ON THE DIVORCE BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND ARGUMENTATION THEORY*

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Abstract: The author compares the views of analytic philosophy regarding argumentation and its philosophical relevance, with those of contemporary argumentation theories, in general, regarding the philosophical idea of meaning. He shows that, in the first case, the theory of meaning (Russell, Wittgenstein, Quine, and others) excludes argumentation and an approach on it, and, in the second, argumentation theories exclude, in practice, a theory of meaning, at least insofar the concept of meaning must be philosophically understood. The author concludes studying the role of each of these theories (meaning/argumentation) in Stephen Toulmin’s philosophy, where, by contrast and according to his interpretation, rhetoric and argumentation are at the core of the foundations of philosophy and of human knowledge and action as a whole.

Keywords: analytic philosophy, argumentation theory, formal logic, informal logic, Quine, rhetoric, theory of meaning, Toulmin, Wittgenstein.

Resumo: O autor compara as perspectivas da filosofia analítica a respeito da argumentação e da sua importância filosófica, com as das teorias da argumentação contemporâneas, de maneira geral, a respeito da ideia filosófica de significação.

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Introduction: On the divorce between theory of meaning and theory of argumentation

One of the most surprising conclusions that researchers on contemporary argumentation theory and on analytic philosophy may draw, after attempting to read the latter in the light of the former, is that we do not find the mere concept of argument, neither among the founders of the analytic movement, nor among most of their scholars to this day. For example, what do Russell, Wittgenstein or Quine have to say about the idea that argumentation is a characteristic expression of the exercise of human reason, that we argue in different ways, which may be studied by themselves, i.e. they may be the subject of specialised research (either philosophical or not)? More precisely, what do these philosophers have to say about the idea that argumentation is a vehicle of meaning in ordinary language? Apparently, nothing. Indeed, as mentioned, the concept of argumentation, in the senses I mentioned, appears nowhere in their books or other publications.1 However, a large number of analytic philosophers who teach formal logic at Universities in Europe and the United States of America (some of whom are attending this international colloquium) insist on underlining that the very same logic, when applied to ordinary language, is both an essential tool for achieving clarity and precision in our reasoning, and provides the fundamental framework for the study of argumentation as it takes place in daily life. In the past decades, after informal logic emerged and developed, and in particular, after what became commonly known as “critical thinking”, it became

1 The terms “argument” and “argumentation” are completely absent from the Index of A Companion to Analytic Philosophy (Martinich & Sosa 2001).