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Developing the Universal Audience



❖ INTRODUCTION: WHY THE UNIVERSAL AUDIENCE FAILS

As a principle of universalization, a universal audience provides shared standards of agreement by which to measure argumentation. It provides the details of what is “reasonable” in any particular case. The task of this chapter will be to explore how this works and is to be understood. To this end, I will first consider some of the more intransigent problems associated with Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s universal audience, before turning to some recent readings of the concept to determine whether those problems have been adequately addressed. The remainder of the chapter will aim to complete that task by developing the idea of the universal audience and suggesting how it can be applied in argument construction and evaluation.

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca distinguished clearly between the rational and the reasonable, matching this to their more fundamental distinction between demonstration and argumentation. Starting from accepted, self-evident premises, demonstrative methods of proof work

well in situations where there is nothing to be argued, where everyone will be compelled by the same "evidence." Argumentation arises when things are controversial and in dispute (1969, 13–14; Perelman 1982, 6). In fields such as law and ethics, those not founded on indubitable self-evidence, argumentation is indispensable. At the same time, where questions arise about the axioms underlying proofs or whether something is self-evident, then argumentation is also called upon. So not everything is arguable and there are matters outside of argumentation, if the principles of demonstration are agreed upon.

Corresponding to this distinction, what is *rational* characterizes demonstration, or mathematical reason, "which grasps necessary relations, which knows *a priori* certain self-evident and immutable truths" (Perelman 1979, 117). What is *reasonable*, on the other hand, characterizes the domain of the holistic inquirer, who draws on experience and dialogue with others. The rational person, we might say, is subsumed by the aspect of *logos*. The reasonable person supplements this with *pathos*¹ and *ethos*, and the *logos* pursued becomes transformed through its alliance with these other components of the human reasoner. Audiences are made up of such reasoners. Unlike the "rational person" in whom reason is separated from other human faculties, the reasonable person judges reason as only one component within the project of human development, and as something that is instantiated in real audiences. *They*, actual reasoners in real audiences, are the source of the principles of good argumentation.

As the previous chapter demonstrated, the desire to find the grounds for what is reasonable is natural and necessary. The difficulties associated with this desire arise from the complexity of the very problem that it aspires to address. It is tantamount to a reformulated statement of the problem of induction itself, since however we approach this, reason underlies itself, is its own justification in some form or another. Hence the criticisms leveled at proposals like that of the universal audience of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca are as understandable as they are challenging.

Something of the concern over the appearance of a subjective element in determining universal audiences was addressed in the last chapter. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst's (1995, 124) charge that the standard of reasonableness is extremely relative is met with the recognition, courtesy of Bakhtin, that the argumentative situation is unique. The arguer, audience, and argument itself exist in relation to a situation

that is defined by them and defines them, and it is among those components that we should look to determine what is reasonable *in that situation*. Still, the criticism here can resonate in other ways. Since we cannot poll the universal audience, how are we to be sure we know its mind (Willard 2002)?

Related to this, we might be concerned by the apparent vagueness of the notion of authority underlying the universal audience: what is the *authority* for identifying characteristics of the universal audience in particular audiences, such that we can judge an audience to be “reasonable” on the one hand, or on the other hand, for determining that something is excluded from the universal audience and so objectionable in a particular audience. This criticism comes closest to identifying the apparent circularity noted earlier of proffering instantiated reason as its own justification.

A third criticism involves a challenge to the general thesis that rhetorical argumentation is the foundation for any integrated model that also includes the dialectical and the logical. A key test of the reasonableness of a claim or position, from the perspective of a universal audience, is whether it can be universalized without contradiction (Tindale 1999a, 118). The reference to “contradiction” here can raise alarms, since this is a logical rather than a rhetorical term (Johnson 2000b). Among the kinds of things that a universal audience would reject as contradictory would be logical fallacies. But how do we see this? Given that one of the problems with fallacies is that they deceive audiences and get believed, why should we think they would be recognized by the reasonable element in an audience? This is to ask how a universal audience really functions as the principle of reasonableness within any audience. How does that principle come alive and operate in specific circumstances? In the absence of such clarification, Johnson (8) draws on his own tools to provide an answer:

It seems clear that [the universal audience] will be relying on some criteria or standards in making these judgments—that is why they are reasonable people. My suspicion is that while there is no overt appeal to them, logical standards for the evaluation of argument (like relevance and truth and sufficiency) will be imbedded in the way the audience is conceptualized; they are built into the notion of a reasonable person. In that way as well, then, the rhetorical presupposes the logical.

If it seems strange to refer to standards the universal audience might use when *it* is being advanced as *the* standard, the problem lies not so much in the criticism as in the vagueness of the idea that is being criticized.

Finally, we might switch our attention from the construction of such audiences to ask how the idea of a universal audience is useful for the individual who must evaluate arguments. The thrust of the account given so far is from the perspective of one who constructs arguments, who must decide what to say to convince the universal audience. But a comprehensive model of argument must also address things from the evaluator's perspective, particularly when that evaluator is also the target audience for the argument. The evaluator's interests seem far more caught up in matters of cogency than matters of rhetoric. So, again, the universal audience fails to make the case generally for the primacy of rhetoric in argument.

Two general concerns about the universal audience emerge from this discussion. The first has to do with the vagueness of the concept itself, the details of its nature and its relationship to the particular audience. The second has to do with its applicability—its usefulness for a range of matters that occupy those interested in argumentation. In addressing both these general concerns I will also respond to the specific questions that have arisen around subjectiveness, authority, the rhetoric/logic relation, and the construction/evaluation distinction. I will approach these issues first by exploring two recent interpretations of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's universal audience put forward by American scholars.

❖ READING THE UNIVERSAL AUDIENCE: TWO VIEWS

The readings I am interested in here are both positive and generally try to provide applications of the universal audience.² The first of these comes from Gross and Dearin (2003), scholars of rhetoric who place an examination of the universal audience within a rich study of Perelman's overall thought. It is their contention that explanations of the universal audience have suffered for not being understood within the complete theory of rhetorical audience that can be derived from Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, and it is this complete theory that they are concerned to detail. To this end, they focus on a core distinction—that between facts and values. Facts and truths constitute the real,

whereas values embody the preferable (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 66). Facts are things that stand fast; values change. Facts relate to the universal audience, values to the particular audience.

Philosophy and science are the paradigm examples of discourses in which facts, truths, and presumptions are central; these are discourses that aim at a universal audience, the imagined community of all rational beings. On the other hand, public address is the paradigm example of a discourse aimed at an imagined community of particular beings: Americans, the Elks, the elderly. (Gross and Dearin 2003, 31–32)

This passage sets the rationale for Gross and Dearin to explore ideas in their later chapters through discourses drawn from philosophy, science, and public address. Of more significance, though, is the claim indicated here that all rhetorical audiences are constructed, whether universal or particular.

Crucial to the interpretation involved is a passage early in *The New Rhetoric* in which Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca distinguish between argumentative structures and the effects they may have on real audiences. Were we to judge arguments only by the effects they have, it is suggested, then we would be in the realm of experimental psychology, “where varied arguments would be tested on varied audiences” (1969, 9). Instead, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca propose to proceed by examining the different argumentative structures, since this must happen prior to any experimental tests of their effects. Gross and Dearin understand this passage to mean that Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca have no interest in studying real audiences, since this is beyond the reach of rhetoric (2003, 32). Hence the complete shift to constructed audiences.

Granted, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca do write that the audience is “always a more or less systematized construction” (1969, 19), but neither this claim nor the passage from *The New Rhetoric* that Gross and Dearin cite precludes a study of real audiences in relation to what is constructed out of them, and the interpretation they develop fails to give sufficient weight to the ways in which the construction of audiences always begins with real auditors or readers. If we look for a balance between the speaker (or writer) and the audience in question, then Gross and Dearin’s account has significantly shifted things to the position of the speaker or writer, who must guess the audiences’ views of

the real and preferable, even though they never deny that there are real people standing before the arguer (2003, 36). So this does seem an interpretation that would lend itself to the criticism that the universal audience is *no more* than a product of the arguer.

Given that both universal audiences and particular audiences are constructed on this reading, the difference lies in the focus of the discourse—on the real or the preferable. In addressing the real, a speaker or writer considers the men and women of the audience not in terms of their nationality or religion, for example, but as rational human beings. Discourse focused on values can never appeal to the universal audience because particular values do not bind all humans.

Ede (1989) criticizes the universal audience as too ideal (and inconsistently presented) because Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca write: "Argumentation addressed to a universal audience must convince the reader that the reasons adduced are of a compelling character, that they are self-evident, and possess an absolute and timeless validity, independent of local or historical contingencies" (1969, 32). At least one of the ways that this is problematic is in its apparent contradiction of the claim that it is demonstration and not argumentation that aims at self-evidence. Gross and Dearin do not dispute what is said in the passage, instead they defend it against Ede's criticisms as highlighting a natural paradox in the exercise of constructing universal audiences: "speakers arguing for the real in a particular case must assume its existence in the general case. All such arguments are subject to the paradox that speakers presuppose a concept of timeless validity, a concept clearly subject to contingency" (2003, 37).

A far stronger defense of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca on this point, however, is to challenge whether the view presented in the offending passage is one that they advocate. Gross and Dearin are right to point out that Perelman is first and foremost a philosopher and his approach a philosophical one (2003, 14). To this end, his and Olbrechts-Tyteca's position is set against a traditional philosophical account of objective reason with its own notion of a universal audience. At issue, for example, is that "[t]he Cartesian ideal of universally applicable self-evident knowledge leaves no room for rhetoric and dialectic" (Perelman 1982, 159). Perelman wants to separate the traditional philosophical values of guaranteed objectivity and a rhetoric based on the "knowledge of truth" from his view of argumentation. Philosophers, he insists, must broaden their conception of reason (161). Thus there are two notions of the universal audience in Perelman and

Olbrechts-Tyteca's work: the traditional one they are resisting and the one they are advocating. The passage Ede criticizes relates to the notion that is rejected. "[It] links importance to previously guaranteed objectivity and not to the adherence of an audience, rejects all rhetoric not based on knowledge of the truth" (Perelman 1989, 244). It is the familiarity of traditional notions of universality along with the obscurity of the new model that Perelman is advancing with Olbrechts-Tyteca that makes our task of understanding the latter so difficult.

Still, important points emerge from Gross and Dearin's account, particularly given their attention to the paradox between the audience a speaker confronts and the one that he or she addresses. In the first instance, identifying philosophical and scientific discourses as paradigmatic of discourses addressed to a universal audience draws attention to the important content of those discourses. A philosopher like Socrates, for example, imagines every member of his audience embodying universal standards of rationality. This "accounts," write Gross and Dearin, "for the emphasis in philosophical discourse on logical as distinct from emotional appeals" (2003, 38). Thus we have some suggestion of how the universal audience might make judgments—by appealing to principles of logic that, if not timeless, certainly endure over time and transcend particular audiences.

It is also interesting to consider how the idea that all audiences are rhetorical is cashed out. In contrast to philosophical and scientific discourses, those of public address focus on both facts and values. Gross and Dearin illustrate this with the example of Lincoln's reply to Douglas at Galesburg, October 1858. In identifying certain values in Douglas, Lincoln is raising matters of fact and so addressing a universal audience. But in asserting that certain of such values, like the advocacy of slavery, are wrong, he is appealing to values, and hence a particular audience. Yet on Gross and Dearin's terms both of these audiences are imagined, rhetorical audiences, audiences that exist in the discourse. The significance of this arises in the interpretation given to Perelman's remarks about the way an audience changes over the course of an argument: "We must not forget that the audience, to the degree that speech is effective, changes with its unfolding development" (Perelman 1982, 149). We saw such change as a natural result of the dynamism of dialogical encounters. Gross and Dearin, however, see these changes rooted in the rhetorical audiences. At the end of his address, for example, Lincoln imagines his audience to be different from the one at its starting point (Gross and Dearin

2003, 41). Whether the actual audience is affected seems, on this account, beside the point.

The view of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's treatment of audience as a coherent theory of rhetorical audience governs the way Gross and Dearin read what is said about relations between the universal and particular audiences. And this reading stems from their initial understanding that Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca are not concerned with the effects of argumentation on actual audiences. In spite of the insights in the account, this distancing of rhetorical audiences from the real ones that underlie them is troubling because of the gaps it allows. Or, rather, it does not sufficiently make clear how the rhetorical audiences are rooted in the real ones that, in underlying them, also constrain them in serious ways, thereby restricting the "imagination" of the arguer.

The other account that I will explore is a more developed one. In fact, there is much more to what Crosswhite (1996) has to say about the universal audience than I can discuss here. Consequently, I focus on what is most striking or useful for the current discussion.

To say that we belong to audiences is to suggest something that seems merely incidental to us—a casual feature of ourselves, one that could be other than it is. Crosswhite puts the lie to this. Speaking of "invoked" or "addressed" audiences fails to capture what is at stake here. "Audience" is an event: "That is, audience is something that happens in time, as an event in people's lives, in their talking and writing and communicating in general" (139). This begins to move audience from the periphery to the center, from something casual to something essential. More profoundly, Crosswhite recognizes, "audience is a mode of being, one of the ways human beings *are*" (139). Even though we may constantly move among audiences as our allegiances and interests change, we are always "in audience." Crosswhite stresses the ways in which audiences serve as the evaluators of arguments. But his central insight here extends to all aspects of argumentation. Argumentation is part of our essential being in the world of others because it is audience-forming and audience-directed. Inasmuch as we cannot escape from being "in audience," neither can we escape the realm of argumentation.

From the point of view of evaluation, argumentation may address us through our particular involvements, in groups, families, religions, and so on. Here it speaks to a specific audience to which we belong. But if it addresses us simply as reasonable people, without recourse to the values of the group or religion, or other involvement, then we are

addressed as a universal audience (141). Thus Crosswhite recognizes the inextricable link between the universal and particular audiences and, combined with his previous insight, we can realize these as two aspects of our way of being as audience—particularly or universally. This is an important observation about the universal audience, which is so often taken as a vague abstraction. It is from the start rooted not only in real audiences, but in our own experience.³

Crosswhite mines Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca for the various ways of constructing universal audiences, for what he calls “Rules” for such constructions. In each case, one begins with a particular audience on which imaginative operations are performed. Thus we might set aside the local features of an audience and consider its universal features. Or we might exclude from the particular audience all members who are prejudiced, or irrational, or incompetent. Or we might combine particular audiences so as to cancel out their particularity (eventually reaching all humanity). Or we might imagine a particular audience across time, as similar audiences in other times (145). None of these approaches to construction is foolproof, and conflicts can arise. But they point to useful ways to determine what is particular and what is universal.

Crucial to this determination again is the fact/value distinction to which Gross and Dearin drew attention. As we recall, facts are things that stand fast while values change; facts relate to the universal audience, values to the particular audience. “Thus,” Crosswhite writes, “there is a rhetorical way to distinguish the domain of the real (what stands fast) from the domain of the preferred, as well as presumptions and hypotheses about the real (about what we can argue without undermining the rhetorical situation)” (147). Values are what define different groups and account for the disagreements between them. Facts are things about which we expect agreement. “Facts have a universal claim on human beings or else they are not facts” (147). And where values have gained the adherence of the universal audience, they have attained the status of facts.

As an implied criticism of this account, Crosswhite notes that it reflects the attitudes of a liberal European of late modern times. But a more significant criticism that takes him beyond the discussion drawn from Gross and Dearin points to a collapse of this fact/value distinction when it comes to the universal audience. As Christie (2000) observes in another important discussion of Perelman’s work, the universal audience is essentially interested in what is good, not only what

is "true." In the same vein, Crosswhite notes that "[t]he universalizing interest of reason is essentially an ethical one" (1996, 154). Hence universal audiences embody the evaluative rather than the factual.

It is in relation to a universal audience's embodiment of values that Crosswhite reaches the farthest. In viewing the universal audience this way, we are adopting another external perspective, one that assesses and judges universal audiences themselves. Whose perspective is this? Crosswhite argues that the universal audience of *The New Rhetoric* can be better understood as a paragon audience, a model of perfection or excellence. In an implicit extension of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's work, Crosswhite suggests,

[f]rom within the rhetorical situation from which a universal audience arises, universality is its defining feature. However, viewed from "outside," relative universality is only one of the features of a paragon audience, and not the only defining feature. From a distance, local concepts of universality are also agreements on concrete values. (151)

He then introduces the concept of an "undefined universal audience," which is mentioned only once in *The New Rhetoric* (1969, 35). This is what is used to judge whether the universal audience drawn from a particular audience is appropriate. *It* is the audience for our construction of a universal audience.

There may seem a danger here of slipping into a kind of "Third Man" criticism that was advanced against Plato's Forms, where each further "external" audience requires yet another more distanced audience to judge *its* appropriateness. But Crosswhite, like Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, counters this by stressing the different kind of universality involved. It is undefined in the sense that it is not tied to any particular audience. Of course, it is the grounds for its judgments that interest us. Crosswhite argues for the familiarity of such a move of addressing the undefined universal audience, "even if one does not understand exactly what it is." We see it whenever an audience responds to us in ways we had not expected yet we recognize to be legitimate. How do we make this recognition? Because operating in us is an (empty) idea of an undefined universal audience, "which allows us to recognize the legitimacy of its responses once they do find a voice" (1996, 153).

It is from here just a small step to the conclusion that the principles of reason (as seen in logical principles and rules), as we currently

understand them, are what we mean by the judgments of a universal audience. Logic gives us real universalizability. "At our current evolutionary and historical-cultural location, we have a relatively well-defined idea of what counts as a competent human being. In its most stripped-down form, it is captured in some basic rules of reason" (159).

Crosswhite, then, arrives at the place where the critic stands who judges the universal audience unnecessary beside the principles of logic. But he arrives there having taken an important journey in order to *explain* the source of these principles of logic in the universal audience, and the universal audience in particular audiences. Thus we see how our notions of what is reasonable can change over time, just as our understanding of the principles of reason changes. Current innovation in informal logic and rhetoric would appear to be an indication of just this point. Thus Johnson was justified earlier in his suspicion that logical standards for the evaluation of arguments are active in the universal audience. But this does not make the rhetorical subordinate to the logical. On the contrary, we see here how the rhetorical is the vehicle for the development and expression of the logical, for the logical is a product of audience and can be nothing more, nor less.

❖ REAPPRAISING THE UNIVERSAL AUDIENCE

In light of the foregoing discussion some clarification on points already expressed is in order. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's first and foremost audience is the person or group to be persuaded, it is the audience that *personalizes* the argument (Perelman 1982, 3). This personalizing of arguments, in ways that make them a co-venture, is in part what prevents the exploitation and abuse of audiences characteristic of traditional criticisms. Argumentation acts upon an audience, to be sure, and is intended to modify its convictions. But "it tries to gain a meeting of minds instead of imposing its will through constraint or conditioning" (1982, 11). This echoes the invitational rhetoric of early Greeks and recent accounts and reinforces the real nature of the audiences involved. It also reinforces the cooperative nature of argumentation that emerged from Chapter 4. Insofar as I imagine my audience, what I imagine is an anticipation of their likely response, given who they are and what they believe, to what I say or write. I have no license to construct something not rooted in the real. Doing so would be

counterproductive to my endeavors. And I must be able to justify the anticipated responses in terms of what is likely, given what is known of my audience. This was graphically demonstrated with the case of the rhetorical figure *prolepsis* in Chapter 3.

Nor is my audience necessarily those who hear or read what I say. If my intention is to reinforce, say, the political views of the majority of those present on a particular occasion, then that there are others present who do not share such views, or that the speech may be printed and more widely disseminated, is incidental to my intentions, with their aim at a specific audience. On the other hand, I may deliberately intend a composite audience, thereby widening my scope so as to encompass all (or more) of those present, and I construct my argument according to this change of intended audience. Either way, my audience is those I want to consider and have work with my arguments (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 19; Perelman 1982, 14).

If I envision those I address as a universal audience, then I appeal to reason. I aim to convince them as reasonable people. In this way, my premises are universalizable and should be "acceptable in principle to all members of the universal audience" (Perelman 1982, 18). Now my exercise has shifted focus, while still having as its principal goal the responses of a particular person or group of people. But here the issue or the circumstances lead me to aspire to a firmer conviction and hence my audience's adherence must be consistent with what is acceptable in principle to reasonable people. There is no mystery to this.

It follows that the premises with which an arguer begins are crucial to the success of the outcome. Where convictions are desired, those premises must be acceptable to both the particular audience and the universal audience. But how do we know what is acceptable to a universal audience? Perelman answers this through his discussion of presumptions.

Presumptions are things that, while not having the status of facts or truths, "furnish a sufficient basis upon which to rest a reasonable conviction" (1982, 24). These are agreements that are sufficiently widespread that anyone who wants to reject them must give good reasons for doing so. In other words, a presumption imposes a burden of proof on anyone who wants to oppose it.

While they can be challenged, then, presumptions are well enough established in a community to serve as reasonable basic premises. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca list some common presumptions that might serve in this way:

Let us mention some common presumptions: the presumption that the quality of an act reveals the quality of the person responsible for it; the presumption of natural truthfulness by which our first reaction is to accept what someone tells us as being true, which is accepted as long and insofar as we have no cause for distrust; the presumption of interest leading us to conclude that any statement brought to our knowledge is supposed to be of interest to us; the presumption concerning the sensible character of any human action. (1969, 70–71)

Gaskins (1992) has criticized Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's notion of presumptions as being "simply localized biases or prejudices, characteristic of discrete groups but certainly not binding on the community as a whole" (34). The examples just provided, however, suggest that they are far more widespread and fundamental, and while they may not be "binding," it is not clear that such a constraint is intended, or even consistent with the basic idea.

Beyond such widely shared agreements, we may also draw presumptions from what we know of the relevant cognitive environment, as this idea was discussed in the first section of the present chapter and in Chapter 1. The point here is that we are justified in presuming that something is widely accepted if we know it exists in the appropriate cognitive environment. The test for this, we recall, is not whether everyone in our intended audience is known to share knowledge, but whether they live in such environments that we can attribute certain presumptions to them. Thus we can justify our claims that such and such is a presumption by recourse to an actual cognitive environment.

Presumptions are connected with what is normal and likely. In fact, *this* claim, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca hold, is itself a presumption accepted by all audiences (1969, 71). Our ability to know and appeal to what is normal depends in turn on the concept of inertia as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca explicate it.

For Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, reason is governed by a force that gives it stability and regularity, a force comparable to the effect of inertia in physics. As they explain this,

In science certain propositions are set apart and qualified as axioms and are thus explicitly granted a privileged position within the system. . . . In most cases, however, a speaker has no firmer support for his presumptions than psychical and social inertia

which are the equivalent in consciousness and society of the inertia in physics. It can be presumed, failing proof to the contrary, that the attitude previously adopted—the opinion expressed, the behavior preferred—will continue in the future, either from a desire for coherency or from force of habit. (1969, 105–106)

Inertia is what gives value to the normal and habitual. At any point in time, reason, embodied in real communities, has a bedrock of attitudes, opinions, and beliefs that are stable and widely accepted. The soundness of argumentation is supported by this ground of acceptability. The obvious institutional examples of this are the body of legal rulings that constitute precedent in law. They represent a tradition of reasoning that requires no justification and is used to illuminate and judge new cases.

Against the background of tradition, change must be justified, whether by pointing out a modification that circumstances necessitate, or an improvement which, while not necessary, is dictated by various goods that are favored. Argumentation is the tool to effect such change. How this change is justified, how the need for it is recognized, points us to the central idea in Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's account. "The rule of justice," they write, "furnishes the foundation which makes it possible to pass from earlier cases to future cases. It makes it possible to present the use of precedent in the form of a quasi-logical argument" (1969, 219).⁴

The link here is the idea of precedent. Precedents set standards for treating similar cases in similar ways. The rule of justice, likewise, "requires giving identical treatment to beings or situations of the same kind" (218). "Justice," for Perelman, is a principle of action that demands the same treatment for beings of the same essential category (1982, 16). The stress on a principle of *action* here is crucial, because argumentation that is effective in bringing about a change in the minds of an audience "tends to produce action" (155). Furthermore, Perelman believes that the rule of justice is our most fundamental and most widely accepted presumption. No matter how much we may disagree on other matters, we agree in principle that those who are equal deserve the same treatment. This insight is captured in all interpretations of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's work that I have reviewed. No matter how else they might differ, they regard the rule of justice as central (Gross and Dearin 2003, 24–25).

In *The New Rhetoric*, the rule of justice becomes the standard of judgment for the strength of arguments: "this strength is appraised

by application of the rule of justice: that which was capable of convincing in a specific situation will appear to be convincing in a similar or analogous situation" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 464). Who makes this judgment? Since they speak here of convincing, and an early discussion had assigned this to argumentation that presumes to gain the adherence of every rational being (28), then this is a role of a universal audience. In fact, as Crosswhite (2000) also observes, this discussion of the strength of arguments is the only place where the universal audience is identified with the application of the rule of justice.

❖ APPLYING THE IDEA OF A UNIVERSAL AUDIENCE

Let us reflect on what we have gathered in the previous sections: The *ground* (rationale, justification) for Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's universal audience is the particular audience that "anchors" it. I use this term deliberately. As was recognized in the previous chapter, particular audiences are notoriously self-interested and prejudiced. "Effective" rhetoric is often seen to have license (or take license) to exploit such traits. We have seen how Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca resist this, and the kind of morality we saw associated with a Bakhtinian model would add its agreement to such resistance. While the success of their rhetoric is the ability to gain the adherence of an audience, they do not sacrifice reasonableness to effectiveness. Any universal audience, as a representation of reasonableness in a specific context, cannot value effectiveness over reasonableness. This would be self-contradictory. The prejudices are still there, but factored out by the particular audience insofar as the universal audience is active in it.

On this model, the particular audience is brought to agreement on its own terms; on terms that are internal to it, that it recognizes and supports. Producing and evaluating argumentation involves learning about what is reasonable, rethinking it, adding to it, and taking from it. The *source* for this is the particular audience and its own values, and it is brought to recognize these and, perhaps, desires to modify them through argumentation. There is no other empirical ground. And the subsequent test of approval of what results is the particular audience. The process is the construction of a universal audience. And the result is the uncovering of what is held to be reasonable, tested and confirmed as such. There is nowhere else to look for our standard

of reasonableness other than to reasoners themselves as they self-consciously engage in this activity.

Again from this, we can see how universal audiences must develop over time as our attitudes toward, and understanding of, what is reasonable changes. The degree of change involved depends always on the communities in question and the ways in which they come to agree with or challenge the views of each other. In regulating a dispute between communities (understood in all the variety the term "community" licenses), seen now as particular audiences, we step back and try to derive a common universal audience that reflects their agreements and in light of which we might hope to move them forward. But, as we have also seen, such a procedure is not a panacea for dispute resolution, no matter how much it may contribute to such a possibility. What the universal audience in such a circumstance makes possible is a common insight into the shared aspects of the communities involved, an insight that can foster understanding, and perhaps no more.

Constructing a Universal Audience

As Gross and Dearin rightly observe, the construction of a universal audience is an operation of the imagination. But as we saw also from the rules for such constructions that Crosswhite extracted from Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, this is an imaginative operation *on* a real audience that exists, whether it be the one I want to convince by arguing *with* them and inviting them to recognize a conclusion to which they should adhere, or the one that I need to extract in order to evaluate argumentation that has been addressed to me as an audience, or to some audience in which I have no involvement (where I am purely an evaluator). In the first type of cases, I am an arguer; in the second, I am an evaluator. While much of the procedure would appear to be the same in both enterprises, the different goals elicit some different features in terms of, say, testing the appropriateness of the universal audience invoked.

To take a case in point, I may decide to argue that community service is something we ought to do. Although I may hold this as a general claim, supportable on that level, I will likely in the first instance apply it in a specific circumstance, arguing to people in my own community. Here, I know particular features about them, drawing on local background and information, constructing premises that are acceptable to them because they involve this information. Taking my "ought"

in its broadest senses, I can appeal to ways in which a community becomes stronger and richer through such service, hence appealing to the self-interest of the audience in having a better place to live; and I can appeal to grounds that merit certain types of sacrifice, of time and finances, by calling upon values that are shared by members of the community related to indirectly expressed notions of the "good" held in common.

If I wish to aim at conviction rather than mere persuasion, I need to consider my audience as reasonable people and ensure that my argumentation will be acceptable to them on that basis. I am effectively testing my argument for its reasonableness, looking for ways in which it fails to take note of events known in the community that might undermine some of my premises (a service agency, for example, that has received bad publicity for wasting, or worse, the help it received from volunteers), for ways in which it contradicts other values that have been expressed. I test the relevance of its parts to the audience I have in mind. I ensure that my argumentation does not violate rules of language that the reasonable element in my audience would catch. Here, of course, my audience is rhetorical in the ways that concern Gross and Dearin, because I am imagining reactions that might, but have not, occurred and addressing them. Here, also, are principles of logical analysis that were suspected to be at work in the activity of invoking a universal audience. But, as noted earlier, this is logic brought to bear upon a rhetorical situation, activated by it. Abstract principles have no real bearing on argumentation *until* they are brought alive in real situations, used by, or tested against, real audiences. Hence the rhetorical underlies this use.

Addressing a Universal Audience

We have turned for our understanding of what is "reasonable" to real audiences, rather than to the empty standards of devices like the Martian critic or the abstract principles of logic. The latter, indeed important and "real" in their own way, only gain that importance and reality for us insofar as they can be used in argumentation (rather than the principles of self-evidence and the like, which are immune to argumentation and hence outside of it).

Here, then, we can be interested in the reasonable in two ways: in how it informs arguments, validates them; and how it is modified by arguments. In the first case, the reasonable informs arguments insofar

as they meet the conditions of the cognitive environment of the audience involved. Successfully doing so ensures that an argument has the important relationship of relevance to the audience. We are relevant insofar as we take into consideration the cognitive environment of the particular audience and construct our reasoning accordingly. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's principle of inertia comes into play here. In anticipating and acquiring the agreement of my audience about basic premises (those that can be presumed in the ways discussed in the previous section), I engage the universal audience within my particular audience. My argumentation is reasonable to my audience to the degree that the premises are acceptable as basic in this way. Testing for this should not be difficult in most cases: it involves asking where the presumption lies with respect to a specific premise, with me as the arguer who must defend it (to search for a more basic premise that is acceptable), or with any member of the audience who would challenge it.

In the strongest type of effect on an audience, I win the adherence of my audience to the conclusion by modifying their cognitive environment so as to introduce the right kinds of evidence for that audience in the right relations to the conclusion. Again, this is a combination of audience-relevance and premise-relevance, the former relating the argumentation to its context, the latter relating the premises of the argument to its conclusion (Tindale 1999a, Chapter 4). As a logical principle, premise-relevance gains its utility from its relation to audience-relevance in specific contexts.

We have seen in earlier chapters of this book ways in which the cognitive environment may be modified by the evidence so as to bring about adherence to the conclusion, so it would be unproductive to repeat them here. But of central interest in this respect is the way the rhetorical arguer makes *present* various aspects of the cognitive environment so that it registers in the audience's minds, encouraging the drawing of inferences and the conviction an audience brings about within itself. Effective here would be the employment of rhetorical figures *as* arguments in the ways explained in Chapter 3; figures that evoke the experience of the reasoning and invite collaboration.

To a great extent, the process discussed above involves the reasonable within an audience being successfully activated and directed. More difficult is to imagine the ways in which the reasonable itself is brought to change. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's discussion of inertia emphasizes this difficulty. Still it does change, as we know. My

understanding of what is reasonable changes when I recognize that another person's point or response to myself has merit, deserves serious consideration, and is then to be adopted over what I have proposed. In being capable of such recognition, in being able to step out of my own perspective with its attachments and interests and take an "objective" stance on the exchange, I must activate the reasonable within me and then add to it, modifying it. After the exercise I no longer think in the same way. I hold some particular claim or position to be reasonable that I did not hold before. And on a more general or abstract level, my understanding of what is reasonable *per se* has changed. And I have convinced myself of this, moved by my firsthand recognition of the force of good argument.

In a sense, then, the reasonable changes insofar as a different universal audience is addressed and convinced. It changes whenever we modify our ideas about reason itself and the principles that "govern" it. This book, in its modest way, is an attempt in that direction, and to that end imagines a universal audience with the background and interests to engage its arguments and reflect on them. And perhaps, in the manner that Crosswhite suggested, to be arrested and convicted by them.

Of course, it is insufficient to say that sometimes we recognize the correctness of someone's criticisms of our ideas, and that the feature within us that makes that recognition is the judgment of a detached and disinterested reason. But this is at least enough to show that we do change our ideas when we are brought to "see" in this way, and that the process does involve an activity of reason within us that is detached from associations with our particular interests. In an analogous way we can imagine this taking place with larger and larger audiences, experiencing this disinterested reason and "seeing" the need to change because of the incorrectness of their views (even if the actual changes take longer to come about). Part of what warrants such changes must be something like Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's rule of justice that does more than perpetuate the traditions of precedents, but creates those precedents through modifications of analogous, but not identical, cases.

Evaluating a Universal Audience

Among the criticisms of the universal audience paraded at the start of the chapter, one remains as having received scant attention in the ensuing discussions. This is the charge that rhetorical considerations seem rarely pertinent to the assessment of arguments.⁵ In particular,

while I must consider what an arguer took her audience to be if I want fairly to understand her argument, it is not clear how audience comes into play when I am trying to decide myself whether to change my mind once the argument has been determined.

To a certain degree, this may be a case of failing to see what is closest to hand, for it is tantamount to asking where the audience is when I am the audience. As Crosswhite poignantly instructs us, we are always "in audience." Of course, in light of some of the other things that have been considered in this chapter, we might want to revise our understanding of this insight. For while I may always be "in audience," while this is an essential aspect of my being in the world, I am not always part of an audience directly addressed by an argument, or the intended audience for an argument. Crosswhite's point can better help us here if we recognize that we always can have the perspective of an audience and hence understand what it can mean to be addressed by any particular discourse (even if we do not understand the particularities of that address, that is, those features that render it for a particular audience in which we are not included). Hence we can pick up a text intended for an audience that may have disappeared long ago and appreciate it from *an* audience's perspective. That is, we can see what it demands of them and the kinds of things it is assuming about them; we appreciate what it would mean to be addressed by that text.

To this we need then add a further distinction to cover two types of evaluation: one in which I am part of the intended audience and one in which I am not (or it is not clear whether I am). I will call the first type of evaluation *engaged* and the second *unengaged*, thereby directly indicating how audience must enter into argument evaluation.

Under the dialogical account developed in previous chapters, we can recognize the engaged evaluation as that which characterizes the ongoing activity of argumentative exchange at its most dynamic. This type of evaluation is coextensive with the development of the argument; it is part of the dialogical exchange of anticipation and response. "Evaluation," from an essentially logical point of view, tends to consider an argument as something finished with neatly defined parameters. We have had difficulty with viewing it so cleanly. Arguments are activities in time, defined by their participants and defining those participants. Thus I become an audience for an argument through such engagement. And as I enter into the exchanges, which evaluation can partly invite me to do, I become co-arguer, as we have seen. From this perspective, as I start to review the reasoning, I should see something

of myself mirrored there, if the initiator of the argument (the “arguer”) has done her job well. For she will have developed her discourse with me in mind, my beliefs and attitudes, such that I should find myself addressed in the discourse, and even my responses anticipated. Where she has not done this well, and I was the intended audience (or part of it), then this argument will likely fail to gain my serious consideration. This is a measure of its weakness. It does not invite me, because it fails to be for me. Once engaged, as a contributor to the exchange, I can look both for what speaks to me particularly and to what speaks to the principle of reason within me. And bringing the skills of a good evaluator to my engagement, I will be particularly alert to the latter. Here, points such as have already been discussed become central: is the discourse relevant to me and does it also exhibit internal relevance between its parts? Have fallacies been committed? And so forth. The question of fallacy is still an appropriate one under this approach to argumentation, even if the notion of “fallacy” changes in a rhetorical account,⁶ because these are violations of the principles of good reason. These change over time, and some audiences will always be deceived by them, it seems. But as an evaluator, and particularly an engaged evaluator, these are always a concern for me.

Unengaged evaluation characterizes classroom analyses as well as the aware readings of arguments for which we are not part of the audience—historical arguments, for example. But while these are distinguished in that the evaluator is not a contributor to the argumentative exchange, the unengaged and engaged evaluations are not necessarily so distinct, and the unengaged can be profitably influenced by the hypothetical existence of the engaged. We can perform engaged evaluations because we can participate in argumentation, and we can do this because we stand socially “in audience.” Thus, we can bring much that we learn from being engaged to the more abstract exercises of unengaged evaluations. What is lost through not having intimate understandings of the particularities of the case can be compensated for by the stance of objectivity that may be possible when we have nothing at stake in the outcome. Here, more than anywhere, we act like a universal audience for that argument. Not abstractly, though, for we are still asking what is reasonable in this context with its particular circumstances. That is, how should the principles of reason, the questions of acceptability and relevance, have been played out here? If we find the argument (treated as complete, as unengaged readings will tend to do) wanting in any of these respects, we can judge that the arguer

failed to construct the appropriate universal audience for the context. How serious a failure we have in any particular circumstance will depend on the specific problems involved, which the details of the evaluation must work out and weigh.

❖ CONCLUSION

Audiences are always at issue, then, and a universal audience particularly so. But as a source of reasonableness in argumentation, a universal audience succeeds where others fail. The key problem with the Martian cases of the previous chapter was the absence of any real objective source standing behind the standard. A universal audience meets this condition insofar as it is anchored by a real, particular audience. This also means that there are recognized means of accessing and evaluating the standard. If difficulties remain in understanding and applying the standard, then the fault lies in our expectation, given the complexity of argumentation itself, that our means of treating it would ever be straightforward. In the final analysis, this seems a better, more legitimately grounded standard than any other available. The standard of the universal audience has the attractive feature of confronting us with the question of what counts as reasonable and the realization that in any particular case it has not been decided in advance. What is ultimately so disconcerting about Martian cases is that they assume otherwise and leave no room for debate. Some of us, governed as we might be by individual prejudice, may prefer a standard that we control and adapt to suit our inclinations. A visitor from Mars, though, would find that quite absurd.

❖ NOTES

1. As Gross and Dearn (2003, 134) observe, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca tend to pay little direct attention to the role of emotion in argumentation.

2. Negative readings such as Ray (1978), Ede (1989), and van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1995) have been addressed elsewhere (Tindale 1999a, 87–89; Crosswhite 1995).

3. Thus Crosswhite avoids the difficulties of those like Habermas and Rawls who attempt to ground conceptions of reasonableness in ideal audiences, because the argumentation directed at such audiences is abstract and formal (1996, 150).

4. Quasi-logical arguments gain their power to convince from their similarity to the formal reasoning of logic and mathematics (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 193).

5. I owe the formulation of this criticism to J. Anthony Blair in a paper delivered at the National Communication Association annual conference, Seattle 2000.

6. For a discussion of fallacies of process in rhetorical argumentation see Tindale 1999a, 157–181 and 2004.

