Chapter 7

THE ARGUMENTATION
What Substantiates the Fundamentals?

1. FIRST PRINCIPLES

Philosophy’s concern is not with bare opinions but with reasoned judgments. And reasoning requires premisses: in rational inquiry as in production we confront the reality that *ex nihilo nihil*. So where are those materials for philosophical reflection to come from? How are the fundamental principles of philosophical reasoning to be secured?

Philosophy deals with fundamentals, with “first principles” that are able to accommodate experience in smooth attunement to the concrete interactions through which the world’s realities make their impact upon us. But all too clearly, the first principles from which our inquirers set out cannot be validated with reference to further considerations that are somehow more basic. (Essentially this is so by hypothesis, since if they could be established in this way, those principles would not be “first” or basic.) Accordingly, since first principles cannot be justified in terms of other, yet more fundamental premisses, they will—if justified at all—have to be justified in terms of their consequences. Their validation requires a systemic approach. It must thus be shown that if the principle is rejected then either (1) certain eminently desirable results will be lost, or (2) certain highly negative results will ensue. The upshot is that such principles can only be validated in terms of the unacceptable implications of their abandonment. In sum, first principles are to be judged by how smoothly they fit into the explanatory rationale of our experience with a view in particular to the question of how efficient an instrumentality they provide for the overall explanation and systematization of that experience. The crux here is that the basic first principles of philosophical deliberation must not only meet the conditions of theoretical systematicity but must do so with reference to experience.

The dialectical process at issue may be clarified in a schematic manner as follows. One begins with the presumptive “trial assumption” or “provisional hypothesis” of a certain cognitive mechanism—an instrumentality (process, method) for issue-resolution. One then proceeds to employ this
instrumentality so as to determine a body of putative knowledge—an overall system. Thereupon, one deploys this knowledge to provide a rational accommodation for our “experience”—an information at large. Then, one revises the initial “trial assumption” (provisional hypotheses) with a view to the successes and failures of these applications. And then the process starts all over again at the first step. What is at issue throughout is not just a merely retrospective revalidation in the theoretical order of justification, but an actual revision or improvement in the dialectical order of development, a cognitive upgrading of suppositions initially adopted on a tentative basis.

Descartes says that only physical things and intelligent beings exist. But what then of animals? Plato maintains that mathematical objects like shapes and numbers exist in a separate realm altogether apart from the material world. But how then can we embodied humans know them? Once a substantive philosophical thesis is formulated, further questions about its meaning, implications, bearing, and purport will always arise. As it stands, in its actual and overt formulation, the thesis is not complete, not quite correct, not altogether adequate to what needs to be said on the subject. Under the pressure of an ongoing readjustment to an ever-widening context of considerations, it admits of various alternative interpretations, constructions, elaborations; it presents further issues that must be resolved, requiring explanation, exposition, qualification. Taken just as it stands, without further elaboration, the exposition is not satisfactory: it leaves loose ends and admits of undermining objections.

In examining our first principles—and thus the philosophical theses that hinge upon them—we accordingly embark on a cyclic (and thus in theory nonterminating) process of elaboration and reformulation. Such a dialectic of contention and elaborative explanation engenders an ever more fine-ground detail the inner commitments and involvements of the initial position that was the starting point of our endeavor to answer the philosophical question at issue. With any substantive philosophical issue, the process of problem-solving and issue resolution can thus carried on at ever more elaborate levels of sophistication.

The ongoing elaboration of a philosophical position constitutes a process of expository development that increasingly brings its various aspects into clearer and sharper focus. The continuing development of conceptual machinery provides a process of ideational magnification analogous to the process of perceptual magnification that accompanies the ongoing development of the physical machinery of microscopy. And there is no reason of
principle why this continual sophistication need ever cease; it can go on as long as our patience and energy and interest hold out. When we stop, it is because our curiosity is assigned to the point when we are willing to rest content, and not because the project as such is completed.

It emerges on this perspective that the first principles that are basic to philosophical understanding are “first” (and ultimate questions “ultimate”) only in the first instance or in the first analysis and not in the final instance and the final analysis. Their firstness represents but a single “moment” in the larger picture of the dialectic of legitimation. They do not mark the dead-end of a *ne plus ultra* that admits no further elaboration and substantiation. The question “Why these principles rather than something else?” is certainly *not* illegitimate here. It is something we can not only ask but also answer, even if only provisionally and imperfectly, in terms of the complex dialectic afforded by the cyclic structure of legitimation as sketched above.

Reflection on this process makes it clear that if this indeed is how the first principles of inquiry in question-resolution are legitimated, then the epistemic status of such principles is defeasible in the light of “the course of experience” and—irrespective of their *content*—their *status* becomes *a posteriori* and contingent. This circumstance is one whose importance cannot be overemphasized. It means that no particular formulation of a philosophical position—no explicitly stated substantive resolution to a philosophical problem—can be altogether definitive as it actually stands, without further explanation, qualification, and explanatory exposition. Further questions will always arise that need to be addressed in the larger scheme of things.

Philosophy’s determinative first principles and their correlative substantive doctrinal contentions are thus seen as defeasible and defensible: they can and need to be legitimated—a process that proceeds in the light of empirical considerations. Forming, as they do, an integral component of the cognitive methods that have evolved over the course of time, it can be said of them—as of other strictly methodological instrumentalities—that “*die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht*”, or, loosely translated, “The proof of the pudding is in the eating.” (Recall too Hegel’s penetrating dictum that metaphysics must follow experience and not precede it.)

These observations go no further than to say that circumstances *could* arise in which even those very fundamental first principles that define for us the very idea of a philosophical category might have to be given up. But conceding the *possibility* at issue here is not—of course—to grant its likelihood—let alone its actuality. Once entrenched, the principles at issue are
so integral a component of our rationality that we ourselves cannot even conceive of any rationality that dispenses with them: we can readily conceive that they might have to be abandoned, but can scarcely conceive how. And so, granting the in-principle defeasibility of these principles does nothing to undermine their indispensability for us now, in the present state of the art in our inquiries. In philosophizing as in travel, we have no alternative to starting out from where it is that we in fact are.

2. A PLATONIC RETROSPECT

A brief historical retrospect is in order. For the basic idea that is at work in the preceding account goes back to the very dawn of speculative thought about the nature of explanation—to Plato’s discussion in the *Republic* (at Book VII, 510 B-C).

In studying geometric matters, the mind is compelled to employ assumptions, and, because it cannot rise above these, does not travel upwards to a first principle; and moreover the mind here uses diagrams as images of those actual things. However, this mathematical sector contrasts with the [philosophical] sector of the intelligible world which unaided reasoning apprehends by the power of dialectic. this treats its assumptions, not as first principles, but as hypotheses in the literal sense, things “laid down” like a flight of steps up which it may mount all the way to something that is not hypothetical, the first principle of all. Then, having grasped this, the mind may turn back and, holding on to the consequences which depend upon it, descend at last to a conclusion, never making use of any sensible object, but only of Forms, moving through Forms from one to another, and ending with Forms. [And so we must] distinguished the field of intelligible reality studied by dialectic as having a greater certainty and truth than the subject-matter of the ‘arts,’ as they are called, which treat their assumptions as first principles. The students of these arts are, it is true, compelled to exercise thought in contemplating objects which the senses cannot perceive; but because they start from assumptions without going back to a first principle, you do not regard them an gaining true understanding about those objects, although the objects themselves, when connected with a first principles, are intelligible.

As such deliberations indicate, Plato too found the idea of unexplained explainers unpalatable. His complaint regarding Euclidean style geometry, for example, is just exactly this—that it proceeds from first principles that are laid down as arbitrary stipulations (“absolute hypotheses”) and not themselves fitted out with an explanatory rationale. By contrast, the great
merit of philosophy—as he saw it—is that it treats its first principles not as absolute but as provisional hypotheses and that it proceeds not deductively but dialectically, looking down along the chain of consequences in order to substantiate the principle from which they derived their credibility.

Accordingly, Plato’s position stressed the idea that for thoroughgoing rationality one must take philosophy’s deeper dialectical approach of justifying one’s beliefs cyclically, so to speak, by looking first upwards to first principles which themselves are then justified downwards with reference to these consequences and ramifications. As Plato thus saw it, the standard process of mathematical justification of terms of absolute hypotheses that themselves remain unjustified—however customary in geometry or arithmetic—is not ultimately satisfactory from a rational point of view because it leaves off at the point where a different, dialectical methodology is called for.

And essentially this same line of reasoning is at issue in the two-tier conception of explanation to which—if the present account is anything like correct—we are driven in the course of trying to make workable sense of the conception of an ultimate theory in physical explanation. For the only really satisfactory validation of any purportedly ultimate commitment is one that invokes the over-all performance of that commitment within the entire system with reference within which its ultimacy obtains. Only the harmonization of this fact within the larger structure of pre-systematic experience as it becomes clarified and sharpened through efforts of systemic integration and coordination can bring to light what sorts of “first principles” are viable for the purposes of philosophizing.

The process of systematization that validates those seemingly axiomatic starting points also envisions something ultimate. But what is ultimate here does not lie in the range of axioms, theses, or propositions, but rather is something methodological—the “dialectal” process, as it were, by which such propped starting points become validated through cyclic and retrospective considerations. Paradoxical though it may seem, the determination of what is basic in philosophy does not come at the start of an inquiry but at its end.

3. THE RHETORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The term rhetoric will here be used in a rather special sense. It will not be used to mean the theory or practice of language-deploying exposition in general. Instead, it will function as a contrast term to argumentation—
which in its turn is here understood as the project of seeking to elicit the acceptance of certain contentions by means of substantiating reasons. The work of rhetoric, by contrast, here is construed as one of inducing agreement by representing certain contentions in a favorable light, seeking to elicit their acceptance by one’s interlocutors through noting their intrinsically appealing features, rather than through substantiating them on the basis of their relationship to other propositions that are intended to provide probative or evidential grounds for them. Thus, while argumentation deploys the resources of inferential reasoning (be it inductive or deductive) to substantiate some claims on the basis of others, rhetoric is seen as a matter of noninferential substantiative appeal. Accordingly, when one seeks to motivate the acceptance of claims by drawing attention to such positive attributes as these claims may exhibit on their own by placing them in a favorable light in the sight of one’s interlocutors, one is proceeding rhetorically. Rhetoric, in sum, involves the endeavor to induce acceptance of propositions through bringing to notice some feature or other of the condition of the contention at issue that has a substantial impetus.

This means that certain dialectical moves are available to the rhetorician that are unavailable to the reasoner. The reasoner must relate the assertoric content of the proposition to that of those other, substantiating propositions. The rhetorician, by contrast, has the option of abstracting from a claim’s specific content altogether, addressing himself to its source or its nature rather than to its assertoric substance. Thus the fact that a proposition issues from a reliable source can bring grist to the rhetorician’s mill, although it clearly involves no reference to the content of the proposition at issue, and a fortiori no inference to this content from the asserted content of otherwise available information.

This use of the term rhetoric may perhaps seem somewhat idiosyncratic but it nevertheless has certain significant merits.

If dictionaries can be believed, general usage understands rhetoric as something like the “art of speaking or writing persuasively”. But this seems altogether too wide since overtly demonstrative discourse can also serve the interests of persuasion. Aristotle, on the other hand, construed rhetoric as imperfect demonstration, construing it as specifically enthymematic reasoning. But this seems too narrow. Rhetoric as we generally understand it is clearly something very different from incomplete demonstration. The best compromise seems to consist in viewing rhetoric as a matter of nondemonstrative or—more generally—noninferential persuasion. This enables us at once to understand the enterprise as a persuasive endeavor.
and to contrast it with specifically demonstrative argumentation in the inductive and deductive modes. This at any rate will be the line we take in these present deliberations.

Interestingly enough, this perspective on the matter leads to the rather startling conclusion that reasoned argumentation is ultimately dependent on rhetoric. Let us consider how this comes about.

It is a fundamental fact of rational—as also of practical—life that *ex nihilo nihil*: in human affairs, intellectual and practical alike, you cannot make something from nothing. Be it in written form or in verbal discourse, to secure something by rational argumentation we must ultimately proceed from conceded premisses. And here inferential rationality is of no further avail, given its indispensable recourse to premisses.

After all, abstract rationality does not tell us what we must unconditionally accept, but only what we must or must not accept if we accept certain other things. Here the role of conditionalization becomes crucial. But to engage the wheels of inferential reason we need inputs—unconditional commitments that can turn our *if-thens* into *sinces*. And while this input can be, and generally is itself discursively grounded—that is, obtained by rational inference from elsewhere—it cannot be so “all the way down”. All these are matters that Aristotle already saw as clearly as anyone, recognizing that reasons must proceed from prior concessions in attaining their purposes. This state of affairs at once leads to the question of how such requisite concessions are to be obtained.

In any dialectical situation we can *reason* only from what is available—and this ultimately means proceeding from claims that have been conceded. The regress of rationally justified conclusions will and must always come to a stop at some point in unreasoned premisses. Reason’s inferential *takens* must end up in conceded and uninferred *givens*. And here rhetoric comes to play an important and indispensable role, for one of its salient tasks is to secure such givens.

It is clear that in certain contexts of discussion various claims may be taken for granted. They come free of charge, so to speak, as commonplaces of the domain—presumptive truths that hold by the topically prevailing conventions. Definitions and traditionary usages afford one example, and the realm of familiar fact and accepted knowledge yet another. But this sort of thing does not take us very far. The range of the noninferential input into our inferential argumentation must clearly be expanded beyond the sphere of local commonplaces.
Like most workmen, the rational dialectician needs materials with which to fashion products, and in this case it is the rhetorician who can provide the requisite input. The key work of rhetoric in rational dialectic is accordingly to elicit from our interlocutors a variety of concessions on whose basis the work of actual inference can come into operation. At this point we must make the transit from reason to judgment and from demonstration to motivation. That is, we must proceed by way of reminders and appeals that amplify the minimal range of locally unproblematic givens.

Here, as everywhere, the issue of normative propriety crops up. Beyond concerning oneself with what people do accept (a strictly factual issue), one can turn to the matter what they should accept (a distinctly normative one). Conscientious rhetoricians will accordingly endeavor to awaken their interlocutors to a proper sense of what they should accept.

And so one important point must be stressed. There is nothing to say that rhetoric, as here understood, must focus on established beliefs and preexisting opinions rather than play an active role in the formulation and shaping of beliefs and opinions. But of course the epistemically conscientious rhetoricians will make appeal to cognitively based—that is, experimentally based—considerations rather than appeal to emotions or prejudices.

The lesson that emerges from these deliberation is that the probative structure of the situation is such that rational dialectic cannot dispense with rhetoric. In the overall setting of rational argumentation, it is not the presence but the extent of a recourse to rhetoric that is at issue: the only question—the pivotal issue, so to speak—is not whether but how much.

This being the situation in probative dialectics in general, I propose now to consider the lay of the land specifically in my own field of professional concern, namely, philosophy. The issue that preoccupies the rest of this discussion is that of philosophical methodology resolving about the question: How can (and should) philosophers go about making out a convincing case for the positions they would induce their readers to accept?

4. THE SITUATION OF PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy cannot provide a cogent explanation for everything, rationalizing all of its claims “all the way down”. Here, as elsewhere the process of explanation and rationalization must—to all appearances—sooner or later come to a halt in the acceptance of at least locally unexplained explainers. Given that explanation is—as Aristotle already stressed—a process that proceeds linearly, in the manner of logical derivation, by explaining A in...
terms of $B$, which is in its turn explained in terms of $C$, and this in turn referred to $D$, then of course we must accept some inexplicable ultimate—unless we are to descend into an infinite regress, a process that is not particularly satisfying, and especially not so in philosophy. At some point, then, we must turn from the discursive to the rhetorical mode. There are two very different modes of philosophical proceeding—the evocative and the discursive.

Discursive philosophy pivots on inferential expressions such as because, since, therefore, has the consequence that, and so cannot, must accordingly, and the like. Evocative philosophizing, by contrast, bristles with adjectives of approbation or derogation—evident, sensible, untenable, absurd, inappropriate, unscientific, and comparable adverbs such as evidently, obviously, foolishly, ill advisedly, and the like. To be sure, this rhetorical process is also a venture in justificatory systematization—just like inferential reasoning—but it is one of a rather different kind. Discursive philosophizing relies primarily on inference and argumentation to substantiate its claims; evocative philosophizing relies primarily on the rhetoric of persuasion. The one seeks to secure the reader’s (or auditor’s) assent by inferential reasoning, the other by an appeal to values and appraisals—and above all by an appeal to fit and consonance within the overall scheme of things.

Consider as a paradigm of evocative philosophizing the following passage from Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals* (with characterizations of approbation/derogation italicized):

It is in the sphere of contracts and legal obligations that the moral universe of guilt, conscience, and duty—sacred duty!—took its inception. Those beginnings were liberally sprinkled with blood, as are the beginnings of everything great on earth. (And may we not say that ethics has never lost its reek of blood and torture—not even in Kant, whose categorical imperative smacks of cruelty?) It was then that the sinister knitting together of the two ideas guilt and pain first occurred, which by now have become quite inextricable. Let us ask once more: in what sense could pain constitute repayment of a debt? In the sense that to make someone suffer was a supreme pleasure. To behold suffering gives pleasure, but to cause another to suffer affords an even greater pleasure. This severe statement expresses an old, powerful, human, all too human sentiment—though the monkeys too might endorse it, for it is reported that they heralded and preluded man in the devising of bizarre cruelties. There is no feast without cruelty, as man’s entire history attests. Punishment, too, has its festive features.¹
Note now this highly evocative passage is replete with devices of evaluative (i.e., positive/negative) characterizations. But observe, too, the total absence of inferential expressions. We are, clearly, invited to draw certain unstated conclusions on an essentially evaluative basis. But the inference that man is by nature given to cruelty, and therefore cruelty—being a natural and innate tendency of ours—is not something bad, something deserving condemnation is left wholly implicit as an exercise for the reader. This unasserted conclusion at which the discussion aims is hinted at but never stated, implied but never maintained. In consequence, reason can gain no fulcrum for pressing the plausible objection: But why should something natural thereby automatically be deemed good; why should the primitiveness of a sentiment or mode of behavior safeguard it against a negative evaluation? By leaving the reader to his own conclusion-drawing devices, Nietzsche relieves himself of the labor of argumentation and the annoyance of objection. Not troubling to formulate his position explicitly, he feels no need to give it support; he is quite content to insinuate it. Here, as elsewhere, he is a master practitioner of evocative philosophizing.

By contrast to the preceding Nietzsche passage, consider the following ideologically kindred passage from Hume’s Treatise (with evaluative terms italicized and inferential terms capitalized):

Now, since the distinguishing impressions by which moral good or evil is known are nothing but particular pains or pleasures, it follows that in all inquiries concerning these moral distinctions it will be sufficient to show the principles which make us feel a satisfaction or uneasiness from the survey of any character, in order to satisfy us why the character is laudable or blamable. An action, or sentiment, or character, is virtuous or vicious; why? Because its view causes a pleasure or uneasiness of a particular kind. In giving a reason, therefore, for the pleasure or uneasiness, we sufficiently explain the vice or virtue. To have the sense of virtue is nothing but to feel a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character. The very feeling constitutes our praise or admiration. We go no further; nor do we inquire into the cause of the satisfaction. We do not infer a character to be virtuous because it pleases; but in feeling that it pleases after such a particular manner we in effect feel that it is virtuous. The case is the same as in our judgments concerning all kinds of beauty, and tastes, and sensations. Our approbation is implied in the immediate pleasure they convey to us.
Observe how this passage bristles with the terminology of ratiocination. What we have all too clearly here is not the stylistic modality of insinuation and evocation but that of argumentation and demonstration.

To be sure, the doctrinal nature and even the ideology of the two passages are not all that different. With Nietzsche, cruelty is something of a virtue—but only because people are held to be generally pleased by engaging in its practice. With Hume, it is something of a vice—but only because people are generally displeased by witnessing it. The positions differ but their ideological kinship is clear; both writers agree that cruelty is not something that is inherently bad as such—for them the pro or con-reaction by people is all-determinative.

Be this as it may, it is strikingly clear that these kindred positions are advanced in very different ways. In the Nietzsche passage, the “argumentation ratio” of inferential to evaluative expressions is 0 to 12, in the Hume passage it is 9 to 6. Hume, in effect, seeks to reason his readers into agreement by presenting a putative a deduction from plain facts; Nietzsche seeks to coax them into it by an appeal to conceded suppositions and pre-judgments.

These different approaches reflect larger issues. Reflection on the contrast between the discursive and the rhetorical modes of philosophical exposition points to a recognition that these two styles are congenial to rather different objectives.

The inferential, argumentative mode of philosophical exposition is by nature geared to enlisting the reader’s assent to certain theses or theories by way of reasoning. It is thus most efficient for securing a reader’s assent to certain claims on the basis of the evidential or predictive relations among one’s beliefs. It is coordinated to a view of philosophy that sees the discipline in information-oriented terms, as preoccupied with the answering of certain questions: the solution of certain cognitive problems.

By contrast, the rhetorical, evocative mode of philosophical exposition is by nature geared to securing acceptance with respect to evaluations. It is preoccupied with forming—or reforming—our sensibilities with respect to the value and, above all, with shaping or influencing one’s priorities and evaluations. It is bound up with a view of philosophy that sees the discipline in axiological terms. It does not proceed by reasoning from prior philosophical givens, but rather exerts its impetus directly on the cognitive values and sympathies that we have fixed on the basis of our experience of the world’s ways. Only indirectly—that is, only insofar as our beliefs and
opinions are shaped by and reflective of our values—does the rhetorical mode of procedure impact on beliefs.

As these considerations indicate, the rhetorical method comes into its own by enabling an exposition to make an appeal to—and if need be influence and modify—the recipient’s preestablished outlook in order to induce a suitable adjustment of evaluations. In thus appealing to an interlocutor’s evaluative sensibilities, the rhetorician must enlist the persuasive impetus of this person’s body of experiences—vicarious experiences included. Here providing information can help—but only by way of influencing the sensibility, the reader’s established way of looking at things and appraising them. There are, of course, many ways to pursue this project. A collection of suitably constituted illustrations and examples, a survey of selected historical episodes that serve as instructive case studies (history teaching by examples), or a vividly articulated fiction can all orient a reader’s evaluative sentiments in a chosen direction—as Voltaire’s Candide or the philosophical methodology of Ludwig Wittgenstein amply illustrate. And, of course, pure invective can also prove rhetorically effective if sufficiently clever in its articulation. What matters is that agreement is elicited through a contention’s being rendered plausible and acceptable by its consonance with duly highlighted aspects of our experience—so that the course of our experience as a preestablished given itself becomes the determinative factor.

It is somewhat surprising that there should be so little connection in philosophy between one’s ideological orientation and one’s expository style. Thinkers of a distinctly scientistic orientation often resort to the tempting appeal of the rhetorical mode (as the Spinoza of the Ethics breaks the chains of his more geometrico exposition and cuts loose in the scholia). And philosophers who adopt highly normative/evaluative positions sometimes advocate them by very argumentative means that give the impression of close reasoning (Francis Herbert Bradley for example). In philosophy, doctrinal tendency and expository mode are less closely conjoined than one might expect.

Nonetheless, markedly distinct views of the mission of the enterprise are at issue with the discursive and evocative approaches to philosophizing, and any debate over the respective merits of the two modes of philosophical exposition is by this very fact rendered inseparable from a dispute about the nature of philosophy. The quarrel is ultimately a contest of ownership: to whom does the discipline of philosophy properly belong, to
the argumentative demonstrators or to the evocative rhetoricians? Whose approach is to be paramount?

This turf war over the ownership of philosophy has been going on since the very inception of the subject. Among the pre-Socratics, the Milesians founded a nature philosophy addressed primarily at issues we should nowadays classify as scientific in a more of less demonstrative manner, while such thinkers as Xenophanes, Heraclitus, and Pythagoras took an evocative—evaluative and distinctly literary—approach to philosophy, illustrated by the following Pythagorean dictum:

Life is like a festival; just as some come to the festival to compete, some to ply their trade, but the best people come as spectators, so in life slavish men go hunting for fame or gain, the philosophers for the truth.4

In nineteenth-century Germany philosophy, Hegel and his rationalizing school typified the scientific/discursive approach, while the post-moderns who were their opponents—Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche—all exemplify the axiological/rhetorical approach. In the twentieth century, the scientistic movement represented by logical positivism vociferously insisted on using the methodology of demonstration, while their antirationalistic opponents among the existentialists resorted extensively to evocative literary devices to promulgate their views—to such an extent that their demonstration-minded opponents sought to exile their work from philosophy into literature, journalism, or some such less “serious” mode of intellectual endeavor.

In this connection, we see as clearly as anywhere the tendency among philosophers toward defining the entire subject in such a way that their own sort of work is central to the enterprise and that their own favored methodology becomes definitive for the way in which work in the field should properly be done. The absence of that urbanity that enables one to see other people’s ways of doing things as appropriate and (in their circumstances) entirely acceptable is thus perhaps the most widespread and characteristic failing of practicing philosophers. But the fact remains that while individual philosophers generally have no alternative but to choose one particular mode of philosophizing as focus of their allegiance, philosophy as such has to accommodate both of these discordant emphases. Philosophy as such is broader than any one philosopher’s philosophy.

Be this as it may, the irony of the situation is that philosophers simply cannot dispense—once and for all and totally—with the methodology they affect to reject and despise. Even the most demonstration-minded philoso-
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...cannot avoid entanglement in rhetorical devices, for even the most rationalistic of thinkers cannot argue demonstratively for everything, all the way down, so to speak. At some point a philosopher must invite assent through an appeal to sympathetic acquiescence based on experience as such. On the other hand, even the most value-ideological philosopher cannot altogether avert all argumentation insofar as his work is to be done thoroughly and well. A reliance on suitable standards of assessment is inescapably present in those proffered evaluations, and this issue of appropriateness cannot be addressed satisfactorily without some recourse to reasons.

It cannot be overemphasized that the availability of means for appraisal and evaluation of contentions is a fundamental precondition of rational controversy. Without the existence of objective standards of adequacy, rational controversy is inherently impossible. Argumentation is pointful as a rational process only if the extent to which a good case has been made out can be assessed in retrospect on a common, shared basis of judgment. Without the guidance of an assessment mechanism for evaluating relevancy and cogency—one whose appropriateness to the discussion at hand is, if not preestablished, at any rate capable of being rationally validated—the whole enterprise of deliberation and discussion becomes futile.

The upshot of these considerations, then, is that while rhetoric without reason in indeed unphilosophical, nevertheless in philosophy reasoning itself becomes impracticable without some rhetorically provided manifold of input materials.

The rhetorical dimension of rationale-provision is crucial in philosophy because in this field we do—or should—aim at substantiating our conclusion through an appeal to experience. And it is our experience of life in this world which must, in the final analysis, provide the materials for the substantiation of our philosophy.

Ironically, then, the two modes of philosophy are locked into an uneasy but indissoluble union. While neither the discursive (inferential) nor the rhetorical (evocative) school can feel altogether comfortable about using the methodology favored by its rival, it lies in the rational structure of the situation that neither side can manage altogether to free itself from entanglement with the opposition. The practice of philosophy is ultimately a matter of striving for a smooth systemic closure between the cognitive projections of reason and the value-formative data of experience—a harmonization in which these two competing modes of philosophizing have to come into a mutually supportive overall harmonization.5
NOTES


5  This chapter was initially presented as a paper at the conference on “Argumentation and Rhetoric” held under the auspices of the Ontario Society for the Study of Argumentation at Brock University in May 1997. For a more extensive treatment of the relevant issues see the author’s *Philosophical Reasoning: A Study in the Methodology of Philosophizing* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) and *Communicative Pragmatism and Other Philosophical Essays on Language* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998).