Argumentation *Ab Homine* in Philosophy

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Abstract: Argumentation that uses the beliefs of one's opponents to refute them is well known (*ad hominem* in the classical sense). This paper proposes that there is a hitherto unnoticed counterpart to it, to be called *ab homine*, in which speakers/writers argue through the manner in which they deliver a message. Since the manner of delivery can never be turned into a premise or premises, this form of argumentation—although somewhat resembling Aristotle's *ethos*—is much closer to the peculiar force of Socratic *elenchos*.

Résumé: L'argumentation qui utilise les croyances de ses adversaires pour les réfuter est bien connue (ad hominem au sens classique). Cet article propose qu'il y ait une contrepartie jusqu'ici inaperçue, appelée ab homine, dans laquelle les orateurs/écrivains raisonnent par la manière dont ils délivrent un message. Puisque le mode de livraison ne peut jamais être transformé en une ou plusieurs prémisses, cette forme d'argumentation —bien qu'elle ressemble quelque peu à l'éthos d'Aristote —est beaucoup plus proche de la force particulière de l'élenchos socratique.

Keywords: *ad hominem*, *ab homine*, argumentation, *elenchos*, *ethos*, philosophy

1. Introduction

In this paper, I propose to demonstrate the existence of an argumentative procedure that I shall call *ab homine*, a phrase coined as a counterpart to *ad hominem*. In spite of the well-known ambiguity of the latter phrase, at its most basic, it simply denotes argumentation directed to someone—the hearer or reader. Similarly, the phrase *ab homine* hints at the origin of the communicative act, meaning argumentation directed from someone—the speaker or writer. In a sense, all this is utterly trivial, for all argumentation is

 Informal Logic, Vol. 41, No. 2 (2021), pp. 219–243.

both *ad hominem* and *ab homine* given that it always comes from someone and goes to someone. Still, we all use the phrase *ad hominem* to highlight a special and remarkable way in which argumentation is directed *to*. This exact same reason moves me to propose the parallel phrase *ab homine* as denoting a special way in which argumentation is directed *from*.

The paper has three unequal parts. First, I shall briefly describe the special way in which argumentation is sometimes markedly "from someone" as well as "to someone" (§2). Then I shall analyze in some detail three argumentative texts that are as different from each other as possible yet can be shown to contain argumentation *ab homine* in the sense described (§3). Finally, I shall respond to some objections that might be made to such an analysis (§4).

2. A question of terms

It is by now well known that before the nineteenth century, the phrase *ad hominem* referred to argumentation that uses premises admitted by one's opponents in order to refute them. Sometime during the nineteenth century, writers began to use the phrase in a curiously distorted sense to signify argumentation that uses personal characteristics of one's opponents to "win the argument." Given that such a "victory" was obtained by *not* engaging with the argument itself, this somehow became a "fallacy," although I do not know when exactly this shift of meaning happened or who was behind it.[1] In any case, the original meaning of the phrase *ad hominem* is at least as old as Aristotle, who uses the exact equivalent Greek phrase or similar ones.[2]

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[1] In Schopenhauer's now quite famous 1830 manuscript on "eristics" (first published by Frauenstädt, 1864, pp. 3-35), it is possible to see the transition in meaning, as it were, *in statu nascendi* (compare tricks 16 and 29; English translation: Saunders, 1896, pp. 27-28 and 34-35; see also p. 13). In that text, Schopenhauer suggests the felicitous phrase *ad personam* to be reserved for the fallacy of textbook lore whilst keeping *ad hominem* for the older meaning.

[2] *De sophisticis elenchis* 178^{b}17: πρὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον; cf. *Metaphysics* K, 1062a3: πρὸς τόνδε, *ad istum*, "to this one"; *Physics* Θ, 263a15: πρὸς τὸν ἐρωτῶντα, *ad interrogantem*, "to the questioner"; *De caelo* B, 294b9: πρὸς τὸν τἀναντία λέγοντα, *ad contra dicentem*, "to the one who contradicts." The

The discoverer of argumentation *ad hominem*, however, was not Aristotle but Socrates. This is pretty clear from Plato's and even from Xenophon's dialogues, in which Socrates often says to his interlocutor,

> I am arguing with *you*, not with Gorgias nor with Homer nor with any author of a speech or book which you may have listened to or read and memorized. You alone are my witness, and I don't need any other. I want to know what *you* think, what *you* believe, what *you* would say that justice, virtue, or whatever is" (see, for instance, *Hippias Minor* 365C-D, *Meno* 71D, *Gorgias* 471E-472C, 474A; Xenophon, *Memorabilia* IV 2).

And, as we know, Socrates always asked questions in order to elicit premises from his interlocutor that could then be used to refute him or to make him contradict himself.

Thus far, we are in familiar territory. Nonetheless, there is a profound difference between Aristotle and Socrates.

For Aristotle, argumentation *ad hominem* is purely dialectical and not apodictic, a matter of opinion not science, and a methodical procedure preparatory but inferior to proof (see Zingano 2017). A superficial reading of Plato or Xenophon seems to confirm that Socrates invented a technique that Aristotle later codified, mainly in his *Topics*. Plato's *Apology*, however, clearly shows that Socrates' ultimate purpose was not limited to refuting half-baked thoughts or finding inconsistencies in his interlocutor's *speeches*. Socrates was not just examining other people's beliefs but their whole *lives*, in the same way that he said he had examined and kept examining his own life.

So, the Aristotelian *ad hominem* could not be farther from the Socratic one. When Socrates is examining someone, taking him as a witness, there is, as it were, a surface structure to the argumenta-

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opposite term is not always πρὸς τὸ πρᾶγμα, *ad rem*, "to the thing"; cf. *De soph. el*. πρὸς τὸν λόγον, "to the argument"; this is inverted in *De caelo* 293a25-26: πρὸς λόγους καὶ δόξας vs. πρὸς τὰ φαίνομενα). In the anonymous paraphrasis of Aristotle's *De soph. el*., §22 (Hayduck 1884, p. 53, l. 11) we have as opposites not only Aristotle's own πρὸς τὸν λόγον ("to the argument"), but also πρὸς τὴν ἀλήθειαν ("to actual truth or reality"), and of course πρὸς τὸ πρᾶγμα. Behind the Aristotelian opposition lies, of course, his distinction between dialectical and apodictic syllogisms (*Topics* A 100a25-b23).

tion. This surface structure certainly has to do with beliefs, premises, and propositions; it can be analyzed, diagrammed, and even formalized. However, there is also a deep structure: something else is being said, if rather indirectly. If Gorgias is unable to express the nature of rhetoric, Laches the nature of courage, Meno the nature of virtue, Thrasymachus the nature of justice, whilst maintaining that they know those natures, then what kind of *men* are they? That is the whole point of the *ad hominem*. But it is the man, only him, only the man who has been examined, who has to see the point; nothing would be gained and indeed much would be lost if Socrates would rub it in. Still, for this second, deeper, underlying argument to sink in, to have an effect, someone with a particular *ethos* had to deliver the treatment. It was only the sheer power of Socrates' persona that enabled such an examination. That is the whole point of the *ab homine*.[3]

The evidence, as far as I can interpret it, indicates that Aristotle never quite understood what was going on in the Socratic dialogues. And so, by dint of codifying the Socratic method, he transformed it into something completely different. On the one hand, he first transformed the *ad hominem* aspect of argumentation into a dialectical game of refutation in the *Topics* (cf. Moraux 1968), and then he took distance from it as not scientific (*Prior Analytics* A 24a22-b15). On the other hand, he converted the *ab homine* aspect of argumentation into *ethos*, a means of persuasion—the most powerful one, he says (*Rhetoric* A 1356a5-13)—only to turn it into advice to orators about how to defeat their opponent by means of *ethos* (see *Rhetoric* Γ 1419b14-17). In other words, Aristotle instrumentalized a living practice into a learnable technique. The focus on examining the lives of flesh and blood people was replaced by an instrument to be used according to this or that pur-

[3] It is to the immense merit of Livio Rossetti to have gone into the depths of what is really going on in Plato's and Xenophon's Socratic dialogues (see especially the studies collected in Rossetti 2011). Although I discovered the structure explored in this paper in the texts analyzed in §3, it was after reading Rossetti that it dawned on me that he, starting from Plato and Xenophon, arrived first to a similar view. In fact, it could be that what he calls "formatting" (Rossetti 1994) is the right explanation for this kind of argumentation, but such a discussion goes beyond what can be done in a single paper.

pose.[4] In Socrates, *ethos* and *elenchus* and *ab homine* and *ad hominem* were the two sides of one and the same coin; they were not separated as in Aristotle, and they were, in the last instance, aimed at conversion. However, I submit that, in practice, many philosophers, if not indeed all of them, ultimately use the properly Socratic way of argumentation, even if *sans le savoir*.

Let us consider some examples.

3. The examples

In this section, I shall analyze three texts widely separated in time: a polemic essay by a contemporary "analytic" philosopher of science (Moulines 1977), the famous *Vorrede* or "preliminary discourse" to Hegel's *Phenomenology of spirit* (1807), and Descartes's *Discourse on method* (1637)—or rather a few sentences from each text. By a curious coincidence, there are exactly 170 years separating the first case from the second and the second from the third. For the record, I did not choose these texts, but they chose me, as it were. As part of my workshops on argumentation in a graduate program in philosophy, I routinely give my students philosophical texts for analysis and evaluation, trying to capture as much diversity as I can in terms of periods, languages, disciplines, and styles. As I was preparing for the discussions of these three texts, it started to dawn on me that something was amiss with them. This suspicion was confirmed by the points raised in class as I went through them with my students.

According to the brief description of the *ab homine* given in §2, we should distinguish between the argumentation that is actually going on between the lines in those texts and the surface arguments that those lines ostensibly contain. To show this gap, we must begin with an analysis of those surface arguments. Such an analysis will reveal that, behind or underneath, there is another

[4] I cannot emphasize enough that the *pistis* by *ethos* in Aristotle is something radically different to what Socrates was represented as doing in the Socratic dialogues. Alan Brinton's ēthotic argument (1986) is even more different. If readers compare my examples with Brinton's (pp. 251-254), they will easily identify the numerous points of contrast.

argument, which is never quite verbalized, and in fact it could not be without destroying its force.

3.1 Why is a philosopher of science not a materialist? (Moulines 1977)

The first text is an 11-page paper, published in Spanish in a journal devoted to what we are used to calling "analytical philosophy." However, it is not an ordinary paper of the sort routinely published in such a journal. In fact, it is a *pièce d'occasion*, a short polemical tract, a pamphlet in the sense usual in nineteenth-century Britain or America. The paper triggered a controversy in the small world of Spanish-speaking analytic philosophy, as was probably intended (see Esquivel 1982).

Already, the title, "Why I am not a materialist," is unusual. The 'I' in this title is clearly not metaphorical or faux-generic, as in Dennett (1981, 1984). In the paper we are discussing, 'I' means quite precisely the author, Ulises Moulines. It is similar to Russell's famous "Why I am not a Christian," in which Russell wanted to justify his personal attitude towards the Christian religion, in fact toward any religion.

The text I want the reader to consider first is made up of the first four sentences of the paper (Moulines 1977, p. 25; bracketed numbers added):

> El materialismo es una doctrina confusa. Si se cree que el materialismo es una doctrina clara, es porque afirma que sólo existe la materia y porque se supone que todo el mundo sabe lo que es la materia. Pero este supuesto es falso. Nadie sabe hoy día a ciencia cierta lo que es la materia.
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> [1] Materialism is a confused doctrine. If people believe that [2] materialism is a clear doctrine, that is because [3] it asserts that only matter exists, and because people assume that [4] everybody knows what matter is. But this assumption is false. [5] Nobody knows in any scientifically informed way what matter is.

The point of the added numbering in the translation is to highlight the five points put forward in this text and to allow tracking of the argument.

The text pits an expert opinion, namely claim [1], against a popular opinion. Popular opinions are indeed usually countered by expert opinions, as in this case. Moulines is an expert whose philosophical authority in matters concerning physics is well established, at least for the readers of the journal in which this essay was published. The widespread opinion is [2], which is incompatible with [1]. Now, [2] is supported by the conjunction of [3], which is simply a definition of the term 'materialism', and [4], which again is a widespread opinion. This second widespread opinion is countered by Moulines's counterclaim [5], again an expert opinion opposed to a popular opinion.

The passage quoted is thus a quasi-logical argument in the sense of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1958, §45; in English 1969, pp. 193-195). If [5] is true, then [4] is false; if [4] is false, then the conjunction of [3] and [4] is false; if the conjunction of [3] and [4] is false, then [2] is false as well; and if [2] is false, then [1] is presumably true. At least, [1] is true if 'confused' is defined as 'not clear,' which can be safely assumed to have been Moulines's meaning and his readers' understanding.

Now, the body of the paper, that is, almost everything that comes after the passage quoted (Moulines 1977, pp. 25-34), consists of a continuous, relentless argument purporting to prove [5] by showing, in a nutshell, that physicists' theories do not include the concept of matter and that none of the concepts that are included in those theories look like the concept of matter. If this protracted argument should be considered sound, then claim [1] must be admitted as true. Materialism *is* a confused doctrine.

Of course, as I usual in philosophy, the argument in favor of [5] has not been considered sound by anyone who has cared to consider it publicly, even though each critic has attacked different aspects of it. Two years after the original publication, the author offered an over 30-page response to his various critics (Moulines 1979). This response has apparently been unconvincing, for later commentators have also failed to accept Moulines's argument (see the whole controversy in Esquivel 1982).

I myself must confess to be much more persuaded by Moulines's argument than by the objections of its detractors; but the purpose of this paper is not to take sides in the materialism

controversy, but rather to point out that the description of the paper's argument, as I have presented it, is incomplete. Claim [1] is not, and cannot be, the end of it. The title of the paper clearly, even loudly and provocatively, expresses what Moulines wants to argue for—*Why I am not a materialist*, where the 'I' refers to him personally, to Dr. Moulines himself. That it is a personal matter is borne out by the fact that the paper's title is followed by an asterisk that refers us to a footnote (Moulines 1977, p. 25):

> Debo el estímulo para escribir este artículo a mi amigo Adolfo G. De la Sienra, quien, al preguntarse asombrado cómo alguien como yo podía no ser materialista, me indujo a poner en orden mis ideas.
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> What spurred me on to write this paper was a question raised by my friend, Adolfo G. de la Sienra. He wondered why it was possible that someone like me was not a materialist. It is that question that moved me to try and put my ideas in order.

So, the purpose of the paper is indeed a personal matter ("someone like me"), originating from a personal question. It is not an impersonal question such as whether the philosophical doctrine of materialism—the "ontological" claim that "only matter exists"—is clear or confused, nor even the "epistemological" question—whether or not we know what matter is. Neither the argument purporting that [5] is true nor the argument leading from [5] to [1] is complete in itself. Something is missing from each, something vital—namely, it is the answer to the personal question raised in wonder by the author's friend.

What, then, is the argument leading from [1] to such an answer? Towards the end of the paper, we find the following statements (Moulines 1977, p. 34):

> Las dificultades del materialismo expuestas hasta aquí me parecen muy graves para alguien que quiera sostener el materialismo con honestidad intelectual. Ello no implica que las considere por principio insalvables. El
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> The troubles of materialism presented up to this point seem to me too severe for whoever may want to uphold materialism with intellectual honesty. I don't mean they cannot be overcome. The point is just

> caso es simplemente que la doctrina me parece tan problemática que considero filosóficamente prudente abstenerse de comulgar con ella, al menos en la situación actual.
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> that this doctrine seems to me so problematic that I deem it philosophically prudent to abstain from sharing it, at least in the current situation.

Notice the highly impersonal reference to two principles: intellectual honesty and philosophical prudence.

The *first* principle concerns the question of whether we know what matter is. In one passage, Moulines says that if physicists are honest, they will answer that they do not know (p. 26), and in another, he says that if atomistic philosophers are honest, they will answer that they do not know but the physicists surely do (p. 28). Yet Moulines does not *say* that he cherishes intellectual honesty. Instead, through the meticulous argument supporting [5], he *shows* us that he does. If he did just say that he is intellectually honest, a skeptical reaction would be in perfect order. It is much more difficult to resist the serious, frank, straightforward tone with which the argument was presented.

That tone is what gives his argument for [5] an *ab homine* character. Now, I have already said that there is another argument leading from [5] to [1]. If our best science does not know what matter is, then materialism can only be a confused doctrine. But the story would end there were it not for the *second* principle mentioned by Moulines: if materialism is confused, then philosophical prudence advises us to reject it as a rash doctrine. But again, Moulines does not *say* that he is philosophically prudent. All he does is argue from [5] to [1], yet that argument *itself* is what justifies his personal answer—his answer to the personal question in the title. The reason he is not a materialist is that materialism is a confused doctrine.

Now, this may *look* like an incomplete argument, but it is not. If it were, then the missing premises would be something like:

(a) Philosophical prudence forbids upholding confused doctrines.
(b) I, Moulines, am philosophically prudent.

We may accept premise (a) as a "warrant" (Toulmin 1958, chapter III) or as a pragmatic optimum (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992, chapter 6), but we cannot accept premise (b), for (b) would just *say* what has to be *shown*.[5] And the only way one can show philosophical prudence is by acting prudently, that is, by rejecting materialism *in actu* against a widespread but wrongheaded consensus. This the author does in the most visible part of his paper: its title. The *active* resistance to popular opinion, as embodied in Moulines's paper, makes his whole text an argument *ab homine* whose conclusion is the answer to the initial question.

Now, it could be argued that Moulines is justifying himself or at least justifying his non-allegiance to widespread materialism among his colleagues. The way to justify oneself or one's philosophical position is by argument. If we succumb to the temptation to understand the purpose of the paper in this way, then there is no way around adding premises that claim, for Moulines, certain intellectual virtues (intellectual honesty and philosophical prudence), and perhaps denying those same virtues to his materialist readers. But by so doing, we would destroy the moral force of the paper. It is quite easy to instead imagine Moulines as a modern Socrates who questions people if not in the agora, then at least in the halls of academia. In fact, the argument leading to [5] is written as a succession of possible answers to the question of what matter is and then refutations of those answers by means of propositions that are very difficult to deny for "analytic" materialists. The paper is profoundly Socratic, an *élenchos* whose purpose is philosophical conversion. It is thus less about Moulines justifying himself as it is about putting facile and shallow claims to shame.

[5] As I said, there is an argument leading to [5] and another leading from [5] to [1]. If we should be so misguided as to reconstruct the bulk of the paper, then the argument leading to [5] would also need two premises: (c) "intellectual honesty forbids believing that materialism is a clear doctrine" and (d) "I, Ulises Moulines, am intellectually honest." Then, we would have an argument effectively answering the question in the title, but, again, such a full argument is exactly what cannot be verbalized without destroying the force of the paper.

3.2 What should a preface be like? (Hegel 1807)

Now we come to an author who could not be further from the tradition of analytic philosophy that Moulines belongs to. It is a historical fact that G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell launched the "analytic philosophy" tradition—perhaps the most consistent one of the last hundred years—precisely by way of a rejection of Hegel. In spite of that, and in spite of the obvious differences between Moulines's text and the text we are going to analyze now, I shall endeavor to show that Hegel argues *ab homine* very much like Moulines does.

Hegel is famous for the numerous and intricate introductory texts he wrote for his major works, but none is more intricate than the first of the two introductory texts he wrote for his first major work, the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, under the title of a "preliminary discourse" (*Vorrede*). Its first two sentences have a somewhat paradoxical sound to them (Hegel 1807, pp. I-II):

> Eine Erklärung, wie sie einer Schrift in einer Vorrede nach der Gewohnheit vorausgeschickt wird, —über den Zweck, den der Verfasser sich in ihr vorgesetzt, sowie über die Veranlassungen und das Verhältnis, worin er sie zu andern frühern oder gleichzeitigen Behandlungen desselben Gegenstandes zu stehen glaubt,— scheint bei einer philosophischen Schrift nicht nur überflüssig, sondern um der Natur der Sache willen sogar unpassend und zweckwidrig zu sein. Denn wie und was von Philosophie in einer Vorrede zu sagen schicklich wäre, —etwaeine historische *Angabe* der Tendenz und des Standpunkts, des allgemeinen Inhalts und der Resultate, eine Verbindung von hin und her sprechenden Behauptungen und
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> An explanation, such as people customarily place in a preliminary discourse before the text itself—about the aim the author pursues in it, as well as the occasion behind it, and the relationship to other, earlier or contemporary, treatments of the subject matter in which the author believes to stand—seems in the case of a philosophical text not only superfluous but improper for the sake of the thing and subverting of the aim pursued. For the content and style in which it would be becoming to talk in a preliminary discourse—say, a *notice* about approach and perspective, a general account and an abstract of

Versicherungen über das Wahre —kann nicht für die Art und Weise gelten, in der die philosophische Wahrheit darzustellen sei.	results, a collection of statements and assertions about what is true, one going this way, the other that way—cannot rightfully apply to the method of exposition of philosophical truth.

My translation may not be the smoothest, but it tries to be faithful to the meaning of the words actually used by the author in view of the purpose of this paper. If you pay attention to that meaning, you will see that this text brims with what we may call, for the sake of brevity, "value judgments." In fact, Hegel draws a clear opposition between two sets of "values." On the one hand, we have the *custom* of writing prefaces in a certain way; we believe certain things are *becoming* in regard to the content and style of a preface. On the other hand, we have intimations of the immeasurably higher standards imposed by philosophy in matters of exposition. The habits of the literary crowd are set against the stringent duties of the philosopher.

The immediate effect of this oppositional gambit upon the attentive reader is not altogether dissimilar to that of the famous painting by René Magritte, in which the sentence *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (This is not a pipe) is written just below what appears to be a pipe. We have all by now probably learned the Belgian painter's lesson: the image of a pipe, a painted pipe, is, precisely, not a pipe at all. In the case of Hegel, what we see is the word *Vorrede* (preliminary discourse) printed above a couple of sentences that imply that the text we have just begun to read will, precisely, not be a *Vorrede*. If we understand what Hegel is doing, we shall understand that it cannot be one.

How is this effect produced? Each of the two sentences in the quoted passage is artfully constructed as a mirror image of the other. In each, the subject is separated from the predicate by an inserted remark placed between hyphens. Each one of the three constituents of the first sentence has a parallel in a constituent of the second sentence: (a) each grammatical subject denotes what is customary and becoming in a preface; (b) each parenthetical remark specifies the denotatum in some detail by telling us the kinds

of things that are expected in a preface; and (c) the predicate finally denies the fit between the denotatum and what philosophy requires. The parallel between the constituents in each sentence is so perfect that some readers might be misled to think they are being treated to a tautology. But are the two sentences tautological? That would be bad writing, for Hegel connects the two sentences by means of an argumentative indicator, 'for' (*denn* in the original German text), so that the second sentence is quite clearly presented as a *reason* for the first one.

But if so, what is the argument? It could be summarized as follows (inverting the order of the sentences so as to emphasize the argument structure):

> (H) The materials considered acceptable for inclusion in a preface do not fit the requirements of philosophical exposition; *therefore*, a preface would appear to be contrary to the purpose of philosophy.

Here we have a purely impersonal argument. In fact, some theorists of argumentation would say that Hegel is not so much arguing in the sense of justifying as he is just explaining the connection of certain norms and aims (those of philosophy) with certain facts (what an ordinary preface can, or rather cannot, do to satisfy those norms and attain those aims). But surely something more is afoot here; we feel that the author is not *explaining* in such a dull sense of the word. The point is that the proper conclusion is not really that a preface, if written in the customary way, subverts the purpose of philosophy. The proper conclusion is rather that it *should* not be so written, or even that it *will* not be so written. But, if we, having seen that, now try to analyze this in the way usual in argumentation studies, then the new, proper conclusion would have to be considered as following from two missing premises:

(a) Honoring the purpose of philosophy forbids writing prefaces as usual.
(b) I (Hegel) should, and will, honor the purpose of philosophy.

Again, for the sake of the argument, we may concede premise (a) as a warrant or a pragmatic optimum. But premise (b) would only invite skepticism. The reader might be excused for thinking "Yeah, that's what everybody says. We all want to honor the purpose of philosophy, so what?" Proclaiming one's "values" utterly spoils the effect.

Moreover, the proper conclusion is not to say that something should be done but *to just do it* right there in front of the reader.[6] And this is precisely what Hegel does. For the rest of his "preliminary discourse" does indeed treat, philosophically, those requirements that "the method of philosophical exposition" embodies. It is a philosophical argument in defense of those requirements that shows them in action. For that long argument that follows the first two sentences of the *Vorrede* is precisely an exposition of the nature of philosophical knowledge that itself embodies and honors those requirements. It is not a mere preparation for what is to come when, after the preface, the real philosophical work begins; it is already that philosophical work, carried out as Hegel best understood it. It does not *talk* about what the book will do; it starts *doing* it. By doing it in the way that it should be done, Hegel does not need to tell the reader what his "values" are; his writing incarnates them.

In other words, beyond argument (H), there is another, more powerful argument, one in which *this man* does that which has to be done. By *doing* it, by showing how it is done, he proves his point.

Here again, it could be argued that Hegel is justifying his beliefs about philosophy and its method before the interested public. However, if we were to represent the *Vorrede* as an argument where some missing premises purport to claim that Hegel possess-

[6] At this point, an anonymous reviewer of the present paper mentioned Aristotle's practical syllogism. This is exactly right and reinforces my point. We could say that the first two sentences of Hegel's *Vorrede* are indeed a complete argument, namely (H), but they correspond to the premises of a practical syllogism whose conclusion is an action, namely, the actual thinking done and deployed in the rest of the *Vorrede*. But note that the conclusion is not the *content* of the complex argumentation following the two sentences, but the arguing in that way itself.

es certain virtues, the whole purpose of the *ab homine* argumentation would be defeated. This is, by the way, as much true of Hegel as it is of his arch-enemies, the analytic philosophers, as I endeavored to show elsewhere (Leal-Carretero and Favila-Vega 2015). It may have been naïve of Diogenes to refute Zeno and his paradoxes by walking in front of him, but in philosophy this is perhaps the only way to show what one really means by a method.[7] Although there is an affinity between Hegel and Moulines, there is also an important difference: in his long argument towards [5], which makes up the bulk of his paper, he can safely assume that his concepts and methods are shared by his readers (after all, his paper was published in an analytic philosophy journal), whereas Hegel is writing for readers who share with Kant the basic idea of *critique*, namely, that one can talk about philosophy without doing it. It is this idea that he tries to refute *in actu*.

3.3 Is good sense optimally distributed? (Descartes 1637)

Let us now go farther back in time, to the beginning of early modern philosophy. The text chosen for analysis comes from both a great arguer and a great mathematician, as well as one of the few great writers that philosophy can boast of:

> Le bon sens est la chose du monde la mieux partagée ; car chascun pense en estre si bien pouruû, que ceux mesme qui sont les plus difficiles à contenter en toute autre chose, n'ont point coustume d'en desirer plus qu'ils en ont. En quoy il n'est pas vraysemblable que
>
> Good sense is the thing best distributed in the world; for everyone thinks already to have got so much of it that even those who are hardest to satisfy in every other field are not used to want more of it than they already have.

[7] Johnstone gives us a beautiful example of how this goes when he tells us the story of the life-changing experience he had when, as a young and self-righteous analytic philosopher, he was hired by a department of philosophy brimming with real-life Hegelians (1978, pp. 1-4). They did not talk about Hegel in a dogmatic manner but rather subjected Johnstone's empiricist prejudices to a Socratic *élenchos* conducted by the kind of questioning of perception that is featured at the beginning of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. His colleagues did not convert Johnstone to Hegelianism, but they surely started him on his well-known path towards the rapprochement of philosophy and rhetoric.

tous se trompent ; mais plutost cela tesmoigne que la puissance de bien iuger, & distinguer le vray d'auec le faux, qui est proprement ce qu'on nomme le bon sens ou la raison, est naturellement esgale en tous les hommes ; et ainsi que la diuersité de nos opinions ne vient pas de ce que les vns sont plus raisonnables que les autres, mais seulement de ce que nous conduisons nos pensées par diuerses voies, & ne considerons pas les mesmes choses. Car ce n'est pas assez d'auoir l'esprit bon, mais le principal est de l'appliquer bien. Les plus grandes ames sont capables des plus grands vices aussy bien que des plus grandes vertus ; et ceux qui ne marchent que fort lentement, peuuent auancer beaucoup dauantage, s'ils suiuent tousjours le droit chemin, que ne font ceux qui courent, & qui s'en esloignent.	About which it is not likely that all are deceived; but, on the contrary, this is a sign that the ability to judge well and to distinguish between the true and the false, which is what is properly called good sense or reason, is by nature equal among all men; and so the diversity of opinions does not come from some people being more reasonable than others, but only from the fact that we follow different paths in our thinking and do not focus on the same subjects. For it is not enough to have a good mind, but the main thing is to use it right. The greatest souls are capable of the greatest vices as much as of the greatest virtues; and those who walk but quite slowly can progress further if they keep a straight course than those who run and depart from it.

We all know how intensely personal the *Discourse on Method* is, but here, in its first paragraph, the tone is, again, as in the two texts analyzed before, utterly impersonal. From the second paragraph on, Descartes speaks to his reader in the first person ("Pour moy, ie n'ai iamais presume…," "As for myself, I have never pretended…"). The first paragraph appears to be different. Nonetheless, I want to show that Descartes is there arguing *ab homine* although in a way that is markedly different from Hegel and Moulines. Descartes argues by a procedure I propose to call "double irony."

Take the first sentence. It has the form of an argument. First, a claim is put forward:

> Good sense is the thing best distributed in the world.

For this claim, a reason (evidence, data) is then offered:

> For everyone thinks already to have got so much of it that even those who are hardest to satisfy in every other field are not used to want more of it than they already have.

Right? Well, not quite because readers of this text, being, for obvious reasons, intelligent and cultured people, will detect an irony here. Surely, Descartes cannot mean what he says. It is true, the reader thinks, that everyone believes themselves to be smart enough already, but most people deceive themselves as to how smart they are. There are natural inequalities among human beings; some are clearly smarter than others, and moreover, a few are vastly superior; more than a few are not a match for these superior intellects but are still all right; many more are just average; and so on down to the really stupid. One is tempted to think that Descartes actually means to make the reverse argument:

> Everyone thinks they already have so much good sense that even those who are hardest to satisfy in every other field are not used to wanting more of it than they already have; *therefore,* good sense is anything but evenly distributed.

In other words, Descartes is being ironical: he means the opposite of what he says.

However, the next sentence surprises the reader by directly embracing people's assessment of their capacities: "It is not likely that all are deceived." Of course, it is not, the reader suddenly realizes. Some people may be wrong, but surely not all of them. They may be wrong about unimportant things, but not about—what? What is exactly this good sense of which Descartes speaks? Our first impulse is to think of something like intelligence, which is clearly not evenly distributed. That is exactly the reason why we believed Descartes was being ironical. But, if it is not intelligence we are talking about, then what? The philosopher right away

explains what he means—the ability to judge well and to distinguish between the true and the false, in one word: reason. This is "by nature equal among all men." For we are all rational animals, are we not?

Some readers may be rash and suggest that reason is not evenly distributed either. But by now it is clear to at least the most perceptive readers that Descartes is serious, deadly serious. He is not fooling around; he is not saying one thing and meaning another. Good readers have been stopped in their tracks. This is what I mean by "double irony." For the irony was not meant, as we thought at first, to be directed to "everyone," but rather to us readers, who *judged* too quickly.

Such is the effect that Descartes' discourse is meant to have on us. This man, evidently a superior mind, has tricked us into an error of judgment. When the reader thought Descartes was gently mocking all those poor benighted souls who believe they are the equals of the intelligent readers, the latter felt complicit in the mockery. Full of their self-importance, they felt for a moment to be equals of Descartes hovering high above the common run of mortals. But they have now been put in their place by the author. They will not commit the same mistake again. No, they must now sit quietly and read carefully, for the meaning of this text is deeper than they thought.

Descartes goes on with his lecture. He now takes the "diversity of opinions" as the fact to be explained. Does it stem from some people being more reasonable than others? No, it does not. It stems from some people thinking in different ways and about different things. Now, that is a thought! The reader becomes pensive. This man Descartes seems to have a point. And then the hammer goes down: "For it is not enough to have a good mind (*esprit*), but the main thing is to use it right." It is very difficult to oppose this, especially considering how rash our initial reading was. Then the final nail in the coffin comes as Descartes reminds us that the best people can also be the worst, and that losing one's bearings has lost many a soul, no matter how well endowed.

The whole argument is presented as coming from *this man*, even though this man (Descartes) has not said a word about who he is—that will come later. Rather, he has *shown* us who he is

precisely by the way he conducted his argument, by the way he talked. And in fact, in the rest of the *Discourse on Method*, he proceeds by presenting himself as an ordinary man, rather average in all his cognitive faculties and yet capable of transcending those by virtue of possessing a method. We are presented with some rules for thinking that will allow the evenly distributed good sense to be exercised, even if one's memory, intelligence, and imagination are not as strong as those of other people—the same message we find in Francis Bacon.[8] This message, characteristic of early modern Europe, was, in 1637, still new and revolutionary, and the mode of argumentation, *ab homine*, was chosen to make the readers open their minds to it.

Of course, you can take the first paragraph of the *Discourse on Method* and separate claims and reasons, order the whole thing into a nice argument map, and even supply missing premises where possible if you wish. It can be done; in fact, it can be done pretty easily because Descartes was a careful reasoner. If some readers should find this exercise useful, let them carry it out; I will not because, after all, my point is that this will just reconstruct the surface structure of the Cartesian argument. Behind or underneath that structure, there is a different kind of argument that works its magic because it manages to prove to readers that they jump to conclusions and they are not as smart as they thought. Method, or the right path to follow in order to discover the truth in the sciences, is something we all should learn "for it is not enough to have a good mind, but the main thing is to use it right." Nonetheless, this other argument cannot be put into a premise-conclusion structure without ruining it.

There are many differences between this text and the preceding ones. The most obvious one concerns historical importance. Des-

[8] Bacon, *Instauratio magna*, Book I, §XLI: "Our method of discovering the sciences is such as to leave little to the sharpness and strength of wit, but rather to level wit and intellect. For, as in the drawing of a straight line or a perfect circle, much depends upon the hand's steadiness and practice, if one does it with one's own hand, but little or nothing if a ruler or compass be employed—our method works exactly like that." In the following century, that revolutionary thought, so characteristic of modernity, had been thoroughly assimilated, as witnessed by Adam Smith (1776, Book I, Chapter II; see Peart and Levy 2005).

cartes's *Discourse* is nothing less than a re-founding of philosophy, the beginning of what we call "modern philosophy." As for Hegel, he works within the framework created by Descartes almost two centuries earlier. Still, within that framework, Hegel creates a niche of his own. His *Phenomenology* is the first really significant work he produced, and it made him immediately famous. The main thing for Hegel was, however, to show how his way of philosophizing marked a serious departure from the Kantian way. Kant believed that before starting to philosophize, there was a place for examining questions of method. In that way, he was, of course, like Locke and all the others: a follower of Descartes. In contrast, Hegel was adamantly opposed to the idea that you can *talk* about philosophy from the outside as it were and discourse on method without already doing philosophy and committing oneself to a method. This departure, which we call Hegelianism, represents an important inflection in the history of philosophy so that, even if the *Phenomenology* is not in the same league as Descartes' *Discourse*, it is nonetheless a highly significant work. Moulines's paper is, in comparison, of very little importance.

Another obvious difference is in the use of irony. We can discern an undertone of mockery in both Moulines and Hegel, but Descartes is far more subtle and adroit. Nonetheless, all three are castigating their readers, putting forward values that their readers are supposed to respect, and endeavoring to make those readers shift their allegiances. The purpose could not be more Socratic, which is why the *ab homine* is very much to the point. For it to work, of course, the author should prove himself a man from whom such a lesson can be taken to heart.

The similarities are thus much stronger than the differences. In all three cases, we find that the underlying argument consists of *showing* how things should be done. We have seen this in the case of Hegel and Moulines. As for Descartes, consider that the first paragraph of his *Discourse* is immediately followed by an autobiographical depiction of how he came by his method and what its rules are, which again is nothing but a preface to the actual specimens of that method: the *Dioptrics*, the *Meteors,* and above all the *Geometry*. Seen from that perspective, the purpose of the first

paragraph is to carry out a kind of *élenchos* directed to smug readers who believe themselves to be oh so superior. And, like Socrates before him, Descartes puts them in their place. In this way, although it is on an altogether different level, he is performing the exact same operation that Hegel, in his own smaller way, and Moulines, in his even smaller way, also performed. For this is what *ab homine* argumentation is designed to do.

4. Objections and replies

Enough with the examples. Let us now face the objections that may be levied against the idea of *ab homine* argumentation.

1. "Three swallows do not a summer make. Let us admit that there is something going on in these texts that can be so described, but that we cannot generalize. Most philosophical arguments, God forbid, are not like that." This objection misses the point, for I was not trying to generalize. If the reader admits that the examples given prove the existence of *ab homine* argumentation as described, then I am satisfied. The question of how widespread the thing may be can be tackled some other day.

2. "The three texts analyzed occur in a particular position, namely at the beginning of the particular work to which they belong. What you call *ab homine* argumentation is not likely to occur anywhere else in a proper philosophical text." I do not know that this is true. Many passages in Plato's dialogues show the *ab homine* character more or less everywhere, as intimated at the beginning of this paper. Take also Pascal or Nietzsche or Feyerabend. Moreover, I suspect that the whole argumentation in Quine's celebrated "Two dogmas of empiricism" is very much *ab homine*. In any case, research on the issue deserves pride of place in the study of the relation between philosophy and rhetoric.

3. "Your three pieces of *ab homine* argumentation are pretty bad arguments. It is more than dubious that the lack of a consensus about the concept of matter among scientific experts in physics justifies avoiding professing philosophical materialism; Hegel's insights about philosophical truth, in particular those opposed to mathematical truth, are anything but true insights; the modernist experiment to equalize cognitive abilities by means of method was

and is a resounding failure." I am far from sure that these assertions are correct, but this is neither here nor there. I was not trying to show that my examples of *ab homine* argumentation are examples of *good* arguments (whatever those may be) but only to show that they are a real phenomenon that has so far escaped attention.

4. "The phenomenon you point out is real enough, but it pertains to the field of persuasion not argumentation. Your so-called *ab homine* arguments may be striking and even convincing to some people, but they are not proper arguments. Why, you practically admit that they cannot be analyzed based on premises and conclusion. No argument map or diagram can be built to show their components and layout. So, they are not really arguments." This objection seems weightier than it really is. First of all, an *ab homine* argument *can*, of course, be reduced to the premise-conclusion form, and it can be diagrammed. However, there is no point in such a reduction. The argument does not work by *saying* but by *showing* if I may again use Wittgenstein's distinction. In fact, by "completing" it and putting it into the PC sequence format (Levi 1995), you will only destroy its strength. Or are we not interested in the strength of an argument anymore?[9]

5. "In the end, as you yourself conceded at the beginning of this paper, *all* arguments come from a particular person and produce their effect by coming from that person. So, there is nothing special about *ab homine* argumentation. All arguments are *ab homine*, so, you are not saying anything of importance." This comment is most welcome, even though it is opposed to some of the above objections. Indeed, it is trivial that all arguments come from a

[9] I can discern a possible route to follow in pursuing the question arising here as to whether only PC sequences are arguments. The sociolinguist Deborah Tannen has called our attention to the fact that every message unavoidably carries with it what she calls a *pragmatic meta-message*, which crucially involves the relationship between sender and receivers (Tannen 1986, 1989, *passim*). You can neither erase the pragmatic metamessage from your message nor can you make it explicit by turning it into a message, for this new message will have its own metamessage, which will usually counteract the original metamessage. For instance, people who insist that they are sincere will usually be perceived as less trustworthy. The explicit argument in my three examples would then be the message and the underlying argument the metamessage. Such an elaboration would require another paper.

particular person. Still, only some arguments work because of the kind of person that has issued them. Aristotle insisted that of all the means of persuasion, *ethos* was the most powerful. But that does not mean it is always powerful. Aristotle also said that *ethos* is not a reputational aura that precedes your speech but is rather produced by that speech (*dia tou logou* 1356a9). Again, few arguers speak or write so well that they thereby create a persona, exude an aura, and project an image that moves the listeners or readers in the special way of *ab homine* argumentation. In a sense, the error behind both this objection and the one before it is that they take the Aristotelian distinction of *logos–pathos–ethos* too literally. The argument that most theorists of argumentation focus on, the verbal set of premises and conclusion, is only one aspect of *logos*, the other one being as a carrier of *ethos* (and *pathos*).

When a philosopher argues *ab homine* in a way that commands attention, it is always *this* human being, talking in *this* way, that is the important thing.

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