In this case, Lincoln’s dissociative device is his reconstruction of the past, a reconstruction he uses to determine the *real* intent of the founders on the issue of the expansion of slavery to the territories and thereby to undermine *any* political arguments the South chooses to make:

> The sum of the whole is, that of our thirty-nine fathers who framed the original Constitution, twenty-one—a clear majority of the whole—certainly understood that no proper division of local from federal authority, nor any part of the Constitution, forbade the Federal Government to control slavery in the federal territories; while all the rest probably had the same understanding. Such, unquestionably, was the understanding of our fathers who framed the original Constitution; and the text affirms that they understood the question “better than we.” (Lincoln 1946, 523)

Later, in the dramatic concluding half of the speech, Lincoln addresses the South directly, less as a conciliator than as a prosecuting attorney. In this segment, Lincoln avers that the *real* purpose of the South's position on slavery in the territories is not to uphold a Constitutional right, but to place sectional over national interests, in effect, to undermine the Union. In this section of his speech, Lincoln's conclusion about the *real* intent of the founding fathers has itself become the device, one by which the South's *real* motive is revealed: "Your purpose, then, plainly stated, is that you will destroy the Government, unless you be allowed to construe and enforce the Constitution as you please, on all points of dispute between you and us. You will rule or ruin in all events" (532). The South is not merely unpatriotic; it is immoral as well. In a final dissociation between the political and the moral, the South's conviction that slavery is right is seen as the *real* reason for its intransigence: "[What] will convince [the South]? This and this only: cease to call slavery *wrong*, and join them in calling it *right*. And this must be done thoroughly—done in *acts* as well as in *words*. Silence will not be tolerated—we must place ourselves avowedly with them" (535). Accordingly, at the conclusion of the Cooper Institute Address, Lincoln declares moral war on the South: "LET US HAVE FAITH THAT RIGHT MAKES MIGHT, AND IN THAT FAITH, LET US, TO THE END, DARE DO OUR DUTY AS WE UNDERSTAND IT" (536). This conclusion is the fitting terminus of his chain of dissociations.[2]

While the dissociation of concepts is useful in the analysis of political argument, Perelman's central insight concerns philosophy; philosophy, he avers, arrives at its truth precisely through dissociation. It is his view that philosophical argument is *essentially* dissociative. The claim is a strong one: "[A]ny new philosophy presupposes the working out of a conceptual apparatus, at least part of which, that which is fundamentally original, results from a dissociation of notions that enables the problems the philosopher has set for himself to be solved. It is for this reason, among others, that we consider the study of the techniques of dissociation to be so significant" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 414). Perelman calls each of the dissociations through which, he contends, all philosophies are constructed a philosophical pair, consisting of two terms, *Term 1*, the term to be devalued, and *Term 2*, the term to be privileged. Perelman's prototypical philosophical pair is

$$\frac{\text{appearance}}{\text{reality}}$$

According to Perelman, this pair of opposites operates throughout Western philosophy. For Plato, the world around us is only an appearance; only

the Forms are real. For John Locke, sights and sounds are appearances, perceptions of the secondary qualities of matter; only primary qualities, such as extension, are real. For Karl Marx, the socio-economic system we see around us is an appearance, the superstructure; only the base, the dialectical struggle leading to the triumph of the proletariat, is real. In contrast, for the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who reverses this philosophical pair, it is these very appearances that are real; the so-called realities of Plato, Locke, and Marx are illusions. In all cases, it is Term 1 that is devalued, as against Term 2.

For the purposes of exemplification, I shall focus on the role of dissociation in the work of two philosophers, Plato and René Descartes. At the center of Plato's *Phaedrus* is the device of dialectic, a two-stage process of liaison and dissociation. In dialectic, the stage of liaison "consists in seeing together things that are scattered about everywhere and collecting them in one kind . . . [. The stage of dissociation consists in being] able to cut up each kind according to its species along its natural joints, [trying] not to splinter any part, as a bad butcher might do" (265E). The *Phaedrus* consists almost entirely of the second stage, that of dissociation: dialectic is the dissociative device on which Plato consistently leans.

The dialogue may be divided into three movements. In the first, two speeches on love are contrasted, the first written by Lysias and recited by Phaedrus, the second spoken by Socrates. The second movement of the *Phaedrus* consists of Socrates' so-called Great Speech on the subject of love. The positive view of *eros* in this speech—it is linked to philosophy, the highest activity of which human beings are capable—contrasts with the negative view in the speech of Lysias and in the first speech of Socrates.

We might be excused if, at this point, we identified love as the subject of the *Phaedrus*. In the final movement of the dialogue, however, we learn that we have been misled; the dialogue is not about love at all. A series of dialectical dissociations ensue, dazzling in their complexity. As a consequence of the first dissociation, we learn that the contrast between the speeches of Lysias and Socrates is not between two views of love, but between a false view and a true view. The real issue is not love at all, but the relationship of rhetoric to truth. By exemplifying the ability of rhetoric to argue on both sides of the issue, these two speeches have illustrated only its irresponsible fecundity. In Plato's view, real rhetoricians, although they must accommodate their speech to the abilities of their audiences, must, in order to do this properly, initiate this process from the vantage point of the unvarnished truth. In this sense, Socrates' Great Speech illustrates the proper use of rhetoric. It is the truth, adapted to the capacities and tastes of

Phaedrus, its audience. The goal of the speech is instruction and inspiration: its purpose is to turn its listener into a philosopher. It is about love because love, properly construed, is, in some sense, the equivalent to philosophy: "[A] soul that has seen the most will be planted in the seed of a man who will become a lover of wisdom or of beauty" (248D).

But in a final, startling dialectical turn, the Great Speech itself is dissociated from the truth as a consequence of its existence as a piece of writing that, by its nature, outlasts its occasion of utterance. Plato drives a wedge between the intellectual interchanges of dialectic, between the active search for the truth and the futile attempt to arrest this search in writing, in "words that are as incapable of speaking in their own defense as they are of teaching the truth adequately" (276C). In other words, writing is an enemy of further intellectual progress:

> [I]t will introduce forgetfulness into the soul of those who learn it: they will not practice using their memory because they will put their trust in writing, which is external and depends on signs that belong to others, instead of trying to remember from the inside, completely on their own. You have not discovered a potion for remembering; you provide your students the appearance of wisdom, not its reality. Your invention will enable them to hear many things without being properly taught, and they will imagine that they have come to know much while for the most part they will know nothing. And they will be difficult to get along with, since they will merely appear to be wise instead of really being so. (275B)

These are words that were particularly salient for Plato, who, at the time, believed that learning was remembering: "[A] human being must understand speech in terms of general forms, proceeding to bring many perceptions together into a reasoned unity. That process is the recollection of things our soul saw when it was traveling with god, when it disregarded the things we now call real and lifted up its head to what is truly real instead" (249C).

We are now at the end of our dialectical journey, one in which rhetoric has been defined and dismissed as a device for searching out the truth. While rhetoric may use the methods of dialectic, it is not dialectic (270E–272B). While its goal is instruction and inspiration, it cannot offer the best kind of instruction—only dialectic can do that—and it cannot be a means by which the truth may be discovered.

This conclusion resolves a paradox I have not yet mentioned, the fact that the Great Speech represents a view of the Forms that Plato did not hold at the time he wrote the *Phaedrus*. From the point of that dialogue, nothing written can represent current views; nothing written can be a mode of truth. This is the case of the dialogue itself: it models, but it is not dia-

lectic, the highest form of intercourse of which human beings are capable (258E–259A).[3]

I now pass from Plato's *Phaedrus* to Descartes's *Third Meditation*. As is well known, Descartes launches his philosophical program with a series of skeptical arguments designed to separate us from our comfortable sense that we are in constant touch with reality. First, he questions the reliability of the senses. He has good reason to be wary of sense perception since, obviously, it sometimes deceives us. But there is another, stronger reason for doubt: sometimes we have dreams so vivid that we confuse them with a waking state: is it not possible, then, that our waking state is also a dream? Finally, is it not possible that there is a Deceiver, a God who allows us to infer from our sense impressions that there is a real world when, in fact, nothing exists beyond those impressions themselves?

Even in the face of these arguments, the most unsettling of which is the third, one clear and distinct belief survives, the *cogito*, the belief that I am a thinking thing. Why is this? Because the cogito is a clear and distinct idea, a technical term defined by Descartes in his *Principles of Philosophy*: "I call a perception 'clear' when it is present and accessible to the attentive mind—just as we say that we see something clearly when it is present to the eye's gaze and stimulates it with a sufficient degree of strength and accessibility. I call a perception 'distinct' if, as well as being clear, it is so sharply separated from all other perceptions that it contains within itself only what is clear" (1993, 85). For Descartes, clear and distinct ideas are immune to skeptical doubt.

But even if I am sure that I exist as a thinking thing—and how can I deny this proposition without affirming it?—I cannot be sure that I am not deceived when I think I am in touch with the world as it really is. The Deceiver argument makes it imperative that the idea of God be clear and distinct: "I must examine whether there is a God, and if there is, whether he can be a deceiver. For if I do not know this, it seems that I can never be quite certain about anything else" (74). Because of the Deceiver argument, only the existence of God can halt Descartes's skeptical regression and affirm the power of human beings to know themselves and the world.

Fortunately, by natural light, that is, clearly and distinctly, I have an idea of a "supreme God, eternal, infinite, <immutable,> omniscient, omnipotent and creator of all things that exist apart from him" (77). But does the image I have correspond to anything real outside of myself? Indeed, it does:

> [I]t is clear to me, by the natural light, that the ideas in me are like <pictures, or> images which can easily fall short of the perfection of the things from which they are taken, but which cannot contain anything greater or more perfect.

> The longer and more carefully I examine all these points, the more clearly and distinctly I recognize their truth. But what is my conclusion to be? If the objective reality of any of my ideas turns out to be so great that I am sure the same reality does not reside in me . . . and hence that I myself cannot be its cause, it will necessarily follow that I am not alone in the world, but that some other thing which is the cause of this idea also exists. (78)

While "it is true that I have the idea of substance in me in virtue of the fact that I am a substance . . . this would not account for my having the idea of an infinite substance, when I am finite, unless this idea proceeded from some substance which was really infinite" (79–80). Moreover, the God that gives me the idea of God as a perfect being cannot be a deceiver, "since it is manifest by the natural light that all fraud and deception depend on some defect" (82). It is thus that Descartes's systematic skepticism is halted; it has turned into a device, a means for affirming the self and the world, and may be discarded forthwith.

In accordance with Perelman's insight, whatever philosopher we study, we shall find that devices and dissociations are coincident with his or her originality (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 414). Perelman purports to have discovered something essential about the nature of philosophical argument. The dissociations of Plato and Descartes certainly coincide exactly with what constitutes the originality of each philosopher. For Plato, this is the dissociation between false and true rhetoric, and, more importantly, between true rhetoric, a means of conveying the truth as we understand it at any one time, and dialectic, a timeless means of discovering the truth. For Descartes, there is the dissociation, first, between our unsure sense both of ourselves and of the world, as revealed to our five senses, and our sure sense of ourselves as thinking things. There is also the dissociation between confused and indistinct ideas and clear and distinct ideas, especially our clear and distinct idea of God as a guarantor of a world our unaided senses can never guarantee.

In the works of both Plato and Descartes, the exact status of the device by which these dissociations are managed is crucial to understanding their significance. To Perelman, all dissociative arguments are, along with the devices they employ, rhetorical. In the cases of Plato and Descartes, however, in contrast to the case of Antony, the devices used can be most plausibly reconstructed as instruments in the search for truth. There is an instructive difference, nonetheless, between Plato's device and systematic skepticism, the device Descartes uses a means to truth in his *Meditations*. For Descartes, systematic skepticism is a temporary expedient, to be discarded once the criteria for certainty have been discovered. For Plato, while

dialectic, as a means to truth, is certainly to be devalued in relationship to its end, its liaisons and dissociations are permanent and inseparable partners in the search for truth.

That dissociation is also central to the arguments that scientists make is a natural extension of Perelman's views. Science tells us that the perceptions of our unaided senses are deceptions. We see a solid table; it is really a congeries of atoms in constant motion. We see a star explode in our present; light years away, it has really exploded millions of years ago. Despite its white, crystalline appearance, table salt is really a combination of equal parts of a metal, sodium, and a gas, chlorine. Despite readily apparent differences, energy and mass are really equivalent, since the one can be converted into the other. In each case, the world we experience is dissociated from the real world that science reveals; in each case, our experience is shown to be a deceptive guide to what is authentically the case. We may complete this analogy to Perelman's insight by asserting that in each case, also, the device by which this deception is revealed is the scientific method, one in a class of means by which science discovers its truths. Such devices have in their respective fields a status analogous to dialectic in Plato's philosophy.

It is not unusual for the dissociations of science to be plainly visible, even on the surface of its prose. In my first selection, from mathematical physics, Herman Minkowski, following Einstein's lead, dissociates and devalues space and time in favor of a new entity, space-time: "The views of space and time which I wish to lay before you have sprung from the soil of experimental physics, and therein lies their strength. They are radical. Henceforth, space by itself, time by itself, are doomed to fade away into mere shadows, and only a kind of union of the two will preserve an independent reality" (1952, 75). In this passage, method rules, as in Plato and Descartes. The mathematics of space-time that Minkowski will erect rests on the methods of experimental physics; it is this physics, and its mathematical consequences, that will force us to abandon space and time as "mere shadows."

My next example, from biology, is the famous last paragraph of *Origin of Species*:

> It is interesting to contemplate a tangled bank, clothed with the many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent upon each other in so complex a manner have all been produced by laws acting around us. These laws, taken in the largest sense, being Growth and Reproduction; Inheritance which is almost implied by reproduction;

> Variability from the indirect and direct action of the conditions of life, and from use and disuse: A Ratio of Increase so high as to lead to a Struggle for Life, and as a consequence to Natural Selection, entailing Divergence of Character and the Extinction of less-improved forms. Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows. (Darwin 1978, 484)

Darwin dissociates and devalues the disorderly beauty of the "tangled bank" as against the orderly reality of natural selection, the lawful process by which evolutionary progress is assured. Influenced by the fossil record and the geographical distribution of animals and plants, and guided by analogies to artificial selection and to Malthusian theories of the limits on natural growth in populations, Darwin has derived natural selection, a law that "entails" evolutionary progress.

So far, my argument puts science, philosophy, and public address more or less on a rhetorical par. But it seems mistaken not to contrast these three very different forms of discourse. Perelman suggests a distinction: "In philosophy, one does not try to establish facts but one argues for 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" (1965, 137).

It may be objected that to say that philosophers (and scientists) aim at truth puts them on pedestals of my own making. But to assert this is to misconstrue the issue. The point is rhetorical, not epistemological. In Perelman's terms, while politicians address particular audiences characterized by parochial views, philosophers (and scientists) address a universal audience consisting of all human beings insofar as they are rational (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 31–35; see also Gross 1999). Again, in Perelman's terms, while politicians persuade, philosophers and scientists convince (26–31). Speaking rhetorically, the concern for us is not whether these different discourses are true, but whether, primarily, their arguments have truth as their ultimate aim, their *telos*. In his Cooper Institute Address, as G. P. Mohrmann and Michael C. Leff point out, Lincoln aims not at truth, but at office; it is "campaign oratory," whose "central concern is ingratiation" (1974, 177). The moral content of the speech was thus subsumed under its overriding practical purpose: Lincoln aims, not at the truth, but at the Presidency.

But this historical telos does not prevent us from reevaluating the speech today as, primarily, a moral statement: "[W]hat would be recalled through

the ages," Zarefsky writes of the Address, "was not Lincoln's legalistic deference to a historical document but his forthright defense of individual rights" (1990, 243). Exactly; the Address speaks to us neither because of its historically situated legalistic argument nor because of its original identity as campaign oratory. It has a new identity appropriate to its eloquence. Now it convinces; now it aims at a universal audience. But we must not confuse what it is now with what it was then.

Other distinctions need to be made. Political rhetoric contrasts with its philosophical counterpart in the heavy dependence of the former on our conviction that the public speech of politicians and their public actions must cohere, must form an integrated whole.[4] That Martin Heidegger joined the Nazi party can be held against him, but not against his work, except by those who believe, mistakenly, that *Being and Time* is surreptitiously ideological. The salient coherence lies within this work, not between it and the man who wrote it. In the case of Heidegger, we can dissociate speech from public action without serious moral penalty.

Finally, philosophy and science contrast in that, while the dissociations of science almost invariably displace one another, those of philosophy tend to persist from generation to generation: while light is no longer the alteration in a medium that it was for Aristotle or the minute spheres it was for Isaac Newton, the philosophical dissociations of Plato and Descartes are still capable of provoking discussion.

Before I conclude, I need to reapply myself to the question of Johnstone's with which this article began: I need to ask whether rhetoric is primarily a technique or primarily a mode of truth. To this question, there is no general answer, as Johnstone asserted. There is no general logic of dissociation or, we may safely add, of any other rhetorical device: rhetoric is by definition situational. Antony's speech is a triumph of technique, of manipulation. Nevertheless, a truth is seriously at issue for him, the parochial truth that his friend has been murdered and must be revenged. A truth is also at issue for Shakespeare, a parochial truth about the dangers of regicide. In Lincoln's campaign oratory, the devices of dissociation are certainly self-serving; at the same time, they highlight the universal truth that slavery is wrong. In contrast, the devices and dissociations of the *Phaedrus* and the *Meditations* aim at universal truth; this is also the case in the sciences. In addition, the rhetoric of *The New Rhetoric* aims at universal truth; it basically is a philosophical discourse devoted to the claim that "only the existence of an argumentation that is neither compelling nor arbitrary can give meaning to human freedom, a state in which a reasonable choice can be exercised" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 514). Finally, Johnstone's

own rhetoric is aimed at universal truth; his dissociation between rhetoric as a mode of truth and as a technique is meant as a contribution to the elucidation of a still salient philosophical question.

We may summarize by saying that Perelman has made a genuine contribution to our understanding of the way philosophers argue. His deceptively simple pairing of device and dissociation yields a rich harvest when applied to works as different as those of Plato and Descartes. Devices as different as dialectic in the first case and systematic skepticism in the second reveal exactly the points at which philosophers define themselves against the traditions to which they belong; it is these dissociations that define their originality, as Perelman predicts. Moreover, Perelman's notions of device and dissociations can be generalized to apply to public address and to the sciences, applications that Perelman does not consider.

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Notes

1. I take Warnick's suggestion (1997) that Perelman is responsible for the philosophical content of his joint work with Olbrechts-Tyteca.
2. All interpretations of this speech are indebted to Leff and Mohrmann's classical and cogent analysis (1974).
3. This interpretation of the *Phaedrus* is heavily indebted to that of Nehamas and Woodruff.
4. These matters are of course contingent. In the United States, the additional coherence of private and public selves seems to be emerging as a political imperative.

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