Douglas Ehninger's Philosophy of Argument

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ABSTRACT: This study, which seeks to analyze Douglas Ehninger's philosophy of argument, highlights three major points. First of all, the primary emphasis of rhetoric in the modern age should be on a theory of argument grounded in informal or practical reasoning. Secondly, an argumentation theory must be attuned to the merging philosophies and scientific discoveries that have a bearing on how human beings reason. Thirdly, the student of argument has a moral obligation, both on the personal and on the societal level, to use this art for the purpose of bettering others and the state.

KEY WORDS: Bilaterality, informal reasoning, personhood, rhetorics, restrained partisanship, self-regulation, Toulmin model, validity.

Among those rhetorical scholars who have contributed significantly to the field of argument in the United States, the late Douglas Ehninger would rank as one the most innovative and influential. Through his numerous essays and monographs in professional communication journals, his chapters in a wide variety of academic volumes, and his books on public speaking, debate, and contemporary rhetorical theory, he has left us an important body of literature that not only contains a well developed philosophy of rhetoric based primarily on the subject of argument but also well articulated guidelines for putting the theory into practice so as to enhance the public good. That Ehninger directly touched the lives and careers of most of the contributors in this inauguaral issue of the journal *Argumentation* there can be little doubt. He has pointed us in new directions, presented us with propositions for the purpose of initiating dialogue, and inspired us to take renewed pride in the nature and relevance of rhetoric.[1]

The burden of this essay is to try to capture the essence and worth of those ideas on argument that Ehninger advanced which now have become a vital part of his legacy.[2] Three major areas will be covered under the following headings: (1) Argument as Informal Logic or Practical Reasoning; (2) Argument as a Reflector of the Prevailing Intellectual and Cultural Forces of a Given Period; and (3) Argument in Service of Society. After completing an analysis of these subject areas, I will briefly describe the

implications of Ehninger's ideas for a relevant theory of argument in the years ahead.

ARGUMENT AS INFORMAL LOGIC OR PRACTICAL REASONING

Before the terms "informal logic," "substantive logic," or "practical reasoning" gained wide currency in the writings of Stephen Toulmin and Chaim Perelman, Ehninger had affirmed that the principles of formal or traditional logic set forth by Aristotle had little or no utility for those engaged in a discussion of contingent propositions. As early as 1943, in his first published essay — 'A Logic of Discussion Method' — he developed the view that the Aristotelian principles of formal logic, with their emphasis on "demonstrating prior premises" and on establishing propositions that have absolute validity for all periods, cannot be employed in discussion as a means of making decisions in human affairs.[3] What is needed, he argued, is to follow the example of the Pragmatist philosophers and make choices on controversial issues that have practical value. In sum, the discussion method, he noted, derives its strength and thrust from probable statements grounded not in certainty but in reasonableness.

A decade later Ehninger had refined his views on the contingency nature of argument but had not altered his central position. An argument-centered theory of rhetoric, he asserted, was not concerned with the "science of valid inference" but with the task of "influencing through language." Perceived in this light, argument goes beyond the principles of invention and disposition by embracing the other canons of rhetoric which are similarly essential for the production of "effective oral and written discourse."[4]

In placing argument within the province of informal logic or practical reasoning, Ehninger was careful to point out the nature of the subject matter that is to be discussed in decision-making regarding propositions that are debatable. Only those topics pertaining to means should be open to conflict. On this point he noted:

> An examination of the nature of ends or values need not concern us here. . . . The important point is that they lie on a deeper stratum than argument is capable of penetrating; they are something which argument cannot shape or determine but which it must presuppose — something which any two disputants need to assume and agree upon as a necessary condition of argumentative interchange.[5]

This limitation, in Ehninger's opinion, does not suggest that a consideration of values is outside the realm of argument. What it does imply is that values should constitute starting points which serve as a shared frame of reference at the onset of any interchange. It further suggests that in assessing the worth of an argument, which by its nature focuses on means,

we should use as one of the criteria the following test: How effectively will the proposed policy implement the shared values of the participants?

As the decade of the 1950's drew to a close, Ehninger had concluded that scholars in the field of speech, unlike their predecessors during the period from 1917 to 1932, were not sufficiently involved in turning their attention to the nature of argument. They seemed content instead to allow students of sociology, psychology, and philosophy to claim the field. If we are to update our understanding of this discipline, therefore, we must, he observed, study the findings of these authors and glean from them those insights that have relevance for the field of speech. With the help of Wayne Brockriede, Ehninger discovered Toulmin's work *The Uses of Argument*, published in 1958. Two years later they introduced Toulmin's celebrated treatise to the American audience. By doing so, they offered to the readers of the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* for the first time an alternative method to Aristotle's enthymeme or, as it is frequently labeled, the rhetorical syllogism.[6]

Ehninger and Brockriede, by endorsing Toulmin's six-step model of argument (Data, Warrant, Claim, Backing for Warrant, Qualifier, and Reservation), saw several distinct advantages in this method when compared to that of traditional logic. Among these are the following: (1) It utilizes "warrant-establishing" rather than "warrant-using" arguments; (2) It emphasizes a clearly organized pattern in which each step of the reasoning process is located in "a specific geographical or spatial position"; (3) It is dynamic because of its stress on "movement from data through warrant to claim"; (4) It encourages a critical examination of each of the six components; (5) It "is able to deal adequately with the problem of material validity"; and (6) It provides an important insight into the degree of probability involved in making an inferential leap.[7]

The foregoing points center on the advantages related to the structural nature of the Toulmin Model. But Ehninger and Brockriede had another equally important reason for recommending the adoption of Toulmin's approach. They saw an opportunity to modify and extend it in such a way that a new system of classifying artistic proofs could be developed. Influenced in part by Aristotle's decision to incoporate logical, ethical, and pathetic proof within the category of artistic reasoning and, at the same time, conscious of Toulmin's tendency to ignore these three relatively discrete forms, they came to believe that the six-step model could accommodate the different types of inventive arguments that demonstrate "the possible routes which the warrant may travel."[8] The terms they used to designate these artistic arguments were substantive, authoritative, and motivational. Each, they argued, has a special means of carrying the data to the claim. Substantive arguments do so by showing the relationship "existing among phenomena in the external world"; authoritative by focusing on the expertise and personal appeal of the source; and motiva-

tional by highlighting the needs, drives, values, and hopes that stimulate one to act.[9]

Although each of the above three types of artistic proof is essential, particularly in those instances where persuasion is the principal goal of the rhetor, the substantive appeals received the greatest attention on the part of the authors. Incorporated within this form are arguments from sign, cause, generalization, parallel case, analogy, and classification. A description of the nature of each of these arguments, and illustrations showing how a representative example could be diagrammed using the Toulmin Model were parts of the discussion.

Not to be overlooked in considering the analysis of substantive arguments is the interesting and creative distinction Ehninger and Brockriede drew between the argument from parallel case and that from analogy. In explaining the difference, they said: "Whereas the argument from parallel case assumes a relationship between two cases, the analogy assumes only a similarity of relationship."[10]

It is difficult to overstate the significance of this essay in the formulation of fresh perspectives on the subject of practical reasoning. In recognizing the inherent limitations of the Aristotelian logical system based on syllogisms and enthymemes, with their excessive preoccupation with distributed middle premises, and in offering a modified version of the Toulmin Model as a cornerstone around which to build a contemporary theory of informal logic, the study stands as a landmark in the history of argument. The authors summarized their findings and what they perceived to be their contribution in the ensuing paragraph:

> Toulmin has supplied us with a contemporary methodology, which in many respects makes the traditional unnecessary. The basic theory has herein been amplified, some extensions have been made, and illustrations of workability have been supplied. All this is not meant to be the end, but rather the beginning of an inquiry into a new contemporary, dynamic, and usable logic for argument.[11]

For the next fifteen years, Ehninger held firmly to the belief that the Toulmin Model of informal logic [12] was the most reasonable means of demonstrating how people argue in their conducting of human affairs. In 1963, it became the motivating force for a revision of his 1954 essay on 'The Logic of Argument'; in the same year it gave direction to the volume *Decision By Debate*, co-authored with Brockriede; and in 1974, it was a major emphasis in his book on *Influence, Belief, and Argument*.[13] It should be noted, however, that despite his enduring enthusiasm for the model of reasoning, he nevertheless became progressively disenchanted with what he thought was Toulmin's lack of awareness of the important role the audience plays in the construction of arguments.[14]

In the preceding analysis of Ehninger's views on the nature of argument, we see his strong commitment to the idea that since reasoning in practical affairs necessarily deals with contingent propositions regarding

means that are debatable, we would be wise to discard those approaches grounded in traditional logic and adopt a method which adequately conforms to human experience. With this rationale on the nature of argument firmly entrenched in his mind, Ehninger proceeded to answer the question, "What are the primary uses of informal reasoning?" Throughout most of his career, in developing a response to this query, he noted that the major use of argument is to correct both the positions held by others and those endorsed by the arguer himself/herself. In his last public presentation, as we shall observe later, he discussed a second use which is commonly described as the generation of knowledge.

In one of his most perceptive essays, entitled 'Argument as Method: Its Nature, Its Limitations and Its Uses' (1970), Ehninger gave a detailed description of the corrective function of argument. He began the opening paragraph with these words:

> When A engages in argument with B he seeks not to enlarge his antagonist's stock of information, but to disabuse him of error; not to add to B's repertory of facts or data, but to reshape a belief or alter an attitude which B already entertains. Argument, in short, instead of being an enterprise in instruction, is an exercise in correction. Its purpose is not to extend knowledge, but to reform and purify it.[15]

This corrective process, he pointed out, must meet the tests associated with the nature of argument. What is implied here, first of all, is that the correction that takes place is a bilateral activity in which the arguer and the opponent are equal parners. Secondly, since the issue in any discussion is concerned only with probable knowledge that is, at best, unstable, the arguer must tolerate various levels of success. Thirdly, the corrector must assume "a posture of restrained partisanship" rather than that of a "naked persuader." Finally, to correct through argument is a "person-risking enterprise" because the arguer, as well as the opponent, may find it necessary to alter his/her original position.[16]

At this point it is instructive to observe that correction resulting from argument differs from corrective acts based on compulsion in several fundamental respects. Compulsion, for example, is a unilateral process that permits only one degree of success. Moreover, it regards the corrector's attitude as being irrelevant to the rhetorical situation, and involves no risk-taking by the arguer.[17]

Notwithstanding the fact that Ehninger remained firm in his conviction that a dominant purpose of argument is to serve as a correcting influence, he also came to the view near the end of his life that an argument-centered theory of rhetoric had the epistemic power to create new knowledge. He asserted this position in what became his valedictory public address, delivered at Ohio State University in February, 1978. In this provocative presentation, which constitutes the closing chapter of *The Rhetoric of Western Thought*, he sought mightily to elevate rhetoric by describing its relevance for the disciplines of science and philosophy.[18] By drawing upon

the writings of such scientists as Jacob Bronowski, Michael Polanyi, and Thomas Kuhn, he persuasively showed that rhetoric is essential for the doing of science. Whether or not a particular paradigm gains a consensus within the scientific community at a specified period in history is directly related to the quality of the arguments advanced by a representative group of respected scholars.

What is true of science, he added, is similarly true for philosophy. Buttressed by the works of Henry Johnstone and Chaim Perelman, he asserted that rhetoric stands squarely at the heart of the philosophical method. Scientists and philosophers alike, he concluded, have the capacity to push back the frontiers of knowledge through the convincing power of argument addressed to an audience that is universal in its range and scope. This perspective on the second role of argument led Ehninger to conclude that students of rhetoric should "reassess our inherited view that rhetoric, even at its best, is an inferior instrument — one that is limited either to conveying knowledge that has previously been derived or guiding us toward judgments concerning matters probable or contingent — that it is a court of second resort to be turned to only in those situations where the firmer methods of science and philosophy cannot be applied."[19] Our altered view, he next asserted, should be as follows:

> We are, I submit, called upon to include within our view the notion that, in addition to being, as (Donald) Bryant has said, a way of "deciding the undecidable," through the role it plays in science and philosophy, also contributes in significant ways to deciding those things that can be "decided" — that, besides its acknowledged services in the area of the contingent, rhetoric also contributes to the production of those sorts of knowledge which we are willing to regard as apodictic or certain; contributes, in short, to our understanding of "reality" or what the world we live in actually is like. . . .[20]

If we have an appropriate understanding of and appreciation for the nature and uses of argument, Ehninger observed, we should have little difficulty in recognizing its values as a method of influence. One of its most observable advantages, which Ehninger calls "self-regulative," stems directly from its corrective function. When two disputants take part in argument each is expected to grant to the other the privilege of criticizing opposing views. Such a situation promotes equality between the communicator and the listeners or readers as the interaction unfolds.[21] Together the participants, therefore, seek to regulate the discussion by critically evaluating the premises and the supporting data, thereby increasing the overall "degree of reality."[22]

The advantages culminating from self-regulation introduce another value of argument — the compelling characteristic of flexibility. Since beliefs and attitudes are attuned to facts that are changeable, it is incumbent that these ideas and feelings be modified in accordance with newly emerging evidence. In this connection, Ehninger asserted: "When new situations arise or new problems are encountered, belief patterns appropriate to them are searched out and developed."[23]

In singling out the qualities of "self-regulation" and "flexibility" as two major values to be derived from the use of argument, Ehninger covered familiar ground often traversed by his predecessors. When he turned his attention, however, to his description of a third advantage, he provided a fresh perspective that has had important implications for the study of practical reasoning. Argument when developed appropriately, he held, is a humane discipline which seeks to elevate persons to the level of their most reasonable selves. His 1968 essay, 'Validity as Moral Obligation,' sets the standard to be achieved in order to fulfill this high moral goal. He initiated his analysis by suggesting that a case cannot be designated as valid merely because it is externally consistent, persuasive, workable, heavily supported by factual data, or presented by a prestigious proponent who presumably has good motives. What is required for a case to be valid is its ability to meet these three tests:

(1)   It must cause an opponent either to abandon his position or to alter it in some fundamental way.
(2)   It must cause him to do so out of necessity rather than choice.
(3)   It must make him fully aware of the adjustments he is effecting and of the reasons why these adjustments are required.[24]

Despite the fact that the second claim tends to move away from argument and toward demonstration, the three statements are significant in suggesting that a sense of responsibility must accompany effectiveness. An arguer relying on compelling reasoning and evidence, it is clear, strives to encourage the listener or reader to modify his/her initial position on an issue. It is against this background of critical reflection that moral obligation takes over.

The essay on 'Validity as Moral Obligation' became a starting point for subsequent probes in the area of argument as a humanizing force capable of bettering one's nature. In the essay on 'Argument as Method,' cited earlier, Ehninger gave his most poignant description demonstrating that argument, when properly understood and practiced, is not only a "person-risking" enterprise but also a "person-making" activity. Observe, for instance, the following paragraph in which he shows the reciprocal relationship that occurs between an arguer and his/her opponent:

By accepting the risks implicit in an attitude of restrained partisanship the arguer both bestows "personhood" on his opponent and gains "personhood" for himself. For to enter upon argument with a full understanding of the commitments which as method it entails is to experience that alchemic moment of transformation is which the ego-centric gives way to the alter-centric; that moment when, in the language of Buber the *Ich-Es* is replaced with the *Ich-Du*; when the "other," no longer regarded as an "object" to be manipulated, is endowed with those qualities of "freedom" and "responsibility" that change the individual as "thing" into the "person" as "no-thing."[25]

Viewed from this perspective, argument, it would appear, scorns all

forms of exploitation and manipulation designed to produce an unfair advantage for one of the sides in a dispute. Its purpose instead is to enable the participants to live through a shared experience in an environmental setting that encourages each to examine an issue from the other's frame of reference. To do this is to bestow "personhood" both on the arguer and on the listener or reader who becomes part of the dialogue.[26]

Ehninger's theory of practical reasoning prompted him to assert that an argument cannot be "value free"; that is, as we have seen, it must center on the implementation of a shared value. For this reason he faulted those authors of contemporary textbooks and course syllabi who, under the influence of the logical empiricists, hold a contrary view. Their problem, he said, is the tendency "to offer students the rudiments of a justificational machinery based on the concepts and rules of formal logic."[27]

In our discussion thus far we have noted Ehninger's recognition of the importance of a system of informal reasoning that not only serves as a corrector and as a way of knowing but also features the values of self-regulation, flexibility, and humaneness. We are now ready to consider a second major aspect of his philosophy.

ARGUMENT AS A REFLECTOR OF THE PREVAILING INTELLECTUAL
AND CULTURAL FORCES OF A GIVEN PERIOD IN HISTORY

A theory of argument, Ehninger believed, is an ongoing, dynamic, developing process which not only is influenced by the ideas of the past but by the intellectual and cultural cross-currents flowing in the present. Except in rare instances, he concurred with the notion advanced by such writers as Teilhard de Chardin, Stephen Toulmin, and Kenneth Boulding that conceptual change occurs in an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary menner.[28] Thus a theoretician at a particular period in history builds upon, extends, and modifies the ideas of previous scholars. As early as 1949, in his doctoral dissertation, Ehninger suggested that several hypotheses grew out of his investigation, two of which stipulate that inventional theory is peculiarly "sensitive to contemporary doctrines of epistemology and psychology," and criticism.[29] In a more broad-ranged claim, he said in 1963 that rhetoric, both as theory and as practice, is especially responsive "to the intellectual and social milieu in which it finds itself, and is constantly changing with the times."[30]

The single instance in which Ehninger deviated from his faith in an evolutionary interpretation of conceptual change was in his treatment of George Campbell's inventional theory. Impressed with Campbell's focus on the audience as a starting point in rhetoric, his criticism of the classical doctrine of common-places — which, in his opinion, was responsible for the popularity of the "scholastic art of syllogizing" — , his belief in faculty

psychology's contribution to our understanding of the ends of discourse, and his innovative concept of moral reasoning, he asserted that the British rhetorician had departed radically from the teachings of the past; and, in doing so, had instituted a "revolution in inventional theory."[31] Although Ehninger defended his thesis in the face of frequent and sustained attacks in the years that followed, he remained vulnerable to the charge that his claim was overdrawn.[32]

Apart from this unrepresentative instance, Ehninger remained devoted to the notion that knowledge of any discipline or field of study moves on an evolutionary plane. As it progresses it maintains what is relevant from the past but at the same time borrows heavily from the emerging views of the present, thereby giving it a uniqueness of its own. This firmly held conclusion was to have a long-range impact on the lines of argument advanced in Ehninger's essays on the systemic nature of rhetoric, his ranking of the British rhetoricians, and his descriptions and applications of the ideas of a group of typical contemporary scientists and philosophers.

Let us examine, first of all, the influence this perspective had on his explanation of the nature of rhetoric. In 1953, Ehninger's future colleague at the University of Iowa — Donald Bryant — in response to a request from the editor of the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, wrote a celebrated essay setting forth what he perceived to be the functions and parameters of rhetoric.[33] The underlying thesis was that rhetoric could lend itself to an interpretation that has permanent relevance because of its singular characteristics that transcend time.

Despite Bryant's penetrating analysis, Ehninger believed the assignment missed a crucial point; it failed to take into account the existence of more than one rhetoric in western history. Rather than attempting to define a single rhetoric embracing all time periods, he said, our task should be to identify and explain the multiple rhetorics that have evolved in order to reflect changing views of knowledge. He himself undertook to meet this challenge in two related essays, written in 1967 and 1968.[34] In the first he identified four rhetorics, and in the more refined and persuasive second study he narrowed the list to three, each of which was called a "system of rhetoric" — the Classical, the British, and the Contemporary. Classical rhetoric was described as being essentially grammatical because of its stress on vocabulary and categories; British rhetoric as primarily psychological because of its emphasis on the audience; and Contemporary rhetoric as basically sociological because of its concern with human relations and communication breakdowns.[35]

One cannot infer from the foregoing analysis that since the British and Contemporary systems are classified as distinct rhetorics in their own right that they have not incorporated many of the elements of the classical system. Indeed such an inference would belie the important role that evolution plays in the process. It simply suggests, in Ehninger's view, that

when the differences equal or outweigh the similarities on vital points, we are justified in using the term separate system.[36]

The notion that our principal concern should be with the idea of rhetorics rather than that of rhetoric found considerable support in Ehninger's long-time study of the British period. Of the dominant trends in English rhetorical thought — neoclassicism, the elocutionary movement, the belletristic approach, and the epistemological emphasis — only the latter two, he felt, showed a sufficient awareness of or interest in the developing theories advanced by contemporary literary critics, philosophers, and social scientists.[37] He was particularly displeased with the neoclassicists because of their belief that the ancients had produced a theory of rhetoric appropriate for the needs of the modern society.[38] How, he wondered, could John Ward — a man who had enjoyed a close association with the Royal Society for more than thirty years and who was acquainted with the writings of the major British epistemologists — fail "to see the significant implications their thought might have for the science of rhetoric."[39] Through this regrettable oversight, Ward and his companion John Lawson wrote books on rhetoric that were, for the most part, sterile imitations of the works of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian.[40]

Quite the contrary was true of three of Ehninger's favorite British authors — Hugh Blair, George Campbell, and Richard Whately. He applauded Blair, the major representative of the belletristic school, for his use of scientific data in rejecting the classical doctrine of commonplaces, and for his willingness to adapt some of the precepts of the emerging Romantic Movement in the formulation of his views on criticism. Moreover, he praised Campbell for seeing the importance of the ideas of John Locke, David Hume, and Thomas Reid for a philosophy of rhetoric suited to an age of science and reason. Additionally, he endorsed Whately's efforts to bring the theory of invention and disposition in line with recent findings in science, and for seeing the relevance of the jurisprudential notions of presumption and burden of proof to the study of argument.[41]

As Ehninger's scholarly interests shifted from an analysis of the British period to a consideration of contemporary thought, he still held strongly to the conviction that a theory of rhetoric or argument to be viable must take into consideration the intellectual and cultural forces initiated and maintained by influential leaders — especially those in philosophy, technology, and science. Not surprisingly, therefore, he was one of the first students of rhetoric, as noted earlier, to apply the Toulmin Model to argument, to recognize the significance of Marshall McLuhan's probes into the area of technology's influence on a message, and to see the contribution of speech act theory for prescriptive discourse.[42] Although other communication scholars, such as Carroll Arnold, may have been the first to discover the writings of philosophers Henry Johnstone and Chaim Perelman, Ehninger was able to apply and extend their theories in a novel and substantive way in the creation of his own views on argument.[43]

What this brief overview of the second major characteristic of Ehninger's philosophy has shown is the importance of updating a theory by incorporating into it the relevant ideas of current thought. Occasionally this may, as we have seen, lead to the creation of a new system. But even if this occurs, the most salient notions of the past that still have relevance will remain. Ehninger, in sum, could round out his career by centering on a contemporary theory of argument because he freely understood and appreciated the fact that it both reflected the dynamic forces of the present and the enduring values of the past.

ARGUMENT IN SERVICE OF SOCIETY

Ehninger, it is important to note at this juncture, was not content to devote his full energy to publications dealing with the philosophical nature of rhetoric and argument. A similarly vital concern to him was the problem of putting the theory into practice so that it could be used as a servant of society. This explains in part his willingness to spend approximately twenty years as a college debate coach.[44] He did so despite his "love-hate" attitude toward this activity because he was convinced that if a student in a forensics program learned to use debate strategies properly, he/she would receive training essential for a society dependent upon participant democracy.[45]

Ehninger, early in his career, became a convert to debate as an effective method of implementing the elements of argument that were a central focus of his theory. He liked the idea, for example, that debate is a self-regulative, critical, and cooperative form of discourse in which the disputants present their case on a controversial issue to a third party — a judge — who has the power to render a decision that each participant agrees in advance to accept.

The genuine debater's consent to put his/her ideas to a test in a forum that guarantees equal speaking time and access to data is in many respects, according to Ehninger, unique. Consider, by contrast, the typical persuasive practices of national and international leaders, sectarians, propagandists, advertisers, and manipulators. Rarely, if ever, do these communicators grant to their opponents an opportunity to refute their claims, and to allow an adjudicating agency to offer a critical evaluation of their efforts. Yet this is precisely what organized debate is designed to do.[46] It has as its fundamental purpose to put ideas "into competition not for their own sake, but in order to determine which of two formulations will better implement a common value."[47]

As much as Ehninger liked to speculate on philosophical matters, and to acknowledge the importance of this area to students of argument,[48] he felt that unless theory were reinforced by practical application, the training could lead to a type of "partialism that is as dangerous as it is fruitless."[49]

With this rationale in mind, he lent his support to the need for classroom debates and for participation in college forensics tournaments. These speaking experiences, he believed, could provide preparation "for responsible participation in the debating situations of later life where free citizens determine public policy."[50]

In affirming the notion that a student's knowledge of the philosophy of argument should be translated into practical applications that would enable him/her to serve society in the future, Ehninger was quick to point out that the practicum associated with college assignments should adhere to a test of reasonableness grounded in society's highest values. When he saw that this goal often was unfulfilled, he chose not, as so many of his disenchanted colleagues did, to withdraw his endorsement of the activity, but sought instead to correct and purify it through a series of carefully developed arguments. These were presented in four essays published during the period from 1958 to 1966.[51] Additionally, he co-authored with Brockriede the historically significant volume *Decision By Debate*.

Ehninger followed similar strategies in his four journal articles on debate. In each he described the nature, uses, and limitations of debate, showing its overall relevance for a citizen in a democracy. But he sounded a warning to those involved in forensics programs. All too frequently, he said, debate coaches and student participants find it easy to overemphasize the importance of victory, to treat the activity as a form of gamesmanship that rewards one for an ability to use tricks, and to downplay the value of the search for truth. These violations substitute "naked persuasion" for investigation, destroy the concept of "personhood," and fail to prepare one for responsible service to society.

Ehninger's four essays went far toward building a philosophy of debate that was consistent with his theory of argument. These studies gave administrators and students a needed rationale for supporting college practicum experiences that potentially made important contributions to societal values. At the same time they gave the practice a philosophical underpinning that discouraged the use of excesses that ran counter to the notion of "good reasons." But he also knew that these analyses must be supplemented by a work stating positively the perspective to be adopted and the procedures to be followed to bring debate into conformity with the central elements of argument. Again with the help of Brockriede, he achieved this end in the publication of the volume alluded to earlier — *Decision By Debate*.

Here the authors, building upon their earlier essay on Toulmin, used the model of argument he proposed as a means of classifying and discussing all aspects of informal reasoning. To this they added their own system of values to challenge their readers to become responsible advocates motivated primarily by a concern for truth and an abiding interest in honoring "person-hood." The work, in short, is an insightful

blending of theory and practice. In the 'Editor's Introduction,' Karl Wallace enthusiastically noted:

> The authors are fully aware of the classic relationship between thinking that is directed to theoretical ends and thinking that is intended to influence conduct and behavior. They recognize, accordingly, that the mathematical logic appropriate to scientific thought is not directly useful in discussing those social problems upon which men come to decision and take action. So in presenting the modes of logical analysis, proof, and evidence they have adopted the point of view of certain modern philosophers. These are the men who bring together logic and ethics and who have identified processes of reasoning held to be more appropriate to action and its values than the logic of science and of the categorical syllogism. For the layout of argument the authors have drawn specifically upon Stephen Toulmin. As a consequence, this book may make a major contribution to the methods of practical argument. Possibly it contributes more to the textbook literature of debate than any work since Laycock and Scales' *Argumentation and Debate* (1907) and Baker and Huntington's *The Principles of Argumentation* (1905), and, indeed, some may regard it as approaching the significance of a book like Richard Whately's *Elements of Rhetoric* (1828).[52]

The use of argument in service of society was not, in Ehninger's opinion, limited to the field of debate. It should also apply to the area of public speaking and, indeed, even in the development of research projects. As a consequence, when he was called upon by the editor of the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* to give a critical assessment of the 1952 and 1956 presidential campaigns, he praised Adlai Stevenson for his use of well reasoned arguments, and faulted both Dwight Eisenhower and Estes Kefaufer for their undue reliance on generalities and personal and emotional appeals.[53]

Stevenson's example of achieving excellence in public communication while losing two presidential elections by decisive margins made a lasting impression on Ehninger. In 1965, for instance, he established the proposition that the success of a speech or rhetorical campaign should be measured not by observable results in receiving a favorable response but by the criteria which state: Did the speech do all that it was possible to do within the constraints of the circumstances? Did it overlook no possibilities and fumble no opportunities? Did it give priority to content over form? If these questions can be answered affirmatively, then the speaker has performed ably whether or not the immediate specific purpose is achieved.[54]

Ehninger's interest in training debaters and public speakers to use sound and relevant arguments suitable not only to a classroom environment or a competitive forensics tournament but also to real-life situations continued in the remaining years of his career.[55] Concurrent with this concern was his belief that students of rhetoric, who are the formulators of a meaningful theory of argument, must use their scholarly talents to do applied research for the benefit of mankind. As Chairman of the

Committee on the Scope of Rhetoric at the Wingspread Conference in 1971, he and other members of this group maintained:

> We certainly do not hold that rhetorical scholarship should be subordinated solely to immediate social needs; but we do observe that scholarship which does not engage these problems ... is remote from the rending passions of the country. Rhetorical studies are not in themselves the solution to social, political, or personal problems. They are, however, by their nature and functions relevant to the tasks of social betterment.[56]

IMPLICATIONS OF EHNINGER'S PHILOSOPHY OF ARGUMENT

What, we may ask in conclusion, is the relevance of Ehninger's philosophy for a theory of rhetoric in the contemporary period? If we use the preceding overview of his ideas as a launching point to answer this query, there appear to be three implications. *First, the primary emphasis of rhetoric in the modern age should be on argument.* This claim — which is consistent with the writings of Aristotle, Whately, Toulmin, Perelman, and a host of other scholars focusing on this subject today — gives to the canon of invention a preeminent place. It also demonstrates forcefully that an argument-centered theory of rhetoric brings together students of oral and written communication with their counterparts in philosophy and science. Such a marriage of epistemologists provides hope for those who wish to weaken or eliminate the prevailing use of the phrase "mere rhetoric."

Ehninger's ideas pertaining to this initial implication further suggest that a modified version of the jurisprudential Toulmin Model is the most appropriate description of what actually occurs in argument. He reminds us, however, that with this model we have a need to integrate Perelman's notion of the audience, and a strong moral dimension designed to enhance the dignity of persons. The result of such an integration is a type of informal reasoning that is bilateral in nature, and stresses the values of investigation, criticism, cooperation, and ethics.

A second implication is that if a theory of argument is to be relevant in the contemporary era it must be attuned to the emerging philosophies and scientific discoveries that have a bearing on how human beings reason, and, in turn, new discoveries in other fields are to be viewed as being rhetorical. When these conceptual changes take place in a significant way, we may appropriately refer to the end product as a new system of rhetoric. But, as we have seen earlier, the concept of "new" does not mean a complete discarding of the "old." It implies instead a combining of the best elements of each. It is through this method that we produce a theory of argument that is dynamic and developing — one which in the light of new evidence is always subject to modification. If we adhere to the perspective that knowledge from numerous fields of study may inform and

influence our views on argument in a productive way, we are saying, with Ehninger, that a multidisciplinary approach to this subject holds considerable promise for the future.

A final implication that can be drawn may be stated as follows: The student of argument has a moral obligation both on the personal and on the societal level to use this art for the purpose of bettering others and the state. Not to participate in argument when the rhetorical situation demands a response is to fall short of fulfilling our civic duty. We cannot, as Ehninger put it, remain silent when an adversary needs to be corrected; nor can we fail to listen respectfully to an opponent who seeks in a reasonable manner to alter our beliefs and attitudes.[57] A similar challenge faces us on matters pertaining to the state. To be effective citizens we are expected to use responsible arguments when advocating political or social causes on the local and national levels, and to assess critically the arguments of others. Argument, in sum, is a vitally essential handmaiden of society.

Ehninger himself set an example of how arguments should be used in human affairs. Taken as a whole, his scholarly publications and his classroom lectures took the form of arguments. Aware of exigencies in the field of communication, he responded to these problems by advancing propositions — often highly controversial in nature — that went beyond descriptive criticism. In developing his thesis, he took bold stands with the hope that they would function not as ultimate solutions but as starting points for further dialogue. This practice was in keeping with the philosophy of argument he so ably espoused.

NOTES

[1] Ehninger was my undergraduate professor at George Washington University, my colleague in the graduate program at The Ohio State University, my professor in graduate studies at the University of Florida, and my collaborator on several joint projects while he was on the faculty at the University of Iowa.
[2] His overall impact can be measured in part by examining the following volume — Ray E. McKerrow, ed., *Explorations in Rhetoric: Studies in Honor of Douglas Ehninger*, Scott, Foresman, Glenview, Ill., 1982.
[3] *Quarterly Journal of Speech* **29** (1943), 163–167.
[4] 'Whately on Dispositio,' *Quarterly Journal of Speech* **40** (1954), 441.

[5] 'Argument as Method: Its Nature, Its Limitations, and Its Uses,' *Speech Monographs* **37** (1970), 108. Hereafter cited as 'Argument as Method.'

[6] Wayne Brockriede and Douglas Ehninger, 'Toulmin on Argument: An Interpretation and Application,' *Quarterly Journal of Speech* **46** (1960), 44—53. Hereafter cited as 'Toulmin on Argument.'

[7] 'Toulmin on Argument,' 46—47.

[8] 'Toulmin on Argument,' 48.

[9] 'Toulmin on Argument,' 48.

[10] 'Toulmin on Argument.' 50.

[11] 'Toulmin on Argument.' 53.

[12] Toulmin preferred the term "substantive logic" because of its more positive connotation. See his essay 'Logic and the Criticism of Arguments,' in James L. Golden, Goodwin F. Berquist, and William E. Coleman (eds.), *The Rhetoric of Western Thought*, 3rd ed., Kendall/Hunt, Dubuque, Iowa, 1983, p. 398.

[13] 'The Logic of Argument,' in James McBath (ed.), *Argumentation and Debate*, rev. ed., Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, New York, 1963, pp. 169—191; *Decision By Debate*, Dodd, Mead, New York, 1963; and *Influence, Belief, and Argument*, Scott, Foresman, Glenview, Ill., 1974. A second edition of *Decision By Debate* was produced by Harper & Row in 1978.

[14] In a conversation with Toulmin in 1978, we discussed the criticism he had received about his apparent neglect of the audience. He noted that the charge had some justification, but that the oversight would be corrected in his forthcoming book which he co-authored: Stephen Toulmin, Richard Rieke, and Allan Janik, *An Introduction to Reasoning*, Macmillan, New York, 1979. Ehninger, of course, had passed away before the publication's appearance.

[15] 'Argument as Method,' 101.

[16] 'Arugment as Method,' 103—104.

[17] 'Argument as Method,' 101—102.

[18] 'Science, Philosophy — and Rhetoric: A Look Toward the Future,' pp. 454—464. Hereafter cited as 'Science, Philosophy — and Rhetoric.'

[19] 'Science, Philosophy — and Rhetoric,' p. 461.

[20] 'Science, Philosophy — and Rhetoric,' P. 461. For a similar view see his essay on 'A Synoptic View of Systems of Western Rhetoric,' *Quarterly Journal of Speech* **56** (1975), 450.

[21] 'Argument as Method,' 109.

[22] 'Argument as Method,' 109.

[23] *Influence, Belief, and Argument*, p. 6.

[24] *Southern Speech Journal* **33** (1968), 220.

[25] 'Argument as Method,' 109—110.

[26] 'Argument as Method,' 110.

[27] Douglas Ehninger and Gerard Hauser, 'Communication of Values,' in Carroll Arnold and John W. Bowers (eds.), *Handbook of Communication Theory*, Allyn and Bacon, Boston, 1984, p. 745.

[28] See Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, Harper and Row, New York, 1959; Stephen Toulmin, *Human Understanding: The Collective Use and Evolution of Concepts*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1972; and Kenneth Boulding, *Ecodynamics: A New Theory of Societal Evolution*, Sage, Beverly Hills, 1978.

[29] 'Selected Theories of *Inventio* in English Rhetoric, 1759—1828,' Doctoral Dissertation presented in Speech, The Ohio State University, 1949, pp. 400—402.

[30] 'Campbell, Blair, and Whately Revisited,' *Southern Speech Journal* **28** (1963), 182.

[31] 'George Campbell and the Revolution in Inventional Theory,' *Southern Speech Journal* **15** (1950), 270—276. This paper was first presented at the Speech Communication

Association Convention in Washington, D.C. in December, 1949, and was read by the author because Ehninger was unable to attend.

[32] In 1968, for example, Ehninger was invited to respond to a critical assessment by Dominic La Russo. The reply was entitled 'George Campbell and the Rhetorical Tradition,' *Western Speech* **32** (1968), 276—279.

[33] *Quarterly Journal of Speech* **39** (1953), 401—424.

[34] 'On Rhetoric and Rhetorics,' *Western Speech* **31** (1967), 242—249; and 'On Systems of Rhetoric,' *Philosophy and Rhetoric* **1** (1968), 131—144.

[35] 'On Systems of Rhetoric,' 133—143.

[36] He articulated this view as early as 1955 in his essay on 'Campbell, Blair, and Whately: Old Friends in a New Light,' *Western Speech* **19** (1955), 269.

[37] See in particular the essay on 'Dominant Trends in English Rhetorical Thought, 1750—1800,' *Southern Speech Journal* **17** (1952), 3—12.

[38] A typical example of the preference shown toward the classicists was Jonathan Swift's satirical essay on 'The Battle of the Books.'

[39] 'John Ward and His Rhetoric,' *Speech Monographs* **18** (1951), 14.

[40] See Ward's *Systems of Oratory*, 2 Vols, London, 1759; and Lawson's *Lectures Concerning Oratory*, George Faulkner, Dublin, 1758.

[41] The following works include one or more of these claims: 'George Campbell and the Revolution in Inventional Theory'; 'The Intrinsic Sources of Blair's Popularity' (co-authored with James Golden), *Southern Speech Journal* **21** (1955), 12—30; 'Campbell, Blair, and Whately: Old Friends in a New Light'; 'Campbell, Blair, and Whately Revisited'; and 'Editor's Introduction,' *Elements of Rhetoric by Richard Whately*, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, 1963, pp. ix—xxx.

[42] See the essay on 'Marshall McLuhan: His Significance for the Field of Speech Communication,' *Speech Journal* **6** (1969), 17—24; and the study entitled: 'Toward a Taxonomy of Prescriptive Discourse,' in *The Rhetorical Process: Studies in Honor of Carroll C. Arnold*, Pennsylvania State University Press, State College, Pa., 1977, p. 89—100. Several years before the publication of the latter study, Ehninger introduced a graduate course on speech act theory at the University of Iowa.

[43] In the essay on 'Argument as Method,' Ehninger footnotes Johnstone's works at least six times; and, as we have noted, Perelman plays a prominent role in the study on 'Science, Philosophy — and Rhetoric.' In my last discussion held with Ehninger on academic matters in 1978, he expressed a warm appreciation for Perelman's theories while denigrating the writings of Burke because of their failure to deal in a systematic way with the subject of argument.

[44] During the academic years of 1947—1948 and 1951—1952, I served as his debate assistant at Ohio State University and the University of Florida respectively.

[45] This love-hate relationship that Ehninger had for school debating has been described by Marilyn Van Graeber in her 'Dedication' in *Explorations in Rhetoric*, pp. ix—x.

[46] 'Debating as Critical Deliberation,' *Southern Speech Journal* **24** (1958), 25.

[47] 'Decision By Debate: A Re-Examination,' *Quarterly Journal of Speech* **45** (1959), 286.

[48] Often in conversations, he expressed a feeling of deep satisfaction that most of his work on the doctoral level at Ohio State was in the area of philosophy. This selection of courses was possible because of his extensive work he had completed at Northwestern University prior to World War II.

[49] 'The Debate About Debating.' *Quarterly Journal of Speech* **44** (1958), 133.

[50] *Decision By Debate*, 1st ed., p. viii.

[51] 'The Debate About Debating,' 128—136; 'Debating as Critical Deliberation,' 22—30; 'Decision By Debate: A Re-Examination,' 282—287; 'Debate as Method: Limitations and Values,' *Speech Teacher* **15** (1966), 180—185. Also of interest is his essay on 'Six Earmarks of a Sound Forensics Program,' *Speech Teacher* **1** (November 1952), 237—241.

[52] Pp. v—vi. For a similar favorable assessment of the significance of this work and the overall influence of Ehninger's scholarship, see Walter Fisher's essay in this issue.

[53] 'The Campaign in the South,' *Quarterly Journal of Speech* **38** (1952), 410—412; and 'Senator Kefaufer,' *Quarterly Journal of Speech* **43** (1957), 43—48.

[54] Unpublished manuscript sent to the author in the Autumn of 1965. It was to be part of a co-authored book on public speaking that we never completed.

[55] For a number of years up to the time of his death in 1978, he served as the primary author of numerous revisions of Alan Monroe's *Principles and Types of Speech* (Scott, Foresman, and Company) — the most popular textbook on public speaking in twentieth-century American history.

[56] Lloyd F. Bitzer and Edwin Black, eds., *The Prospect of Rhetoric*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1971, p. 210

[57] *Influence, Belief, and Argument*, p. 3.