A Scheme for Representing Written Argument

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A scheme for representing argument is a formalism used to describe the structure or pattern within argumentative discourse. The value of any such scheme lies in its ability to focus attention on certain aspects of perceptually complex argument and direct interpretation and use of these aspects in detail. Formal logic, beginning with the syllogism, represents a large class of argument schemes. So too do the schemes of classical rhetoric.

If there is any trend among those who teach argument as part of advanced composition, it is a decided movement away from abstraction. Writing teachers interested in argument production often voice concern about schemes that omit the concrete detail needed to direct students to compose an argument. At the Third Annual Summer Conference on Argumentation, for example, Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor criticized Toulmin's argument scheme for “sitting far above the specific contents of the argument,” asserting that “we want to know not just what slots to fill in, but something more about how to fill them in” (136). In the same forum, Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg argued that the teacher of argument should not be teaching “universal” and “purified” forms of argument, but rather situated content and conventions (132-33). In several articles, David Kaufer (“A Plan”) and Kaufer and Christine Neuwirth propose less abstract modifications of formal logic and stasis theory for the writing classroom.

This paper represents a departure from the current trend against abstraction. Our plan is not to adapt an existing formalism for the classroom but to propose a new one. In particular, we argue that when it comes to representing written arguments composed in response to multiple sources, existing schemes of argument have been missing important abstractions about how authors use the arguments of others in the development and presentation of their own.

Stephen Jay Gould's Use of Sources

For several years now, we have been comparing how experts and students compose written arguments from sources (Kaufer and Geisler; Geisler). While this research has involved looking mainly at argumentation in ethics, the patterns we discovered appear to be common to a great many texts in the
Western essayist tradition. Authors in this tradition, we observe, tend to establish complex dependencies between prior sources and their own positions. Take, for example, Stephen Jay Gould's orchestration of sources in a recent essay on the evolutionary views of the Russian anarchist, Petr Kropotkin. In the paragraphs from Gould's essay printed below, we have placed these sources in boldface:

If we ask why Kropotkin favored cooperation while most nineteenth-century Darwinians advocated competition as the predominant result of struggle in nature, two major reasons stand out. The first seems less interesting, as obvious under the slightly cynical but utterly realistic principle that true believers tend to read their social preferences into nature. Kropotkin, the anarchist who yearned to replace laws of central government with consensus of local communities, certainly hoped to locate a deep preference for mutual aid in the innermost evolutionary marrow of our being. Let mutual aid pervade nature and human cooperation becomes a simple instance of the law of life.

But the second reason is more interesting, as a welcome empirical input from Kropotkin's own experience as a naturalist and as an affirmation of Todes's intriguing thesis that the usual flow from ideology to interpretation of nature may sometimes be reversed, and that the landscape can sometimes color social preference. As a young man, long before his conversion to political radicalism, Kropotkin spent five years in Siberia (1862-66) just after Darwin published the Origin of the Species. He went as a military officer, but his commission served as a convenient excuse for his desire to study the geology, geography, and zoology of Russia's vast interior. There, in the polar opposite to Darwin's tropical experiences, he dwelled in the environment least conducive to Malthus's vision. He observed a sparsely populated world, swept with frequent catastrophes that threatened the few species able to find a place in such bleakness. As a potential disciple of Darwin, he looked for competition, but rarely found any. Instead, he continually observed the benefits of mutual aid in coping with an exterior harshness that threatened all alike and could not be overcome by the analogues of warfare and boxing. Kropotkin, in short, had a personal and empirical reason to look with favor upon cooperation as a natural force.

As is typical in other written arguments we have analyzed, Gould uses this orchestration to lead to the main point with which he concludes his essay:

What can we make of Kropotkin's argument today, and that of the entire Russian school represented by him? Were they just victims of cultural hope and intellectual conservatism? I don't think so. In fact, I would hold that Kropotkin's basic argument is correct. Struggle does occur in many modes, and some lead to cooperation among members of a species as the best pathway to advantage for individuals. If Kropotkin overemphasized mutual aid, most Darwinians in Western Europe had exaggerated competition just as strongly. If Kropotkin drew hope for social reform inappropriately from his concept of nature, Darwinians had erred just as firmly (and for motives that most of us would now decry) in justifying imperial conquest, racism, and oppression of industrial workers as the harsh outcome of natural selection in the competitive mode.

I would fault Kropotkin only in two ways—one technical, the other general. He did commit a common conceptual error in failing to recognize that natural selection is an argument about advantages to individual organisms, however they may struggle. More generally, I like to apply a somewhat cynical rule of thumb in judging arguments about nature that also have overt social implications: when such claims imbue nature with just those properties that make us feel good or fuel our prejudices, be doubly suspicious. I am especially wary of arguments that find kindness, mutuality, synergism,
harmony—the very elements that we strive mightily, and so often unsuccessfully, to put into our own lives—intrinsically in nature. I see no evidence for TELLHARD'S noosphere, for Capra's California style of holism, for Sheldrake's morphic resonance. Gaia strikes me as a metaphor, not a mechanism. (Metaphors can be liberating and enlightening, but new scientific theories must supply new statements about causality. Gaia, to me, only seems to reformulate, in different terms, the basic conclusions long ago achieved by the classically reductionist arguments of biogeochemical cycling theory.)

There are no shortcuts to moral insight. Nature is not intrinsically anything that can offer comfort or solace in human terms—if only because our species is such an insignificant latecomer in a world not constructed for us. The answers to moral dilemmas are not lying out there, waiting to be discovered. They reside, like the kingdom of God, within us—the most difficult and inaccessible spot for any discovery or consensus. (21)

Complex dependencies between prior sources and an author's own position, like those illustrated in this extended excerpt from Gould's essay, regularly appear to affect both the process by which authors discover their argument and the pattern in which they present it on the page. In general, we have found that authors use the strengths and weaknesses they note in previous positions to guide the discovery of their own position. This observation, we should note, squares with a long research tradition in complex problem-solving where it has been shown that processes of testing and discovery are typically interleaved (Langley et al. 57; Glymour et al. 46). In the excerpt quoted above, for example, Gould has used Kropotkin to reinforce his preference for empirically-based claims as well as his avoidance of those rooted in ideology. Furthermore, once authors have discovered their position, they will often use a kind of "metric of faultiness" to determine the order in which they will introduce and discuss prior sources in their own text: the more unlike their own position, the earlier they discuss a source; the more like their own position, the later they discuss it. Gould, for instance, finds fault with the nineteenth-century view on Darwinian competition, which he characterizes early in his essay; he has more sympathy for Kropotkin's view, which he introduces later on.

If we assume these regularities can be represented in existing schemes of written argument, we need to ask where they fit. Simple answers are not easy to come by. The standard textbook advice suggests that students use sources to support their own position. But in published examples of written argument, this support may be indirect at best. In Gould's text, for example, the claims attributed to nineteenth-century Darwinians and to Kropotkin don't directly support Gould's main argument that nature does not provide moral insight. Instead, they simply help him establish the criteria that will lead readers to understand and adopt this final position.

The Rhetoric of Sources

Classical rhetoric may offer some guidance in understanding Gould's use of sources. The nineteenth-century Darwinians and Kropotkin, seem to function under a general category of contrast, providing a background
against which Gould's position can finally be framed. Classical rhetoric provides two standard categories fundamentally related to the idea of contrast: rebuttal and refutation. In the classical oration, the rebuttal and refutation form that part of a speech in which the speaker can entertain and dismiss competing positions.

The prior sources we have been describing in Gould's text are not merely rebuttals and refutations, however. In classical schemes of rhetoric, rebuttals and refutations are typically removed in time and space from the presentation of the constructive argument. Roman rhetorics as well as modern forensics provide separate forums for entertaining proposals and counter-proposals. In written argument, however, authors do not operate in this fashion. Rather, like Gould, they entertain and critique sources in the course of developing their constructive argument. Multiple sources are thus quilted into the same paragraph of prose.

Furthermore, in the classical and forensic context, rebuttals and refutations are not typically linked to discovery. Rather, they are used to increase the listener's preference for a position taken prior to an examination of the evidence, as when a lawyer accepts a client's case or a debate team agrees to argue the affirmative.

A third possibility is suggested by more contemporary dialogic schemes which do not so neatly divide discovery and refutation. In such schemes, the object is to put forth and sustain a claim against the resistance of a small group of physically proximate opponents or interlocutors. Each member of the group issues claims that become the target of one another's rebuttal and refutation; each member thus becomes an external instigator for the others, leading them to qualify their own claims toward greater credibility. Incorporating rebuttals and refutations into his or her positive position gives each arguer elaborative help.

In contemporary informal schemes of argument, dialogic assumptions are pervasive. In their detailed synthesis of contemporary argument theory in the United States and Europe, van Eemeren, Grootendorst, and Kruiger list eight propositions that seem to unite current theory. Four of these propositions employ the word interlocutor to describe the arguer's audience. Two examples from theory are indicative of how this assumption can be played out. The early Henry Johnstone, for one, used dialogic assumptions when he coined the term valid ad hominem to depict the kind of refutative argumentation that he believed characterized philosophical discourse. Ad hominem validity is clearly dialogic because it relies on directly refuting a single opponent. Toulmin's apparatus of claim-warrant-rebuttal-qualification-backing-data is also dialogic by default. Toulmin's notion of rebuttal functions as an afterthought to the original claim, helping to qualify it. He did not design the rebuttal category to accommodate the influence of prior and external sources on an author's major claim.
For our purposes, the most important feature of dialogical argument in both the classical and contemporary versions is that the external voices shaping the argument are considered close at hand, whole, and unproblematic. They are part of the implicit presence of the argument and so need no official incorporation into the argument structure itself. They suggest simple and straightforward ways to handle the opponent's constructive point of view in one's own argumentative text: display it as a character in scripted dialogue; or save it for an isolated section in the argument. In either case, incorporating the opponent's positive position is not a problem because "the opponent" is a discrete individual or a small collection of discrete individuals with their voices left intact.

While appropriate in many settings, dialogic assumptions of argument do not cover the print conventions of post-Enlightenment scholarly argument, where the arguer is expected to say something new against the resistance of earlier texts. These are the conventions lying just under the surface of Gould's text. These alternative conventions emerged with the standardization of print as a medium of intellectual communication (which in fact occurred well into the seventeenth century, long after the invention of the printing press). As Elizabeth Eisenstein has noted, print brought forth a multitude of cultural changes. Not least of these changes was the conduct of scholarship. Instead of molding one's argument under the watchful eye and criticism of a single or small number of discrete and indivisible opponents, the post-print scholarly author needed to be accountable to a library of previous and distant authors, whose ideas had been extended, though often in abbreviated and piecemeal form, through print. Under these modified print conventions of argumentation, incorporating the position of external sources into one's own argument became problematic.

With the expansion of what Eisenstein calls "print culture," the dialogue form became increasingly unmanageable, not to mention less interesting, as a structure for written argument. To an argumentative event, print brought too many interlocutors and too few intact ones to furnish the stuff out of which good dialogues are made. At the same time, the multitude of alien perspectives offered through print could not be easily or elegantly assigned to a single section on rebuttals and refutations. True enough, some contemporary writers do relegate alien perspectives to single sections of this type, especially when they are fearful of cluttering their constructive argument. However, the more important point at issue is that many, if not most, contemporary writers of argument do not remain bound to this dialogic convention. Instead, they distribute brief or extended fragments of alien voices throughout their constructive argument as Gould has done.

To get at the structure of Gould's argument, or any multi-source written argument, we need to capture the dependencies between prior positions and the author's original position. As we have suggested, argument schemes based on dialogic assumptions are not designed to depict these dependen-
cies. The balance of this paper discusses a scheme designed expressly for this purpose.

A Scheme For Multi-Source Written Argument

For the past several years, we have worked on a representational scheme for written argument that better represents its use of multiple sources. Our scheme doesn't so much replace dialogical schemes as elaborate them to include information about the dependencies between external sources and the author's major claims and reasons. It also offers a visual system for illustrating these dependencies so that they can be noticed at a glance. We call our scheme the main path/faulty path representation of written argument for reasons that will become clear below.

We have chosen to illustrate our scheme using Stephen Jay Gould's essay because it is an extremely simple argument in terms of Gould's own claims and reasons; it is an extremely difficult argument, however, when we track the alien claims and reasons Gould weaves throughout his argument and their dependence on his own perspective. Our scheme is best utilized when understanding the relationship between external sources and an author's original line of argument is at a premium.

The Author's Main Path

The main path refers to the claims in an argument that an author directly endorses or avows. Imagine an author's line of argument as a sequence of claims moving readers forward on an issue. If we think of an author's claims as points on a directed line moving from left to right, then an author's main path looks something like the drawing in Figure 1.

Figure 1
The Main Path

Roughly speaking, our notion of an author's main path coincides with the traditional notion of the set of assertions, points, or claims advanced by the author. The notion of a "main path," however, enjoys several advantages over the notion of the author's "set of claims." First, the idea of a path suggests that the claims that fall along this path are not an unordered set, but somehow are conjoined, cumulative, and directional. Readers won't com-
prehend Gould, for example, merely by isolating and then grouping his claims. They must see these claims as fitting into a connected line of argument. They must see Gould as trying to take them somewhere. In particular, they must unravel the relationship between Gould's intermediate point that ideology often reflects the natural environment in which one lives and his concluding point that nature provide no ideological guidance in human affairs. The key to this connection lies in Gould's unstated claim that nature is so varied that an environment can always be found to support a particular ideology; thus, Gould concludes, nature favors no ideology in particular.

Second, the idea that the path is "main" indicates that claims falling along this path also fall within Gould's perspective. When Gould issues claims associated with his main path, readers know he is speaking from his own perspective. In our studies, we have found a number of stylistic cues that experienced readers look for from writers to tip them off that a particular claim being offered falls along a main path. The most abbreviated cue writers can give is to offer a claim in a direct manner, with no false notes or winks to the reader. In Gould's text, this is most evident when he makes his position clear in the final paragraph:

There are no shortcuts to moral insight. Nature is not intrinsically anything that can offer comfort or solace in human terms—if only because our species is such an insignificant latecomer in a world not constructed for us. They reside, like the kingdom of God, within us—the most difficult and inaccessible spot for any discovery or consensus. (21)

We assume Gould issues this claim from his own perspective because the language is direct. Authors can offer more elaborate cues, however. They can use the first person pronoun (singular or plural) as Gould does in the following paragraph:

My own preference lies with a different solution based on taking Darwin's metaphorical view of struggle seriously (admittedly in the face of Darwin's own preference for gladiatorial examples): nature is sometimes nasty, sometimes nice. (14)

Furthermore, authors can present claims in a self-conscious rhetorical pattern of sequence (the second reason is X) or a problem/solution framework (the problem is Y; the solution is Z):

The answers to moral dilemmas are not lying out there, waiting to be discovered. They reside, like the kingdom of God, within us—the most difficult and inaccessible spot for any discovery or consensus. (21)

Among the most obvious cues authors can drop for a main path claim is to praise it:
But the second reason is more interesting, as a welcome empirical input from Kropotkin's own experience as a naturalist and as an affirmation of Todes's intriguing thesis that the usual flow from ideology to interpretation of nature may sometimes be reversed, and that the landscape can sometimes color social preference. (18)

The third advantage of the idea of a main path is that, unlike the concept of the author's claims, it suggests an enduring narrator leading the reader, even if behind the scenes, to the end of the text. While the author may choose to move in and out of various perspectives as the argument unfolds, readers can be assured they will meet the author's own perspective reasonably early into the argument and will be escorted from the text by that same perspective at its conclusion. Despite moving in and out of various perspectives in his argument, for example, Gould is emphatic about ending his argument with Gould and Gould alone.

Authors of argument typically conclude with their own perspective even if that is not where they begin. An apparent exception is highly ironical discourse when the author may choose to be less reliable in announcing and maintaining a perspective. But ironical argument, as we will see below, conforms to the rules of a strong authorial presence; and it does not have a decisive presence in multi-source scholarly argument.

Faulty Paths

An author's main path organizes claims and support that fall within the author's perspective or point of view. By contrast, the author's faulty paths organize claims and support that fall outside the author's perspective. Whereas authors use main-path claims to offer the reader a positive course to take in exploring an issue, they rely on faulty-path claims to identify detours and deadends along the way. Authors present faulty paths as claims that readers need to understand if only to avoid. Faulty paths mark the perceptual boundaries and increase the perceptual clarity of the main path. This function is not unique to argument. It applies to any species of direction-giving: “You'll see an exit marked ‘North: Grove City.’ Even though you want to go to Grove City, don't take it. It will take you twenty miles out of the way.”

A direction-giver would include this faulty path in a set of travel directions on the assumption that the direction-taker can easily confuse faulty paths with the main path. Sophisticated argument includes faulty paths in its design for the same reason. Rather than lead people through physical territory, an argument leads listeners or readers through the conceptual territory of an issue. And, while an author offers readers a single main path, many faulty paths can branch from it along the way. Visualizing faulty paths branching from a main path, we get a picture like that given in Figure 2.
Faulty paths consist of the multiple detours and exits that can lead a reader off course. The descriptor "faulty" is potentially confusing so we need to explain why we chose it. By "faulty," we do not necessarily mean logically "fallacious." Of course, the descriptor can also include this logical notion; an author can, for example, decide to reject a claim as faulty because it is logically fallacious, lacking in intrinsic merit or support. But we must always keep in mind that the author, for whatever reason, has decided to use these external ideas in the design of the constructive argument. And it would be most unlikely for the author to find these external ideas useful if they were also judged absolutely devoid of merit. Faulty paths are thus to be distinguished from the grossly fallacious (hence useless) claims found in logic texts. Faulty paths are anything but useless. They may be claims an author ultimately judges fallacious or otherwise difficult to accept. But by deciding not to ignore them and, indeed, by weaving them into the larger design of their argument, authors acknowledge their utility. As intellectual touchstones, they function as indispensable points of contrast for the author's constructive line of reasoning, the author's main path. As social touchstones, authors rely on them as demonstrative proof to readers that they have done their homework on the previous literature and so are justified in moving ahead.

As with claims falling along an author's main path, authors rely on stylistic signals to cue readers that they are characterizing some claims as faulty. Many of these cues are the mirror image of the cues used to signal main-path arguments. Rather than writing in direct statement, for example, an author winks at the reader by bracketing claims in quotation marks or by using parody to capture the message of the claim while avoiding its weight:

As Kropotkin cranked through his selected examples, and built up steam for his own preferences, he became more and more convinced that the cooperative style, leading to mutual aid, not only predominated in general but also characterized the most advanced creatures in any group. (18)
Another overt distancing technique is to attack a claim directly, creating an immediate and palpable distance between the author's perspective and the perspective of the claim under discussion:

If Kropotkin drew hope for social reform inappropriately from his concept of nature, other Darwinians in Western Europe had erred just as firmly (and for motives that most of us would now decry) in justifying imperial conquest, racism, and oppression of industrial workers as the harsh outcome of natural selection in the competitive mode. (21)

While these two techniques can tire readers when sustained for more than a paragraph or two, a more subtle distancing allows an author to characterize a claim over an extended stretch of discourse. Gould achieves this effect by taking care to attribute claims to outside sources while keeping his own perspective tightly under wraps. When describing part of Kropotkin's position that he rejects, for example, Gould writes:

As the title suggests, Kropotkin argues, as his cardinal premise, that the struggle for existence usually leads to mutual aid rather than combat as the chief criterion of evolutionary success. Human society must therefore build upon our natural inclinations (not reverse them, as Huxley held) in formulating a moral order that will bring both peace and prosperity to our species. In a series of chapters, Kropotkin tries to illustrate continuity between natural selection for mutual aid among animals and the basis for success in increasingly progressive human social organization. His five sequential chapters address mutual aid among animals, among savages, among barbarians, in the medieval city, and amongst ourselves. (16)

Gould asserts nothing overtly in this characterization that would signal his rejection of it. Still, he signals his distance covertly, by not offering to show empathy with it. Just to illustrate one opportunity for showing empathy from the boundless number Gould has scrupulously avoided, consider the above paragraph with the author attributions removed, the adjective cogently inserted, and the verb form try to dropped out:

As the title cogently suggests, the struggle for existence usually leads to mutual aid rather than combat as the chief criterion of evolutionary success. Human society must therefore build upon our natural inclinations (not reverse them, as Huxley held) in formulating a moral order that will bring both peace and prosperity to our species. In a series of chapters, this book illustrates the continuity between natural selection for mutual aid among animals and the basis for success in increasingly progressive human social organization. Five sequential chapters address mutual aid among animals, among savages, among barbarians, in the medieval city, and amongst ourselves.

Readers of argument, it seems, distinguish main from faulty-path claims by keeping track of how an author distributes empathy as the argument unfolds. As we can see in the contrast between the first and second versions of the above paragraph, the sustained absence of empathy seems a dead give-
away that the claims under discussion lie on faulty paths. Experienced readers, we have found, can pick out the absence of empathy in an author's characterization long before they need to be told in so many words of this distance.

Earlier, we observed that authors of argument seem highly bound to ending with their own perspective, even if that is not where they begin. An apparent exception, we noted, is ironical discourse where the author may choose to be less reliable in announcing and maintaining a perspective. Actually, irony is not an exception at all. Indeed, we need the main path/faulty path distinction to explain how irony works in argument. Enacting a perceptual reversal of empathy, authors who use irony discuss their main path claims by pretending they lie on faulty paths and discuss their faulty path claims by pretending they lie along the main path. In the philosophical and linguistic literature, all attempts to explain irony solely in terms of logic and logical opposition fail (see Kaufer, "Understanding"). Yet, to follow irony we must understand we are hearing a characterization that, at best, doesn't tell the whole story and, at worst, is downright unreliable. Characterizing, and thus importing, external sources into one's own voice is so basic to ironic communication that Sperber and Wilson were led to call irony "echoic mention" (237-42). Those cultivating the "art" of irony elevate characterization to an aesthetic form, moreover, by conveying their "external echoes" through as few overt signals as possible.

As a device of written argument, irony has been linked more closely to the dialogue and satiric essay (Swift's Modest Proposal) than the multi-source scholarly argument. The satiric essay establishes a single faulty path and carefully masquerades it as a main path. By contrast, the multi-source scholarly argument whose origins trace back to the Port Royal Society (see Bazerman, Chapter 5) manages the proliferation of external voices from print only by abstracting them into routine citations. Thus, the sheer number and routinization of external sources in scholarly authoring dilutes the challenge of trying to use ironic artistry to portray them.

Return Paths

Clearly, the main path/faulty path distinction can be useful in keeping track of the multiple perspectives that written argument can incorporate; however, an argument is not a chorus of perspectives. Rather, it is a tightly sequenced set of directions controlled by the author's perspective. Authors decide to include other perspectives for self-serving not democratic reasons. They include other perspectives when these perspectives can make their own more clear or fair-minded or persuasive by way of background or contrast.

Consequently, authors must rely on a mechanism to organize main- and faulty-path claims into a single line of argument. They need an opportunity to summarize for themselves and for readers what lessons they will take with them from the rejected position to incorporate into their own. Metaphori-
cally, this mechanism must help readers see the limitations in faulty-path claims and must help them “return” from these paths, putting them securely back on course. In keeping with this metaphor, we call this mechanism “return paths.” Returning to our original visualization, a line of argument with return paths filled in looks something like that represented in Figure 3. From the writer's point of view, then, return paths can offer new directions to explore. From the reader's point of view, they provide the reader with reasons for exiting a particular faulty path and resuming the main-path discussion.

Figure 3
Return Paths

The means by which authors signal return paths are directly related to how they signal faulty paths. When authors are bald or unsubtle about signalling faulty paths, their reasons for returning from such a path will be overtly cued in their initial characterization of it. For example, by characterizing a position initially as "ill-informed," an author builds the return directly into the characterization. As authors become more subtle or scholarly in their characterization of faulty paths, however, their discourse for characterizing faulty paths and their discourse for returning from them grows increasingly distinct. They devote full sentences and paragraphs to characterizing the path before overtly indicating their reasons for leaving it. They apportion more stage time to faulty claims before extending the hook. By devoting more space to perspectives outside their own, authors can teach readers about these perspectives instead of using them only as foils. Gould's practice falls along these scholarly lines.

An important goal of Gould's argument is to teach us about a position (Kropotkin's) he ultimately rejects. As a result, Gould's essay has few return paths. Indeed, the body of his essay offers a serious characterization of the Russian's position. Only at the very end does Gould issue his return when he explains why we must finally reject Kropotkin's views:
I would fault Kropotkin only in two ways—one technical, the other general. He did commit a common conceptual error in failing to recognize that natural selection is an argument about advantages to individual organisms, however they may struggle. . . .

More generally, I like to apply a somewhat cynical rule of thumb in judging arguments about nature that also have overt social implications: when such claims imbue nature with just those properties that make us feel good or fuel our prejudices, be doubly suspicious. (21)

Summary and Conclusion

Diagrammed in terms of main, faulty, and return paths, Gould's essay appears as we show in Figure 4. We believe this main path/faulty path scheme captures the complex relationships between Gould’s own position and his prior sources in ways the schemes we reviewed earlier could not. First, as we discussed earlier, it suggests a relationship among the points on Gould's main path, indicating the way Gould has built upon his first point about standard evolutionary theory and his second point about “Todes' intriguing thesis” to arrive at his final point that nature provides no ideological guidance.

Second, our scheme suggests a relationship between Gould's main points and the various faulty paths he introduces—showing, for instance, how discussing Tolstoy's misinterpretation of Darwin allows Gould to make his first main point or how discussing Kropotkin's overemphasis on cooperation allows him to make his third. Finally, our scheme suggests something of the metric of values that Gould has used in constructing his argument: Tolstoy's argument has serious faults of misinterpretation; nineteenth-century Dar-
winians are more correct in interpretation but often immoral in their emphasis; and Kropotkin is more moral in his emphasis, but still incorrect in looking to nature for moral insight.

Though we believe our scheme has much to recommend it, we freely acknowledge that much work remains to be done. Of particular interest, both as a research and educational issue, is the value of this scheme in teaching argument in the disciplines. Thus far, we have applied our scheme mainly to popular and public policy argument such as Gould’s essay. But does our scheme fit the framework of academic argument as a whole, needing only to be adjusted in small ways from one author or discipline to the next? Or is the scheme only fruitful for some types of written argument? We have implied in our analysis of Gould that the main path/faulty path scheme can enable insights about an author’s deeper rhetorical strategies. Can we learn more about a particular author’s (such as Gould’s) strategies (and how to teach them) through the formal patterns by which authors distribute main, faulty, and return paths in their argumentative prose?

More importantly, perhaps, can we characterize the social epistemology of whole disciplines or subdisciplines by seeking regularities in the structures of the arguments they sanction? For example, philosophers seem to rely on deeply embedded faulty- and return-path structures, which allow them to carry on extended conversations with previous authors. Social scientists seem much less dialectical in their argument, yielding less space for the discussion of alien perspectives and using citation practices for background and support more than for contrast. The result is the subjective impression that philosophers talk to their sources a great deal while social scientists only talk from them. Can we quantify these subjective impressions and so build a rigorous social-epistemic profile of a discipline by the structures of argument it regularizes?

Finally, there are the fundamental questions of educational policy in the way we link (or have failed to link) argument and advanced composition. We have already hinted that our instruction in written argument can be no more sophisticated than our theories for representing it. Insofar as education is considered a worthy goal, we must take care to evaluate argument schemes for their classroom utility. Education has always been a central motive for our interest in a representational theory (Kaufer, Geisler, and Neuwirth). A significant obstacle is that the dominant pedagogical paradigms for argument have been rooted in decision-making schemes (is this claim valid and credible?) more than schemes emphasizing interpretive reading and writing. As soon as we accept the framework of formal logic and even some of the more rhetorically-biased logics of decision, we enter domains already well-stocked by philosophers and philosophically-minded rhetoricians. We teach our students how to ask the question, “Is it warranted and for whom?” without motivating them also to ask, “How might I follow an argument from sources and how might I design one?”
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We certainly do not mean to disparage schemes that focus on argument evaluation and evidence, nor do we suggest they are off the mark relative to the purposes for which they are best designed. Clearly, any attempt to teach the reading and writing of argument can’t avoid the matter of assessing the support offered. It’s rather a question of balance. Too often, teachers of advanced composition find themselves with an abundance of materials on assessing logical and rhetorical validity but left on their own to plan meaningful writing assignments around them. The recommendation “to teach argument” too often gets translated into a directive to impose a moratorium on open-ended reading and writing. We hope this paper has shed some light on why this tension exists between argument theory and advanced composition and why it is avoidable.

Works Cited


Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition

Linda Brodkey, Marilyn Cooper, Jim Corder, Peter Elbow, Jeanne Fahnestock, Michael Halloran, Anne Herrington, Susan Jarratt, Debra Journet, Richard Larson, Carolyn Miller, James J. Murphy, and John Schilb will be among the featured speakers at the Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition next July 10-13 in State College, Pennsylvania.

Persons interested in participating are invited to present papers, demonstrations, or workshops on topics related to rhetoric or the teaching of writing: on composition, rhetorical history and theory, basic writing, technical and business communication, advanced composition, writing across the curriculum, and so on. One-page proposals will be accepted through April 2, 1991.

To submit a proposal, volunteer to chair a session, or learn more about the conference, write to John Harwood, Department of English, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802 (BITNET: JHT at PSUVM).