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The Pragmatic Force of Making Reasons Apparent

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Making arguments makes reasons apparent. Sometimes those reasons may affect audiences. But over-emphasis on effects distracts from other things that making arguments accomplishes and thus fails to account for its pragmatic force. We advance the normative pragmatic program on argumentation through case studies of how early advocates for women's suffrage in the US made arguments to demonstrate that they were persons capable of making reasons apparent and that their actions were reasonable.

KEYWORDS: Argumentation, argument, enactment, function of argument, normative pragmatics, women's suffrage

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past 20 years there has been increasing focus on pragmatic theories—those which, in the words of the conference theme, approach argumentation “as a mode of action.” In Figure 1 we attempt to represent in a neutral way the assumptions shared by many pragmatic theories. At its most basic, a pragmatic theory asks us to understand what O’Keefe (1982) termed argument₁s—the premise/conclusion units people exchange with each other—by placing them in the context of the argument₂s in which they occur—the transactions between speakers and audiences.

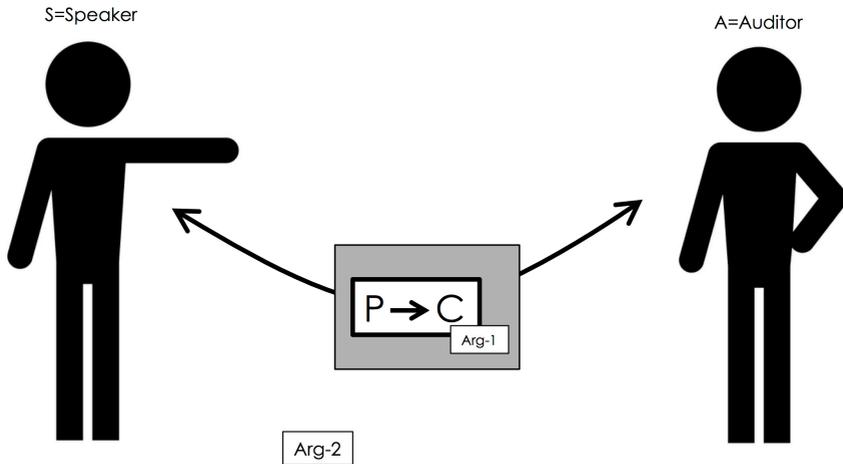


Figure 2 - Elements of a pragmatic theory of argumentation

Functionalist theories of argumentation are a subset of pragmatic theories—probably the dominant one. As Dima Mohammed has pointed out in her recent, incisive article (2015), functionalist theories pick out some argumentative activity—either the collective interaction or some individual activity going on within it—and assert that it has an “intrinsic goal.” As Mohammed further points out, the intrinsic goals that have been put forward are quite varied. For example, perhaps S’s argumentative activity is to:

- justify C to A (Bermejo-Luque, 2010, perhaps)
- invite A to infer C (Pinto, 2001, since partially reconsidered in Pinto, 2009)
- increase A’s adherence to C (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969; the view often ascribed to rhetoric)
- rationally persuade A that C (Johnson, 2000)
- critically test C, in order to induce A to accept C as a standpoint, thus rationally resolving the disagreement between A and S (pragma-dialectical theories generally)

There are important (and unresolved) differences among these views. But all share a focus on A, the audience addressed. S’s argumentative activity is aimed to change either A’s cognitive attitude towards C (e.g., infer, adhere, be persuaded) or to change his “external” activities with respect to C (e.g., openly accept as a standpoint). In this view, a

pragmatic theory of argumentation investigates the interpersonal conditions and activities that have to take place in order for the specified function to be realized; these lead to norms for argumentation.

We have critiqued many aspects of functionalist theorizing (Goodwin, 2001a, 2001b, 2007a, 2007b; Innocenti, 2005, 2006, 2011a, 2011b). Here we want to continue to urge an enlargement of view by shifting attention from what making an argument₁ does to an audience to an even more basic “mode of action.” In this paper, we will present two case studies demonstrating how making argument₁s accomplishes important tasks that have nothing to do with changing an audience's relationship to C. Instead, it is simply S's putting P→C out there in the world that has force; she does something worth doing by making P→C apparent, by showing P→C, by making P→C manifest, by making P→C explicit—that is, in the shorthand we will use in this paper, by *making a reason apparent*. In each case study we will see:

1. S makes a reason apparent.
2. S cannot expect A to accept (etc.) C.
3. S does something by making a reason apparent.

We will draw the two case studies from the early women's suffrage movement in the US: one from 1848, one from 1869-1875. While women in the mid-19th century were achieving important gains, little advance was made or reasonably could be made on obtaining the right to vote. As we will show, throughout the period deeply entrenched beliefs worked against them. One representative anecdote gives the flavour of the dominant beliefs suffrage advocates faced. As late as 1915, a *New York Times* editorial called for readers to vote “no” in a referendum on women's suffrage in part because women “lack the genius for politics” and, while men “vote according to judgments founded on observation and knowledge acquired in the pursuit of their daily business,” women “would inevitably attempt to decide such matters empirically or emotionally” (“The woman suffrage crisis,” 1915).

In these circumstances, it was not reasonable to expect that making argument₁s would change audiences' relationships to C, the claim that women should be able to vote. Nevertheless, advocates used argument₁s, and used them well. We close this paper by drawing out the implications of these cases for pragmatic theories of argumentation.

2. CASE 1: 1848: THE FIRST WOMEN'S RIGHTS CONVENTION AND ITS AFTERMATH

The first women's rights convention met in Seneca Falls, where Elizabeth Cady Stanton lived and worked for reform movements including women's rights and the abolition of slavery while caring for her five children. Organizers put a brief notice in the local newspaper that a women's rights convention would be held in a local church, and about 300 people attended, including at least 40 men (Flexner & Fitzpatrick, 1996). Among the charges against men in the famous "Declaration of Sentiments" that emerged from the event was a complaint about suffrage: "He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise."

Public opinion, even among some convention organizers (Wellman, 2004), viewed women's suffrage as preposterous, however. Leading activist Lucretia Mott reportedly said upon hearing Stanton read the complaint about suffrage in the "Declaration," "Oh Lizzie! If thou demands that, thou will make us ridiculous! We must go slowly" (qtd. in Lutz, 1940). In the first half of the 19th century it was "obvious" that women ought to be excluded from the public sphere, including both voting and public speaking. One of the main grounds for this exclusion was that women lacked the intellectual capacity to participate in public life; they were ruled by their bodies and emotions and had visions limited to the domestic sphere (Isenberg, 1998). Consider some examples:

Women's supposed irrationality and seductiveness could be invoked to preclude their participation in public advocacy (Welter, 1966; Zaeske, 1995), and their so-called superior moral virtue could be raised as a reason to block their participation in raucous partisan debates (Blackwell 2004). Some myths were sanctioned by science. In 1873 Edward H. Clarke, a medical doctor, wrote about educating women in a book that went to 17 editions in 13 years (Cayleff, 1992). He insisted that a girl ought not "work her brain over mathematics, botany, chemistry, German, and the like" because it is not possible to "safely divert blood from the reproductive apparatus to the head" (Clarke, 1873, p.126). Women did not have the intellectual ability to vote and, even if they did, they ought not use it to think about political matters lest their reproductive organs atrophy and home and society suffer. In his lecture on "Woman" delivered in Philadelphia in 1849, Richard Henry Dana made the commonplace assertion that there is a divine, natural order, and woman's place in that order is in the home where she may exercise influence in the world "mediately [. . .] by permeating the masculine actor with the feminine of her own nature" (qtd. in Henry,

1995, p. 13). Woman and man ought to act together; “the heart is then working with the head; there is union between the affections and faculties” (qtd. in Henry, 1995, p. 13). One need not read long or deeply in texts of the time to see the “pervasiveness of that philosophy in the larger socio-political culture” (Henry, 1995, p. 12).

In short, as one historian has put it, “the notion of political equality for women was so radical that for a long time it was virtually impossible even to imagine woman suffrage” (DuBois, 1987, p. 839). Although these sentiments were commonplace, Stanton herself seems to have been surprised by the negative reaction to the event. McMillan, in her comprehensive study of the Seneca Falls Convention, reports that Stanton

later recorded in her memoir, “No words could express our astonishment on finding, a few days afterward, that what seemed to us so timely, so rational, and so sacred, should be a subject for sarcasm and ridicule to the entire press of the nation.” Those who attended the Convention were derided as ‘women out of their latitude’ and encouraged to spend their time more productively by tending to their domestic duties.

The convention’s demands were characterized as “impracticable, absurd,...ridiculous...excessively silly...[and] unnatural” (McMillen, 2008, p. 99).

The speech Stanton gave several times after the convention (available at Stanton, 2010) can be seen as an attempt to overturn some of these stereotypes. The speech is highly argumentative. We encourage you to read it. Less important than what the argument₁s were, however, was the fact that *Elizabeth Cady Stanton was making them*. By standing up and putting argument₁s out there—by making reasons apparent—she was showing that she was the kind of person who could make reasons apparent. She was demonstrating that she had the capacity to participate in public life, that she had reason as well as emotion, that she had a vision of affairs beyond the domestic sphere.

Contemporary rhetorical scholarship calls the technique Stanton was employing *enactment*. In enactment, a claim is supported by the *activity* of making the claim.¹ Campbell and Jamieson have described enactment as a form “in which the speaker incarnates the argument, *is* the proof of the truth of what is said” (Campbell & Jamieson, 1978, p. 9; see also Campbell, 1988; Crenshaw, 1997; Lewis, 2011). In Michael

¹ The technique is thus the inverse of the performative contradiction, where the speaker’s making of a claim serves to undermine it; it is the “I am alive” in contrast to the “I am dead.”

Mendelson's words, the speaker "embodies" the claim being made; "the subject of one's discourse is rendered in the very form of that discourse" (1998, p. 38). Similarly, Palczewski has remarked, "the power of the (presentational) proof exceeds the (discursive) words" (2002, p. 7). Stanton was not alone among the early suffrage advocates in using enactment; many women defended their ability to be in public, to speak, and to reason by in fact being in public, speaking, and reasoning (e.g., Daughton, 1995; Huxman, 2000; Linkugel, 1993).

When Stanton engaged in argumentative activities as a form of enactment, she was performing a specific and forceful "mode of action":

1. In her speech, Stanton made many reasons apparent in support of her claims for women's rights, and for suffrage in particular.
2. In light of the opposition the movement was already experiencing, it was unlikely that her audiences would seriously consider, much less be moved by, her demands for the vote.
3. Nevertheless, by making reasons apparent, Stanton accomplished something: she showed to her audiences that she, a woman, was a person capable of making argument₁s.

3. CASE 2: 1869-1875: THE "NEW DEPARTURE"

Step forward two decades. In the post-Civil War period, many suffrage activists expected women to be enfranchised alongside formerly enslaved men. When those expectations proved false, the women's movement fell into disarray; the organization splintered, and the leadership had no clear strategy for moving ahead. This changed in 1869 with the emergence of a new strategy, sometimes called the "New Departure," resting on an argument₁ that women *already* had the right to vote (Balkin, 2005; DuBois, 1987). In its basic form, the argument₁ went like this:

P1. Women are citizens of the United States.

P2. Voting is a privilege or immunity of citizenship.

P3. The (new) 14th Amendment to the Constitution provides that "no State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States."

C. Therefore, no state can abridge women's right to vote.

Based on this reasoning, women should not have to plead for the vote to be granted. They already had the right, and should be able to claim the support of the courts if it was denied. Hundreds of women across the

country therefore presented themselves at the polls, requested ballots, and in some cases managed to cast them (Ray, 2007).

In addition to motivating women to vote, the core argument₁ was also presented to audiences outside the movement. Most famously, Susan B. Anthony and her lawyers made it in defending her against charges of illegal voting (Richards, 2007). It was made before the US Supreme Court in the case of *Minor v. Happersett*, brought to force local officials to register Virginia Minor (Ray & Richards, 2007). Victoria Woodhull made it when giving the first speech by a woman to a Congressional committee (DuBois, 1987; Jones, 2009). And it was made by many less famous women when they showed up at voting places.

The argument₁ was met with scorn in almost every case. For example, the state didn't even bother to send a lawyer to the Supreme Court hearing in the *Happersett* case, counting (correctly) on the Court to decide unanimously against the woman's claim. The lower court had written that the right of states to limit the suffrage to men

cannot at this day be questioned. The (I may say) universal construction of the Constitution of the United States on this subject, and the almost universal practice of all of the States in reference to this subject, from the adoption of the Constitution to the present time, ought to be sufficient to prevent the necessity of an investigation of this subject now. There are certainly some questions that the courts of the country have a right to consider as settled, and that question I think is one of them ("*Minor v. Happersett*," 1873).

Note that the court here is not engaging the argument₁; it is dismissing it as one that does not even deserve "investigation," since women's position is "settled" and "cannot...be questioned." Nowadays, we may have a hard time recovering the "off the wall" (Balkin, 2005) nature of the New Departure reasoning, since we find the question "settled" on the other side. To get a sense of how bizarre women may have sounded, try substituting the words "seven year olds" for "women" in the core argument₁ identified above.

Nevertheless, women continued to make the argument₁, and that making did have force. Consider the following dialogue, reported by Ray (2007, p. 12) from a contemporary woman's periodical:

Miss B. Here is my vote, sir, (handing in her ticket).

Judge. What is the name?

Miss B. Carrie S. Burnham.

Judge. Where do you reside?

Miss B. No. 1329 Vine street.

The parties in charge of the window books promptly consulted their lists and found that these answers were correct.

Judge. I am sorry, Miss Burnham, but I have instructions not to receive your vote.

Miss B. *Why not, sir? I am a citizen. I pay taxes. I am governed, and I have a right to vote.*

Judge. I cannot receive your vote.

Damon [Killgore]. What reason do you assign?

Judge. This is not the place to argue the matter. I cannot take the vote.

Damon. Let us not proceed too hastily. Allow me to present to your consideration the result of laborious research in this matter.

Mr. Killgore then drew forth document after document, in order to convince the judge of the election that a lady had the right to vote. The decision of the judge could not be changed, and Mr. Killgore and his lady friend re-entered their carriage.

Miss B. shows up at a voting place and enacts the ritual of voting. As Ray has said, this is the “the appropriation of the cultural performance of a ritual for rhetorical ends.” Her performance is rejected; at that point, she makes the (emphasized) core argument₁. What does this making *do*? It has no chance of persuading—as the official points out, this is not the “place” for considering the argument₁. Nevertheless, making the argument₁ does an important job. As Ray also points out, an out-of-place rhetorical performance can be interpreted as a parody; it is so off-the-wall that it must be some sort of game, or practical joke, or, as we would say nowadays, “performance art.” In that case, the woman’s attempt to vote would be taken as outrageous or silly. Making the argument, however, demonstrates that the activity (a woman voting) is an activity that is supportable by reasons. Thus it demonstrates that Miss B. is *serious*. She has a reason for thinking that she can vote—a reason that she shows to the world in making the argument₁.

This demonstration can have impact on the world; for example, it makes it harder for the judge to just push Miss B. out of the polling place or otherwise treat her with disrespect.² The demonstration can also have an impact on the demonstrator herself. Ray notes that “some women [attempting to vote] reported despondence and a motivating anger, whereas others expressed joy or renewed self-respect” (Ray, 2007, p. 16). As Stillion Southard has said about the New Departure

² It should be noticed that Mr. Killgore, stepping in to speak for his companion, threatens to reduce the event to farce; the gentleman doth argue *too much*, methinks.

strategy more broadly, “it pressed the issue of woman suffrage into the privileged spaces of national politics and created the opportunity for women to enter these spaces and enact the citizenship rights they sought. Most significantly, the New Departure prompted women to leave their homes, walk to voting polls, and cast ballots” (2011, p. 43). This effect of speaking on the speaker herself Dale Hample has termed “arguing to display identity” (Hample & Irions, 2015); Richard Gregg (1971) once called it the “ego-function of rhetoric.” What is involved, Gregg explains, is not so much “self-persuasion” about the particular “claims or the sense and probity of appeals and arguments,” but instead *self-constitution*: “establishing, defining, and affirming one’s self-hood as one engages in a rhetorical act” (p. 74).

Here again we find women engaging in argumentative activities to perform a specific and forceful “mode of action”:

1. In making the New Departure argument₁, women like Miss B made apparent a reason why the US Constitution guaranteed women’s suffrage.
2. In light of long-established precedent and hostile public opinion, it was unlikely that their audiences would seriously consider, much less be moved by, the argument₁.
3. Nevertheless, by making a reason apparent, the women accomplished something: they showed to their audiences—and to themselves—that their attempts to vote were reasoned; they were not joking, but serious.

4. IMPLICATIONS

To summarize, these two case studies show:

1. S’s making argument_{1s} can have the “mode of action” of making reasons apparent.
2. Even when S’s making a reason apparent is unlikely to have any impact on A’s relationship to C,
3. nevertheless, S’s making a reason apparent can accomplish many tasks of individual and social importance.

Are these uses of argument_{1s} weird, atypical, rare? No. Many individuals and groups advocating causes outside the mainstream need to demonstrate that they aren’t nuts in order to have a voice in the public sphere and be taken seriously. Making reasons apparent is a strategy for accomplishing this. Various forms of enactment—including the enactment of reason-giving—were typical of the women’s movement from its inception to the granting of suffrage by the 21st Amendment in 1920, and beyond. And there are further potential uses; for example, as pointed out by Scott Jacobs in the discussion of this

paper, making reasons for C apparent can break the taken-for-granted appearance that $\sim C$ is obvious. Making reasons apparent can make it apparent that there is a disputable issue, with reasons on both sides.

What is the relationship between making reasons apparent and the functions of argumentation asserted by functionalist theories? We have critiqued functionalist theories for not defending why the specific function each asserts is *the* function of argumentation, with all other argumentative activities and purposes merely parasitic on it (Goodwin, 2007a). Here we provide an argument that many asserted functions are parasitic on *making reasons apparent*. In order to affect an audience in any way (to persuade them, to induce them to alter their standpoint, etc.) a speaker first has to make a reason apparent. It is not possible to change A's relationship to C without making a reason apparent, although it is possible (as we have shown) for S to make a reason apparent without trying to change A's relationship to C. Making reasons apparent is thus a task pragmatically necessary for any audience effect. Therefore, if there is a function of argumentation, making reasons apparent is more likely it.³

Do we *want* to take making reasons apparent to be the function of argumentation? We don't see why we would. If making reasons apparent is indeed the function of argumentation, it is going to be hard to derive substantial norms from it; it is too thin. What interpersonal or discursive conditions need to be in place for making reasons apparent to get its job done? The leading candidates might be:

1. What is made apparent has to be a reason. Note that it doesn't have to be a very good reason; it just has to be a $P \rightarrow C$ unit: a premise, in some sort of support relationship with a claim/conclusion. Interestingly, this suggests that argumentative activities rely on a

³ As an aside: in the discussion after this paper was presented, several commentators including Geoffrey Goddu suggested that there can be an implied audience targeted for persuasion even when the immediate audience cannot be moved. We certainly agree that argumentative activities commonly have multiple goals, both short and long-term; that is a basic assumption in rhetorical studies. For example, suffrage advocates were looking forward to shifting public opinion in the long run and claiming recognition from an audience of posterity. But it is hard to build a *pragmatic* theory of argumentation around an imagined audience. The aim of pragmatic theories has been to gain better understandings of argument₁s by embedding them in the immediate context of the argument₂s in which they occur. Invoking more diffuse contexts like social controversies or a universal audience will not give the same sort of traction for theory-building.

conception of “→”—i.e., that a pragmatic theory of argumentation needs support from a theory of reasons.

2. The discourse has to make the reason apparent. This suggests a norm of clarity in making argument₁s.

In our experience, both of these norms are indeed important for teaching, where we find ourselves frequently asking our students to make argument₁s (not tell stories) and to use lots of indicator words to make the structure of their argument₁s clear. However, these two items hardly exhaust the norms needed to capture the goodness of argument₁s or argument₂s. In particular, since A, the audience of the argumentative activity, isn't relevant to this function of making reasons apparent, it is unlikely that this function will provide a basis for audience-regarding norms like fairness to A or a responsibility to listen to A's counter-arguments.

If it seems strained or unimpressive to talk about *making a reason apparent* as the “function of argumentation” why not drop the function talk and just say that to make an argument₁, a speaker has to make a reason apparent? Making a reason apparent is what making an argument₁ *is* (Jacobs, 2000; O'Keefe, 1982). Adopting this approach, argumentation theories with a pragmatic bent remain interested in what people can do individually and collectively by making argument₁s. But instead of anointing one or more of these doings as *functions*, all such “modes of action” are embraced as *uses*.⁴ Pragmatic theories of argumentation are responsible for understanding argumentative activities in all their cunning, their richness and diversity, including accounting for how arguers constitute or make contextually determinate the norms governing their argumentative activities. The normative pragmatic approach to argumentation theory has been doing just that.

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⁴ Or to use Mohammed's proposed terminology, *uses* or *purposes*.

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