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Else Barth (1928–2015)

Erik C. W. Krabbe¹

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Else Margarete Barth, a Norwegian and Dutch philosopher and logician, was born in Strinda (now part of Trondheim) on August 3, 1928; she died in Groningen on January 6, 2015. Else Barth was an exceptionally forceful contributor to the development of argumentation theory in the Netherlands and beyond, both through her own contributions and by the way she inspired others to do research in this area and helped to build up a community of researchers. Logic she took very seriously as a potential instrument for understanding and improving our often sloppy or flawed ways of reasoning and arguing. However, for this potential to actualize, logical theorizing could not remain restricted to a priori investigations of logical systems but had to be pursued into a more dialectical, pragmatical, and empirical direction. Her research, which was more encompassing than just argumentation studies, contributed to this reorientation in various ways.

Else Barth studied mathematics, physics, psychology, and philosophy in Trondheim (with Haakon Wergeland), Oslo (with Arne Næss), and Amsterdam (with Evert Willem Beth and Arend Heyting). In Norway she took a degree in psychology (*embetseksam* 1958). In January 1959 she moved definitively to the Netherlands, where she was, for some years, a teacher of mathematics at the *Spinoza Lyceum* (a secondary school) and a research assistant at the University of Amsterdam while studying logic and philosophy. In 1962 she took a master's degree in the faculty of mathematics and science (*cum laude*). From 1962 until 1971 she taught logic and philosophy as an assistant professor at the same University. In 1971, she earned a doctorate (*cum laude*), supervised by Gabriel R. F. M. Nuchelmans at Leiden University, by submitting a voluminous dissertation on the

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logic of the articles. This dissertation, which was written in Dutch, was later expanded and translated into English to appear as: *The Logic of the Articles in Traditional Philosophy: A Contribution to the Study of Conceptual Structures* (Reidel 1974). The same year, 1971, and even before the dissertation had been defended, she was appointed at the University of Utrecht as a junior full professor (*lector*) on a chair for logic including the history of logic and philosophy of logic in relation to philosophy in general. Her inaugural address [*Evaluaties* (Evaluations) (1972)] contained her dual approach to logical validity in which she distinguished between objective (problem-solving) and intersubjective (conventional) validity. From 1977 until 1993, she held the chair of analytic philosophy (later expanded to include logic) at the University of Groningen. She was a member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) and of The Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters (DNVA). In 1993, the year of her retirement, she received a knighthood in the Order of the Dutch Lion. Furthermore, a Festschrift in her honor, prepared by her colleagues, was presented to her as a surprise when she attended an informal logic gathering at the University of Windsor (E. C.W. Krabbe, R. Dalitz & P. Smit (Eds.), *Empirical Logic and Public Debate*, Rodopi, 1993).

As an author, Else Barth started out in the early nineteen-sixties with technical papers on logical subjects such as semantic tableaux and natural deduction. Soon she also began to publish papers on different philosophical subjects, both in scholarly journals and in magazines meant to reach a non-professional but educated readership. Among her early papers were *De algemene hond en het niets* [The General Dog and Nothingness] (1968), *Maxi-niet en mini-niet* [Maxi-not and Mini-not] (1970), and *Enten-eller: De logica van licht en donker* [Either-or: The Logic of Light and Darkness] (1970). She published mostly in Dutch, Norwegian or English but sometimes in French or German. Her areas of interest included (1) the genealogy of conceptual structures and the foundations of philosophical and other systems of thought, (2) theory of argumentation, dialogue logic, and empirical logic, (3) intensional logic and linguistics, and (4) sexism and anti-sexism. These four areas must be seen as related and overlapping. In each of them she not only published a number of papers but also at least one monograph. Thus, in the area of conceptual structures, she contributed, besides many papers, not only her dissertation on the logic of the articles but also a book about the conceptual structures lying behind the ways of thinking of the Norwegian Nazi Vidkun Quisling (*A Nazi Interior: Quisling's Hidden Philosophy*, Peter Lang, 2003). In the area of theory of argumentation, she emphasized the importance of the systems of dialogical logic that had been put forward by Paul Lorenzen. In a monograph, she showed how the rules of these logics could be philosophically defended as being suitable for the resolution of conflicts of opinion (E. M. Barth & E. C. W. Krabbe, *From Axiom to Dialogue: A Philosophical Study of Logics and Argumentation*, Walter de Gruyter, 1982). In the area of intensional linguistics, she wrote a monograph about the pragmatization of "Montague grammar," i.e. Richard Montague's theory as expounded in "The Proper Treatment of Quantification in Ordinary English" (1973), combining this theory with the semantics of the Prague school of linguistics (E.M. Barth & R. T. P. Wiche, *Problems, Functions and Semantic Roles: A Pragmatists' Analysis of Montague's Theory*, Walter de Gruyter,

1986). In the area of sexism and anti-sexism, she dealt not only with underlying philosophical issues but also with historical facts and developments. She published a bibliography of the contributions of female philosophers through the ages (*Women philosophers: A Bibliography of Books Through 1990*, Philosophical Documentation Center, Bowling Green State University, 1992). In her last book, which appeared only 5 years ago, she and her husband discussed and evaluated contributions of male feminists from about 1500 until 1900 in the Netherlands and Scandinavia (Henk Misset & Else Barth, *Feministische mannen: Nederland in de schaduw van Scandinavië* [Male Feminists: The Netherlands in the Shadow of Scandinavia], Eburon, 2010).

Else Barth was a highly original scholar but has of course been influenced and inspired by many others. Among those that, at an early stage of her career, made an impact on her are, besides the educators already mentioned, Leonard Linsky, L. M. (Bertus) de Rijk, and Johan B. Ubbink. She herself had a great impact on many people. Her well attended classes made an indelible impression on the students, both through their captivating contents and through the spirited way in which they were taught. Advanced students were encouraged to take up research. In 1976 she started the “Ko-Wah-group,” an irregularly convening seminar in argumentation theory for young researchers, which were affiliated with various universities. In their sessions these tyros discussed not only recent publications by others but also their own attempts. The group, which included the future founders of pragma-dialectics, assembled at her house in Amsterdam, but only after having had dinner around the corner at restaurant Ko Wah. She also advanced the field of argumentation studies and empirical logic by organizing conferences. In 1978 she organized, with Jo Martens, the Groningen Conference on the Theory of Argumentation, and in 1990, with Pier Smit, the Colloquium “Logic and Politics” at the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) in Amsterdam.

Else Barth was only shortly survived by her husband, H. A. J. F. (Henk) Misset [formerly, professor of economics at the University of Amsterdam and director of the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIAS)], who died on April 23, 2015.