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AUTHOR   Brockriede, Wayne
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ABSTRACT
                This paper discusses some of the central issues
involved in philosophizing about rhetoric by raising two primary
questions within the context of three traditional branches of
philosophy: ontology, axiology, and epistemology. The two questions
raised are: What are dialectical tensions in a philosophy of
rhetoric? and How does a person try to cope with them? By using a
construct of dialectic involving choice but not resolution, an
ontological tension concerns the construction of reality through the
interaction of certainty and uncertainty. An axiological tension
concerns the conflict between polar opposites (i.e., the value of
control vs. the value of choice, the conflict between security and
freedom). An epistemological tension involves determining what data
is acceptable in pursuing reliable knowledge. A construct of argument
is proposed as a method for coping with dialectical tensions. Six
characteristics of the construct are: an inferential leap from one
belief to the adoption of a new one; a perceived rationale for the
leap; a choice among two or more competing claims; a regulation of
uncertainty; the risk of confronting one's peers with one's choices;
and a frame of reference shared optimally by those who argue. (TS)

COPING WITH DIALECTICAL TENSIONS

by
Wayne Brockriede
Department of Communication
University of Colorado
Boulder, CO 80302

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Wayne Brockriede

You may well wonder how coping with dialectical tensions fits into a program advertised as inquiring about viable theories of rhetoric for 1974 and the foreseeable future. The shortest response I can think of is to say, "They don't." Another reply springs from a growing conviction that people in this discipline, myself included, spend much too much time sermonizing about how to do rhetoric, or philosophy, or theory, or research, and far too little time doing any of the above. What I hope to do today is to sketch the beginnings of a perspective for looking at some of the central issues involved in philosophizing about rhetoric, a concern I take to be prior to that of theorizing about it.

In trying to achieve that purpose I'll ask two primary questions within the context of three traditional branches of philosophy: ontology, issues about how people construe reality; axiology, issues about how people choose what they value; and epistemology, issues about how people come to know. The two questions I raise about these issues are (1) What _are_ dialectical tensions in a philosophy of rhetoric? and (2) How _does_ a person try to cope with them?

Philosophers often view issues dialectically as systems of categories, as relationships between generalization and analysis, or as dichotomies or continua. Implicit in these ways of structuring issues is the idea that people can choose one philosophic position

or pole and that by doing so they ignore or destroy others. This appears to be the function of dialectic in Socratic dialogues, in Aristotelian dialectical syllogisms, in Marxist materialism, in Hegelian syntheses, and in Burkeian transcendence. This view of dialectic presumes the function of _resolving_ such issues as how best to construe reality, to determine values, and to come to know.

By contrast, the construct of dialectic I'm proposing involves choice but not resolution. A person can choose a stance on a variety of philosophical issues about rhetoric, but dialectical tensions between polar opposites are never to be resolved or exorcised by that choice. The choice postulates a kind of cease-fire but does not end the war.

The relationship between polar opposites resembles the ancient Chinese symbol of yin-yang that recognizes unity in dualism. Dark and light, good and evil, and other dichotomies exist, but polar opposites are not separable, unique entities that dual to the death with one another. Rather, the yin and the yang are united in a relationship neither can leave since both dimensions are needed for the preservation of the other and of the unified entity. Since people must live with the tension between philosophical polar opposites, they must look for ways of coping that may achieve a momentary accommodation.

On the dittoed sheet I've distributed, a number of dialectical tensions are represented under the headings of ontology, axiology, and epistemology. What I'd like to do now is to discuss the first

tension of each category with the hope that these three issues will illustrate and clarify my central idea.

One problem in discussing the ontological issue of certainty and uncertainty is that I tend to get dogmatic when expressing my belief that communicative processes are necessarily uncertain. Yet in better moments I recognize that to be human involves construing reality through the ambiguous interaction of these polar opposites. People sometimes behave as though certain about the facticity of something, about the analytic entailment of a logical conclusion, or about the propriety of making decisions by applying a philosophical position, a conceptual frame of reference, a theological creed, or a political dogma. But the yin of certainty is not to be separated from the yang of disbelief and doubt, because a "fact" can become an illusion and a "truth" a delusion. Even positivistic persons may have to live with the tensions of pluralism and relativism. On the other hand, even the most relativistic of persons may have to act sometimes as though certain about themselves or their environment.

An axiological issue that illustrates the persistence of the tensions between polar opposites is the conflict between the value of control and the value of choice, the conflict between security and freedom. Carried to an extreme, absolute denial of choice is totally coercive communication, probably a null category. But the polar opposite, total freedom of choice, also carried to an extreme, is probably also a null category. This dialectical tension of the

yin of deterministic control and the yang of freedom of choice should illustrate well the principal argument I'm trying to make. Hardly ever, if ever, is a person under unqualified and deterministic control; hardly ever, if ever, does a person have unrestrained choice. Even when a person wants most to control, other people can choose; even when a person wants most to choose, other people can control.

An epistemological tension concerns what data shall be acceptable in pursuing reliable knowledge. At one pole are objective empiricists who want to ground knowledge on "the facts," on objective observation and measurement. At the other pole are subjective intuitionists or formalists who distrust sense data and want to rely on formal principles, on common sense, or on subjective certainty. Yet coping with this issue either by ignoring the world or sensation "out there" or the constructs of the person viewing the world seems unlikely to produce reliable knowledge. A better choice is to cope with the tension between the knower and the known, between the construer and the phenomena perceived through the construct. Seeing these forces in dialectical tension implies intersubjectivity, a useful idea but one that doesn't eradicate tensions.

If these and other ontological, axiological, and epistemological issues are in perpetual dialectical tension and form an array of yin-yangs, how can a person cope with such a condition? My first answer is, "Carefully and bravely." A second answer is to find a method that fits the nature of the tensions with which one wants to cope.

This criterion would rule out, first, any attempt to ignore tensions by choosing one pole and forgetting the other. Such a strategy of avoidance would not work for a person who really was aware of, and wanted to cope with, the tensions of philosophical issues. Once aroused, tensions of this sort are not easily put to rest by philosophers.

The criterion of appropriateness rules out, second, any attempt to cope with tensions by formulating a synthesis that establishes on a long-range basis some philosophical truth. A philosopher who sees a synthesis as the end of tensions is "too soon made glad, too easily impressed." For any newly synthesized position that is worthy of a philosopher has already in its essence the polar opposite that will generate a revised tension.

I therefore propose as a method for coping with dialectical tensions a construct of argument that seems to fit that with which it is supposed to cope. The construct of argument I propose, like the dialectical tensions themselves, falls squarely into the realm of the problematic. What people argue about are nontrivial enough to pose a problem, and so are dialectical tensions. At the same time, what people argue about are not easily to be resolved and so remain somewhat problematic, and so do philosophical dialectical tensions. Each of the six characteristics of the construct of argument I'm proposing is also a function of the variable logic of more or less and not a function of the categorical logic of yes and no. That is, each characteristic, and the construct as a whole, lies

within the midrange of the more or less continuum, and so do dialectical tensions. If an argument is not problematic enough or if any characteristic is too minimal--no argument. Too much of a problematic character or too much of any of the characteristics--no argument. Likewise, minimal dialectical tensions requires no coping; maximal tensions cause argument to lose its power as a method of coping.

Characteristic One--an inferential leap from one belief to the adoption of a new one or the reinforcement of an old one. A person has little to argue about if the conclusion of an argument doesn't extend beyond the materials of the argument or extends only slightly; but one may be unable to make a convincing argument if the leap is too large, perhaps perceived as suicidal. Characteristic Two--a perceived rationale for the leap. If the arguer wants someone to entertain a claim only for the sake of argument, not much rationale is needed; but if a person is expected to accept the conclusion with some commitment, a heftier rationale is required. If a rationale is too slender to justify the leap, the result is a quibble rather than an argument; but a rationale so strong a conclusion is entailed removes the activity from the realm of the problematic and hence from the realm of argument. Characteristic Three--a choice among two or more competing claims. If people have too little choice, if a belief is entailed by formal logic or required by their status as true believers, they need not argue; but if people have too much choice, if they have to deal with choice overload, then argument may not work

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well as a method of coping. Characteristic Four--a regulation of uncertainty. If people have no uncertainty or too little uncertainty to regulate, then they have no problems to solve, no tensions with which to cope, and argument isn't necessary; but if the regulation of uncertainty is too difficult, if one has too much trouble either reducing or escalating the degree of uncertainty, then argument may not be able to cope satisfactorily. Characteristic Five --the risk of confronting one's choices with peers. If the leap is too little, the rationale too minimal, the choice too slender, the problem of uncertainty-regulation too miniscule, then the potential risk of disconfirmation after confrontation is probably not enough to justify calling the communicative behavior argument; but if the characteristics are too overwhelming, the risk may be too great and a person may be unwilling to subject an idea through argument to confrontation and probable disconfirmation. To these five characteristics of my original construct, Karen Rasmussen has added a sixth--a frame of reference shared optimally by those who argue. If arguers share too little, they have little hope of productive argument; if they share too much, they need not argue.

Each of these characteristics, as well as the gestalt of the construct, is problematic and is variable. So, too, are the dialectical tensions with which one must cope in pursuing a philosophy of rhetoric. Therefore, argument is an appropriate method for coping with dialectical tensions, and it works on two levels.

First, argument can help a person choose and develop a char-
acteristic perspective toward the tensions. For example, one can
take a logical empiricist position or a phenomenological position
on the epistemological question of whether to focus greater atten-
tion on "objective reality" or on a person's attempt to construe a
kind of "subjective reality." But the logical empiricist has to cope
through argument with the tension that experimental subjects and
other people to whom the findings are to generalise aren't objects
but are choice-making, symbol-using people who interpret and construe
themselves and their social and physical environment. And the phe-
nomenologist must cope through argument with the tension that the
shared intersubjective assumptions about a "real" world may be brack-
eted or reduced when one does phenomenology but that those assumpt-
ions will not self-destruct when confronted by a transcendental ego
who construes a world through unique experience. A general philo-
sophical perspective may also help a person cope with the tensions
among the tensions.

Second, because of the people involved, because of how they
relate to one another, because of circumstances in a situation, be-
cause of ideas salient to a situation, in any given communicative
act a person may not make the characteristic philosophical choice,
one may move up and down the continuum within a range of acceptable
choices, one may even discover an unprecedented way of coping with a
tension. Argument can help people at the concrete level as well as
at the metalevel. Indeed, sometimes a dialectical tension may exist

when the best choice from a general philosophical position runs counter to what appears to be the best situational choice.

My argument is that in relation to pursuing a philosophy of rhetoric, as well as in engaging in other enterprises, people tend to construct sets of polar opposites. They feel some tension between these opposing forces, tensions that ambiguously stretch the poles apart and yet keep them indivisibly together. A strategy of avoidance is not worthy of a philosopher, and a strategy of transcendence or resolution is only a temporary expedient. Whether on a metalevel or on the concrete level of particular philosophical choice, a person can best cope with ontological, axiological, and epistemological tensions by means of an open concept of argument that makes choices but not resolutions. The tensions and the coping method of argument constitute problematic processes and imply a rationality that lies between the boundaries of too little and too much.