cultural studies need to be created. Furthermore, in the field of composition, we should change the practice of only hiring "administrating" compositionists in tenure-track lines by employing theorists and cultural studies specialists dedicated to the teaching of writing. For this to work, deans and chairs have to realize that composition is a serious intellectual pursuit worthy of full-time status and rewards for research. By defending the intellectual content of composition, we can work against the myth that writing courses are empty and universal. In other terms, we can fight against the abstract universal negativity that often circulates in postmodern theory and late capitalism by affirming an academic *mythos* (Rickert's term) linking theory to collective social action.

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**Conflict in Concert: Fighting Hannah Arendt’s Good Fight**

James Crosswhite

How to make a fight a good one? How to make conflict cooperative? How to struggle against each other for a common good? What better questions could confront the rhetorician? In "Fighting Without Hatred: Hannah Arendt's Agonistic Rhetoric," Patricia Roberts-Miller argues that "ago-
nal" and not collaborative rhetoric "is the best discourse for a diverse and inclusive public sphere," and so, we should all give a greater place to agonistic rhetoric, even to the point of honoring and furthering the "polemical agonism" favored by Arendt.

The argument here is so powerful and timely and important that part of any appropriate response is simply to amplify it as best one can. However, there are also plenty of formal ironies in Roberts-Miller's arguments, and it would be remiss of me not to point them out. There are also some interesting reversals, and I will remark on those, too. Finally, since I am in most ways persuaded by Roberts-Miller's arguments, it would be inconsistent of me to go down without a fight, and so I will also fight back.

Roberts-Miller's arguments are structured around several conceptual pairs, the first of which is between rhetoric as simply being agonistic and rhetoric as being either agonistic or collaborative. This distinction is itself the first jab Roberts-Miller lands since we have in the agonistic corner Walter Ong, James Kastely, Thomas Sloane, and "arguably," Kenneth Burke (one can almost imagine him standing so arguably there), and in the collaborative corner unnamed adherents of a "more popular approach." Whenever a scholar opposes serious scholarship to "a more popular approach," and you are not in a Cultural Studies Program, you know that some kind of punch has been landed for serious scholarship.

However, the mention of this first pair is only a set-up for the closer analysis of the second: the posited opposition between agonistic and collaborative rhetoric. The creation of this pair is not only a kind of "fall" from the original unity of the idea of agonistic rhetoric, but it is also a diminution of the value of the agon and an exaggeration of the value of niceness. Roberts-Miller cites John Gage's observation that as soon as someone sets up this dichotomy, one knows that the collaborative is being valorized. Roberts-Miller's task is to relieve the pair of this hierarchicalizing power.

She has several very general formal moves available as she works with this pair, and it is worth watching her thinking play itself out at this formal level because part of having a good fight is knowing the available moves: (1) she can attack the distinction itself and argue for a return to the undifferentiated version of rhetoric; this is in fact the direction of her first jab, and it is a jab she uses occasionally throughout her essay; (2) she can propose a different distinction, one that solves the problems in a different way and that helps to create arguments for the value of agonistic rhetoric; she also uses this strategy, but it creates its own set of new difficulties; (3)
she can accept the distinction but use it in arguments that reverse the value hierarchy favored by the creators of the distinction; most of her energies are in fact focused in this direction, and this strategy seems to be executed at the lowest cost; (4) she can describe the interactions between the two terms in a way that diminishes the value of collaborative rhetoric and amplifies the value of agonistic rhetoric; (5) she can apply the distinction in new ways to new situations (say, to criminal trials) that would highlight the weaknesses of collaborative rhetoric and show the value of adversarial reasoning; her use of Hannah Arendt and the consequent appearance of political contexts of argumentation accomplish this to some degree; (6) she can discover instabilities in the notion of the collaborative and uncover a new pair inside of that concept that allows her to recover the agonistic in the collaborative; however, her polemical bent takes over here—instead of taking on the notion of the collaborative, she takes on the notion of the agonistic and finds a new pair lurking in it, one that both carries the true agonistic flag and one that also has reached reconciliations with the nicer side.

Like any good fighter, Roberts-Miller takes advantage of all these available moves, combining and feigning and repeating them in artful ways. I can focus on only a few of these here, and then make use of a few myself without comment. *Caveat lector*; you are also in the fight, or you should be.

Early in her essay, and again at the end, Roberts-Miller shakes hands with her opponent and acknowledges that there is a legitimate grievance against agonistic rhetoric. The basic problem with valuing agonistic rhetoric is that one seems at the same time to be promoting mere wrangling. The opponents of agonistic rhetoric have opposed it on these grounds. One needs a way to distinguish between agonistic rhetoric that is merely succeed-at-all-costs-and-never-give-in combat and agonistic rhetoric that uses competition and struggle to accomplish something greater than simple conquest. She is not sure that she has a satisfying way of addressing this problem, but she cites a passage from John Locke in which the essence of wrangling is that the wranglers are incapable of changing their minds, of being convinced by opposing arguments. Later in her essay, in her gloss on a passage from Arendt, she develops this important feature of agonistic discourse: “It is not asymmetric manipulation of others . . . it must be a world into which one enters and by which one can be changed” (593). This is a familiar condition by which argumentation theorists attempt to delineate just what argumentation is. If the interlocutors are not willing to change their minds, then they are not
engaged in argumentation. Near the end of her article, she regrets that Arendt did not do more to distinguish polemical agonism from wrangling, and then she drops the discussion.

It would of course be very interesting to hear more about this. The agonistic/collaborative distinction is made in large part, according to Roberts-Miller herself, because one cannot distinguish the valuable kind of rhetoric from the destructive kind. If neither Arendt nor Roberts-Miller can address this, then something is seriously amiss. At this point, it is just impossible not to regret that the last half-century’s resurgence of argumentation theory is not more broadly acknowledged by those who make a profession of rhetoric, writing, and literacy. Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca labor carefully in *The New Rhetoric* to describe what makes possible the “contact of minds” that is a condition for the possibility of genuine argumentation. Franz van Eemeren and the late Rob Grootendorst worked for years on their “pragma-dialectical” rules for argumentative discourse. And more recently, in *The New Dialectic*, Douglas Walton has systematized his thinking on the rules for argumentative dialogues and distinguished the rules for eristic dialogues from the rules for inquiry dialogues, deliberative dialogues, and other kinds of argumentative discourse. It would be interesting to know whether Roberts-Miller would find in this work a way to elaborate the concept of polemical agonism and save it from its indistinguishability from wrangling.

However the threat of agonism’s logical indistinguishability from wrangling is only part of the problem. There is also a psychological dimension to the objection to agonistic argumentation. Some people are just psychologically defeated by it. Their experience— in childhood, in a bad marriage, in the course of life in general, or even in court and with lawyers, and perhaps in education—is to have been outdone by argumentation. It has not been a way for them to gain a hearing, or a way to negotiate, or a way to resolve conflict, or a way to learn, or a way to gain self-knowledge. They have succumbed to the threat that Socrates feared for his own interlocutors—misology, the hatred of arguments— because of the experience of being constantly defeated by them and by those who wield them with virtuosity. This is not a problem that can be directly addressed by theorizing and argumentation, although the theory of argumentation is quite an important part of it. It requires rather a practical kind of wisdom and virtuous action. When Socrates breaks off the argument with young Theaetetus in Plato’s dialogue of that name, it is because he understands Theaetetus and his condition, the stage of his
formation, and the threat of misology, and because he has the virtue to act on the younger man's behalf, to keep a space open for his individual development. One of the less noted objections to agonistic rhetoric is that it damages those who are defeated by it, that it creates an association between reason and failure, reason and psychological pain. It would be interesting to hear Roberts-Miller address this objection. What would it take not only to theorize a logical distinction between agonistic rhetoric and wrangling but also to make use of the distinction in our practice and teaching?

The central move in Roberts-Miller's deployment of Arendt's thinking is to accept the distinction between agonistic and collaborative rhetoric but to present arguments that reverse the value hierarchy that the split sets up: to replace "much of our dislike of conflict with a dislike of consensus." Here she gives us Arendt at her most Heideggerian. Human beings are beset by a powerful drift toward conformity that is an evasion of individual responsibility. This drift is not simply a superficial, external conformity but a deep one in which our thinking becomes the thinking of no one in particular and in which our individual identities meld in an anonymous social self. Ironically, this conformity is so deep that we can be most social even while most isolated; in fact, conformity depends in part on a certain kind of isolation, an unwillingness to express our disagreements and test them by arguments in some public way. Instead, one's social and institutional identities pretty much determine how one should think and act on almost all occasions. This conformist sociality is the absolutization of bureaucracy and the apotheosis of collaborationism. In Arendt's and Roberts-Miller's hands, the idea of the collaborative takes on all the resonance the word had when it was used of those who capitulated to the Nazis. One can almost see and hear scenes from The Sorrow and the Pity as one ponders these Arendtian ideas. And, of course, Arendt's prime exhibit of "collaborative man" is the desk-murderer Adolph Eichmann, the perfect administrator who, even after recognizing his complicity in the murder of millions, could understand his guilt only as the guilt of obedience to his superiors, the guilt of doing his official duties. Eichmann is the thoroughly historicist, perfectly formed social constructionist. To the challenge that he should have spoken out against what was going on, he replied: "Under the circumstances then prevailing such an attitude was not possible. Nor did anyone behave in this fashion. From my experience I know that the possibility, which was alleged only after the War, of opposing orders is a self-protective fairy tale." Arendt's argument depends on Eichmann's
words never losing their power to chill us. And so Roberts-Miller looks to Arendt for help in “replacing our mistrust of conflict with a mistrust of consensus.”

What Eichmann and collaborationism both lack is a capacity for being hospitable to a conflict of ideas. True individuality (and not the passive isolation of the “personal”; even Eichmann was not “personally” in favor of the persecution of the Jews) requires active political interaction that involves conflict and competition and the struggle and testing of competing perspectives in argumentation. True individuality requires risk—the exposure of our individual thoughts to the sometimes painful experience of their public examination. This is the heroism of thinking. One always risks losing and having to change. However, as Stanley Cavell would point out, this is also the joy and adventure of individuality: to change, to imagine oneself as on some kind of path, to think of change as (sometimes painful) transformation. This conflict, says Roberts-Miller, need not be forced. It is the form taken by open acknowledgment of difference. We find identities in the course of these conflicts; we set out on paths toward ourselves. And this can all take place only when there is some kind of social space for it and when there are individuals capable of it. And so, says Roberts-Miller, we should trust collaborationism less and look to the agonism that allows for individuality and openness to difference.

In some ways, I am perhaps the worst person to comment on this argument because I so wholeheartedly endorse it and because my own interest is in amplifying and promoting it. It is hard to think of what major shift in rhetoric, writing, and literacy studies would be more salutary than the one Roberts-Miller is leading us toward here. However, for just this reason I find her qualifications and reservations about this project almost incomprehensible. A primary Roberts-Miller fret is that this ideal of agonistic rhetoric is somehow “elitist.” In the context of this doubt, she describes agonism as requiring that one “simultaneously trust and doubt one’s perceptions, rely on one’s own judgments and consider the judgments of others, think for oneself and imagine how others think” (597). Now, since she is promoting a greater mistrust of collaborationism and a greater trust of the agonistic, it is hard to see how this in itself might be “elitist.” Nowhere is a demonstrated capacity for agonistic rhetoric represented as a qualification for political participation or social privilege. Why should the mere argument that agonistic rhetoric has important social, political, and individual value be suspected of furthering some kind of elitism? If there is a kind of discourse that undermines the
thoughtless intellectual and practical conformity on which totalitarianisms of all kinds depend, and if this kind of discourse develops human individuality and allows for the expression of the differences on which the idea of a free society depends, then its value goes way beyond the interests of some elite faction.

Part of Roberts-Miller’s discussion suggests that perhaps not everyone can engage in Arendtian “thought” of this kind, that the ideal is somehow too high. However, it is difficult to see how this counts against the ideal. The ideal of informed voters going through careful deliberations about social and political goods when they vote is also an “elitist” ideal if elitism simply means that not all voters are capable of this. Many of the most worthwhile social ideals for which human beings strive—tolerance, freedom, justice—are beyond the current capabilities of many people, even the people that are striving for them. This does not mean that the ideal cannot orient their thinking and their action or their work on law and policy—or their teaching and writing.

Part of this vague notion that agonistic rhetoric is somehow elitist rests on a reified and destructively essentialist idea of what human beings are capable of. To say that agonistic rhetoric is not a kind of thought in which everyone can engage is to try to confine human beings to a current historical situation and educational system that are not the results but the causes of this purported incapacity. If agonistic rhetoric is really what Roberts-Miller says it is, then the point would seem to be to change our educational practices and work tirelessly to amplify the attractiveness of agonistic rhetoric in all the spheres where it might have some effect.

If there are those who are incapable of both thinking for themselves and imagining how others think, incapable of the internal dialogue of reason, incapable of the transformation that occurs when we risk our perspectives in the attempt to understand the perspectives of others (and, as Gadamer says, simply to understand is to be transformed and partly convinced), then what is education for but to develop the capacity for this? I take it that someone who sees the truth in Arendt’s description of thoughtlessness will not be involved in education that is simply aimed toward producing efficient laborers who will fill the slots that the reigning bureaucracies have identified as needing to be filled (see Gadamer 379, 567).

Roberts-Miller cites a telling passage from Arendt: “As a living experience, thought has always been assumed, perhaps wrongly, to be known only to the few” (597). First, we must accentuate the “perhaps wrongly!” It is not presumptuous to believe that people everywhere have struggled to develop Arendtian “thinking,” and that they have struggled,
too, to participate in agonistic rhetoric, and that where they have failed to do so, it is because they were held back, either materially or socially, by design or by misfortune. However, this passage is also reminiscent of the Kantian ideas of freedom and morality. Even though we have no sense experience of freedom, even though it is an idea of "reason" alone, and so according to Kant should not be a fact, he still regards freedom as a fact because it is proved by morality itself. And even if no one has ever acted morally, freely, and Kant at one point openly doubts whether anyone ever has, it would still be a fact because freedom is necessary for morality, and to deny it altogether is to deny what moral experience we do have.

The tradition of critical theory that follows from Kant, the tradition in which Arendt herself partly stands, makes a great deal of these kinds of ideas. Herbert Marcuse sometimes calls them "utopian," but he does this in the context of a rehabilitation of utopian thinking. In his view, whether utopian ideals are realizable or not, they still provide a critical standard by which we can measure our current social condition and the direction in which our political programs are taking us. They provide a measure. They are partly constitutive of our thought and action, which would be very different without them. Jürgen Habermas uses the idea of an ideal speech situation in much the same way. He knows that this idea is "counterfactual," that there has never in reality been such a situation. However, if it is an illusion, it is a "constitutive illusion" that gives us a more complete understanding of our actual situation by providing a measure, for insofar as our actual communicative situations fail to realize this ideal, they are potentially criticizable. It is finally up to actual interlocutors to decide how much falling short is tolerable in each situation.

Agonistic rhetoric and Arendtian thought are themselves ideas of this sort, capable of lighting up a direction for educational efforts and providing a measure for the actual thinking and communication we are attempting to understand and evaluate. They are not the only such ideas, but as Roberts-Miller argues, they are significant ones, and, I would add, significantly undervalued just now, when cultural and political and economic conflicts are too easily conceptualized—on all sides—on the model of a clash of civilizations which only violence can adequately address. As Arendt wrote: "We do not know where... developments will lead us, but we know, or should know, that every decrease in power is an open invitation to violence" (87). Power, for Arendt, is the ability to act in concert, and the agonistic rhetoric of the public sphere is the ability to have conflict-in-concert.
The issue is not elitism. The issue on an educational level is how to address the situation of those who have not yet developed their capacity for this kind of thinking and argumentation—and I don’t believe that there is a general educational-bureaucratic solution or a scientific pedagogy that will come to the rescue here. I am much more inclined to the Socratic view that you have to know the psyche with which you are dealing. Because individuals vary so greatly in their psychological formation around experiences of argumentative discourse, and because the rhetorical psyche also fractures along all the usual multiple and unsystematic lines of race, gender, and so on, this will always be a matter that individual teachers must address with individuals and classes as best they can—and against whatever educational-bureaucratic power has installed itself and its general “solutions” at the time. The issue on a political level is always to fight to keep this public sphere open. The courage and vigilance required here have not been exaggerated.

There are a few other remaining challenges in Roberts-Miller’s argument. In her own polemical agonism, she exaggerates the distinction between the agonistic and the collaborative. Anyone who thinks through the relation between agonistic and collaborative rhetoric more thoroughly will find a great deal of the collaborative in the agonistic and the agonistic in the collaborative—enough, perhaps, to begin to destabilize the distinction itself. In fact, agonistic rhetoric may require a depth of cooperation and mutual practical respect that collaborative rhetoric does not. After all, the practical respect required to go on discoursing with someone who does not agree with you requires a more profound moral relation than that required to go on speaking with someone with whom you are reaching an agreement. There are many other deep interactions and inter-identities to be explored in these concepts. Any program that would follow from Roberts-Miller’s arguments would have to be aware of these to be practicable at anything more than an abstract level.

In fact, it is here that we encounter another of the formal ironies in Roberts-Miller’s approach. At her most polemical moment, when she begins the hyperdistinguishing that finds a new binary in agonistic rhetoric itself, she at the same time begins to reconcile the social and the individual, the collaborative and the agonistic. The new pair is persuasive agonism (associated with John Gage) and polemical agonism (associated with Hannah Arendt). Persuasive agonism is aimed at gaining the agreement of others and so the criterion of its success is persuasion. Polemical agonism is aimed partly at the invention and clarification of the ideas themselves, as well as at their public testing and further develop-
ment. The criterion of success is the quality of the subsequent controversy. Although this distinction doesn’t quite capture the Gagean position (since Gage describes the argumentation he teaches as a way of discovering the best grounds for a position), it does allow Roberts-Miller a very interesting and Quintilianesque move that tells us how speaking well is different from speaking persuasively, for persuasion is not the ultimate goal. Polemical agonism is not the asymmetric work of a single rhetor bent on overpowering an interlocutor in a competition. Instead, its success lies in the continuing agreement of the conflicting parties to persevere in argumentation, to go on testing ideas together. This new distinction allows Roberts-Miller to find in polemical agonism a deeper kind of “collaboration,” a conflict-in-concert. Polemical agonism is not the simple resolution of conflict in agreement but the continuation of conflict in a creative and valuable way, a way of having conflict that requires deep kinds of cooperation.

Now, one could try to undermine this new pair in the usual ways. For example, it is difficult to imagine how polemical agonism would take place unless it somehow integrated persuasive agonism. Without the provisional goal of persuasion, it is hard to see how polemical agonism could achieve its aim of sustaining a high quality of public controversy. The athletic analogy comes to mind here. We play to win because that is how the best playing gets accomplished. And in the end this is the position Roberts-Miller herself takes when she writes that Arendtian rhetoric leads not to ultimate Truth but to decisions, for decisions come only when we do come to agreement, only when an argument does persuade—and yet, as Roberts-Miller also points out, these decisions must be reconsidered later, and so a continuing controversy must be possible. This is certainly an integrating of the polemical and the persuasive.

Perhaps the most striking fact about Roberts-Miller’s overall argument is not just that it is so timely and appropriate but that it implicitly forecasts a reconvention of rhetoric itself. I have already mentioned that argumentation studies have for the last half-century labored to develop theories of argumentation that would capture much of what Roberts-Miller needs to flesh out this case for agonistic rhetoric and to distinguish it from wrangling. However, this work is still too little known among rhetoricians and receives little detailed attention in their literature. Yet, it represents perhaps the greatest development of rhetoric in our lifetimes. And then, from another side, there has been a complicated and troubling discussion of the relations among language, discourse, power, and violence that would intensify and deepen this worry that Roberts-Miller
has about domination and wrangling. From Walter Benjamin through Arendt's own important elaboration of the distinction between power and violence, through the conversation between Levinas and Derrida on metaphysics and violence, to Foucault's back and forth on power and violence, all the way to two recent books on just this issue, Beatrice Hanssen's *Critique of Violence* and Hent De Vries's *Religion and Violence*—both of which try to organize and sustain the controversy on exactly the issue of the difference between debate and discussion, on the one hand, and domination and violence and entrenched antagonisms on the other—the ideal of something like an agonistic rhetoric has been at stake. At the unstable center of this highly developed controversy, the difference and identity of violence and power hold sway. Arendt had a big stake in this, and insisted on the difference between power and violence and on a form of power in which people could act in concert—a form of power not at all unrelated to the way polemical agonism helps to sustain societies in which power keeps violence at bay. When Foucault was confronted with Arendt's idea, he of course could not consent to this valorizing even of the provisional consensus that comes out of polemical agonism because Foucault had great difficulty acknowledging that power might not involve domination. His finessing of the issue was to say that "perhaps one must not be for consensuality, but one must be against nonconsensuality" (379). As Derrida finesses the same issue, one can hope to avoid only "the worst violence" and hope "to choose the lesser violence within an *economy of violence*" (152, 313n.).

Is it utopian to imagine that Roberts-Miller's call for a new trust of conflict, a call for an integration of Arendt's "thought" into rhetorical studies, might be a forecast of a more general call to reconvene rhetoric itself, to call back argumentation studies and the now decades-long conflicts in critical theory and post-structuralism into the history of rhetoric, where they belong?

There are powerful arguments to be made on behalf of the general approach of Hannah Arendt to show how discourse—and argumentation in particular—can be a way of having conflict, conflict that might otherwise be carried out in actual violence or some other kind of overt domination. And not only are there powerful arguments to be made, but there are powerful attractions in the kind of sociality opened up by those discursive practices, many of them described in a compelling way by Roberts-Miller. One can always take the critical position and search out the domination lurking in every concrete experience of peace and freedom, but this is only natural. Real wisdom lies in knowing when and
where to do this. In the end, thinking all of this through will mean seeing how agonism thought through becomes acting-in-concert and how the critique of domination thought through becomes, as Foucault shows in his refusal of both polemics and of consensus, a way of keeping the fight going. There is reason to believe that the recent popular favoring of collaboration is a kind of practical acting-out of a fear of domination, but a discourse founded in a vision that sees only domination in agonistic rhetoric and so has to seclude itself in a carefully controlled process of de-individualization so only the collaborative can dominate will not easily survive this thinking-through. Whether and how an agonism motivated by the ideals so well expressed by Patricia Roberts-Miller in her essay will itself survive a careful thinking-through remains to be seen. But she has my fighting gratitude for making such a thought-provoking case.

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The Age of Irony?

Susan Searls Giroux

I recall surfing the Web the morning after the fateful midterm elections of November 2002, searching for a handle on what seemed to me a deeply troubling outcome in every respect. I felt I understood the consequences all too well; I was stuck on Why. Then I caught a glimpse of the headline that proclaimed: "The Chickens Have Elected Colonel Sanders." Clever, I thought, but churlish. A cynical condemnation of both the government and the people. It's hard to laugh at the need for faith and conviction in times of such gross uncertainty and fear, no matter how dubious the results seem. But it's easy to dehumanize. Certainly the election results—and public reaction to mainstream national politics in general—demand