Robert Scott (1967) proposed that rhetoric is epistemic—that it is the foundation—rather than something applied after the fact, like a fresh coat of paint. The genealogy here begins with Stephen Toulmin’s groundbreaking _The Uses of Argument_ (1958), outlining a method of argument (i.e., making a case). Any claim (i.e., logical conclusion) we make about grounds (i.e., something that happened) rests on warrants (i.e., our assumptions and background knowledge). Wayne Brockridge and Douglas Ehninger (1963) followed with work that named Toulmin’s model a contemporary methodology that disrupts traditional logic. Scott follows by showing the ways that rhetorical inquiry, with attention to ethics, logic, and an understanding of audience, has always been and might continue to be how we really operate in the world.

Scott’s essay, in the truest sense of the word (i.e., an exploration or weighing, assaying), is mostly abstract except for a political example that none of us were alive for. In this activity, your team will be in charge of a passage from the article. Your job first is to come to terms and make sense of the passage. What does it mean? What distinctions is Scott making? What contemporary examples might you consider for some of the passages?

You will have 5-10 minutes in your team to become experts. Feel free to use other parts of the article to clarify, phone a friend, or search the internet. After that time, we will have a discussion, and you are the discussion leaders for your passage, but also experts on the topics surrounding the passage.

**Ravenclaw**

Were all men able as some men are to reason soundly from true premises, then rhetoric would be superfluous...

Accepting the notion that truth exists, may be known, and communicated leads logically to the position that there should be only two modes of discourse: a neutral presenting of data among equals and a persuasive leading of inferiors by the capable. The attitude with which this position may be espoused can vary from benevolent to cynical, but it is certainly undemocratic. Still the contemporary rhetorician is prone to accept the assumption, to say, in effect, "My art is simply one which is useful in making the truth effective in practical affairs;' scarcely conscious of the irony inherent in his statement. (p. 308)

**Slytherin**

By "truth" one may mean some set of generally accepted social norms, experience, or even matters of faith as reference points in working out the contingencies in which men find themselves. In such cases, the word might be better avoided, for in it the breath of the fanatic hangs threatening to transmute the term to one of crushing certainty. If truth is somehow both prior and substantial, then problems need not be worked out but only classified and disposed of. Unwittingly, one may commit himself to a rhetoric which tolerates only equals, that is, those who understand his "truths" and consequently the conclusions drawn from them; such a rhetoric approaches those who are not able to take its "truths" at face value as inferiors to be treated as such. (pp. 311-312)

**Durmstrang**

When Ehninger and Brockriede describe debate as cooperative critical inquiry, they may be interpreted as taking a radical departure from the typical point of view. If debate is critical inquiry, then it is not simply an effort to make a preconceived position effective. It would be absurd for anyone who begins with the attitude that he possesses truth, in the sense in which I began this essay, to embark on any genuine enterprise of cooperative critical inquiry. Of course these statements do not mean that Ehninger and Brockriede reject investigation before speaking or the use by speakers of experience, references to social norms, or even to articles of faith. What these statements do suggest is that truth is not prior and immutable but is contingent. Insofar as we can say that there is truth in human affairs it is in time; it can be the result of a process of interaction at a given moment. Thus, rhetoric may be viewed not as a matter of giving effectiveness to truth but of creating truth. (pp. 312-313)
Beauxbaton

Ehninger and Brockriede’s debate-as-cooperative-critical-inquiry is one vantage point from which to see rhetoric as epistemic. This notion is most coherent when it is taken as normative rather than as descriptive. When so taken, it calls for a commitment to a standard and several matters become clear: one may be committed and, being human, fall short of the standard; further, one may make use of the attributes associated with the standard without at all being committed to it. (p. 313)

Death Eaters

The direction of analysis, from Toulmin through Ehninger and Brockriede, leads to the conclusion that there is no possibility in matters relevant to human interaction to determine truth in any a priori way, that truth can arise only from cooperative critical inquiry. Men may have recourse to some universal ideas in which they are willing to affirm their faith, but these must enter into the contingencies of time and place and will not give rise to products which are certain. This analysis has led toward the tragic view of life: man who desires certainty understands that he cannot be certain and, moreover, that he must act in dissonant circumstances. One of the great symbols of man, Faust, sits in his chamber at the point of suicide early in Goethe’s drama. He is vastly learned in all four of the great professions, but he is certain only that he cannot. (p. 314)

Ministry of Magic

In human affairs, ours is a world of conflicting claims. Not only may one person contradict another, but a single person may find himself called upon to believe or act when his knowledge gives rise to directives which are dissonant. He may be caught, for example, in a conflict of duty toward his family and his country. As a father, he may reason that he ought keep a well-paying job to provide for the material necessities of his children and by his presence help guide them during their immaturity. As a citizen, he may reason that he is obligated to lower his income and remove his presence from his home to serve in the armed forces. He may decide that his duty to country must take precedence and even that in following the demands of that duty he will in many ways serve his family, but although he is able to make such a decision, the rightness of the decision does not obviate the responsibilities generated by the rejected claim. (p. 315)

Hufflepuff

The attractiveness of the notion that first one must know the truth and that persuasion at its best is simply making the truth effective rests in large part on man’s desire to be ethical. “How can I assure myself that my actions are good?” is the question with which he nags himself. The question is a good one. The position I have argued is not one that sets it aside but one that holds that the question cannot be answered in the abstract and that whatever principles one holds are only guides in acting consistently with moral demands...

The point of view that holds that man cannot be certain but must act in the face of uncertainty to create situational truth entails three ethical guidelines: toleration, will, and responsibility (p. 316).

Gryffindor

Man must consider truth not as something fixed and final but as something to be created moment by moment in the circumstances in which he finds himself and with which he must cope. Man may plot his course by fixed stars but he does not possess those stars; he only proceeds, more or less effectively, on his course. Furthermore, man has learned that his stars are fixed only in a relative sense. (p. 318)