

Christopher W. Tindale, *The Philosophy of Argument and Audience Reception*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, 244pp., (hard-back), ISBN 9781107101111.

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Argumentation is essentially a form of dialogue, an activity that involves interaction between various participants. When we argue we always address an audience. However, this simple observation has been significantly under-appreciated in argumentation theory, especially by those working in the Gricean tradition. Such authors systematically focus on the speaker, her intentions, the reasoning behind her utterances etc. This tendency may result in the false impression that argumentation is a form of reasoning, or at least suspiciously similar to it, ignoring significant differences. The role of the audience in argumentative interchanges has been usually treated as minimal, and unjustly so, argues Tindale. The achievement of *The Philosophy of Argument and Audience Reception* is to compensate for this unbalanced perspective by a detailed overview of the literature. Tindale revisits a considerable number of authors and positions, and finds substantive insights into the role of the audience in the process of argumentation.

In what follows, I summarize the main points of each chapter, adding a few comments and suggestions. Chapter 1 illustrates some of the ideas that are important in the project by appealing to three argumentative speeches, all by former US President Barack Obama: the 2007 speech in which he announces his candidacy, his 2008 speech as president elect, and his 2009 eulogy of Senator Edward Kennedy. The discussion of these speeches turns

our attention to the theoretical questions to be discussed in the rest of the book, and the main ways in which these issues are approached. Chapter 2 announces the main thesis of the book: that audiences are important because argumentation has a social nature, not only in the sense that it involves social interaction, but also in that we are arguers in virtue of, and only after, we have learned to act as audiences. As Tindale puts it, “the audience is the most fundamental argumentative experience.” (p. 21) That is why, he believes, “Theories of argumentation must not only have an appreciation for the importance of audience and a role for the concept, they must be developed around it.” (p. 19) Insights from the works of Robert Brandom, Mikhail Bakhtin, Stephen Toulmin and Aristotle are brought to the fore in order to develop the above suggestions.

The second part of chapter 2 introduces three key concepts that relate to a range of difficult issues in argumentation theory that the audience-centred approach proposed in the book promises to illuminate. One is that of *identity*, in a variety of senses of the term. This includes issues related to the “personal identity” of the audience, “composite audiences”, i.e. audiences that are composed of various groups of people, with various backgrounds, but also questions concerning the identification of audiences. The latter is not a trivial matter in the case of, for instance, historical arguments, such as Hume’s argument against the existence of God in his *Dialogues on Natural Religion*. Relating in an appropriate way to arguments that were intended for people living in a very different cultural and philosophical context is not always easy for contemporary readers. The second key concept is that of *persuasion*, and the third concept is that of *evaluation* of an argument.

Chapter 3 focuses on Aristotle’s conception of audience. Tindale argues that Aristotle has a dynamic conception of audience, which is conceived as an active participant in the processes of persuasion (p. 56). Moreover, the audience is seen as rich and diverse in its background knowledge, values and interests, all these aspects factoring into the choice of the best means to address it. In arriving at this conclusion, the author analyses several concepts in Aristotle’s work on the basis of the previous exegetical literature. One central concept in Aristotle’s work on rhetoric, according to Tindale, is that of *dunamis*, which is defined as the power or potentiality that a thing has to produce a change from a source within itself (p. 41). There is, for instance, a *dunamis* of virtue in the audience, which argumentation might

activate, if correctly employed. Aristotle, he notes, places great emphasis on the idea that the means of persuasion must be chosen carefully. Rhetoric, as a discipline, is for Aristotle the study of the capacity to see the available means of persuasion when addressing a particular audience (pp. 37, 43). Implicitly, it has a practical dimension, that of helping us perfect a particular form of *insight*. Rhetoric is also the study of the means by which the speaker should prepare the ground upon which persuasion can build (p. 53), such as capturing the attention of the audience and making it receptive to one's arguments. If the audience does not feel that the subject is relevant to their concerns and values, and means something to them personally, they might listen inattentively or fail to open their mind to what the speaker has to say. In relation to this point, Aristotle uses what Tindale qualifies as "a startling, if awkward, metaphor", that of the necessity to "make room in the hearer's mind for the speech one is going to give" (p. 55). The spatial metaphor is meant to indicate that one must prepare one's audience carefully.

The concept of audience takes central stage in the work of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca. Apart from the real audience the arguer addresses, and which the authors define in intentional vocabulary, as those whom the speaker wants to influence by arguing (p.58), they introduce the famous "universal audience", a concept that has raised many questions and received several interpretations. On one interpretation, it is seen as an atemporal, abstract, ideal audience that the speaker has in mind when building her arguments and whom she intends to convince. This is a misinterpretation, Tindale argues, as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca reject it, insisting that the universal audience is rooted in a culture and a time. According to them, each culture has its own conception of the universal audience (p. 62). But then in what sense is the universal audience universal? Tindale prefers to see it as "a standard of reasonableness that is alive in all particular audiences" (p. 63). What characterizes the reasonable is precisely that it is universal, even if it takes many shapes and applies in various ways to different contexts. The universal audience is present in all audiences in the sense that reasonable argumentation can be recognized by all audiences, and, as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca say, "can inspire everyone in analogous circumstances" (quoted in Tindale p. 73).

Argumentation theory occupies a significant position in Jürgen Haber-

mas' work, on which chapter 5 focuses. It plays a significant role in the ethical view the German philosopher is most tightly associated with, discourse ethics. This is an ethical approach of Kantian inspiration, as it involves a form of universalization. However, what is meant to be universalized in this case is not a particular maxim of action, but the non-coercive acceptance of a norm, after careful argumentation, by all those affected by its consequences (p. 90). Thus, for Habermas, ethics, political philosophy and argumentation are tightly related.

As an integral part of this approach, audiences play an active and significant role. They are not passive recipients of arguments, but active members of the process of decision, whose assent to public norms is required for the latter to be legitimate, and needs to be reached in a way that avoids bias and self-interest (p. 92). That is why, according to Habermas, in arguing speakers must aim at winning the assent of a *universal audience* (p. 97), a concept that resembles the one developed in Perelman's and Olbrechts-Tyteca's work. As in the case of the latter, for Habermas the universal audience is not a real audience, in the same sense in which "the ideal speech situation" is not a real context in which dialogue takes place. Instead, both of them have to do with the idealizing presuppositions of all real argumentations. Among such ideal presuppositions is the one that no part affected by what is at issue should be left without a voice, or that consensus should be reached in a non-coercive manner and only in view of the force of the best arguments adduced. Habermas places much theoretical weight on the concept of *the force of the better argument*, but Tindale (p. 92) comments that the concept is in need of clarification. However, Tindale notes that Habermas clearly does not have in mind a narrow conception of the goodness of arguments that reduces to logical validity (see, for instance, the discussion of Habermas' notion of a "validity claim", pp. 83 ff). In the first part of *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (1990) Habermas comments favourably on Stephen Toulmin's approach, and discusses in an appreciative tone the school of informal logic that was then beginning to take momentum at the University of Windsor, Canada.

Chapter 6 focuses on the relation between different accounts of meaning and the argumentation theory. Tindale first discusses H. P. Grice's theory of meaning and his account of communication. While both the Cooperative Principle and the maxims, proposed in his 'Logic and Conversation'

(1975), invite the speaker to consider carefully the way her contribution to a conversation might be received by the audience, these norms all concern the speaker and not the audience. Tindal notes that there is, however, an exception. In 'Presupposition and Conversational Implicature', an essay from 1981, Grice suggests that a further maxim be added to the classical four. This maxim reads as follows: "Frame whatever you say in the form most suitable for any reply that would be regarded as appropriate." This proposal is worth mentioning, Tindale believes, because "it constitutes an explicit movement towards the audience" (p. 103). The speaker is required not only to have the audience in mind, but also to anticipate the contribution of the audience to the conversation. Implicitly, Tindale comments, the audience is not conceived of as a passive receiver of messages, but as one that is actively engaged in the interchange.

In the account of non-natural speaker meaning that Grice develops in his article 'Meaning' (1957) and subsequent writings the notion of an audience is central. The audience features explicitly in the analysis of meaning (as quoted at p. 107): 'U meant something by uttering x' is true iff, for some audience A, U uttered x intending: (1) A to produce a particular response r; (2) A to think (recognize) that U intends (1); (3) A to fulfil (1) on the basis of his fulfillment of (2). As Tindale notes, one of the most severe problems that the analysis seems to face, and which Grice discusses in 'Utterer's Meaning and Intentions' (1969), is that speaker meaning does not seem to require the presence of an audience. In the article mentioned, Grice acknowledges this problem and discusses several such cases, which include silent thinking, thinking out loud, writing a note to oneself, or rehearsing a discourse. While in some such cases one could save the Gricean analysis by arguing that the audience is the speaker herself, in other cases this is not a plausible option (e.g., that of addressing an imaginary audience).

Tindale's claim that Grice's analysis is an implicit recognition of the role of the audience in creating meaning invites a couple of comments. The first one is that, although the claim seems correct, the analysis goes too far in this direction, at least according to Grice's critics. The requirement that there be an audience whenever a speaker means something with an utterance is too strong, for it creates the problems we have just seen. So, it is not clear this is really a virtue of the analysis. The second comment is that, at times, Tindale seems to exaggerate the significance Grice gives to

the role the audience plays in the formation of speaker meaning. Tindale writes that “Grice shows why he (and we) cannot take away the recognition of intention” (p. 107), and that, on his account, “I cannot be said to have meant something without my intended effect being recognized.” (p. 110) This is not really so. On Grice’s account the speaker can non-naturally mean something with her utterance even if the audience completely fails to recognize her intentions. Let us see why. The Gricean analysis requires that the utterer have the *intentions* (1), (2) and (3) quoted above. The speaker must *intend* (2) that her intention (1) to produce a reaction in the audience be recognized by the latter, and *intend* (3) that (2) be achieved on the basis of (1). However, this does not entail that any of these intentions be fulfilled, only that the speaker must *have* them.

Let me insist some more on this point, and consider more carefully condition (3). This requires that the utterer *U intend* that the audience *A* produce a particular response *r* to the utterance *on the basis of A’s recognition* that *U intends A* to produce that response. It might seem that this condition *presupposes* that the basis obtain, i.e. that *A recognizes U’s intention* (1) in the first place. But this is not the case. Suppose a sentence Φ presupposes that π ; it does not follow that ‘*U intends that Φ* ’ also presupposes that π . As Karttunen (1974, p. 189) notes, sentences expressing non-doxastic propositional attitudes such as intending presuppose only *that U believes that π* . ‘I eat the sandwich in my bag.’ presupposes that *there is a sandwich in my bag*, but ‘I intend to eat the sandwich in my bag’ does not: I might intend the latter even if it turns out I forgot my sandwich at home. The same applies to condition (3) of the Gricean analysis: it is not a presupposition of condition (3) that *A recognizes U’s intention (1)*. So, intention recognition is not an essential part of the analysis at all.

The second part of chapter 6 focuses on Brandom’s inferentialist theory of meaning, and the role it assigns to assertion as a fundamental kind of move in the language game of giving and asking for reasons. The role of the audience is much more significant on Brandom’s approach, due to the fact that it has at its core the concept of interpretation, which is always construed from the perspective of the audience, of those engaged in the shared practice of interpretation (p. 125). In relation to this last point, I would suggest that Tindale’s project could be further developed by looking at the work of Michael Haugh, Marina Sbisà, Antonella Carassa and Marco

Colombetti, among others, on how joint meaning is created in the process of communicative interaction, both with respect to the illocutionary force of speech acts, as well as with respect to classical pragmatic phenomena such as implicature or presupposition. This perspective, known as “interactionist pragmatics”, as opposed to the more standard Gricean intentionalist pragmatics, starts from the intuition that meaning is negotiated by speaker and hearer in the process of communication. Thus, interactionist pragmatics overcomes the classical distinction between speaker and audience, and takes all participants in communication to play an active role in the creation of meaning. It is, therefore, a line of investigation that might suit very well Tindale’s perspective.

Chapter 7 discusses testimony. First, it observes that testimony is also used in science, contrary to the received wisdom, which says that science relies exclusively on proof and corroboration of hypotheses with the data. In fact, scientists rely on the work of other scientists, which they take as a starting point for further investigation. The discussion then turns to the appeal to expert knowledge on behalf of people who do not have competence in a particular field. Tindale raises the question “whether we are able to do anything but rely on others, whether they are experts or otherwise.” (p. 129) The alternative, I would add, seems to be a radical form of scepticism which suspends judgement on anything that the subject might not deem “self-evident”. But such an epistemic position is unsustainable, and seems to be more of a philosophical construct than one that a real epistemic subject might have ever subscribed to. The subsequent discussion analyses different views of testimony, reductionist and non-reductionist, with a special emphasis on Jennifer Lackey’s Statement View of Testimony, which Tindale finds appealing as it places the audience at its centre.

In chapter 8 Tindale turns to the role emotions play in argumentation, both with respect to interpretation of arguments and with respect to persuasion. The chapter looks at how this issue is treated in Aristotle’s works, as well as in that of modern cognitive scientists such as Daniel Kahneman, Paul Thagard, and Antonio Damasio. These authors emphasize the interplay between emotions and cognition, in contrast to the Cartesian tradition (p.160), which sees reason as an independent mechanism, unaffected by other forms of cognition. Chapter 9 focuses on the social nature of the self, connecting to the criticism of the Cartesian tradition in the previous chap-

ter, which conceives of reason as disembodied, isolated from the other aspects of the self as well as from society. Tindale insists on the social nature of personhood and of the criteria of personal identity, in opposition to essentialist views that identify the criterion with an internal mechanism of solipsistic reasoning: “When I engage in self-reflection”, Tindale writes, “I do not discover an isolated Cartesian ego. Rather, I discover myself among others and form important parts of my identity through that interaction with others.” (p. 171) This idea is reinforced (pp. 173-174) by appeal to various views of the social situatedness of personhood (as in Amartya Sen’s work, or in Seyla Benhabib’s criticism of John Rawls’s “original position”), and of conceptions of the extended mind, which connects the biological system to external resources (proposed by Andy Clark and David Chalmers).

Chapters 6 to 9 form a remarkable fragment of the book that might be read as a whole: they provide an extended argument for the conclusion that social phenomena penetrate and conform the individual, with respect to speaker meaning, testimony, emotions and, respectively, personal identity. Chapter 10 looks at the arguer-audience relation from the perspective of rhetoric, and in particular, that of how to make the reasons *present* to the audience’s mind. Tindale discusses various techniques, such as creating visual vividness and using metaphors (p. 184), or Barack Obama’s appeal to the figure of Lincoln in his 2007 speech, the purpose of which is to associate himself with the much-respected historical leader in order to invite the audience to notice the similarities (p. 186). The second part of the chapter considers the way in which the environments that arguers and audiences share shape and frame the meanings they communicate. Tindale rejects the Gricean view of communication that takes it to consist, when successful, of a transfer of content from speaker to audience; instead, he sides with Brandom, for whom there might be various correct interpretation of an utterance, which vary depending on the previous commitments of audiences. This line of thought continues in the next chapter, which is devoted to how audiences receive meaning, how they contribute to its modulation and how arguers might anticipate the response they produce in the audience.

The last chapter brings together the main insights taken from the authors discussed so far and applies them to an intricate problem already mentioned above, that of the historical audience. This is an audience that

the arguer cannot have in mind, and from which she can receive no feedback. The cognitive environments on which the present arguments might land in the future are difficult to anticipate. However, some of the ideas and concepts already introduced seem to be helpful here, as they apply to any audience, present or future: the relation between emotion and cognition, the presence of the universal audience, and notions like “truth” and “bias” (p. 220), offer a footing for argumentation that one might expect to connect present arguers to future audiences.

Overall, the book is a valuable resource, first of all, as an overview of the role the concept of audience plays in a variety of theories of argumentation and cognition. This alone makes the book an achievement, for such a project has not been pursued before. But the book is more than an overview, for its aim is also to make the case for the claim that argumentation, both with respect to interpretation and persuasion, has a social dimension. As I already mentioned, the nucleus of the argument is to be found in chapters 6 to 9. I find the project successful in this sense too. The reader who, when opening the book, shares the widespread belief that the audience is merely a passive receptor of argument will definitely come to a different opinion when she reaches the end.

It is true, however, that the book has certain deficiencies. One of them is that not all the pieces fit together equally well: some of the issues addressed, such as certain fragments of the chapter on emotions, connect only indirectly to the main theme of the book. The same can be said of the discussion of the concept of presence in chapter 10: while these topics do relate to that of the audience, as virtually any topic in argumentation does, they are not *about* the audience. Moreover, the book does not always unfold and develop in a way that the reader could easily follow. The sensation, at times, is that one is taken through a line of thought without knowing where one is being led to or what exactly is the question under discussion.

However, despite these limitations, the book is highly recommendable. If I had to pick one idea that I have gained from reading it, it is that there are innumerable factors that the arguer must consider when addressing an audience, and innumerable choices that she must carefully make so as to communicate better, and ultimately to be more successful in persuading a particular audience. I have in mind the discussion of presence (see chapter 10), but also the idea (in chapter 3) that argumentation that invites the au-

dience to contribute not only missing premisses but also a point of view, a perspective, an insight, is potentially more persuasive, and definitely more respectful with the audience.

Works cited

Karttunen, Lauri. "Presuppositions and Linguistic Context", *Theoretical Linguistics*, 1 (1974): 181-194.