

Commentary

Comments on ‘Nonfallacious Rhetorical Strategies: Lyndon Johnson’s Daisy Ad’

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In this paper, Scott Jacobs explores an interesting aspect of the relationship between rhetoric, dialectic and logic through the examination of the notion of strategy. Strategy, which Jacobs views as basic as *an organization of means to accomplish an end*, appears to be problematic for the three disciplines. While logic and dialectic are not comfortable with the notion of strategy, rhetoric is too comfortable with it. Consequently, none of the three disciplines is capable to provide an independent tool for evaluating strategy, as it comes about in argumentative discourse, he argues. Jacobs considers strategy *unavoidable* in argumentative discourse, which causes the problem of evaluating strategies to yield problems in evaluating argumentative discourse in general. To solve this problem, Jacobs proposes broadening the scope of rhetoric to include the aim of improving the quality of deliberation. In this broadened view, argumentative effectiveness is not restricted to persuasiveness as an individual pursuit, anymore. Argumentative effectiveness is rather perceived as ‘an adaptation to the complex of multiple competing demands facing arguers’ in their effort to achieve the ‘institutional, dialectical aims of the activity in which individuals are embedded’, which is mainly to improve the quality of deliberation.

According to Jacobs, argumentation critics that employ logical and dialectical approaches when dealing with strategy face a dilemma. As he expresses it, on the one hand, strategy is present in every argumentative discourse, but on the other hand, a strategy is conceived as intrinsically fallacious from epistemic and deliberative approaches. The point presented in this dilemma—mainly that the notion of strategy is problematic in terms of epistemic and deliberative virtues—addresses an important shortcoming of logical and dialectical approaches. However, the shortcomings cannot be really seen as a dilemma. It is true that, because strategies do not affect the propositional content of arguments, the evaluation of argumentative discourse is just not capable to capture aspects of strategy such as eloquence in terms of epistemic truth. I think, however, that this is not enough to claim that strategic aspects of argumentative moves are irrational. The fact that strategy is conceived as intrinsically fallacious from epistemic and deliberative

approaches, as Jacobs claims, is very strong as a claim. As Jacobs states it himself, the rationality of a strategy, when it comes to eloquence for example, is an aspect to which logic is just blind. Furthermore, even though at first glance, one might think that strategy, as an organization of means aimed at transforming an initial state into an end state, presents a hindrance to a critical deliberation, it is in fact not always the case that the aim of strategy *to influence* degrades the procedural quality of deliberation. The aim to influence needs not necessarily to be in contradiction with the aim of critical deliberation. For example, as it has been previously argued within formal dialectics, the aim to influence can sometimes further the critical testing. For example, it can be helpful for a party that aims at persuading its opponents to be as critical as possible.

It is still a crucial point, though, that logic, dialectic and rhetoric—each on its own—cannot provide a comprehensive tool for evaluating argumentative discourse and detecting fallacies. While a rhetorical approach cannot provide independent norms for evaluating strategies in argumentative discourse, a purely logical or dialectical evaluation is not capable of accounting fully for strategy. In relation to that, Jacobs' suggestion to broaden the scope of rhetorical effectiveness to cover the aims of improving the quality of deliberation is a bright way to overcome the problems which logic, dialectic and rhetoric each faces when dealing with strategy. Such a broadening of rhetoric makes it possible to attribute a strategic rhetorical aspect to every argumentative move in discourse, since the aim of influencing the procedure of argumentation is intrinsic to all argumentative moves. Broadening the scope of rhetoric, in that sense, also allows Jacobs to broaden the scope of the notion of strategy to cover fallacies but not to be restricted to them. Within the broadened view, strategy becomes larger than fallacy. So, as presented by Jacobs, while any fallacy can be seen as a strategy, there is nothing necessarily fallacious about a strategy; strategies may be so, but need not be. The broadening of the concept of strategy in order to dissociate a strategy from a fallacy is a successful step in solving the problem of evaluating strategies. Yet, the question 'when does strategy become fallacious?' remains.

In relation to the proposed view by Jacobs, I believe it to be useful to bring into the discussion the pragma-dialectical notion of strategic manoeuvring as developed by van Eemeren and Houtlosser. Jacobs' strategy and the pragma-dialectical strategic manoeuvring are comparable to a good extent. Both notions are used to refer to what can be attributed to arguers in every move of argumentative discourse. Both incorporate insights from rhetoric to provide a better evaluation of argumentative discourse, and there is nothing intrinsically fallacious in both.

In spite of these similarities between the approaches, Jacobs' strategy and pragma-dialectical strategic manoeuvring suggest different norms for evaluating argumentative discourse and judging the fallaciousness of an argumentative move. While pragma-dialectics maintains the dialectical norm of critical testing as the norm for evaluating instances of strategic manoeuvring, Jacob's strategy is evaluated in terms of its rhetorical capacity to affect the quality of the deliberation procedure.

The difference in evaluating strategies and strategic manoeuvres might be partly due to the different places given to rhetorical insights in the two approaches. While in pragma-dialectics, the dialectical critical testing norm in the critical deliberation is superior to the integrated rhetorical insights, the rhetorical aim of influencing the procedure of deliberation is more important in Jacobs' view. Pragma-dialectics, as it attributes to the arguers the attempt to strike a balance between the aims of critically testing standpoints and winning the discussion, on the one hand, allows for the realisation of the arguers attempts to influence the procedure of deliberation, and on the other hand, evaluates these attempts in terms of their adherence to the dialectical norm of critical testing. In that sense, while the fallaciousness of a strategic manoeuvre is judged in pragma-dialectical terms based on its contribution within the critical testing procedure, in Jacobs' view, the fallaciousness of a strategy is to be determined mainly in terms of the influence of strategy on bringing about a 'good' deliberation procedure, no matter what the role of such a strategy within this procedure is.

Jacobs' view is an invitation to a new approach to fallacies. In this approach, in spite of the importance of critical deliberation, argumentation is not evaluated in terms of its observance of the norm of critical deliberation. As it can be seen from the Daisy ad example, within this approach, even strategies that represent a salient violation of critical deliberation (the appeal to emotions, for instance) are considered reasonable, because they offer possibilities for improving the quality of argumentative discussion. The proposed approach manages to shed light on the interesting possible contribution of strategies which breach the norms of critical deliberation to the restoration of a critical deliberation. Nevertheless, there is a great risk in considering such strategies reasonable: it is still often the case that the result of these strategies is a complete damage of any possibility of a reasonable discussion. Unfortunately, it remains unclear what the norms for evaluating the outcome of such strategies are. Furthermore, one might wonder, what is the value of a norm if the way to enhance it is through violating it?