

# Arguing Without Trying to Persuade? Elements for a *Non-Persuasive* Definition of Argumentation

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**Abstract** If we consider the field of argumentation studies, we notice that many approaches consider argumentation in a *pragmatic* manner and define it as a *verbal activity oriented towards the realization of a goal*. The idea that subtends—in an explicit or implicit way—most of these approaches is that argumentation fundamentally aims to *produce an effect* upon an addressee, and that this effect consists in a *change of attitude with respect to a viewpoint*: argumentation theories inevitably confront the issue of persuasion. In this article, I defend, on the contrary, the hypothesis that it is not necessary to have recourse to the notion of *persuasion*, nor even to speak of an *attempt to provoke a change of attitude in the addressee*, in order to develop a general definition of argumentation. It seems to me that there are serious reasons to uncouple, insofar as a definition is concerned, argumentation and persuasion. I will look to identify these reasons, to formulate them and to evaluate their strength. In the same vein as recent works by Christian Plantin and Marc Angenot, I will try to contribute to the development of a *non-persuasive* conception of argumentation. Such a conception bases the definition of argumentation on the pragmatic aims of “justification” and “positioning”, as well as on the articulation of a discourse and a counter-discourse. I argue that such a conception might offer a better empirical adequacy than those that link, insofar as a definition, the argumentative activity and the persuasive aim.

**Keywords** Argumentation · Counter-discourse · Discourse · Justification · Positioning · Persuasion

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## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 The Pragmatic Question of the Aims of Argumentation

If we consider the spectacular development of argumentation studies over the last 30 years in fields as diverse as logic, philosophy, rhetoric or linguistics, it would be immediately apparent that the very definition of the notion of argumentation is far from being one based on consensus. Yet, if we survey the debates that take place in the community of specialists on argumentation, we would find that there is a very general agreement (even if it is implicit) on the *defining criteria* of this notion. Indeed, in their efforts to define argumentation, researchers seem to invariably come back to a limited set of questions to which they bring potentially divergent answers. The notion of argumentation thus takes different meanings according to the theories, but this cannot mask the fact that some very strong tendencies characterize the debates about its definition. As such, and without too much risk, we can begin with the following assessment: beyond their divergences, the current definitions of argumentation incorporate, in the large majority of cases, a criterion of a *pragmatic* nature. The term “pragmatic” is used here in a way that is deliberately unspecific and designates, in a very general way, a means of apprehending language<sup>1</sup> that, at its bare minimum, implies the taking into account of the *goal(s)* that speakers associate with a given linguistic phenomenon. Such a perspective prompts researchers to view argumentation as a *verbal activity oriented towards the realization of a goal* (and not only as a sequentiality of propositions whose formal structure can be described).<sup>2</sup> Of course, this question of goals, by itself, cannot sum up the pragmatic perspective, but it undoubtedly constitutes one of its essential dimensions. In this respect, numerous approaches to argumentation—that strongly diverge on other points—dovetail<sup>3</sup> in the following question that was particularly well stated by Ralph Johnson: “A pragmatic approach begins by asking: *what purpose(s) does argument serve?*” (2000: 149, the italics are mine). We will quickly consider, without the intention of being exhaustive, three different approaches that have made meaningful contributions to argumentation theory and that, each in its own way, put this pragmatic criterion of goals at the forefront:

- Among the normative approaches that have been developed in the English-speaking research, the pragma-dialectical approach promotes—as its name suggests—a pragmatic conception of argumentation and finds in this a “verbal activity” for which the goal consists of “convinc[ing] the listener or reader of

<sup>1</sup> We are therefore not referring to pragmatics understood as a specific school of thought within the realm of language sciences, which studies phenomena like speech acts, implicatures, etc.

<sup>2</sup> In the English language, certain authors (Blair 2004; Johnson 2000) use the couple “argumentation”/“argument” to distinguish the *process* (at a pragmatic level) and the *product* (at a more textual level). Others are satisfied by a single word “argumentation”, while playing upon the *process-product* ambiguity (Van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004).

<sup>3</sup> With the noteworthy exception, in French-speaking research in linguistics, of Oswald Ducrot who explicitly refuses to define argumentation as a “verbal activity aiming to make someone believe something” and conceives it as an intrinsic component in the meaning of utterances and lexical entities (2004: 18, translated from French).

the acceptability of [a standpoint]", by means of a "constellation of propositions justifying or refuting the proposition expressed in the standpoint" (Van Eemeren 2003: 2).

- Still in the ranks of normative approaches, and as shown in Ralph Johnson's works, informal logic also takes a resolutely pragmatic turn. According to Johnson, it is suitable to go beyond a purely "structural" conception: "if a satisfactory conceptualization of argument is to be developed, the purpose [...] of the discourse must be referred to" (2000: 148). The prototypical goal of argumentation—even if there may be others—is identified with "rational persuasion"<sup>4</sup> which is to say that "the arguer wishes to persuade the Other to accept a conclusion", by means of "the reasons and considerations cited, and those alone" (2000: 150).
- If we now turn our attention to the ledger of descriptive approaches inspired by the rhetoric tradition, we realize that the pragmatic criterion of *goals* is still paramount to such an extent that the definitions of argumentation can therein be qualified as "teleological". The goals consist of, as shown in Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca's foundational works, "induc[ing] or increas[ing] the mind's adherence to the theses presented for its assent" (1969: 4). This neo-rhetorical perspective is extended by current works by Ruth Amossy, for whom argumentation is to be understood as the "verbal means" aiming to "act upon addressees by attempting to make them adhere to a thesis, to modify or to reinforce the representations and the opinions that it lends them, or [otherwise] simply to orient their ways of seeing or to give rise to the questioning of a given problem" (2010: 36, translated from French).

It is not our intention to minimize the significant differences between the approaches that we just cited. It is clearly important to note that they do not assign the same task to argumentation theory (both pragma-dialectics and informal logic explicitly intend to combine description and normative evaluation, whereas approaches inspired from rhetoric tend towards a purely descriptive posture). However—and this assessment will serve as my starting point -, these diverse definitions of argumentation meet up in the way they conceive the pragmatic criterion of goals: they assume that (i) argumentation is a *finalized verbal activity*, that (ii) this activity aims to *produce an effect on the addressee* and that (iii) this effect fundamentally consists of a *change of attitude in the addressee with respect to a viewpoint*. It is here that theories of argumentation explicitly or implicitly encounter the issue of persuasion. It is true that the approaches that we have cited do not agree upon the exact *nature* of the intended effect: it is precisely here that we incontestably find meaningful terminological and conceptual differences between "to convince", "to rationally persuade", "to induce or to increase adherence", "to orient ways of seeing", etc. Neither is there an agreement as to the *verbal means* that one can legitimately use to produce the intended effect. We know that

<sup>4</sup> This point of view is shared by Trudy Govier who is another partisan of informal logic: "Typically, people present arguments to try to persuade others to accept claims" (1996: 2). Conversely, in response to the question "Does using arguments entail trying to persuade?", Blair (2004: 139) clearly responds: "Not at all. [...] using them to try to persuade is just one of many uses".

normative approaches tend to be more restrictive on this point than descriptive approaches stemming from rhetoric and language sciences: the latter are, for their part, more apt to consider the subjective and emotional resources of argumentation (*ethos* and *pathos*). However, as important as they may be, these points of disagreement should not mask the implicit convergence of these approaches in the following larger idea: one of the defining criteria of argumentative discourse resides in the fact that *the speaker pursues the goal of provoking a change of attitude in the addressee with respect to a viewpoint*.

## 1.2 Towards a *Non-Persuasive* Definition of Argumentation

For this article, my objective is precisely to act as a counterbalance to this apparently obvious idea: I would like to defend the hypothesis that it is not necessary to rely upon the notion of *persuasion*, nor even to speak of an *attempt to provoke a change of attitude in the addressee* in order to develop a general definition of argumentation. It seems to me that there are serious reasons to uncouple, in so far as a definition is concerned, argumentation and persuasion. I will look, in what follows, to identify these reasons, to formulate them and to evaluate their strength. It is necessary, at this point, to make the hypothesis that will be herein defended perfectly clear. The idea is not that persuasion or, in a larger way, changes of attitude with respect to a viewpoint (both as *intended* effects and as effects *produced* by the discourse) are *never* associated with certain uses of argumentation; such a hypothesis would obviously be too strong. I wish only to call these points into question *in as much as criteria for a general definition of argumentation*. To do this, I will rely upon recent works published in French language research on argumentation: approaches inspired by discourse analysis have been marked, these past few years, by several important theoretical contributions that overtly contest the utility of the notion of persuasion for a functioning definition of argumentation. Marc Angenot asserts that one “does not argue in order to persuade” (2008: 95, translated from French). Christian Plantin finds that “the issue of persuasion [...] cannot a priori found the field of argumentation” (2009: 53, translated from French). Along the same lines as those traced by these authors, I would like to modestly contribute to the development of a *non-persuasive* conception of argumentation. I call “non-persuasive” a conception according to which we do not need, in order to define argumentative discourse in general, to assume that the speaker aims to provoke a change of attitude in the addressee with respect to a viewpoint. I will therefore use the notion of “persuasion,” as we will come to see, in an intentionally unspecific sense and I am also disregarding the conceptual distinctions that are often made between “to persuade” and “to convince.” The topic of this article is indeed and above all, to contest the utility of the notion of *attitude change* as a means of defining the pragmatic aim of argumentation. The criticisms that I will attempt to formulate are as much about the theories that explicitly call for the notion of “persuasion” as those that speak of “convincing [the addressee]” or “induc[ing] or increas[ing] adherence”. This means that I will be, by convenience, led to qualify certain definitions of argumentation as “persuasive” even if they do not directly employ the concept of persuasion. Therein lies a paradox of which I am conscious.

It would be more accurate (but also more cumbersome) to speak each time of definitions that refer to the fact that “the speaker aims to provoke a change of attitude in his addressee with respect to a viewpoint”. This also explains two methodological limitations to my process. Firstly, I will not attempt to proceed, from a philosophical perspective, towards a deep analysis of the notional couple “to persuade” versus “to convince”. Secondly, I will not directly discuss the works that, in the field of social sciences (namely psychology), study the effects of persuasion with the help of experimental methodologies (for a general panorama, see O’Keefe 2002 and Perloff 2003).

The structure of this paper is twofold. In the first part, I am setting out to formulate and analyze two major criticisms that one can address to theories of argumentation that integrate, inasmuch as a definition, the notion of persuasion or attitude change (Sects. 2.1 and 2.2). In the second part (Sect. 3.1), I will try to identify the aims that can be associated with argumentation as seen from a non-persuasive conception. What is at stake is not—I insist—to give up the pragmatic question of goals, but rather to bring a somewhat different response to it. If persuasion and attitude change are not considered as defining, how can we grasp the pragmatic dimension of argumentative discourse? In conclusion (Sect. 3.2), I will outline a few potential methodological advantages of this non-persuasive conception of argumentation.

## 2 Pushing Aside Persuasion: Two Major Criticisms

On what basis can we refuse to establish persuasion as a defining criterion of argumentation? Let’s recall that we are not working towards the idea that the use of argumentation is never associated with persuasive aims or effects. The issue is only to contest the utility of relying upon the notion of persuasion for a general definition of argumentation. I will here consider two major criticisms that we can charge upon definitions of argumentation that include the notion of persuasion. According to the first, recourse to the notion of persuasion has the weakness of leading to an *excessively restrictive* definition (Sect. 2.1). According to the second, it has the weakness of leading to an *excessively large* definition (Sect. 2.2). In both cases, I will attempt to see—and this is sometimes difficult—upon which conceptions of persuasion these criticisms are based.

### 2.1 First Criticism: The Problem of Empirical Attestation and of Persistence

The first criticism makes use of what I will call the problem of *insufficient empirical attestation*. This criticism can be formulated in the following manner. If we define argumentation based on a pragmatic criterion relative to the goal that it is supposed to pursue, and we assimilate this goal to persuasion—meant in a very general way as a *change of attitude in the addressee with respect to a viewpoint* –, then we will confront a problem: among the numerous discourses that seem to result from argumentation, many do not seem to be especially oriented towards such a goal.

This objection amounts to saying that, on the basis of an empirical observation of argumentative discourses in all their diversity, it is uncertain that arguers always *aim* for a persuasive effect. It is even less certain that they indeed manage to *produce* such an effect. Persuasion (both as an intended effect and as a produced one) seems then insufficiently manifest to be legitimately established as a defining criterion of the notion of argumentation. The author that undoubtedly supports this point of view with the most vigor is Marc Angenot. He criticizes the apprehension of argumentation “based upon an efficient ideal, persuasion, that is but rarely present”:

Rhetoric supposes an axiom that it never questions as long as it seems to go without saying: an axiom according to which humans, even if they don't succeed in doing so every single time, argue to persuade one another—or at least to persuade third-parties [...] of the error of your adversary and the weakness of his or her arguments and the fairness of yours. [This axiom] is contradicted by all observations: if I argued only against people whom I believed I had a good chance of convincing or shifting, I would have trouble explaining the abundance of discourses used in arguments [...] where the chances of persuading an interlocutor, to modify his or her point of view, are practically zero [...] (2008: 439, translated from French)

Immediately following this problem of insufficient empirical attestation is a second one, namely that of *persistence*. I am using the word “persistence” to designate the fact that a phenomenon can persist in spite of the disappearance of its supposed cause. In the case that interests us, speakers can *continue arguing* (in the minimal sense of “advancing reasons supporting a viewpoint”), and this even when it is implausible to explain their activity by a persuasive aim. In hypothesizing that all arguments necessarily aim to persuade, the analyst is confronted with multiple *residues*, which is to say discourses for which it is counter-intuitive to say that they do not result from an argumentation, and that, however, seem devoid of any persuasive aim. It seems to me that these residues correspond to two principal types of situations. (i) First of all, there are situations of *consensus*, in which the participants in the interaction consistently manifest their agreement upon a given viewpoint; (ii) Inversely, there are situations of profound *dissensus* (“deep disagreement”, see Fogelin 2005), in which the participants consistently manifest their complete disagreement upon a given viewpoint, or even verbalize their persuasive “impermeability”. In both of these types of situations, we are liable to observe *persistence* in argumentation: the participants *persist in arguing* even though the persuasive effect does not seem (or no longer seems) to be an issue (either because the participants agree, on the one hand, or because they agree that they will not agree, on the other hand).

Let's attempt to evaluate the strength of this first criticism as it pertains to definitions of argumentation based on the notion of persuasion. For this, it is necessary to clarify a crucial point: upon which conception of persuasion is this criticism reliant? It is here, let's admit it, that we identify one of the difficulties that arise from the non-persuasive definitions of argumentation: it is rare that they openly state which conception of persuasion they attack. It seems to me that it is

necessary to make a minimum of a distinction between a (i) *radical* conception and a (ii) more *moderate* conception of persuasion.

(i) The conception that I call *radical* comes from the rhetorical tradition, and happens to be well formulated by Laurent Pernot: “To bring the Other, without an apparent constraint, to think something that he did not, or did not yet, previously believe” (2000: 7, translated from French). We can see that, according to this conception, persuasion supposes the transformation of a state of affairs during a process that is both temporally and causally ordered. In the beginning (state of affairs S1), the Other is hostile or, at best, doubtful with respect to a viewpoint. Next, the orator accomplishes the oratory act. In the end (state of affairs S2), the Other should, ideally, have become favorable to the viewpoint in question by the sole grace of the oratory act. We have here a radical conception of persuasion meant as a *conversion* (or as a *revolution*). Now, if we adopt such a conception, the objections that we just saw are very serious. In particular, the two types of situations that we evoked—situations of consensus, on the one hand, and those of profound dissensus, on the other—constitute, if we adopt a radical conception of persuasion, potentially decisive counter-examples. A definition of argumentation that makes the persuasive aim a central criterion and that above all finds a *conversion* in persuasion can hardly explain why, during an interaction, speakers continue to argue even when they agree upon a given viewpoint or, to the contrary, when they have given up on reaching an agreement upon the said viewpoint.

(ii) Now, what is there to say about a more moderate conception of persuasion? Is it of a nature to minimize the impact of criticisms addressed to persuasive conceptions of argumentation? We can choose to understand persuasion less as an operation of *conversion* as one of *reinforcement*. From such a perspective, persuasion no longer necessarily implies the changing of the *content* of a viewpoint (for example, changing one’s viewpoint on the death penalty being useful for society to one according to which it is useless): it could be concerned with only the adjustment of the *intensity* of a viewpoint in which the content does not change. If we rely upon this moderate conception of persuasion, situations of consensus no longer constitute such a devastating counter-example. Indeed, if speakers who manifest their full agreement with one another about a viewpoint *continue to argue*, one would say that this can be explained by the fact that they seek, through their activity, to reinforce their *own* state of persuasion (and the definition of argumentation based on persuasion would thus be saved!).

To attempt a summary, we can say that, according to this first criticism, a definition of argumentation based on persuasion is excessively *restrictive*. The notion of persuasion acts in the same way as an *excessively narrow filter*. I am here using a metaphor by imagining a filter through which we “pass” different discourses in order to decide whether they are argumentative or not: the filter should, if it works well, let discourses pass through if they pertain to argumentation and retain those that do not. In this regard, a conception of argumentation that is based on persuasion has the weakness of *not* allowing discourses to pass through the filter even if everything about them would lead to consider them as argumentative.

## 2.2 Second Criticism: An Excessively Large Definition of Argumentation

Let's now analyze a second criticism brought upon persuasion that does not exactly converge with the one we just examined. According to the first criticism, we saw that persuasion (both as a manifestly intended effect as well as a produced one) seems insufficiently demonstrated, and consequently has the error of leading to an excessively narrow definition of argumentation. According to the second criticism, we could say that it is... actually the contrary! The idea, that we aim to explain, is well formulated by Plantin:

The issue of persuasion is often connected with that of argumentation, but it cannot a priori found the field of argumentation [...] If we define argumentation by the persuasive effect, and the persuasive effect by a change of representation, then there is no longer any difference between the argumentative and the informative, since all new information modifies the representations of the person that receives it. (Plantin 2009: 53, translated from French)

We can see that the reasoning is different from what we have heretofore seen. Indeed, the comments fundamentally consist in *trivializing* persuasion. We have seen that criticisms like those made by Angenot (Sect. 2.1) tend, to the contrary, to make persuasion *more rare*: they underline its weak empirical attestation and conclude that it is not eligible to be a defining criterion of argumentation (except in leading to an excessively restrictive definition). The second major criticism that we can identify aims to show persuasion as a well-proven phenomenon but which is insufficiently *specific* to found an adequate definition of argumentation. The problem, as Plantin points out rather well, is that persuasion, in *one of its definitions* (“change of representation”), leads to a definition of argumentation that is not too restrictive, but this time *too accommodating*. The distinction between “information” and “argumentation” becomes blurred. An utterance as “banally informative” as “It is eight o'clock” becomes argumentative because, no matter what the context is, we can postulate that it aims to “act upon the representations” of the addressee. We would therefore have—which Plantin denounces—a “dissolution” of the notion of argumentation in “language, meaning or information” (2005: 33–34).

If we endeavor to summarize the major characteristics of this second criticism against persuasion by comparing it with the first, we would say then that it is about an unwarranted expansion of the field of argumentation. In this second case, the notion of persuasion proves to be—once again calling upon the metaphor of the filter—an *excessively large filter*: it has the weakness of allowing discourses to pass through even if everything about them leads to consider them as non-argumentative.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> To my eyes, one such criticism can be addressed specifically to the approaches in the Francophone field that tend towards a *generalized argumentativism* and imply that argumentation is *constitutive in general*: this is the case in works by Jean-Blaise Grize (1996) that connect argumentation with *schematization* and also in works by Ruth Amossy with the notion of “argumentative dimension” (2010).



### 3 The Question of the *Aims* of Argumentation in a *Non-Persuasive* Conception

I would like to develop the following question in the second part of this article: if persuasion is dispelled in as much as a defining criterion of argumentation, by what may it be replaced? It seems difficult to ignore the pragmatic considerations and to not wonder about argumentation in as much as an activity and, more specifically, to attempt to identify the *goal(s)* that the agents that accomplish this activity are striving towards. So, we will try to understand what the conception that I called “non-persuasive” brings to the table, no longer only *negatively* (by means of criticism, cf. Sects. 2.1 and 2.2), but also *positively*.

#### 3.1 Justification and Positioning

The originality of a non-persuasive conception is to shake the following idea that, in either an implicit or explicit way, subtends the majority of other theories: the pragmatic dimension of argumentation would be defined in large part by an *intended effect upon the Other, consisting in a change of attitude with respect to a viewpoint*. Of course, the descriptive approaches coming from rhetoric, as well as the normative approaches (pragma-dialectics, informal logic...), do not in any way agree upon the *means* that one can use to attain such a goal while remaining within the framework of “argumentation”: normative approaches tend to be more restrictive in this regard. However the general idea that argumentation is defined by *seeking to change the attitude of the addressee* seems to me to be very widely accepted. It is necessary to understand, for starters, that the non-persuasive conception does not substitute in place of “to persuade the Other”, “to convince the Other”, “to make the Other adhere” ... another type of intended effect upon the Other. It is the very notion of an “intended effect upon the Other” whose utility is questioned when defining the phenomenon of argumentation. How, then, can we describe the pragmatic dimension of argumentation? The non-persuasive conception seems capable of accentuating two major points.

(i) The first point is one entirely based on consensus, and can be grasped by way of the notion of *justification*. Speakers “argue to *justify* themselves, to procure a *justification* in front of the world” (Angenot 2008: 441, translated from French). The questioning of their point of view forces them to “argue, which is to say to develop a justifying discourse” (Plantin 2005: 53, translated from French). I will not linger on this point because it is generally agreed upon by all the other theories: “[to] justifi[y] the acceptability of a standpoint” (Van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004: 1), “[to] produc[e] reasons that support [a thesis]” (Johnson 2000: 169), etc.

(ii) The second point is more complicated because it raises the fundamental question of the *role of the Other* in the definition of the argumentative activity. I will use, once again following Angenot’s lead, the notion of “positioning”: speakers “argue to *situate themselves* with respect to the reasons put forth by others by testing the coherence and the strength that they ascribe to their positions, [they argue] to position themselves [...] and to ensure their capacity to resist” (2008: 441, translated from French). In this way, the notion of justification in and of itself does not suffice to fully seize the notion of argumentation: when we argue, we of course

aim to *justify* a viewpoint; but this justifying aim is accompanied by the aim of *positioning our discourse with respect to another one*. This other discourse, that I will designate by the label “counter-discourse” in order to clearly mark its structural function in argumentation, can oppose the discourse (i) by defending a *different viewpoint* on the same question or (ii) by defending the same viewpoint by means of *different reasons*. The counter-discourse can be *effectively held by another speaker* in response to the discourse: this is the register of dialogue (in its strict sense), which we can observe notably in multiparty and joint-constructed argumentative interactions wherein speakers interrupt one another and respond to one another. It can also be a counter-discourse which is more *virtual* and which the speaker represents in his own discourse: it is the “dialogical” register that we observe in a mono-generated discourse by a speaker who is not interrupted by others and to whom no one directly responds. But, this speaker projects, when he is arguing, an image of the counter-discourse that is virtually opposed to his own discourse. In a general way, we do not seem to need, in order to construct a *general* definition of argumentation, to say that it is an activity during which one aims to act *upon* the Other (by seeking to provoke a change in attitude sort of effect). We only need to say that argumentation is an activity through which one necessarily acts *with respect* to the Other. Otherwise stated, what is considered as defining of argumentation is the very fact that a discourse and a counter-discourse are opposed to each other on a given question,<sup>6</sup> formulate different points of view in response to this question and are constructed with respect to one another. However, and even though it is witnessed in *certain argumentative situations*, the fact that the speaker carrying the discourse aims to provoke a change in the viewpoint of the speaker holding the counter-discourse—and thus even attempts to make him or her renounce the counter-discourse—does not seem defining of the argumentative activity *in general*. The change in preposition (“to act *with respect* to the Other” versus “to act *upon* the Other”) is not purely cosmetic and, we must underline, does not at all minimize the role of the Other in the definition of the argumentative activity. When one argues, one seeks, according to Marianne Doury’s particularly apt expression, to construct one’s discourse in a way as to “*make it more resistant to contestation*” (2003: 11–13, translated from French). This notion of “resistance to contestation” implies that the speaker accounts for the existence—be it pressing and immediate or more virtual—of a counter-discourse and thus that he or she constructs his or her discourse accordingly. So we here see that the non-persuasive conception of argumentation does not at all make this an activity approaching a soliloquy in which speakers would speak only «to themselves »and would not listen to one another.

So what happens to this *persuasive aim* that many theories incorporate into the definition of argumentation? We must recognize that the non-persuasive conception does not deny the *very existence* of such an aim. It is only that it does not make it a defining criterion of argumentation *in general*, but rather a characteristic of *certain discourse genres* in which argumentation is liable to develop. We recognize, then,

<sup>6</sup> We are here inspired by the “dialogal” model of argumentation developed by Christian Plantin over the last 15 years (see notably 1996, 2005, and 2009).

that there are of course many discourse genres that are explicitly oriented towards a persuasive aim, and that these genres are sometimes conducive to arguing (meant in the sense of justification and positioning), but that the persuasive aim should be associated with the definition of the genres in question, and not with the definition of argumentation per se.<sup>7</sup>

### 3.2 Methodological Interest of a *Non-Persuasive* Conception of Argumentation

Having sketched this non-persuasive conception of argumentation, I would like to, with an eye to concluding, position it one last time with respect to other theories and thus to imagine the potential methodological gains that it may bring. The question is the following: as argumentation theorists, what do we truly gain by refusing to incorporate the persuasive aim into the definition of argumentation? To my mind, the gain is twofold. (i) First of all, with the notion of “positioning”, the non-persuasive conception incorporates one of the major advancements in contemporary thought about argumentation, namely the insistence upon the *dialectical* dimension. The argumentative discourse - insisted upon as much by the pragma-dialectics as by Johnson’s pragmatic approach - is intrinsically dialectical in that it always implies the anticipation and the management of a counter-discourse. (ii) Next, by renouncing the association of aims such as “to persuade”, “to convince”, etc. with argumentation *in general*, the non-persuasive conception diverges from other approaches in a way that reaches, it seems to me, a larger *empirical adequacy*: it allows us to subsume, in a rigorous manner, a larger number of discourse genres that are argumentatively pertinent. If we base the definition on justification and positioning, we can, on the one hand, subsume the genres that include a clear persuasive aim under the notion of argumentation; and, on the other hand, also those that do not include any or do so in but a secondary way. For example, we can analyze both a criminal trial defense in which a lawyer aims to persuade the jury that his client is not guilty of the infraction with which he is charged—a type of discourse in which the persuasive aim is central and where the argumentation is subordinate to it—and a long-lasting polemic in philosophy that opposes the advocates of “relativism” to those of “realism”—a situation in which the conflicting parties strive to construct their position in a way as to render it as “resistant” as possible “to the contestation” of the adversarial party, to borrow Doury’s formulation once again. In short, with aims such as *justification* and *positioning*, we are maybe hitting the *lowest common denominator* of various realizations of argumentation. But we are not doing this—or at least not doing it as much—when we base the definition of argumentation upon the idea of an *effect aimed at the Other* and upon a specification of this effect in terms of persuasion, even if it were qualified as “rational.”

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<sup>7</sup> Doury developed this idea by arguing that the objective of persuasion seems to be “more linked with the communicative situation, the type of interaction or discourse, than the argumentative activity itself” (2003: 11, translated from French).

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