

## Introduction

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### 1. Introduction

We are pleased to publish this issue devoted to the work of Nicholas Rescher that has special significance for informal logic.

Rescher's interest in informal logic is evidenced by his serving on this journal's Editorial Board, refereeing articles for it, and supporting it in other ways. What may be less well known is that some of his own philosophical work has a direct bearing on the problems addressed in this field. It has become customary to refer to the foundational significance for informal logic of Stephen Toulmin's *The Uses of Argument* (1958), Chaim Perelman and Lucy Olbrechts-Tyteca's *The New Rhetoric* (1958) and C. L. Hamblin's *Fallacies* (1970). In our view, Rescher's work in logic and argumentation theory in the 1970s needs to be recognized as having similar import for informal logic. Its influence has been felt on the thinking of a number of those developing theory in the field, for example John Woods and Douglas Walton.

Elsewhere in this issue you will read of Rescher's contributions to argumentation theory and the theory of rationality. We devote the rest of this Introduction to some of Rescher's less well known contributions to informal logic—and to critical thinking.

### 2. Rescher and the Principle of Charity

The idea of charity as a regulative principle of interpretation goes back to debates in the philosophy of language, and especially to questions about the indeterminacy of radical translation. Quine cites N. L.

Wilson's principle of charity, and offers his own "maxim of translation": "assertions startlingly false on the face of them are likely to turn on hidden differences of language" (*Word and Object*, 1960, p. 59).

In his *Introduction to Logic* (1964) Rescher brought this principle to bear specifically on logic. He wrote:

The governing rule in the reconstruction of enthymematic arguments is the principle of charity—one should, insofar as is possible, try to make the argument valid and its premisses true. (p. 162)

For Rescher here the principle is applied specifically to argument reconstruction, the reconstruction of (deductive) enthymemes, and the formulation of the unexpressed premisses of such enthymemes. It is expressed in terms of the theory of evaluation pegged to deductive logic: a good argument is a sound argument (having true premisses and being formally deductively valid). The principle of charity has, in subsequent formulations, been extended to apply to the reconstruction of arguments generally—not just of their unexpressed premisses, but also of expressed textual material—to non-deductive as well as deductive arguments, and to the evaluation as well as the analysis of arguments. It has also been expressed in terms of broader theories of evaluation than the soundness model of good argument. While there is disagreement about the correct formulation of the principle of charity, most theorists today agree that some such principle plays an essential role in argument analysis and criticism at various levels. To our knowledge, Rescher was the first explicitly to

label and give a formulation to the principle of charity as it applies to argumentation.

### 3. Rescher on the nature of and models for argumentation

How are we to conceive of the artifact we call argument and of the social activity of argumentation? These questions lie at the very core of the informal logic enterprise. Under the influence of developments in the foundations of mathematics and formal logic in the late 19th century, the very notion of argument underwent a transformation in logic. Essentially what happened, we would say, is that the concept of argument was mathematicized.

One of the earliest manifestations of the naturalization movement in philosophy was the reaction against this mathematicization of argumentation by such pioneering authors as Perelman, Toulmin and Hamblin. We contend that Rescher belongs in that number. His own particular contribution is most evident in two works: *Plausible Reasoning* (1976) and *Dialectics: A Controversy Oriented Approach to the Theory of Knowledge* (1977). In the former work, he formulates an account of appeals to authority in support of claims, which appeals do not fit the standard model of argument neatly, being neither premisses entailing their conclusions nor straightforward inductive evidence for them. In the latter work, Rescher reaches back to the scholastic tradition to investigate and revitalize the model of argument as a dialectical exchange between disputants. In so doing he moves to counteract the solipsistic Cartesian model with an approach that emphasizes "the communal and controversy oriented aspects of rational argumentation and inquiry." Rescher's discussions of presumption and of the burden of proof in *Dialectics* alone justify a study of that work.

Readers will find in this special issue papers on Rescher's work on plausible

reasoning, inconsistency, fallacy and rationality—all central issues for informal logic.

### 4. Rescher's Sonoma presentation

In a presentation titled, "Some Criticisms of Critical Thinking," given at the *Second National Conference on Critical Thinking and Moral Critique* at Sonoma State University in 1982, Rescher made a number of observations about informal logic and critical thinking, two of which have remained with us particularly. Here we are relying on our joint memory, as members of the audience that day: the session was not taped and to our knowledge Rescher's remarks were not published.

#### (a) On two types of argument structure

Rescher proposed that in analyzing arguments we should be attentive to two very different types of argument construction. Some arguments have a chain structure, and in them the argument is undercut by any one flaw. It is this type of argument that Meiland must have had in mind when he wrote (*College Thinking*, 1980, p. 34):

Just as a chain is only as strong as its weakest link so a conclusion is only as plausible as the weakest premises of an argument.

But there is a different kind of argument construction, which is like a rope made of different strands woven together. Here the premisses do not function as individual links, but instead as overlapping, accumulating fibres. Such an argument will be as strong as the totality of its premisses. It will not yield to the criticism that because the argument has a false premise, it is not sound.

#### (b) On the epistemic orientation of critical thinking

Elsewhere in "Some Criticisms" Rescher appealed to the pragmatists, particularly William James, to help articulate

a concern he had about what might be called the cautious epistemic orientation of the critical thinking movement. He mentioned James's view that there are two different cognitive orientations, (1) seek truth, (2) avoid error, and quoted James's famous passage in *Essays on Pragmatism*:

Our errors are surely not such awfully solemn things. In a world where we are so certain to incur them in spite of all our caution, a certain lightness of heart seems healthier than excessive nervousness on their behalf.

Rescher said he thought there was too much concern in the critical thinking literature about the avoidance of error. While a concern to avoid error is certainly legitimate, it has its downside: the

discouragement of cognitive risk-taking. Rescher expressed a worry that with the current emphasis, training in critical thinking could well result in students who were error-avoiders rather than risk-takers in pursuit of truth.

## 5. Conclusion

Professor Rescher has left his imprint on every one of the many areas to which he has pressed his singular talents and intellectual imagination. Informal logic and critical thinking are no exceptions, and these fields are the richer for his contributions—as the articles assembled in this issue make manifest.

## DIALOGUE

Canadian Philosophical Review/Revue canadienne de philosophie

*Dialogue* est la revue trimestrielle de l'Association canadienne de philosophie. Des contributions représentant les domaines principaux de la philosophie y sont publiées. Certains des articles du volume 29 sont mentionnés ci-dessous.

*Dialogue* is the quarterly journal of the Canadian Philosophical Association. Most of the main areas of philosophy are represented in its pages. Articles from Volume 29 are listed below.

- Apriorisme et théorie du choix rationnel : arguments pour la défense de la position de l'École autrichienne- par J. NICOLAS KAUFMANN
- "The World Essence" by JOHN BIGELOW
- Perelman et la philosophie anglo-saxonne- par LOUISE MARCIL-LACOSTE
- "Emotions, Feelings and Contexts: A Reply to Robert Kraut" by ROBERT C. SOLOMON
- Le rôle de l'imagination dans le mouvement animal et l'action humaine chez Aristote- par FRANÇOIS DUGRÉ
- "Sartre and James on the Role of the Body in Emotion" by BRUCE BAUGH
- Le statut de l'argument dialectique d'après *Ref. soph.* II, 172a9-15- par LOUIS-ANDRÉ DORION
- "On the Aim of Scientific Theories in Relating to the World: A Defence of the Semantic Account" by MICHAEL BAUR

Les manuscrits d'articles, d'études critiques et de comptes rendus rédigés en français ainsi que les livres pour recension doivent être adressés à: François Duchesneau, Département de philosophie, Université de Montréal, C.P. 6128, succ. A, Montréal, Québec, H3C 3J7, Canada.

English-language manuscripts and books for review should be sent to Professor Steven Davis, East Academic Annex, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC, V5A 1S6, Canada.

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