

Pursuing Reason

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Introduction

Christopher W. Tindale

Pursuing Reason marks the latest collection of essays from a scholar known for thoughtful theoretical treatments of a wide range of problems in informal logic and for practical applications that bring the insights of her research to real world issues. With the re-publication of several papers that deserve wider exposure and the first-time publication of a series of six new essays, this collection uncovers threads of thought that have tracked through much of the author's career.

Trudy Govier is a philosopher who has been involved in the informal logic "movement" almost from the beginning and has contributed pioneering work of wide influence. By her own admission (2018), the shift to studying real arguments expressed in natural language took her by surprise, but she was a quick and enthusiastic adherent. Her early work in the Informal Logic Newsletter (later to become the journal Informal Logic) identified some of the principal issues and concerns that became important threads in the research agenda of the field that emerged at the end of the 70s and into the 80s. And her early books on theory (1987) and practice (1985) developed and applied many of those research questions.

The collection starts with a relatively recent paper that appeared in Informal Logic in 2021 (volume 41 issue 4). "Reflections on Minimal Adversariality" engages a debate that she herself inaugurated in 1999, when she first addressed the concern raised by some feminist scholars that argument was too adversarial, proposing in response a conception of minimal adversariality as a necessary feature of controversies (1999: 247). Various scholars have since weighed in on the central issue of that discussion: how much adversariality is appropriate? Govier modifies some of her

earlier thinking as she reviews the scholarship that her original paper has engendered, offering corrections and challenges where necessary. We are adversarial, she concludes, in providing reasons for some claims and opposing others. This is the normal give and take at the heart of argumentative activity, a heart that centres around a conception of argument as a product, conceiving an argument “with premises and conclusion such that the premises are put forward in an effort to support the conclusion.” This is a conception that has lain at the foundation of all of her work and continues to do so in the debates she enters in *Pursuing Reason*.

The second chapter provides the first of the new papers, “Argument and Explanation: A Pragmatic and Ethical Account.” While new, it is still a paper that develops thinking she has maintained across her scholarship. She offers her own understanding of the relationship between argument (as defined in the previous paper) and explanation, a distinction that confounds both novice and seasoned researcher. In the course of her investigation, she returns to the work of Stephen N. Thomas, one of the early contributors to this issue. The distinction, as she unravels matters, is a complicated affair. She ends with a defence of argument against the negative moral evaluation of Robert Nozick. Arguments may indeed be flawed at times, but we cannot be without them along with the evidence they identify for claims, something explanations fail to provide.

Her disagreement with Nozick (who recommended against arguing) carries over to the next new chapter—“What Should We Argue?” In this chapter she details the many values that derive from argument, which allows her to recognize the underlying considerations of recognition and respect for others that govern good arguing in the appropriate circumstances.

The themes of the early papers in this collection revolve around disagreement and arguing, and Chapter Four carries these themes forward, first with its discussion of “Opposition.” This is another of the papers available here for the first time, although,

again, there are echoes of past concerns and insights. The differences between logical and social opposition are explored in a discussion that builds on (Govier 2009). In that paper she had offered a preliminary account of logical and social opposition and explored ways to connect them. Here, she tackles further the differences between these types of opposition and contradiction and revisits an earlier debate with Ralph Johnson (1998b) over the difficulties of addressing objections to a position.

The subject matter shifts in Chapters Five, Six and Seven to the kinds of discourses that can be judged argumentative and the debate around narrative arguments. Anecdotes are a case in point. How do they work in arguments, and should they? As discussed in Chapter Five, there is an obvious danger of falling in the fallacy of Hasty Generalization. But there are also non-fallacious uses of anecdotes proposed here. An earlier paper (Govier & Ayers 2012), reprinted here as Chapter Six, had explored the way arguments might be conveyed through narratives, particularly parables. But problems in doing so were noted, as was the difficulty of seeing narrative as arguments, considering the propositional conception of argument set out in Chapter One. Throughout the analysis a tension is maintained between the effects a narrative may have (like charm) and logical cogency. This tension is a concern for Govier and her co-author: that audiences may be inappropriately moved by something other than the logic of good reasons. Two things of importance are concluded: (i) that the arguments drawn from the narratives (parables) are rarely cogent, and (ii) that such arguments lack any distinctive narrative form but instead involve analogies or generalizations.

This topic with its attention to narratives and parables is revisited in “Teaching and Learning, Stories and Arguments,” from 2013, this time with a focus on teaching and learning. The paper provides a method for extracting the argumentative nature of some stories, a process that might enhance the study of literature.

“Issues of Logicism and Objectivity,” from *Informal Logic* (2017), comprises Chapter Eight in this collection. The principal focus is Harald Wohlrapp’s theory of argumentation and the criticisms he develops of what he takes to be the principles behind Govier’s approach to conductive arguments. Her response provides her the opportunity to clarify some important and long-standing features of her own theoretical commitments, like defending her ‘product’ approach to argument (the premise/conclusion packages) against what she takes to be a process approach in Wohlrapp, and advancing a related conception of objectivity.

This leads naturally into the discussion of Chapter Nine (“Argument as Product, Argument as Process”), which also explores the product and process distinction, the first of which we associate with a logical perspective on argumentation and the second with a rhetorical approach. The process approach, for example, understands a much broader conception of narrative and narrative argument than she had allowed in the earlier papers of this collection. For Govier, a process conception of argument, dynamic in nature and conveying the lived experience of the participants, is simply too vague when set aside the logical core of the argument-as-product conception. Moreover, such a process view lacks clear criteria for evaluation. Similar deficiencies are found in other versions of the process approach, like that of virtue argumentation.

The final two chapters, Ten and Eleven, revisit what many may judge some of Govier’s most important interventions into the social epistemology of argument. Some years before Miranda Fricker’s work on *Epistemic Injustice* was published (Fricker 2007), Govier had advanced concerns about what she called rhetorical disadvantage (Govier 1993a).¹ Identifying groups whose access to argumentation might be restricted and whose own attempts at arguing is silenced or marginalized allowed her to develop accounts of testimony and credibility. It is these accounts that receive further treatments in the new papers “Considering Credibility” (Chapter Ten) and “The Tu Quoque and Moral Credibility” (Chapter Eleven). Exploring the relevance of identity con-

siderations and lived experience to credibility itself in contexts where one depends on testimony, and addressing the relationship between moral credibility and an arguer's testimony serve to show the ongoing relevance of Govier's work to real world problems in which argumentation is important. In fact, these papers are the fitting conclusion to a set of papers that might be seen as unified by just these kinds of social concerns.

In this respect *Pursuing Reason* perfectly captures of the dual-nature of Govier's work over many decades, seen in the careful theoretical work in informal logic and the more outward looking treatments of her work on trust and on victimhood (2015) and on the truth and reconciliation commission in South Africa. This work is replete with instances of narrative accounts provided as evidence. And, again, the primary source of "proof" considered by this work is testimony, thus bringing the testifier directly into view. Consider the following remark: "Our way of life includes the social practices of asking and telling. These practices presume that we can acquire knowledge from others whom we believe when they respond to our questions. Because knowledge is communicable, and only because it is communicable, we have social practices of asking questions and telling people answers. ...Thus, propositions come to be known because persons are believed" (Govier 1993b: 20). Our way of life also, of course, includes the social practice of giving and receiving reasons in the form of arguments, and here these two practices overlap, or the first becomes a type of the second.

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1988) recognized the fundamental role that argumentation plays in society, and no one reading their multi-volume report could miss this. "Language, discourse and rhetoric does things: it constructs social categories, it gives orders, it persuades us, it justifies, explains, gives reasons, excuses. It constructs reality. It moves certain people against other people," (1998, 5.7.124). Uncontroversially, I think, we can add argumentation to "language, discourse, and rhetoric."

For Govier “Trust is in essence an attitude of positive expectation about other people, a sense that they are basically well intentioned and unlikely to harm us” (1998: 6). And again, “A trustworthy person is one who has both good intentions and reasonable competence” (Ibid).

More significantly, “Our trust is based on our beliefs, and our beliefs are grounded on evidence from experience” (7). While she identifies two forms of trust in her work, social and interpersonal, both of which bear on types of argumentation, it is the former that resonates in the new collection. Social trust relies on evidence from experience, the experience of others, of how they behave, what drives them, and what reasons they give. It requires us to make reasonable judgments about others and evaluate what they say accordingly. Trust is at issue when assessing the gaps in communication; it will often be behind our decision that we have sufficient evidence to make a judgment (or draw a conclusion), and it will be at stake in deciding where the burden of proof resides. But trust, clearly, cannot be extended without some considerable level of understanding about the social contexts in which we interact. That is where the evidence of experience comes to the fore.

Social experience produces knowledge, or at least the prospects of knowledge that can be tested later. And this is where testimony is unavoidable. Testimony has always been an important criterion of evaluation in Govier’s informal logic, and is a concept that unites the two threads of her work, bringing into view both the importance of an argument’s core and who it is that puts it forward.

Informal logic has developed from being not just a pedagogical enterprise with a related body of theoretical insights but also a model of reasoning that engages with the social world and offers itself as an account of social argumentation. In doing so, it must confront what Govier has identified as the underlying challenge of testimony: “to justify relying on what other people have told us, we have to make use of what other people have told us” (2015: 88-9). We must evaluate speakers and not just

speech, arguers beyond their arguments. Or, rather, we cannot separate the two: to evaluate the argument is to take the arguer fully into consideration. In this way, we begin to address what Govier has now identified as the “considerable rhetorical disadvantage” of marginalized groups: that we “fail to grasp that such persons are making assertions at all” (2015: 96). That was a danger ever present in Govier’s earlier work on informal logic, work that cannot be siloed in isolation from the later work on trust and victimhood. That is a danger that she continues to make present and address in her work.

Many of the discussions in this collection are essentially counter-arguments to those who have taken up her concerns and offered some constructive disagreement. In her responses, what becomes apparent is how influential her ideas have been, how crucial they have become to some of the central problems addressed by informal logicians. And those countered here, we might reasonably assume, is just a smattering of the scholars who have enriched their own ideas by reading Govier and entering into dialogue with her work.

- – Christopher W. Tindale

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1.

Reflections on Minimal Adversariality

Abstract: Beginning with my 1999 account in *The Philosophy of Argument*, this essay explores views about adversariality in argument. Although my distinction between minimal and ancillary adversariality is widely accepted, there are flaws in my defense of the claim that all arguments exhibit minimal adversariality and in a lack of sensitivity to aspects of gender and culture. Further discussions of minimal adversariality, including those of Scott Aikin, John Casey, Katharina Stevens and Daniel Cohen, are discussed. The claim that all argument are adversarial in at least a minimal sense is defended due to its connection with arguers' intent to support their conclusions.

Two classic papers raised central questions about adversariality in philosophical discussions and arguments. Janice Moulton (1983) and Maryann Ayim (1988) both noted the harshly critical rhetoric and divisive practices common in professional philosophy, suspecting that their prevalence was an important factor limiting the participation of women. The nature of, and need or lack of need for, adversariality was at that point introduced as a topic for philosophical exploration but received relatively little attention in academic publications.

One exception was Dan Cohen's (1995) paper "Argument is war and war is hell." Cohen noted the prevalence in argument of war metaphors such as defense, tactics, strategy, and victory, calling for the development of alternative metaphors. Another exception was Michael Gilbert's (1995) account of coalescent argument. In his treatment of argument, Gilbert emphasized agreement, not disagreement, urging that communication be understood as situated and that personal considerations matter a great deal when

people offer arguments to each other. He sought to embrace inclusion, agreement, and connectedness when teaching critical reasoning. For Gilbert, the argument as considered by formal and informal logicians, with its premises and conclusion, was the tip of the iceberg; physical and emotional factors, as well as instincts and intuition deserve attention when seeking agreement. Gilbert distinguished logical issues from emotional, visceral, and kisceral (regarding instincts and intuitions) ones. His interest was in how people could come to agree—not on more standard logical issues such as ambiguity, fallacies, background assumptions, or missing premises. Gilbert’s model is interesting regarding conflict resolution, extending more broadly than considerations of informal logic would generally recommend.

Though academic exploration of issues of adversariality was rather slight through the nineties, the tone of philosophical discussions at conferences and meetings did moderate and (whether related to diminished adversariality or not) the participation of women in philosophy increased. In this writer’s experience both shifts were welcome and useful.

In a 1999 book, *The philosophy of argument*, I offered some reflections on controversy and adversariality. These reflections received scant attention until recently, when they have received considerably more. It will be useful to revisit the 1999 account here as an introduction to some later work. I noted that there are “logical gaps between a difference of beliefs and a battle of the wits” (p. 54). You can oppose a claim in the sense of doubting or disputing it without opposing the person who is advancing that claim. Logical aspects of opposite claims are distinct from social aspects regarding opposition to persons. Considering the accounts of Moulton and Ayim, I argued that hostile adversariality could be eliminated from practices of argument without eliminating adversariality altogether. In the essay “Feminists, adversaries, and the integrity of argument,” I placed considerable emphasis on disagreement or doubt in the context of argument but stopped short of stating that they are strictly necessary conditions for its existence. An arguer might express support for a conclusion or claim because he thought the audience disagreed, denying it; or he might think

that some people could doubt it. On the other hand, he might think that the audience had never considered the claim, or he might be exploring how it could be rationally supported and articulate evidence or reasons as part of that exploration. In “The positive power of controversy,” I offered a definition of an adversarial practice as one in which people occupy roles that set them against each other as opponents (p. 242). I maintained that to understand the point of an argument, we have to understand how its conclusion is contested or doubtful, or might seem so. (p. 243) Who would need this argument? Which people differ from the arguer and might disagree with the conclusion or have doubts about it?

One might say that arguing for X is by implication arguing against something else. If this is the case, arguing would be an inherently adversarial practice, one that could lead to the abrasive oppositionality decried by feminist authors such as Moulton and Ayim. Addressing this issue in 1999, I offered an account of minimal adversariality, indicating why it might seem intrinsic to argumentation. (p. 244). Allowing ‘X’ to stand for the conclusion claim, my account went like this:

1. I hold X.
2. I think that X is correct. (Follows from (1))
3. I think that not-X is not correct. (Follows from (2))
4. I think that those who hold not-X are wrong, or are making a mistake. (Follows from (3))
5. Should I need to argue for X, I will thereby be arguing against not-X. (?)
6. Those who hold not-X are, with regard to the correctness of X and my argument for X, my opponents. (?)

We may infer from this model that in arguing for X, one will in the nature of the case have opponents, real or hypothetical. We can note here—as critics (Rooney 2003) have observed—that the account questions inferences from (4) to (5) and from (5) to (6). In fact, I could have raised questions earlier—from (3) to (4),

certainly, and even from (2) to (3). In a context where an argument is offered to explore how a claim or theory *might be justified*, one might even question the starting point, (1), as was later noted by Catherine Hundleby (2013). The model is flawed. The insight underlying it is that if one is saying something, there will be claims logically incompatible with what one is saying, and one will be committed to the denial of those claims. This insight is relevant to considerations about adversariality and should be taken into account.

It was in this 1999 essay that I introduced a distinction between minimal and ancillary adversariality. Minimal adversariality is neutral and a matter of logic in the sense that a person committed to one claim is thereby committed to the denial of its contradictory and contraries. In offering and seeking support for X, an arguer is committed to rejecting other claims that are logically incompatible with X. Minimal adversariality in this sense does not require hostility, enmity, or any form of social opposition, and may be intrinsic to argumentation. Ancillary adversariality is something else: it includes such features as opposition to persons, hostility, name-calling, belligerence, dogmatism, lack of empathy, and intolerance and will often extend to such fallacies as *ad hominem* and straw man. Ancillary adversariality is generally negative. With minimal adversariality, the arguer for X explicitly or implicitly denies not-X as a claim and rebuts challenges to the premises offered in support of X and the conclusion X. But the arguer need not express hostility or oppositionality to persons who disagree and would believe not-X. The distinction between minimal and ancillary adversariality has met with approval of late, even by those (Hundleby 2013; Rooney 2003, 2010; Yap 2020) who have questioned other aspects of my 1999 account.

I noted that if criticisms help an arguer develop her account more accurately and effectively, it is inappropriate to think of her critic as an opponent: the critic in such a case is more like an aide. Hundleby (2013) agrees also with the claim that controversy is often necessary and productive. She notes its need in contexts where supporting women requires opposing patriarchal institutions and their practices. She states “Adversarial structures

of controversy may allow space for the development of non-coercive standards for persuasion that involve a negotiable rationality” (p. 247). Yet Hundleby finds my 1999 account too abstract and idealized: she maintains that it assumes idealized situations and capacities and ignores the forms of oppression relevant to many argumentative situations. I recommended politeness on the part of arguers. Hundleby argues that politeness will hardly suffice to eliminate unnecessary aggressiveness in contexts of argument. My recommendation of politeness might appear uncontroversial, but it turns out not to be so. Standards of politeness are gendered in the sense that strong objections launched by women are unacceptable in ways specific to them and not men. Feminists have noted that women will be restricted and handicapped if they abide by social norms that disadvantage them, and some such norms are norms of politeness (Rooney 2003, 2010; Hundleby 2013; Yap 2020). It is unclear just what should be pragmatically recommended for women arguers functioning in a gender-biased context (it seems rather implausible to recommend rudeness, which could be counter-productive to say the least). Nevertheless, the criticism by feminists stands: due to double standards on gender, politeness according to prevailing social norms cannot always be recommended as norms for arguers.

An arguer will put forward considerations within a culture, and cultural norms may vary. Further qualifications regarding my 1999 account are needed for cultural reasons, as pointed out by Audrey Yap (2020) and Tempest Henning (2021). I maintained that being open and direct was a way of showing respect. According to Henning, that stance indicates a western bias. How respect is shown in argumentation will vary culturally. In some cultures and contexts, indirectness may be valued, as illustrated vividly by Henning. Generally, it will make sense for an arguer to put forward her considerations in ways that are understandable and acceptable in her own culture. So, my 1999 account needs qualification with regard to culture as well as to gender.

Several recent accounts consider the notion of minimal adversariality (Rooney 2003, 2010; Cohen 2020; Hundleby 2013). One concern is that of slippage. Rooney echoes the view that opposi-

tionality should not shift from a *claim* to a *person*.¹ And yet from minimal adversariality, an arguer might slide into various more strident forms. Indeed, I anticipated this possibility, which is elaborated in my later paper on dichotomy, opposition and polarization (Govier 2020). But the possibility of slippage can be acknowledged while upholding the distinction between minimal and ancillary adversariality: one can slip from A to B even though A and B are distinct.

Several recent accounts broadly agree with my claim that minimal adversariality is a necessary feature of argument, though they offer slightly different versions of it. One such is that of Scott Aikin (2011). Aikin states that adversariality is intrinsic to all argumentative contexts on the grounds that they all involve efforts to support a claim that is denied or is viewed as doubtful. He states that in supporting a claim, one is committed to rebutting or undercutting all challenges to it. Aikin maintains that such adversariality can be minimal and need not involve hostility. To offer arguments on behalf of a claim, in discussions, debates, need not be a belligerent or aggressive activity. Indeed, Aikin states, such an approach can be understood as pacifist, given that disagreements and disputes are addressed with words, not weapons.²

John Casey (2020) is another who broadly supports minimal adversariality. Casey maintains that an arguer seeks to change the beliefs or commitments of his or her audience. Casey submits that belief is an involuntary matter: when an arguer offers argument to change the beliefs of another, he or she is attempting to influence that person in a way that the other cannot voluntarily control. If the evidence or reasons offered by the arguer bring about a change in the other's beliefs, that change will result independently of that person's will. Casey defines an adversarial interaction as one with two participants, one of whom tries to impede or compel the other. Suppose, for example, that Fred is arguing with Bill as to whether climate change is due to human activity, and Bill doubts or denies

1. See also Dutilh Novaes (2020).

2. See also Cohen and Stevens (2019); Dutilh Novaes (2020).

that claim. When Fred states evidence or reasons for his position, he is seeking to cause Bill to change his mind, and any change on the basis of the argument will come about involuntarily because it will be independent of Bill's will. Fred will have influenced Bill in a way Bill cannot control. The argumentative exchange between Fred and Bill will necessarily be an adversarial one, in Casey's sense. There really is a necessary opposition between people in this engagement, despite the fact that Bill may have consented to interact argumentatively with Fred, realizing that he needs to expose his beliefs to challenge to improve their epistemic character. Because of the involuntariness of belief, on this account there is at least minimal adversariality in an argumentative interaction.

Casey urges that we distinguish in discussions of adversariality between argument as product and the process of arguing, and make it clear which is being considered so far as adversariality is concerned. This distinction seems important and promising. Adversarial aspects would appear most readily in processes. We can imagine two persons arguing back and forth, and we can consider their body language, tone of voice, expressions, and apparent degree of opposition to each other. If they display considerable hostility, we have an adversarial process characterized by ancillary adversariality in my original sense; if they disagree and argue back and forth but display respect and moderation, we have minimal adversariality. It is less straightforward to apply these distinctions to argumentative texts in which arguers are not engaging with each other. It is, however, possible to do so, making inferences from context, most obviously from the language used. Suppose, for instance, that an arguer writes 'only an idiot could say such and such.' From the language, we infer hostile opposition.

Questioning even minimal adversariality, several recent accounts contest the need for disagreement or doubt, maintaining that not all arguing occurs in such contexts. We may argue to consider things, to deliberate, to explore ideas, or even simply in conversation. When we argue we put forward evidence or reasons (premises) to support a conclusion, and we may do this in a variety of contexts, of which countering an opposite claim is only one. Douglas Walton and Erik Krabbe (1995) developed the notion of

various types of argumentative dialogue: they maintain that the persuasion dialogue, wherein A and B disagree and A uses argument to try to persuade B to change her mind, is only one type of dialogue.³ On their analysis, other dialogue types are inquiry (find and verify evidence); deliberation (make a choice); discovery (information seeking); negotiation (get what you want) and eristic (the quarrel). Walton and Krabbe's account has had considerable influence.

It can be plausibly argued that some of the dialogue types put forward by Walton and Krabbe as alternatives to the persuasion dialogue will include efforts at persuasion. One can certainly make this claim with regard to inquiry, discovery, deliberation, and negotiation. One may inquire into the truth or plausibility of X by seeking reasons or evidence for X and exploring the strength of that support, doing that by considering objections and alternative positions. One may discover a claim Y by examining the implications of accepted evidence or reasons for Y and related claims. One may deliberate by considering pros and cons of several alternative choices and the cumulative significance or 'weight' of these pros and cons, as in conductive arguments (a solo person may do these things, or two or more people may do it). As for negotiation, one may pursue one's interests by making a claim and then seeking to support it with reasons. It is by no means clear, then, that the dialogue types distinguished by Walton and Krabbe in 1995 should be understood as precluding the argumentative norms of the persuasion dialogue, which can plausibly be argued to be fundamental. Thus, a plausible case can be made that the other types of dialogue necessarily include key elements of the persuasive one.

In any event, I do not accept a dialogue model of argument. I would not accept that reflections on different types of argumentative dialogues and roles that arguers may take in them provide the best route to a resolution of questions of adversariality. In my essay "When they can't talk back," in *The philosophy of argument* (1999), I pointed out that many arguments are put forward in contexts in which there is no audience interacting with the arguer.

3. Walton and Krabbe wrote of *persuasion*, not of seeing to compel people.

Consider, for instance, a letter to the editor, written for a mass circulation newspaper in which it is eventually published. Often such letters comment on an event or situation and are not written to address the views of particular persons. When someone writes such a letter, its eventual audience is not present and not known to her. Its size is indeterminate, potentially large. Persons in that audience are likely to have different interests, beliefs, values, and levels of confidence. This is the audience that can't talk back. Although a few readers may write to the arguer or to the paper supporting or questioning her argument, most—and we do not know how many or who they might be—will necessarily remain silent. Such an arguer might fruitfully consider herself to be in 'dialogue' with potential members of that audience and would be advised to consider possible objections to her account. She could, while reasoning or writing, consider amendments or denials that some of these remote and hypothetical persons might raise against her case. It is often instructive to think in such a way. But that would be an imagined dialogue, a hypothetical one. Hers would remain a solo argument.⁴ Theorists of argument reflecting on how to resolve disputes may construct rules and strategies specifying norms for such 'dialogues.' But the relevance of such theorist-constructed rules intended for imagined dialogues to the real situations of dialogue is questionable at best.

We may think of a dialogue between two people, together and responding to each other, as a kind of Primary Case of argument and arguing. But it is by no means the only case, as the issue of the non-interactive audience reveals. My 1999 account could be updated with reference to such technological developments as Zoom, Google Meet, Twitter, and Facebook, which allow more ready interaction between physically distant people. But the points about diversity, lack of knowledge, and lack of response by many in a mass audience will remain.

Given that disagreement, doubt, and possible doubt are extremely common in contexts where arguments are offered, we can understand the appeal of the idea that arguments must be

4. See also Blair (1998); Johnson (2013).

adversarial in at least a minimal sense. To accept one claim (the conclusion) logically requires rejecting some other claims (the contradictory and contraries of that conclusion). But elementary reasoning about this point may be over-simplified, as it was in my 1999 model. And if there are different dialogue types in which arguments are used, minimal adversariality may not fit all of them. To further explore these considerations, we can reflect on refinements urged by Katharina Stevens and Daniel Cohen (Stevens 2016, 2018; Stevens and Cohen 2019, 2020).

In their discussions of roles in dialogue, Stevens and Cohen (2019) do not consider all the types noted by Walton and Krabbe. Rather they concentrate on two contrasting attitudinal aspects of these roles: adversariality and cooperativeness. In this paper they maintain that adversariality would fit a context characterized by difference and disagreement; whereas cooperativeness would characterize one of deliberation or inquiry. Assuming that these are dialogue types, in a dialogue featuring difference, person A would try to persuade person B of a claim; A would be a proponent and B an opponent in that dialogue. A would be seeking to support a claim and would seek to respond to B's challenges about it or argument for it. According to Stevens and Cohen (2019), in this context A's goal is self-interested in the sense that he wants to 'win' and the roles of A and B in this persuasion dialogue would be adversarial in at least a minimal sense (the proceedings would not need to be characterized by any expression of personal opposition). The matter of adversariality is otherwise in a context of inquiry or deliberation. Sharon Bailin and Mark Battersby (2017) maintain that if A and B are deliberating together, pursuing truth as distinct from victory, they will be cooperating to recall and address reasons supporting a decision. If they are inquiring together, the same point can be made. In their account Bailin and Battersby urge that adversariality and cooperativeness are not both required when we argue; we only need cooperativeness. If, in some dialogue types, adversariality is not needed, then contrary to myself and some others, minimal adversariality is not a necessary feature of all arguments.

Stevens and Cohen (2018) argue against Bailin and Battersby regarding adversariality and cooperativeness. They maintain that both self-interested (aspiring to win) goals and epistemic goals are key to understanding the processes and goals of argumentation. Stevens and Cohen acknowledge that cooperativeness is often important and adversariality can go too far. They emphasize that the overall goal of arguing is epistemic betterment. But they contend that to utterly dispense with adversariality, as Bailin and Battersby sought to do, would be to deny to arguers a legitimate role in pursuing their formally self-interested goal of winning. They urge that norms of argumentation should not be formulated in the abstract, and we are not ideal people. Argumentative partners, situations, and contexts vary; the need for and contribution of adversarial stances will do so likewise. An arguer could be, in their sense, virtuous, while supporting and defending her claims in a (minimally) adversarial context. What is a problem is not adversariality itself but rather “vicious” adversariality, where selfish concerns completely outweigh epistemic ones.

Stevens and Cohen note a lack of fit between my 1999 account and my later paper on opposition and polarization (Govier 2020). Indeed, the fit between these papers is not entirely clear, a fact that is understandable given that they are separated by a twenty-year period. In the later paper, I was primarily concerned with opposites and dichotomies. I emphasized the distinction between logical opposites, which I maintained are relevant to all inquiry and debate, and social opposites, which are not. I urged that logical opposition is often over-simplified when it is understood in terms of contradictories only, and contraries are not considered. In that paper I used the term “restrained partisanship” (Brockreide 1972) instead of minimal adversariality. I emphasized that animosity need not be present, noting that when persons are arguing for claims and against their logical opposites (whether contradictory or contrary), social opposition need not be present. However, slippage is possible, I allowed. One may move from difference to distinction, to exclusive disjunction, competition, polarization, demonization, and even destruction, such that disagreement about a claim expands to hatred between people on

opposing sides. The shift from logical to social opposites begins here at the stage of competition and, according to my 2020 account, is not desirable.

In a 2020 paper, Stevens and Cohen distinguish three different respects in which adversariality might be essential to argument: descriptive, normative and conceptual. They point out that when adversariality appears, it can be in the *attitudes* of persons arguing; the *stance* such persons take—for example proponent and opponent on the one hand or fellow inquirers on the other; the *function* of their arguments in meeting challenges; and the *persuasive effects* of those arguments. They state that the persuasive adversarial effect is conceptually necessary, and the adversarial function is normatively essential in contexts of argument.

Qualifications are required with regard to conceptual, descriptive, and normative features. If, as a conceptual matter, argument were to be necessarily adversarial (at least in a minimal sense), then any supposed argument that was not adversarial would not qualify as an argument at all. If a feature is conceptually necessary to a phenomenon, then, we need not consider whether it is descriptively characteristic of that phenomenon: it will always be present. The relevant norms can, of course, be developed and articulated, as Stevens and Cohen do.

Stevens and Cohen (2020) introduce the intriguing notion of an angelic devil's advocate, a figure needed to introduce objections and difficulties, thereby serving to protect arguers from my side bias and self-deception as to the merits of their own case. The angelic devil's advocate is a restrained being who is judicious and careful and never goes too far.

We need angelic devil's advocates when we argue but cannot have them. They are necessary because without opposition, we deceive ourselves into thinking that our conclusions really are the ones best supported by the balance of reasons—when we have not in fact fairly balanced the reasons. We need them because none of us can simply stop being closed-minded, susceptible to bias, and adversarial in attitude (2020, p. 910).

These are flaws of the human mind. The adversarial function, aided by the angelic devil's advocate, includes probing tasks, formulating objections, and raising questions.

There is, after all, some confrontation of ideas needed in argumentation, state Stevens and Cohen. If the confrontation is not explicit, it is implicit and easily shown to be so. Why? Their argument is quick at this point and relies on Aikin (2017). They state that the 'adversarial function' must be fulfilled in all argumentative contexts—whether with actual or hypothetical opponents, whether explicitly or implicitly. They maintain that the adversarial function is so pervasive that it is always at least implicit and must be included in any adequate account of argument. Again, why?

At this point, I return to the fundamental idea of an argument with premises and conclusion such that the premises are put forward in an effort to support the conclusion. In putting forward an argument, the arguer seeks to support the conclusion. If there are objections that would challenge the premises, reasoning, or conclusion, then the arguer seeking to support that conclusion must address these as part of the effort to support it (Aikin 2017, Johnson 2000). I suggest this insertion in Stevens and Cohen's account. Trying to give support with evidence or reasons is a necessary feature of argument and from this feature, we can see that it is normatively necessary to address objections that oppose the argument. The insight behind my 1999 account, that in supporting a claim, one is committed to denying some others (contradictories, contraries and rivals in context) should also be considered. In seeking to support a claim with evidence or reasons we are denying other claims. We have, then, necessary oppositional elements in argument, which is to say that we have a necessarily adversarial element. This adversariality can be minimal, as urged in my 1999 account.

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2.

Argument and Explanation: A Pragmatic and Ethical Account

Abstract: This essay explores and defends the distinction between argument and explanation. The distinction does not amount to a dichotomy: obviously there are discourses that are neither arguments nor explanations. Typically, in an explanation the claim that would be in a structurally similar position to the conclusion of an argument is known or accepted whereas that is typically not the case for the conclusion of an argument. However, interesting complications arise. One is that some arguments can also serve as explanations. Another is the combined themes of explanation and argument in transcendental arguments and yet another is that some discourses are hard to classify. Reflections by S.N. Thomas, who rejected the distinction between argument and explanation, are considered. I dispute the contention by Robert Nozick, that argument is coercive and “not nice” while in philosophy explanation should be preferred.

There is a standard account of the difference between argument and explanation, and it is one that I broadly endorse. An argument contains premise claims put forward in an effort to support a further claim, the conclusion. The arguer offers these premises as reasons or evidence to support the conclusion claim. The effort generally presupposes that the premises are accepted and will ground a shift to acceptance of the conclusion, which typically is in some doubt in the context in which the argument is put forward. Broadly speaking, the premises are to be presumed and are offered to support the conclusion claim, which is generally in doubt. Explanations have a different balance of acceptance, because the claim describing what is to be explained – the *explanandum* – is presumed to be true or accepted (there is or

was an actual phenomenon) while the factors explaining it – the *explanans* – may also be presumed. We can say, then, that an argument is to be anchored in its premises, whereas an explanation is to be anchored in its *explanandum*.

Some Background

I offered an elementary account of the difference between argument and explanation in my textbook *A Practical Study of Argument* (Govier 2010) and wrote about the matter in my 1987 work *Problems in Argument Analysis and Evaluation* (Govier 1987, re-issued 2018). I should explain that I'm articulating a distinction here, not a dichotomy. There is no exhaustive disjunction because there are discourses that are neither explanation nor argument; these include descriptions, commands, narratives, and jokes. And there is not exclusive disjunction because, as maintained by S.N. Thomas (1981), there are some discourses that amount to both argument and explanation.

I have been interested in this matter for several reasons. First, my experience has been that students find the distinction difficult and confusing. Second, I wrote a Ph.D. thesis about transcendental arguments, which combine argument and explanation in an intriguing way. Third, Thomas 1981, an early textbook in informal logic, posed challenging examples that seemed to constitute both argument and explanation, and had, on the basis of cases of this sort, rejected the distinction. Lastly – and this is the most fundamental point – there are significant similarities between arguments and explanations. Both offer answers to 'why?' questions, offering reasons. Both typically involve reasoning from some claims to others. Both may use the same indicator words such as "since", "because", "so," "hence," "thus", and even "therefore. And they may be set out in parallel ways. Thus:

Argument:

- Premise 1
- Premise 2

- Premise 3
-
- Therefore
- Conclusion

Explanation:

- Explanans 1
- Explanans 2
- Explanans 3
-
- So
- Explanandum

Looking at these models and stating the distinction in simple terms, we can say that in arguments, we offer justification whereas in explanations, we offer understanding.

Interesting Complications

This basic distinction between argument and explanation needs to be qualified and complicated. Not all arguments concern claims about which there is doubt or disagreement. Arguments may be put forward in contexts of inquiry or deliberation in which, as tools of inquiry or choice, participants explore what reasons might plausibly be put forward in support of a conclusion. We can think here, for instance, of explorations of our belief in objects existing outside the mind. Philosophers develop and explore purported justifications for our confident belief in the existence of external objects, but not because there is active doubt or disagreement about the matter. On the explanation side of the distinction, qualifications are also needed. It is not quite accurate to say that phenomena to be explained must be actual. There are explanations as to how something is possible or might be possible; these presume weaker claims. Those who reflect philosophically on explanations tend to concentrate on scientific causal explanations, as to how something

came to be. Yet not all explanations are causal – we may explain the meaning of a word or explain by motive and intention.

And there are further complications. These include:

- There are discourses in which premises support a conclusion such that the phenomenon described in that conclusion can, in turn, be explained when those premises are regarded as *explanans*. Such discourses offer both argument and explanation. Cases of this type were described by Thomas 1981, who cited the phenomenon as grounds for giving up the distinction between argument and explanation. I believe that he shows that the distinction is not an exclusive one, but I maintain that it still holds.
- There are discourses in which argument and explanation supplement each other, as described in Mayes 2010. According to Mayes, explanations offer understanding, whereas arguments offer knowledge. (I prefer to say ‘justification’ here, as distinct from ‘knowledge’. It seems a safer claim.) Mayes contends, nevertheless, that a discourse may contain both argument and explanation, where these reasonings complement each other. One might, for example offer an argument for claim C and then with further statements offer an explanation of the phenomenon described in C. Alternately, an argument might be needed to complete an explanation; for instance, a claim put forward as part of an explanation might itself need argumentative support.
- There are hard-to-classify discourses in which it is unclear which claims are to be presumed, or rightly presumed, and who is to decide that matter, as described in a recent account in Dufour 2017.
- There are abductive arguments in which an argument is offered to support a proffered explanation, on the grounds that it is the best (or best available) explanation of some phenomenon. These are arguments in support

of an explanation. In such arguments, the claim that the proffered explanation is the best or best available needs support. (Govier 2010)

- There are transcendental arguments in which a key statement is ‘only if E is X possible’. They offer an argument to E from the claims that X is possible and E is a necessary condition of X. That argument is based on necessary condition: If X then E; X; therefore, E. Then, there is an explanatory stage to the reasoning. E being established, E is cited as a factor explaining X. The classic source for transcendental arguments is, of course, Immanuel Kant.

All these cases are challenging and interesting – and more may well exist. But I will not discuss them here. Rather I will shift to matters closer to the moral domain. To be sure, questions may be raised as to the significance of moral evaluation in the context of discourse. Broadly speaking, since most discourse is communicative, it concerns relationships between persons and, as such, can appropriately be evaluated from a moral point of view. For example, one may maintain that a kind of discourse furthers wellbeing or harms it; expresses respect or disrespect; conveys needed information or disguises it. Such evaluative claims will often have a grounding in logic, epistemology, or linguistic analysis. And yet they are often ethical in nature and highly significant as such. I’m thinking here about broad claims about types of discourse – particular arguments or types of argument. Or explanations. Here flaws may be found and some have moral significance as, for example, in a case where a faulty appeal to authority lures people into using a harmful product.

Deceptiveness and Intent to Deceive: A Distinction

Accounts of fallacy in argument characteristically emphasize deceptiveness: an argument seems to be cogent though it contains a type of mistake. Its seeming cogent when it is not means that it is deceptive and if it is of a type that is deceptive, it exemplifies a fal-

lacy. Here I would emphasize that discourse may be deceptive in the sense of tending to deceive without the arguer being a deceiver in the sense that that person intends to deceive. One may communicate, through argument or other means, in a manner that is deceptive without intending to do so. Accordingly, analyses finding flaws, even flaws of moral significance, in a discourse do not always establish a moral fault in the person who is the author of that discourse. Deceptive mistakes can be made unwittingly.

Robert Nozick and Force in Argument

Returning now to the more specific context of argument and explanation, I begin by considering Nozick 1981, *Philosophical Explanations*. In that work, Nozick favoured explanation over argument, asking early on “Why are philosophers intent on forcing others to believe things? Is that a nice way to behave toward someone?” (p. 5) The implied answer to this rhetorical question was “no, it’s not nice.” Nozick went on to offer an account of philosophy without such attempts to force people to believe things, with less manipulation and more explanation. In short, he defended a way of working in philosophy without employing arguments. In this kind of philosophy, Nozick said, there would be a quest for explanation, a quest to understand “*how something is or can be possible.*” (p.8) What would be sought would be understanding, not proof. Nozick claimed “The philosophical goal of explanation rather than proof not only is morally better, it is more in accord with one’s philosophical motivation,” (p. 13) which, on this view, is that of understanding. Pragmatically, Nozick agrees with the account I have offered here: the *explanandum* must be known or believed, whereas, contrastingly, in an argument or proffered proof, it is the premises and not the conclusion that must be known or believed for the argument to work. Nozick comments on transcendental arguments in a way consistent with my account here. He notes that there is a difference between *proving* that *q*, on the grounds that it is a necessary condition of *p*, which is true or accepted, and *explaining* *p* via *q*, once *q* has been established. (p.15)

We may extract from Nozick's 1981 account the broad conclusion that seeking to justify a claim by offering an argument for it is morally worse than offering an explanation for that claim, because the former is intentionally coercive whereas the latter is not.

Given the argumentative style of Nozick 1974, *Anarchy State and Utopia*, we might speculate that he came to regret his own style of philosophizing and some of the cut-throat debates that his work inspired. In the later book *Philosophical Explanations* Nozick was objecting to the way many philosophers reason and communicate about philosophical topics; he was writing specifically about *meta-philosophy*. Given this context, one might think it an interpretive mistake to extend his views about the morally negative aspects of arguing to broader contexts such as those of everyday life, science, and law. Yet the positing of this charitable restriction to the specific context of meta-philosophy seems questionable: one would think that if trying to force people to believe things in philosophy is 'not nice,' then it would similarly be 'not nice' elsewhere. Such terms as "proof" and "knock down arguments" indicate that Nozick was considering *deductive* arguments in which the premises are true. Not all arguments are deductive and candidates for 'knock-down' status in this sense; accordingly one might argue for another charitable restriction in interpreting Nozick's view. One might suggest that his account would not apply to empirically inductive, analogical, or conductive arguments, these being less coercive. Yet this charitable interpretation too seems questionable. These arguments will all have premises, some of which may be claims that the intended audience does not accept at the outset. For Nozick, these would still be claims that the arguer was trying to *force* upon the audience.

Let us shift to another matter, concerning freedom. *Anarchy State and Utopia* is a work in defence of political libertarianism. On that view, freedom is very highly valued. One could even argue that for political libertarians, freedom is the only value. For them, if one person attempts to force another person to do something and is in that sense seeking to violate that other person's freedom, this agent is committing a profoundly important moral offence. Free-

dom is the moral trump card in this context. (No pun intended.) Yet the libertarian view is open to criticism on the grounds that there are values other than freedom – wellbeing, fairness, truth, for instance. A definitive negative evaluation of arguing could not be warranted simply by the fact (if it were indeed a fact) that it involves an attempt to violate the freedom of another person. Even if we were to grant such a claim, it would not suffice to support the negative moral evaluation of argument given the relevance of other values to that judgment. Evaluations of infringements on individual freedom, if such infringements are real, would be different in a framework other than the one Nozick presumes.

Luring Explanations

In explanations, we do not attempt to support claims but rather to offer understanding of phenomena that are accepted as real. We do not seek to justify or offer reasons in the sense of epistemic support for the *explanandum* claim. There are, nevertheless, ways in which explanation can go wrong and be deceptive, even in seriously harmful ways. No doubt there are many such ways. Here I shall describe only one, concerning the status of the *explanandum* claim, which I refer to here as E. It is appropriate to offer an explanation of E only if there is a strong presumption in favour of E; that is to say only if E is known to be true or reasonably believed to be true. There is no need to explain the truth of a false claim. For instance, there is no need to explain that why or how 80% of births in the province of Alberta in 2020 were female, since that was not the case. It is not a fact: no explanation is called for. Reflecting further on this requirement for the *explanandum* points us to deceptive faults that may be found in some explanations. The claim E may be one for which no required presumption exists. It may be false, improbable, or simply unknown. In such a case, no explanation of E is called for.

For example, suppose that someone asks why the Royal Family sought to have Princess Diana killed. Then, suppose an explanation is put forward. ‘They sought to have her killed because she

was very popular and had left the family and threatened its status.’ That could be an explanation as to why the Royal Family would seek to have Diana killed. But wait a minute. We do not know or reasonably believe that there was such a phenomenon in the first place. If the Royal Family did not seek to have Diana killed, we do not need an explanation as to why they did. The ‘why?’ question in this context is ill-founded. If an explanation is offered in response to this improper question, it may lure people into believing that the phenomenon was a real one.

One can readily come up with other examples. You could ask: why did Democratic politicians establish their organizational centre for pedophilia in the basement of a Washington pizza parlour? Was it because that seemed to be a good hiding place? Or did that particular pizza parlour have an especially spacious basement? But if you did ask this ‘why?’ question, it would be inappropriate. There is no need for an explanation in this context because there was no such pedophilia set-up in the Washington pizza parlour. The presumed phenomenon did not exist. If what is described in E is not a phenomenon, there is no proper question ‘Why E?’; there is no need to explain E.

If an explanation for a non-phenomenon is offered, it strongly implies that the non-phenomenon is a phenomenon. That message will be incorrect and deceptive. The offering of an explanation for a non-fact may lure us into supposing that the non-fact is a fact.

E is introduced in a context that presumes assent, but the presumption is unsound in a case where E is at best unwarranted and at worst false. The proffering of an explanation for E strongly suggests E’s acceptability, and that without offering any reasons or evidence for E. Such a procedure is misleading and deceptive and anyone who uses it knowingly is a deceiver. This verdict clearly has moral import. A number of such proffered and luring explanations may be strung together: conspiracy theories would seem to be a favourite context for such flawed explanatory reasoning. We can see, then, that it is not only in arguments that communicative flaws of moral significance can occur.

Some Moral Concerns about Arguments

Turning now back to arguments, we can look to accounts of fallacies for flaws that are deceptive and of moral significance. And many come readily to mind: these include false authority, *ad hominem*, straw man, guilt by association, and begging the question, just to get us started. Such argumentative moves are deceptive in the sense that they are often undetected so that poor arguments seem to be cogent and people are led to faulty inferences and the acceptance of conclusions that lack proper epistemic support. Arguers may offer fallacious arguments despite lacking any intention to deceive; they may fail to recognize the flaws in their own thinking. To the extent that they recognize such flaws and intend to deceive, they are open to moral criticism. These points seem to me to be rather obvious and I will not comment on them further here.

I return instead to Nozick's negative evaluation of argument on the grounds that arguers seek to force beliefs on their audience. Nozick put this idea forward as an observation; he did not seek to support it. Later, John Casey (2020) did seek to support it. I'll turn to Casey's account. After citing Nozick, Casey supported him on the grounds that belief is involuntary. Though there may be some voluntary choices regards belief formation, we cannot believe by *fiat*; you can test this out in a thought experiment. Believe that the Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau will retire from politics at the age of 55. (my example) Just do it. Try. You will find that you can't. It's not like raising your arm or deciding to have lunch, which you obviously can do. To be sure, you can do things related to believing: for instance, you can direct your attention in various ways, or consider sources in a selective way, associate with some people rather than others, or engage in some activities rather than others. Defending his Wager, Pascal 1670 pointed this out in the context of religious belief. But such processes are unlikely to produce belief, especially if one remembers their selective nature. Casey 2010 maintains that, given that the involuntary nature of belief, if a person changes her beliefs, she will not do so voluntar-

ily. A change of beliefs is simply something that will happen to her.

Applying Casey's account, suppose that Joseph seeks to convince Sheila of a claim, C, with which she disagrees. Joseph offers support for C, reasons or evidence, and Sheila considers these claims, accepts them, reasons through to C, and changes her mind. She has come to believe C, as a result of the argument Joseph put forward. If belief is involuntary, as Casey submits, Sheila has involuntarily come to believe C and that has happened as a result of Joseph's arguing the point. We might say at this point that Joseph has *forced* Sheila to change her beliefs – or, as we would more colloquially say, change her mind. For Nozick, Sheila's freedom has been restricted by Joseph in a way that is “not nice” and there is a clear moral negative in such a case: Nozick maintains that successful argument is morally offensive and wrong because it amounts to a violation of freedom. The audience is forced to believe something. For Casey, it would also be true that Joseph has forced Sheila to believe something. Nozick claimed that philosophers should avoid efforts to force people's thinking in one way or another and offer explanations instead of arguments. Casey makes no such claim.

We can note that Sheila would not need to be engaged in an interactive argumentative process for the alleged forcing to occur. Let us suppose that Sheila is in a waiting room at a dental office and reads a magazine article on the issue of guaranteed annual income. Suppose that she has always been sceptical about this notion, believing that if people were guaranteed a basic income sufficient for survival, they would lose the incentive to work. Now she reads the article, by a source she finds credible, and finds in it data from a 1970s study reporting that a high percentage of young men receiving a guaranteed income used it to complete high school and engage in vocational programs. This data she finds novel and interesting. Considering the matter further, Sheila changes her mind about guaranteed annual income. Now comes the question. Has Sheila been *forced* by the reading of the article, to change her mind? Given alleged ‘forcing’, should the process leading to it get a negative moral evaluation? Perhaps the author of the article is

responsible for violating Sheila's freedom? Has he in some way invaded her belief system to 'force' her to think in a new way? It does not seem plausible to say so. We might also consider a case in which someone does not verbally communicate with Sheila either in speech or in writing, but nevertheless influences her beliefs and causes her to change her mind. Perhaps he acts in the world in a way that impresses and inspires her and changes her mind without his ever seeking to do that. It would be highly implausible to say that he forced her to change her beliefs. Though I confess my inability to spell it out, I suspect that something has gone wrong with questions about communication and the voluntary or involuntary nature of belief.

In any event, an adaptation by Casey seems to offer relief. In his 2020 paper Casey contends that the involuntariness of belief establishes a necessary adversarial element in arguing (that would be minimal adversariality), but does not support a general negative moral evaluation of argument. The reason he provides is consent. If Sheila consents to that argumentative interchange with Joseph, she is exposing her beliefs to his communications and critique, and in so doing she knows that she could change her mind. And the same basic point may be made in the context of reading the article. Sheila may consent in this way because she is willing to expose her beliefs to criticism. (It would be like voluntarily testing your strength in a boxing match. The idea would be that if you are hit and knocked over, to be sure, you involuntarily fall over, but it's not a case of assault, provided you consented to engage in the match.) To the extent that Sheila's beliefs survive the exposure to Joseph's argument, they will be more likely to be true. So much the better. She will knowingly and willingly expose them to the test. (Note: this last bit is my addition to Casey, as I interpret him.) I think that Casey's account is more plausible than Nozick's. Complexities will arise regarding self-defence and consent, of course. Yet his account allows a morally positive role for argument despite its incorporation of the somewhat questionable idea that, arguing, people seek to *force* others to change their minds and that one will change one's mind only when *forced* to do so because one can only do so involuntarily.

Conclusion

I do not think that Nozick's negative moral evaluation of argument is warranted. We need to support our claims and theories with evidence and reasons. Explanations do not do this. Our arguments offering support for claims cannot be functionally and effectively replaced by explanations. Both arguments and explanations can be flawed in various ways; these flaws may be deceptive; on occasion those offering flawed arguments or explanations may be intending to deceive. If so, they are open to moral criticism. The possibilities are numerous: just to begin, one may say that inferences may be incorrect and hasty and, whether as premises or as *explanandum*, unwarranted or implausible claims may be communicated without support. There is no general superiority of explanation over argument in this regard. Sometimes speakers are unaware of the flaws they communicate in their explanations and arguments; discourse, though not its agents, may be said to be morally flawed. Sometimes speakers and writers know full well what they are doing. In that case, they are seeking to deceive and for that reason open to negative moral criticism.

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3.

When Should We Argue?

Abstract: Arguing involves giving reasons for what one claims. The various functions of argument, as described by Anthony Blair in a 2004 essay, are cited along with several additions. To argue with someone is to show respect for him or her in the sense that it is to recognize the capacity of that person to reflect and respond by considering and offering reasons. This essay considers contexts in which it is not appropriate to offer reasons for a view in a situation of differing beliefs. Factors of context and relationship are distinguished and discussed.

When should we argue? Never, because it is ‘not nice’? Always, provided we do it compassionately? So far as I have found out, the matter is seldom investigated, but it is of interest and, in addition, gives rise to further intriguing questions.

Background

As we have seen, Robert Nozick once maintained that it was not nice to argue, on the grounds that when one argues with someone else, one is attempting to coerce that person into changing her beliefs, which is an intrusion on her freedom. Nozick seems to have been thinking of deductive arguments that sought to be ‘knock down’ proofs, and of persons who used them in the context of philosophical discussion and debate. His conclusion, though, would seem to apply also outside philosophy, given that attempting to coerce belief in other contexts such as law, science, shopping, and negotiation would presumably also be ‘not nice’. On Nozick’s 1981 account, if person Y causes person X to change her beliefs because of an argument he has presented to X, then X has

been forced to make this shift as a result of Y's coercive influence. And for Y to coerce X in this way – or to try to do so — is wrong. Nozick did not give a reason apart from 'forcing'. His case was buttressed recently by John Casey, who added a key supporting premise to the effect that belief is involuntary.

The view that arguing is 'not nice' and wrong is provocative and likely to seem highly implausible to many theorists of argument. Nozick himself gave a reason for this view, the reason being that arguing is coercive. In giving this reason, contrary to his own advice, he offered an argument. His account is now rather dated; in any event, it is unlikely that he held it through the whole of his philosophical career. Nevertheless, his challenge leads us to interesting questions and reflections.

J. Anthony Blair wrote of the many uses of argument. (Blair 2004) He listed the following:

- Persuasion
- Quasi-persuasion
- Inquiry
- Deliberation
- Justification
- Collaboration
- Rationale-giving
- Edification, instruction
- Evaluation

I would add to this list, negotiation. Now, thinking for the moment from the view of Nozick in 1980, we may allow that in some of these functions there will be a coercive element. We might allege this for justification, evaluation, and edification. For example, a person seeking to defend his monetary evaluation of an art object might cite its specific qualities, past cost, or high reputation creator in defence of his conclusion about its value. If he submitted these considerations to someone giving the object a lower value,

we might allow that with the argument in support of his valuation, he is trying to ‘coerce’ that other person into changing his view. Other functions cited by Blair – such as deliberation and collaboration — are harder to fit into a Nozickian account. Deliberating, we consider pros and cons and may be reflecting on our own opinions; there is no need for others to be involved, much less for us to be trying to change their beliefs. Given the many functions of argument, forswearing it altogether in the interests of supposed freedom would surely be difficult from a practical point of view. Furthermore, valuing freedom of belief as of higher value than being accountable to reasons and evidence is not sensible and does not give us plausible reasons for giving up on argument.

A very different view has recently been put forward by Angel Eduardo. Eduardo initially struck me as maintaining that whenever a person Y disagrees with a claim put forward by another person X, Y should address their disagreement by putting forth an argument. He did not mean a quarrelsome sort of argument that would involve animosity and yelling, but rather the offering of reasons and evidence to support the view held. Eduardo maintains that most people seek the best as they understand it for the world as they understand it. They may have bad ideas, or what we deem to be bad ideas, but that does not mean that they are bad people – at worst, monsters in quest of evil and destruction. Eduardo claims that even apparently trivial matters– for example beliefs in superstitions such as the unluckiness of the number 13– should be questioned and discussed so as not to encourage laxity about beliefs. Lapses in critical thinking can add up, he says, and we should nip the problem of nonsense in its bud. (Eduardo 2021)

Causing someone to change her mind is not always harmful. If Y enables X to get rid of his ignorance, X benefits. Y has not disturbed X’s freedom; rather, she has given X the benefit of eliminating a mistake. On Eduardo’s account, we need to disabuse ourselves and others of mistaken ideas. We should up-date our beliefs just as we up-date our wardrobes. Eduardo advocates compassionate conversation in the context of disagreement. We should not castigate or dismiss those with whom we disagree, even about fun-

damentals, but never should we seek to avoid difficult conversations.

I had at first interpreted Eduardo as maintaining (in full contrast to Nozick) that we should always argue in contexts of disagreement. But he was kind enough to respond to my email inquiry (Eduardo 2022b) and there agreed that if the other is suffering from dementia or insanity or is near death or for some other reason unable to respond to reasons, there is no point in arguing. His view, then, is not that we should always argue, but rather that we should almost always argue.

There is, however, some qualifying comment needed at this point. And I offer this in the spirit of Eduardo's account of wariness about our attitudes to others. We need to be cautious about any determination that another person is incapable of responding to reason. If we infer rational incapacity simply from the content of that person's beliefs, we risk labelling a person rationally incapable simply on the basis of serious disagreement with us. Doing this, we would then hold back from argumentative conversation with that person simply on grounds of the disagreement. Such a response risks avoiding important discussions and is just what Eduardo opposes.

When Not to Argue: Reflections on Cases

Seeking a position on the question of when to argue, I came to realize that responses are affected by the way in which the question is framed. Let's say Xavier and Yolanda disagree about some matter and their disagreement has come to light. Suppose now that we, as observers, ask ourselves whether Yolanda should argue with Xavier. We may formulate this question in various ways. We can ask whether Yolanda should offer to Xavier *reasons or evidence* for her view. Putting the point this way, an affirmative response is suggested; the terms suggest that Yolanda would be giving something to Xavier, suggesting an attitude similar to that of Eduardo. If we pose the question differently, though, and ask whether Yolanda should *argue* with Xavier, there may arise asso-

ciations of strident quarrelsomeness, adversariality, and animosity so often associated with argument and arguing. Then we might think that Yolanda should not argue with Xavier over a disagreement, as this would be quarrelsome. I submit that these aspects of animosity are detachable and should be detached. If they are not detached, they risk loading the question in the direction of a negative response. Thus I recommend detachment from these associations of quarrelsomeness, so as to leave open the question of whether to argue in a context of disagreement.

Nevertheless, even considering the matter in this light, I rather easily came up with a number of factors seeming *prima facie* to favour Nozick rather than Eduardo. I won't include here aspects of X's circumstances making him incapable of responding to reasons – aspects such as dementia, insanity, severe illness, or extremely trying circumstances. Here are some such factors.

Thinking about Contexts

In these matters, context is highly significant. Supposing that X and Y have unequal power, either Y could be vulnerable to X (as when Y is consulting a professional, X, whose help she needs) or X could be vulnerable to Y, as when Y is a teacher and X is her student. When X has greater power, Y may be reluctant to engage him, fearing that X will resent being challenged. Y may, accordingly, not wish to articulate the disagreement or offer reasons for her stance; Y may fear that X could be alienated. Even where the power dynamics are reversed, Y may feel that inequality holds her back. She may think that she should not put forward all of what she knows, fearing to overwhelm or intimidate X. Third parties may contend that Y should not argue with X because X could be harmed or offended in the process. These considerations may be taken seriously and could deter Y from putting forward her views. There are risks here, where a meta-argument about whether to argue can distract X and Y and observers from the claim that was originally at stake. (Breakey 2021)

Another sort of context where it is inappropriate for Y to give an X an argument is one where X is highly vulnerable due to some life crisis such as death of a family member. Suppose for example that a person were in a state of grief and consoling himself with the prospect of meeting persons in heaven. For a person who did not believe in an afterlife, this would not be a suitable occasion to discuss the point and explore reasons that the afterlife might not exist.

There are also contexts wherein X may demand engagement by Y. One type is that of the entreating missionary. Consider for example a situation where Yolanda is making dinner for her hungry family, including several restless children, and Xavier arrives at the door, religious tracts in hand. When she tells him that she is busy preparing a meal and is not willing to talk with him, he insists that she state her own religious beliefs and give reasons for them. Xavier, prepared for an engagement on these matters, presses Yolanda to engage with him. She does not wish to do so – really, not ever, and certainly not in the circumstances. In this context, Yolanda is surely entitled to refuse, as she would be seriously inconvenienced and has done nothing to initiate their contact. The matter would be different in another context in which Yolanda had put herself forward as the supporter of a particular view. Suppose, for instance, that Yolanda was taking part in a demonstration and carrying a sign expressing her viewpoint. Let's suppose her sign says, 'No tax money for art purchase': she is opposing a large expenditure on foreign art in a situation wherein there are many needy local people. If Xavier approaches Yolanda and demands reasons for her stance, in that context she is obliged to give it, because she has 'put herself out there' in public space, proclaiming her view as the most appropriate one in a situation of controversy.

Cases Considered in Two Groups

The first group has to do with the topic in various circumstances; the second with relationships.

A. Considerations of topic

1. Unimportance: the topic concerned is so unimportant that the effort of arguing about it is simply not worth it.
2. Stupidity: the view X holds is really stupid and was shown conclusively to be false and is recognized as such. Arguing about it would be a waste of time, as it is unnecessary.
3. Vexaciousness: the view X holds is one that is intensely held and disputes about it are typically emotional and futile. There is likely to be a heavy personal cost in engaging in disputes about these things.
4. Obsolescence: the problem addressed no longer exists.
5. Complexity: the subject of disagreement is highly complicated and the potential arguer does not have time to research it.

These factors implying that Y need not argue, or should not argue, are pragmatic and epistemic in nature. They appear reasonable but should be considered with a degree of scepticism, due to the possibility of error, including error due to self-deception. Obviously, one could be mistaken in judging that a topic is unimportant or obsolescent. Matters seeming trivial in a given context can turn out to be of significant interest if the context shifts, or if the context itself has been misunderstood. For example, suppose that a child who is normally an attentive student were to misbehave in class on one particular day. A teacher inclined to challenge the mother's proffered explanation that the child had slept poorly the night before, might first deem the mother's account implausible, deeming the issue rather unimportant. Yet it could turn out that a significant shift such as a death of a friend or the introduction of a new person to the household was the underlying cause of the change, and that matter was important in understanding the girl's behavior.

As to the factor of stupidity, we will necessarily judge that by our own standards and should be aware of any tendency to brand as ‘stupid’ any view that we reject ourselves. Myside Bias is a serious risk here. Regarding vexaciousness and complexity, self-deception is a distinct possibility in these contexts. Seeking to avoid hostility and conflict, or demands for prolonged intellectual effort on our part, we may cite these factors as reasons not to argue. In doing so, we may simply wish to protect ourselves from serious effort. That impulse toward self-indulgence can undermine the reliability of our judgment that we need not argue about the matter. I submit, then, that factors (1) to (5) here do indeed provide epistemic or pragmatic reasons not to argue, but these reasons themselves are not compelling in every case and should be scrutinized carefully.

B. Considerations of relationship

6. Intimate relationship: X is a spouse, lover, or intimate friend of Y and Y does not want to risk their friendship by challenging the views of X.
7. Professional status: X is a professional and Y is not; Y feels vulnerable to X and does not wish to challenge X for this reason.
8. Legitimacy: Y is an illegitimate party and X does not want to offer this party legitimacy, which he would do if he were to argue with him.
9. Identity: the matter in question is so central to X’s identity that Y fears that X would feeling gravely insulted and respond irrationally to its being challenged.

Underlying (6) and (7) here are considerations of relationship that the potential arguer needs and seeks to maintain, relationships that he fears will be at risk if he disputes the others’ view. Examples readily come to mind. Regarding (6) we can imagine deferring to an intimate with the goal of maintaining a close and easy relationship, thinking that ready agreement on some matter is more important than exploring alternatives. But there are problems underlying

this response, since giving in too frequently risks subservience in the relationship and resentment of the submissive party. In short, if Y regularly defers to X's judgment and choices, holding back from arguing about judgments and decisions, his stance will weaken the relationship instead of strengthening it. Regarding (7), here is an example from my own experience. An audiologist was seeking to explain to me a device that could enhance the effectiveness of my hearing aids. I had used a trial device and had trouble using it, partly due to the fact that there were hard-to-read signs as to whether the device was on or off. Explaining how it worked, she was stroking the device gently. When I asked the purpose of the stroking – 'why are you doing that? Does it have anything to do with the way the device works?' –she responded "because I am a professional and you are not." That response struck me as peculiar, irrelevant, and not at all a plausible answer to my question. Why and how would the significance of the physical action of stroking vary according to the stroker's professional status? I considered questioning what she said and entering into an argument, but decided not to. I was in a vulnerable position and required her assistance: I needed this person's services and, for that reason, her good will. (I was perhaps influenced at this point by the stories of several friends whose doctors had barred them from their practice because they had asked questions which were — on my view inappropriately — interpreted as signs of disrespect)

Considerations of legitimacy (8) may arise in political contexts. One recent Canadian example was that of the Freedom Convoy in Ottawa in February of 2022. Its anti-vax and anti-government demonstrations were boisterous, featuring large trucks blocking key roadways, loud honking day and night, and signs displaying swastikas and Confederate symbols. At one point, the group publicized an anti-government manifesto indicating that it sought to replace the Justin Trudeau government with an alternative that would include the Governor General, the opposition Conservative party, and themselves. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau did not talk with the demonstrators, a stance that was defended by prominent commentators including Mark Carney (former governor of the Bank of Canada and the Bank of England) and respected

commentator Chantal Hebert. Their concern was that talking would legitimate these people, who were acting in illegal ways and planning sedition. Legitimacy considerations of this type are often put forward in situations of intense conflict where one party (Y in my account) is in power and the other (X) is resisting. It is serious and tends to be taken seriously.

However, there are problems with such reasoning. If Y does not engage with X, Y will not come to know the nature of X. When X is a group – as was the case in Ottawa – its members are likely to vary in their views, goals, and actions. Y and others may have simplified on the basis of early signs and labelled the group incorrectly, undermining opportunities for negotiation and conflict resolution. Not engaging, even to the extent of talking and discussion, is likely to cause the other party to feel unheard and disrespected, and thereby worsen the conflict. Discussion of the Ottawa events, extending into subsequent months, revealed such feelings to be a significant factor. with spokesmen travelling later to try to gain an audience with the prime minister.

We often hear about risks of legitimation, but presumptions around it merit scrutiny. Is party Y really in a position to confer legitimacy on party X simply by with it in discussion and debate? What sort of legitimacy is in question, and how if at all would Y be able to confer it? A related question is how Y's broader audience (assume here that is the public) will interpret the discussions with X. The Legitimacy Argument makes assumptions about this and those assumptions are open to question. The public may see the talks not as recognition of legitimacy but rather as undertaken to prevent violence, reach a negotiated solution, or obtain useful information. I would maintain, accordingly, the legitimacy considerations do not always provide compelling reasons not to pursue argument.

Similar points can be made regarding identity. A reason that Y might have for holding back on engagement with X is a sense that the belief X has expressed is essential to his or her sense of identity. Notoriously, such matters arise very frequently and are delicate to handle. X may be a Trump supporter, or an anti-vaxxer, and feel intensely about the matter and beliefs related to

his stance. X may identify as Black and have beliefs about his origin in Africa, beliefs that he treasures despite the fact that scholars have argued against them. Or X may identify as pro-life, on the abortion issue, but as condoning capital punishment on the basis of theories of innocent and non-innocent life that Y deems to be ill-founded. In these sorts of cases, Y may be inclined to hold back from arguing about the matters at stake, or even from expressing her disagreement with X. She may not wish to challenge X in any way on such matters, fearing an intense reaction likely to elicit strong emotions and possibly even damage Y's sense of who he is. The question arises, then, whether Y should engage with X in such cases. And the temptation for Y – and for theorists – seems to be that she has no need to do so. There is no duty for Y to challenge X's sense of who he is, and it may be a matter of showing respect not to do so.

Doubts arise here, however. If Y's identity really is deeply important to him, and X never challenges it, any relationship between them is likely to be shallow and based on restricted honesty. Furthermore, Y should ask herself whether X really has the identity in question and subscribes to the various beliefs associated with it. That may not be the case. Someone may appear to be Black or Asian and not identify as such; he may say simply 'I was born here; I am Canadian' – or American. And as to associated commitments and beliefs, they may vary more than our generalizations suggest. For example, some persons who are Canadian and Indigenous support further action on residential schools whereas others prefer to 'move on' and do not. Some persons who are Black support reparations for slavery and others do not. Even a person who is a Trump supporter may not believe in 'the steal'; he could, for example, support Trump for reasons having to do with foreign affairs or immigration policy. X may be more open to challenges than Y believes. In holding back from engagement, Y may be missing opportunities that could lead X to reflect productively on his identity. Missed opportunities may be important, as nuances in identity commitments could be beneficial for relationships both in personal relations and in social and political life.

Concluding Comments

If one person offers reasons or evidence to another in a context of disagreement – if, that is to say, she offers an argument to that other, she is showing respect for that person. This is respect in the sense that she is indicating that she regards that other person as capable of reasoning, of thinking about reasons and their significance, and of changing his mind on the basis of reason. That support runs contrary to the anti-argument stance taken by Robert Nozick in 1981, favouring instead the more recent view of Angel Eduardo. The arguer presents reasons for her stance but presents these non-coercively because she allows for the other person's entitlement to determine his beliefs on the basis of his own reflections. In presenting her argument she is not indicating an unwavering conviction that in this context of disagreement she is the one who must be right and the other must come around to her way of thinking. She is not presuming infallibility. And granting that she holds back from seeking to rationally manipulate the other person, she can be said to respect reason itself. (Breakey 2022, Govier 1999) She indicates a commitment to reflection on reasons and evidence and to what extent they logically support an expressed viewpoint. This is a commitment to truth and logically related values, and it is a worthy one. There are some exceptions to the principle that one should argue in a context of disagreement. But these exceptions are fewer than we might think, and their rationale merits scrutiny.

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4.

Opposition

Abstract: I explore the relation between forms of logical opposition and forms of social opposition. The distinction between contraries and contradictories is developed and applied. Arguments by Graham Priest are criticized on the grounds that he interprets as contradictories claims more plausibly interpreted as contraries. One matter considered is the distinction between the expressible and the inexpressible. Another matter is Ralph Johnson's treatment of alternative positions. For many claims, there exist more than one alternative or 'opposite' position. Does it make sense to think of an arguer as the opponent of a claim or the opponent of a person? Regarding the latter, there are degrees of opposition, ranging from difference and distinction to competition, polarization, and further pathological cases.

Bertrand Russell once said "what is wanted is not the will to believe, but the will to find out, which is the very opposite." Russell is known as a clear writer, but it is not obvious what he meant when he made this comment. In what sense is the will to find out the opposite, or the 'very opposite' of the will to believe?

In discussion and debate, it is useful to ask whether, and in what sense, the claims people want to support are *logical opposites*. And if they are opposites, in what sense of logical opposition – as logical contradictories or as contraries? Do the people supporting 'opposed' claims necessarily, or customarily, find themselves in opposed social roles? If so, how competitive are those roles, to what extent are they polarized, and how far does the adversariality go? *Logical* opposition is relevant to all inquiry and debate, but *social* opposition involving adversariality need not be. While all contexts in which argumentation appears should allow

for reflection and criticism, not all require adversarial competition. We might call such contexts those of calm opposition or *restrained partisanship* in the sense understood by Wayne Brockriede. (Trapp and Schuetz 2006) It is clearly possible for criticism and the consideration of objections and replies to be conducted within the bounds of calm opposition.

Inevitable Contradictions in Philosophy?

In a book entitled *Beyond the Limits of Thought* (1995), Graham Priest uses dichotomous constructions to mount an argument to the effect that contradictions inevitably emerge in philosophy. He welcomes this result, one that for many would constitute either a refutation or a paradox needing to be resolved. The standard view, that to show of any philosophical or scientific position that it leads to a contradiction constitutes a decisive refutation of it, is not accepted by Priest. As is well-known, he believes that contradictions should (presumably sometimes) be accepted; he has been a major introducer of para-consistent logic. I contend that Priest employs in his premises dichotomous constructions that are disputable.

These constructions include the following:

- Determinate/indeterminate
- Sayable/not sayable
- Expressible/inexpressible
- Intrinsic/extrinsic

A basic objection to Priest's arguments is based on the claim that they misrepresent contrary predicates as though they were contradictory. In fact, though obviously not written for that purpose, his book appears to be a prime source for this mistake.¹ Working through Priest's arguments, we often find that terms that should be understood as contraries and as admitting of degrees are

1. I am indebted to Colin Hirano for his insight into the work of Graham Priest.

treated as fully contradictory opposites; then paradoxes are developed from the resulting structure. For example, Priest speaks of what can be expressed in contrast to what cannot be expressed. Following Wittgenstein, Priest accepts a dichotomous opposition between what can be expressed in language and what cannot be expressed in language. In his discussion of expressibility, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* is often quoted, as in "Propositions cannot represent logical form; it is mirrored in them;" "What finds its reflection in language, language cannot represent;" and "What can be shown cannot be said."

Priest is concerned with limits, and argues that the many philosophers similarly concerned have stated contradictory views. They have wanted to say there is a limit beyond which thought or language cannot go; yet they have found themselves thinking on both sides of that supposed limit. Kant, as is well-known, argued that phenomena (within space and time and describable using the categories of pure reason) can be experienced and known, whereas noumena (not known to be within space and time, and not describable using the categories) cannot be experienced and known. Yet, contrary to the tenets of his own epistemology, Kant did make claims about noumena; he had to do that, because he would have been unable to articulate his own position within the limits he had set.

In many places, Priest's oppositions are readily interpretable as *contrary opposites*, and as a result his arguments fail. Priest seems insensitive to the problems that can arise when contraries are taken to be contradictories. If we represent a statement as x is Q and another statement that we understand as its opposite as x is *not* Q , we may too easily interpret this decision as indicating that the second predicate is the contradictory opposite of the first. That is to say, an item X is either Q *or* it is not Q , and there is no further possibility: the 'or' is taken as exclusive. 'X is Q **or** X is not Q ' represents a true dichotomy given that the *or* in the statement is the exclusive *or*. On this interpretation, the principles of non-contradiction and excluded middle both apply, and proofs erected on this dichotomous presumption need not involve a false premise. If, on the other hand, we should decide that the natural language

predicates are best understood and represented as contrary predicates admitting of middles and degrees, then statements expressing their opposition should not be interpreted as contradictories and they formalized accordingly.

We express decisions about our *pre-formal* interpretation of predicates when we decide how to formally represent them. We can interpret the predicates as contraries and generate contrary propositions; we can interpret the predicates as contradictories and generate contradictory propositions. I submit that in many of Priest's arguments what should be contrary predicates are represented as contradictories, and a key premise fails for that reason. If a qualified interpretation along the lines of 'X can be Q with respect to Z' and 'X cannot be Q with respect to W' can be made out, then the statements 'X can be Q' and 'X cannot be Q' can be reconciled, and there is no contradictory opposition.

As a case in point, let us further consider the *expressible* and the *inexpressible*. One might suppose, as Priest evidently does, that something is either expressible or not, that 'expressible' and 'inexpressible' are contradictory opposite predicates and that is simply the end of the story. The presumption is that there is no 'middle' here because an element either is expressible or it is NOT: if it is not expressible, then it is inexpressible. In setting up this opposition as contradictory there is no need to consider failures of exhaustiveness or exclusivity, differences of degree, borderline cases, or differential respects in which a thing might be expressible or not. No such things matter. Presuming such a dichotomous opposition, Priest constructs an argument leading to a contradictory conclusion and claims an illustration of his theory that contradictions are inevitable in philosophy when one starts to reason about the limits of knowledge and thought. I would argue that this line of reasoning is not correct, because it starts from a premise flawed because it is constructed on an incorrect opposition, where what should be contrary is presumed to be contradictory.

It seems to me that there are feelings and ideas that can be partially expressed. Wittgenstein famously said that if you can't say something you can't whistle it either. But the fact that this

remark is well-known shouldn't isolate it from critical scrutiny. On a pleasant summer morning, a person might go for a walk and have a certain feeling of wellbeing and carefree-ness that she could not articulate in words: it would not be happiness or joy or wellbeing or gladness, let us say. Now let us suppose that this person walks along, with this sense of contentment and freedom, and begins to whistle along the way. We may say here that her feelings are inexpressible because she can't quite find a convenient word for them. But it is also fair to say that there is a sense in which her feelings are expressed, in the way she whistles as she walks along.

Nor is this the only type of example we might wish to consider. Interesting in this context are the views of Leo Groarke with regard to the feasibility of visual arguments. Groarke (2007) defends the claim that there can be such a thing as visual argument; he states categorically that a picture or item that can be seen can truly be an element of an argument. A simple example would involve the presentation of a counter-example that would refute a universal claim. Suppose you say that Elbe yoghurt will never spoil before its due date, and I on May 5, 2018 without saying a word, present you with a container of Elbe yoghurt, all moldy and spoiled, with a due date of May 10, 2018. (My example.) My argument is based on my display of this item; I show you something that constitutes a refutation of the claim you made to me. We might say, I show you that your claim is false by showing you this item; seeing the item is what will, by ostensive display, demonstrate to you that you are wrong. My display is visual: you can in a fully literal sense *see* that there is a counter-example to your claim, even though I may not express my claim in words. What may be said in this sort of context is that even though I have said nothing, expressed nothing in words, it is reasonable to interpret me as having argued along these lines: 'There exists a container of Elbe yoghurt which spoiled before its due date; therefore Elbe yoghurt can spoil before its due date.'²

2. Groarke resists the idea that all arguments must be expressed, or at least expressible, in terms of claims representing premises and conclusion. See, for example, Groarke

Because you can see the container of yoghurt, we can interpret my display as amounting to a visual argument, one based on ostensive display. To spell out the argument here, the instance has been described. One might say that the original argument was not expressed, meaning that it was not expressed *in words*, and that would be correct. If we said that the original argument was *expressible* in the sense that it could be captured in words, that would also seem to be correct, although one could dispute *to what extent* the ostensive presentation of the actual spoiled yoghurt had been captured in the words used to state the premise and conclusion of the argument. I submit that it is reasonable to conclude from this example (and many similar ones) that it makes sense to think of ideas as expressible in some sense or to some extent, and inexpressible in others.

Still clearer are cases in which arguments have premises and conclusion that are explicitly stated but are said, as well, to contain implicit material. Plausible examples are readily found. Consider:

He is Polish, so probably he is Catholic.

The implicit premise here is ‘Most Polish people are Catholic.’ Consider as well:

The bigger the burger, the better the burger. The burgers are bigger at Burger King.

These claims, made in an advertisement, deductively entail that the burgers are better at Burger King, which is the implicit conclusion of the argument. Although issues about implicit material in argument are large, complex, and disputed, these two cases are pretty clear and would not be contested by theorists of argument.³

and Birdsell 2007. I do not resist this claim, and am re-structuring Groarke’s views according to my own assumptions, which are more standard in this regard.

3. My own general approach to the problem of unstated premises and conclusion may be found in Chapter Two of *A Practical Study of Argument*, Seventh Edition (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth 2010.)

It is generally agreed that least some arguments have implicit premises or conclusions, and these are two straightforward cases. With regard to considerations of expressibility, the case that can be made is this: if material is implicit, it is by definition not explicitly stated, but there are elements in the discourse which give us reason to claim that material as implicit.⁴ Call these, for the moment, *inferential elements*, those elements that license the inference that such-and-such material is implicit. These inferential elements are explicit (if they are words in a text or speech) or are unstated but can be rendered in language (as when we explain the context of the burger example, saying, for example, ‘this is an ad’). There is a sense in which implicit elements in an argument are not spelled out and hence clearly not expressed but there is another sense in which they are made evident by what is articulated or easily made explicit. These claims are not expressed, in one sense, and yet they are (at least arguably) expressed, in another. (Compare Alston 1956) If claims can be partially expressed, it is reasonable to infer that they can be partially expressible. From that implication, we can (again) conclude that ‘expressible’ and ‘inexpressible’ are contrary predicates, not contradictory ones.

Along somewhat similar lines, we may consider ‘knowability’ with regard to the Big Bang (the cosmic event, not the television series). Should we count this event as *knowable* or as *unknowable*? To the extent that it is known it is obviously *knowable*. To the extent that it is unknown, it may be unknowable given contemporary scientific resources, unknowable for the predictable future, or unknowable absolutely. It seems reasonable in this context to say that the Big Bang is *knowable* to some extent. Cosmologists claim to know that such an event as the Big Bang occurred and had certain characteristics but they would not (for example) claim to know what, if anything, preceded the Big Bang or what might be entailed by the view that nothing preceded it. Indeed, they might very well claim with regard to its putative precedents that such things are unknowable in the radical sense

4. I include here the context. In the case of the better burgers, for instance, it is relevant to know that these claims were made in an ad.

that they will never be able to be known. Now given all these considerations, it seems reasonable here to speak of what is known and hence knowable, what is knowable to some extent, what is not known and is potentially unknowable, and what is radically unknowable. To consider knowability in these terms is, in effect, to interpret ‘knowable’ and ‘unknowable’ as contrary predicates – not as contradictory ones.

Repugnance and Recoil

In a series of lectures published under the title “Sense, Nonsense, and the Senses: An Inquiry into the Powers of the Human Mind,” Hilary Putnam (1994) discusses baneful divisions in philosophy, attributing some of them to a phenomenon of *recoil*. Putnam claims that what happens in much philosophical debate is that two positions are defined in such a way that one is a kind of ‘mirror image’ of the other. The positions are (in some sense) logically opposed, and interpreted by their proponents as contradictorily opposed. But that is by no means the end of the matter, because the logical opposition is so often accompanied by a kind of repugnance. “One is dominated by the feeling that one must put as much distance as possible between oneself and a particular philosophical stance,” Putnam says. What we find here is a pattern of recoil that causes philosophy to leap from frying pan to fire, from fire to a different frying pan, from different frying pan to a different fire, and so on, apparently without end. The response is not helpful to those seeking to develop careful and plausible philosophical accounts.

Thinking of contrary and contradictory opposites enables us to more fully understand what Putnam is alluding to as repugnance and recoil. The notion of recoil is expressed in the formula, ‘I don’t agree with X; I support not-X, and hence Y, which is *the opposite view to X.*’ Someone reasoning this way understands two accounts as exhaustive and exclusive opposites. Because he finds one of these accounts *repugnant*, he *recoils* from it and opts for the other, presumed to be its contradictory opposite. Clearly, the logical correctness of such a move depends on the soundness of the presump-

tion that the two accounts do indeed amount to exhaustive and exclusive alternatives. In this context, as in many others in philosophy, an ‘opposite’ view is made in the mirror image of another presumed to constitute an exhaustive and exclusive alternative.

Consider the following as representative of simplistic opposites in philosophy:

- Relativism/Absolutism
- Feminism/Non-feminism
- Dualism/Materialism
- Analytic philosophy/continental philosophy

An illustrative case here is that of feminism. Suppose a man asserts that he is not a feminist. What could he mean? A non-feminist might be someone who simply is not a feminist in the sense that he takes little interest in the sorts of issues feminists are interested in; he can accordingly be said to be a non-feminist. (Though that description is rather vacuous and contains little information.) Another possibility is that this man might not be a feminist in the sense that he asserts claims that are denied by most feminists. He might, unlike nearly all feminists, maintain that a human embryo counts as a person from the moment of conception and has human rights fully equivalent to those of an adult woman from that moment on. Still again, he might not be a feminist in the sense of being against feminism, opposed to it in the sense of denying it and feeling some emotional involvement in doing that. He might find its disputing of social norms requiring that women defer to men objectionable theoretically and emotionally, and he might speak out strongly against such feminists, defending male privilege. Clearly, these ways of being a non-feminist are distinct from each other. Because there are many alternatives to feminism, just as there are various versions of it, the feminism/non-feminism opposition is rather simplistic; it is uninformative but misleading to say that a person is simply a feminist *or not*.

With philosophical ‘opposites’ we feel ourselves in situations of dilemma, but should be suspicious of constructed opposites in

the territory of antinomy. Putnam (1994) finds an antinomy in treatments of realism and anti-realism and describes himself as seeking an account that amounts neither to dogmatic realism nor to dogmatic anti-realism. After explaining recoil, he launches into a prolonged and complex discussion of debates about realism and anti-realism in twentieth century philosophy, arriving on the basis of this discussion at his own position, which he understands to be a kind of nuanced naïve realism. More briefly Putnam describes another familiar philosophical dilemma concerning materialism and consciousness. We have a sense, he claims, that we would have to either accept some version of mind/brain identity OR be committed to mind/body dualism, often assumed to be its full and only opposite. If we are repelled by dualism and presume it to be the only alternative to materialism, we may accept materialism on those grounds. In so doing we will presume a dilemma, presupposing a binary choice situation. We understand our problem as though there is an exhaustive and exclusive disjunction between accepting mind/brain identity on the one hand and accepting mind/body dualism on the other. This presumption is mistaken. The ‘or’ should be inclusive.

Alternative Positions

In discussing the dialectical aspects of argument and introducing the notion of a dialectical tier on which arguers respond to objections and consider positions other than the one they have defended, Ralph Johnson (2000) wrote about *alternative positions*.⁵ Johnson acknowledged in response to criticism that it is by no means obvious just what *the alternatives* to a particular position are. We might think of just one: if your position is X then the alternative position is the contradictory opposite of X, namely not-X. But that is obviously over-simplified and will not do, given that there will often be many ways of denying X. There will be many possible positions contrary to X, though not contradictory to it, and some of

5. See Chapters Twelve and Thirteen of Govier1999.

these will qualify as opposite. In a broad sense a pro-choice view on abortion is ‘the opposite’ of a pro-life view and as such an alternative to it. If we delve into the matter, however, we will see that there are different versions of ‘pro-life’ and ‘pro-choice’. Some versions of pro-life would permit abortion in a case in which a woman had been raped in time of war, or was a victim of incest, while others would not. Some versions of pro-choice would permit abortion at six months of pregnancy, while others would not. There are obviously more than two sides in such cases, which can serve as an illustration of the complications that arise when we try to explain, with regard to some position X, what the alternatives to that position are. Logical alternatives are likely to be several at least, if we consider contraries as well as contradictories. Furthermore, positions that reach similar conclusions for very different reasons might be considered alternative. (Govier 1988)

View 3 might be an alternative to View 1 and View 2 because it denies an assumption common to both. View 4 might account for many, but not quite all, of the phenomena dealt with by Views 1 and 2, and to some extent count as alternative to them despite its failure to handle *exactly* the same questions. View 5 might be a sort of compromise between Views 1 and 2, reconciling elements of each. Unless we adopt the limiting presumption that the only alternative to X is not-X, there are plural alternatives. It is highly problematic to support a view on the grounds that one is repelled by ‘its opposite.’

Logical and Social Conflict

We find logic texts with duels portrayed on the cover; the roles of logical defender and logical challenger are portrayed in fighting terms. Two slightly embarrassed authors of such a book responded to feminist challenges of the representation by claiming that the illustration featuring men with swords portrayed a *metaphor*: they claimed that any ‘fight’ between proponent and opponent would of course be non-literal. There is no real battle in the case, only challenge and response, where the challenge is intellectual criti-

cism and the response is an answer to that, not by the sword but in words.

This response merits attention. We may first note that it is hard to make literal sense of the notion of being opposed to a *claim*; far more plausible is the idea of being opposed to a *person* who makes that claim. This sort of personal opposition is familiar in our daily experience. Say you are a socialist and I am a libertarian, and we enter into a discussion about politics. In our discussion I am in a role where I question and ‘oppose’ your position; that is the structure of our debate. The positions can be spelled out in propositions, but our actual discussion is not a set of propositions. Rather, it is a sequence of events in which you and I as persons are engaged and within which we find ourselves in ‘opposite’ roles, you as proponent and I as your opponent. We are, by the structure of this situation, *opposed*. But in just what sense are we opposed? Is there a conflict between the claims we are discussing? They are opposed claims, opposed in the logical sense; they are either contradictory or contrary. Or are we ourselves, as persons, in some kind of conflict? What is the relationship here between the conflict between the claims (as contrary or contradictory) and conflict between people?

Suppose that we are arguing back and forth against each other. Now it is possible and, according to many including myself would be ideal, to display our opposition purely in terms of roles in a discussion, and insist that there need be no opposition between us in any sense involving alienation or hostility. But, notoriously, that is not always the case.

To the claim that there is adversariality (social opposition) in the situation, one can reply as did the authors just mentioned and say that any *contest* or *fight* in a debate or discussion is metaphorical, not real. We are not really in any sense adversaries or enemies; we merely find ourselves in opposing or opposite roles in this particular circumstance, and it is a constructed and finite circumstance from which we can easily extract ourselves. As described so far, ours is an informal discussion. In another context, we might be in a formally structured debate where as proponent and opponent we would act out opposing roles structured designed to facilitate the

defending and challenging of claims. But even if this is the case, then adversariality should be purely role-determined and, accordingly, limited. The metaphor of a duel is just that, a metaphor about what people are doing in defending and attacking claims.

Consider here a person and her 'opponent' in an argument; call them A and B. Let us say that A puts forward an argument defending claim C, and B is making a critical response to that argument. In many discussions, A is referred to as the proponent and B as the opponent. Now at this point we need to ask the 'opponent or proponent of what?' Strictly speaking the answer should be that A puts forward a claim; she propounds it; she is the proponent of the claim and of an argument on its behalf. And B, in the challenging role, should be challenging either the claim C or the arguments that A has offered on its behalf. In the discussion A is the proponent of the claim, and B is the 'opponent.' (A and B take *opposite* roles.⁶) But we must ask again: of what, and in what sense, is B the *opponent*? Strictly speaking the only things at issue in the case are claims and arguments; there should be no people, personalities, or emotions involved.

In what sense is the opponent B *against* the claim C? There are many possibilities. He may accept a contrary proposition; he may accept a contradictory proposition. He may not accept any 'opposite' claim but may, rather, be somewhat agnostic about C itself or the arguments that A has put forward to support it. The structuring of an argumentative discussion into one between the proponent and the opponent does not require distinctions between these different possibilities. In the discussion, B is the *opponent* of A, who is a *proponent* of claim C. As A's opponent, we may say that B is in an oppositional role in relation to A. If this is all that is involved, there need be no aspects of adversariality in the case. Clearly this oppositionality need not be adversarial nor even in any sense competitive.

6. That is a simplification because B may question various aspects of A's position; in addition, as noted earlier, B may advocate a claim either contradictory to, or contrary to, that of A.

However slippage is common at this point. Often the discussion acquires a competitive overtone, as both proponent and opponent seek to dominate and 'win' by showing that they are right and the other party is wrong. People often go far beyond the calm and restrained discussion of evidence and reasons for and against opposite claims. Outside formal debates, and sometimes even within them, people engage in argumentative processes with considerable passion, experiencing strong identification with the positions they defend. The dynamic acquires a *motif* that some of my (male) colleagues loved to joke about: I am right and you are wrong. The message is a joking one, but the joke is not entire. The point may expand: 'Ha ha, I am *right* and you are *wrong*; I am right *because* you are wrong, and you are wrong *because* I am right. Furthermore, in the fight we are having, I am *victorious*.' The imposed assumptions are first that there are only two possibilities, right and wrong, and second that it is a competition to see which person gets to be in which position. What may have begun as an argumentative discussion involving logical conflict between claims has become a competition between people in a *win/lose* framework. The socialist strives to assert himself against the libertarian; the realist against the anti-realist; the monistic materialist against the dualist.

Arguing back and forth, considering claims and challenges, A and B struggle for victory. Each wants to prevail over the person understood as an opponent. Each seeks to win in the discussion or debate. Moving beyond the strict confines of intellectual discussion, competing for dominance in a game played as zero sum, A and B begin to function as opponents in a more-than-logical sense. Not to win will mean to lose, and losing will be experienced as a kind of diminution to the person who has identified with the claims he is making and may even experience humiliation if he is defeated in the 'battle' or battle.

Pathologies of Opposition

Conflicts between *claims* become conflicts between *people*, resulting in social opposition. Intense opposition between persons and groups, arising from disagreement about alternative positions, is expressed in a variety of ways involving competition, adversariality, ultimately even violence. Not only are there *logical* pathologies of opposition, *social pathologies* of opposition are many. Logical and social pathologies may buttress each other, with bad logical health supporting bad social health and conversely. Often people come to associate the positions they hold closely with their very identity, as when ‘I am a libertarian’ or ‘I am a materialist’ are taken literally. The logical opposition between claims that are contrary or contradictory becomes attached to persons who strongly identify with the claim they are defending; what could be simply a discussion of alternative positions comes to be associated with rivalry and competition. In such cases questioning a position may be understood as threatening identity, a situation underlying some unhealthy aspects of debate and facilitating such common fallacies as Straw Man, *ad hominem*, and guilt by association.

Rarely can differences between a pro-life position on abortion and a pro-choice position be understood purely at the level of propositional content. The pro-life supporter is likely to be opposed to the pro-choice supporter in a sense of social opposition, competition, and even animosity. The conflict has become intense to the point of murder. Socially, people may have ‘opponents’ and be ‘opposed’ in various ways and to various degrees. For the moment, let us define a social pathology of opposition as one in which oppositional roles have acquired extraneous and unnecessary elements of enmity and hostility. We may consider opponent roles in a variety of contexts including those of intellectual discussion and debate; competition in sports; social institutions such as court and parliament; and political conflict ranging from electioneering to outright war.

Opposite Sides?

The opponent becomes a competitor and even an enemy in a win/lose struggle – even though the role of opponent need not, in principle, include such elements of adversariality. For some competitive spirits, losing will feel costly to the point of humiliation and it will seem extraordinarily important to win. This is the kind of intellectual adversariality and struggle for dominance that feminist philosophers have strongly criticized. They deemed the adversarial and highly competitive style of much philosophy to be macho, overly-competitive, counter-productive, and alien to many women. (Ayim 1988)

The common assumption that there are ‘two sides’ to every question is incorrect. (Govier 1988) Although many procedures along these lines, it conveys a gross over-simplification. We think of ‘pro’ and ‘con’ and assume that because there are only two alternatives and you are *for* one of them, you must therefore be *against* the other. A slide into pathological opposition is greatly facilitated by this sort of binary framework, as it encourages the phenomenon of *recoil*. We set things up so as to favour the recoil phenomenon described by Putnam (1994). Debates are typically constructed as though there are two sides, although the two positions represented distort or fail to represent relevant possibilities. Typically the notion that there are two sides is an improvement over the notion that there is only one side, the truth, requiring no scrutiny or analysis. And yet if *only two* positions are considered, if people are not receptive to qualifications, considerations of borderline cases and anomalies, and the reinterpretation of constitutive terms, and if recoil is a factor, a highly partisan tone and dynamic become more likely.

Epistemically and politically the notion that discussion should be based on a consideration of two sides may have baneful consequences. It may serve to encourage the simplistic notion that objectivity is to be understood as ‘balance,’ wherein an advocacy of one ‘side’ is accompanied by an advocacy of ‘the other.’ (It is assumed, the one other. Govier 1988) For casual consumers of

such accounts a corollary may be that there is no truth to the matter, as a position and its (single) alternative can be argued with equal force and credibility. For others, the corollary may be that the truth is to be found somewhere ‘in the middle.’ Simplified and polarized debates of this kind easily and commonly omit to display and consider interesting intermediate positions. In the context of abortion, most obviously omitted are views according to which abortion should be a matter of choice up to a certain stage in a pregnancy and restricted after that. In the context of climate change debates, those arguing against the claim that man-induced global warming is occurring have sought simply to establish that there is a debate about this matter. To the extent that they can do this, they can induce in media an obligation to portray ‘both sides’ in the name of objectivity, and people may conclude that the truth lies somewhere ‘in between’ or that there is no truth of the matter at all. In political contexts, including discussion of the United Kingdom election in May, 2010, there is often a notion that a clear and pure campaign would involve an opposition of positions between two opponents; a situation where there are three major contenders is not only complicated in unwelcome ways, but somehow impure. In the United Kingdom and in Canada, the notion of a coalition is easily made to seem contaminated with objectionable compromises. The presumption that there is something illicit and nasty about a coalition was exploited by Canada’s Stephen Harper in December 2009.

Beyond the Roles: Going Too Far

Many institutions and practices involve oppositional roles: courts, formal debates, and Parliament provide three important examples. In Parliament we have the government and the opposition; in law, the prosecution and defense. In debates there are those who oppose and those who support a proposition; as we have seen, theorists of debate and critical discussion use the terms *proponent* and *opponent* going so far as to portray intellectual discussions as duels between defender and challenger. In these contexts, there

are important ways in which oppositional roles are useful. They are needed for the progress of discussion and investigation and, in legal contexts, for fairness and procedural justice. The accused needs a defender. These roles presuppose opposition in the sense of criticism; some persons put forward claims, and it is the role of other persons to submit those claims to scrutiny. They do not require unrestrained partisanship or adversariality. Oppositional roles have important social functions and – interestingly — require cooperation in a number of significant respects. Courts are said to be highly adversarial and are often criticized as such, for their winner/loser framework which does not easily adapt itself to compromise or the creation of new solutions to a conflict. But be this as it may, the operation of court requires rules and cooperation within the bounds of those rules. In principle and even in fact people can occupy and perform in opposing roles calmly and even non-competitively; they need not involve one-upmanship, a quest for domination, hostility and insult, or even a spirit of competitiveness. Those who do so are often misunderstood, since expectations of battling over clearly distinguished and opposed positions are so common.

Yet as is very familiar, court, parliament, debates, and academic discussions may be conducted in a highly competitive and combative way, featuring intense rivalry and such hostile elements as name-calling and recourse to *ad hominem* and Straw Man fallacies. Shouting, insults, and (in some countries) even physical fighting may be involved. In 2003, the *New Statesman* reported that some female members of the British House of Commons, struggling to survive in the macho world of politics, were taking testosterone treatments so as to be able to participate in highly combative debates that were required for their political careers. The hormone apparently boosts competitiveness and makes people feel more confident and more powerful. A prescribing doctor defended his practice by saying that these women needed a boost to be able to compete with male colleagues in committee meetings and parliamentary debates. To many, the story was horrifying. A commentator cited the phenomenon as demonstrating that only by behaving like an alpha baboon could a person reach the top.

(Mallee 2003) Critics of the practice expressed concern, reminding people of the harmful side effects that turned out to result from another hormone treatment, that of female hormone replacement therapy for post menopausal women.

Adversarial Extremes

In some conflict involving enmity, the idea is to win victory by the application of physical force. Opposition becomes intense to the point where it becomes a struggle to the death, resulting in war and, in the worst cases, massacre and genocide. The survival of the *us* is at stake, jeopardized by the *them*, and it is presumed the *us* must eliminate the *them* in order to survive. Demonization of the enemy serves to justify the struggle. We may here think of Aryan and Jew, Serb and Croat, Tutsi and Hutu, Muslim and Hindu. Opposition is a matter of Us and Them at its most intense, expanding to the point of exterminism. If middle or outsider roles exist at all in such conflicts, they will be precarious. Sides are polarized and there is tremendous pressure to be on one side or the other. Much of the rhetoric of war can provide appalling illustrations of a slide from rhetorical opposition to enmity to demonization and de-humanization, when opposing forces are categorized in such vicious terms as ‘scumbags,’ ‘cockroaches,’ and ‘vermin.’ Identities may be tied to oppositional roles taken to such an extreme that survival of one side is construed as requiring the elimination of the other. We can speak here of perniciously oppositional identities.

A Sequence

We can set out a sequence here, beginning with difference and proceeding to demonization and de-humanization. It goes like this:

- *Difference.* Things are in the world and we notice differences between them.
- *Distinction.* We mark those differences using words.

- *Disjunction* as early exclusion. (Not both, at the same time and in the same respect.) Marking those differences, we conclude that if a thing is Q, it is not at the same time P, where we have distinguished Q and P and they are contraries. (My cloth is blue; it is therefore not, at the same time, and in the same respect, green.)
- *Dichotomy*. We think of P and Q, which are contraries, as though they were contradictory predicates. We begin to assume that everything within our system is either P or Q, and nothing is both. We are, in effect, interpreting Q as not-P.
- *Competition*. People organize around the P/not-P opposition and compete. Who will win? The Ps or the not-Ps? It will be either one or the other; it cannot be both. This is a competitive struggle. At this point there are adversaries, but the adversariality is not necessary to the pursuit and overcome when one exits the context, which is fairly easy to do.
- *Polarization*. Competition intensifies and is accompanied by some amount of enmity. People feel compelled to identify with one side or the other in the zero sum game that is being played. There is no middle and there will be no compromise between extremes.
- *Demonization*. The opponent is viewed as evil and Satanic.
- *Destruction, or Struggle to the Death*. There are two hostile sides, struggling to the death. Each side thinks its wellbeing and survival depends on the destruction of the other.

In this sequence, we must stop somewhere, presuming that we do not wish to engage in genocidal extermination. Where should we stop? That depends on the context: sometimes between distinction and dichotomy (as urged by Putnam) and sometimes between competition and polarization (as suggested when we consider vio-

lence in sports). When opposition based on logical simplifications is accompanied by adversariality and attached to one's very conception of who one is, we are definitely in a danger zone from which we have every reason to escape. Polarization is dangerous, as has been all too obvious in recent political contexts.

I don't wish to dispute the value of criticism or oppositional roles, but rather to warn against intensifying those roles so as to slide into unnecessary polarization and even further into destructive enmity and exterminism. Simplified logical opposition can support unnecessary social opposition. But the relationship almost certainly works in the other direction too. If we see others as opponents in a conflict, we are more likely to exaggerate the differences between their positions and our own, resulting in logical inaccuracies. Logically, contraries and contradictories are different opposites. Socially, people can be opponents in different senses, with different degrees and kinds of competition and hostility. The various forms of logical opposition and social opposition are related, in ways both interesting and pathological.

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Anecdotes in Arguments

Abstract: While acknowledging that arguing from an anecdote to a generalization or universal claim is fallacious, this essay discusses some of the non-fallacious roles anecdotes may play in argument. Considering the work of Louis Groarke, Michael Leff and Christopher Oldenburg, I discuss the use of anecdotes to focus attention, draw interest, amuse, introduce a topic, suggest hypotheses, provide illustrations, and pose counterexamples. Synecdoche is also discussed.

Traditional wisdom in logic treats ‘anecdotal argument’ as a form of hasty generalization and, as such, a fallacy. The problem is straightforward: one cannot properly infer a general or universal claim from a single case, as described in an anecdote. The anecdote is a short narrative, often vivid and memorable due to its surprising or amusing character. Anecdotes describe something concrete and specific. They are often interesting and fun, but in them particular events are described and those cannot lend significant logical support to general or universal claims. Their specificity constitutes much of the basis of their appeal; it also makes them scant evidence for generalizations.

Some Recent Accounts

Some years back Louis Groarke questioned logical tradition and standard textbooks accounts on the matter of anecdotal arguments. He argued that generalizing from even a single example is not necessarily fallacious. (Louis Groarke 2001). He cited Aristotle, claiming that we may grasp the universal in the particular. Some-

times, if X is true *in this case*, X is true *in this sort of case*. Why? Because all the cases are the same with respect to the property ascribed. If we knew that the anecdote case was representative of all or most cases of its type, then information about it would suffice to ground a universal or general claim. For example, there are ways in which all circles are alike. If we calculate the ratio between the radius of a given circle and its circumference, that ratio will hold for all circles, because in this geometric respect, all circles are the same and known to be so. In this case, the circle as a geometric object is known with ‘insight’; we are capable of ‘rational observation’ of it, Louis Groarke says. He supports Aristotle’s view that with the mind one can see universals, stating that induction is not simply mechanical when a knower is capable of rational observation.

The case of the circle may seem persuasive. But we need to ask how we know that all circles are the same, regarding the radius/circumference ratio. I submit that it is *a priori* knowledge. It will be true by definition, following from a definition of what a circle is. It is not an empirical matter. When we know or can prove a universalization in advance, regarding the circle, we are not deriving our knowledge from empirical scrutiny of a particular case. We could construct a (weak and boring) anecdote about measuring the circumference of a circle and calculating that measure compared to its radius, but those measurements and calculation would not be the basis of our knowledge of the ratio. If Y is a circle, then if X is a circle, these two are identical in geometric respects. That is not a matter of induction or of an anecdote told as the beginning of an induction. Louis Groarke’s other cases are more empirical: an elephant, then a Roman Catholic. But what happens in these cases is that the knowledge of the universal is smuggled in to the understanding and description of the particular, not that it arises from it. Though Louis Groarke’s account, urging a more positive evaluation of anecdotal arguments, provokes thought, it is unconvincing in the end.

Another presentation urging that we re-think the role of anecdotes in arguments is that of Michael Leff and Christopher Oldenburg. (Leff and Oldenburg 2009) Questioning logical tradition on

the matter, they regard the anecdote as a kind of “rhetorical synecdoche” in which an individual narrative is employed to invite the audience to grasp the whole of some subject through an insight about a particular that (they claim) is more inclusive and engaging than anything a generalized proposition could provide. Leff and Oldenburg discuss two anecdotes, one told by George W. Bush, the other by Hilary Clinton, in the context of U.S. presidential campaigns. (See also Govier and Jansen 2011)

Asked whether the war in Iraq had been worth its cost in American lives, George W. Bush recounted his meeting with Missy Johnson, the widow of PJ Johnson, who was killed in that war. He called her a “fantastic lady” and said that she and her husband had understood that even the sacrifice of precious lives was necessary to “defeat hatred and tyranny” and spread freedom. Leff and Oldenburg claim that in his narrative of this encounter Bush invited a general positive estimation of his own character on the basis of the impression implied by the anecdote: the implication was that he was an empathetic and compassionate person. Bush’s attitudes as described on this occasion were to represent his character in general. Missy was to represent bereaved families, not just herself. Leff and Oldenburg claim that Bush was making an “ethotic argument” that “lends credibility” to implied conclusions about himself and about attitudes to the war. These claims are that Bush was a compassionate leader and that the war was necessary. But I cannot share the favorable judgments Leff and Oldenburg express here. First of all, even if we grant that Bush is accurately describing his attitudes and character on this one occasion, how he behaved on one occasion is insufficient to support a general claim about his character. Similarly, Missy Johnson’s attitudes could not logically represent those of all members of the deceased soldiers’ families; this broad group would almost certainly vary in many relevant respects. Furthermore, the question posed by the journalist and the one that Bush should have been answering was a different one, not about Bush’s character or about attitudes to the war, but rather about whether the war in general was worth its cost in American lives. Neither evidence about his own character nor evidence

about the attitudes of Missy Johnson and her husband is even relevant to that question.

Leff and Oldenburg seek to bridge the logical gaps here by deeming the anecdote as a rhetorical synecdoche, a particular that offers a substantive, rather than a statistical, representation of a larger whole. In the 'rhetorical synecdoche' the hearer or reader is supposed to be able to grasp the whole of a subject (general) through insight into a particular case. But can one actually do this? Can one grasp a universal, or whole, by considering a particular, or part? Verbally a part can represent a whole, as when one says "all hands on deck" or speaks of "getting bums on seats" or "paying with plastic". There is representation in the sense that the word for a part of something refers to the whole of it. The part represents the whole in the sense that reference is achieved by this usage; in these expressions, the words "hands" or "bums" refer to persons and are understood to do that. "Plastic" refers to a credit card. Synecdoche is a verbal device, a figure of speech. Reference to a part, or particular, can successfully achieve a verbal reference to a whole, or group. But it is an entirely different question whether a synecdoche achieves representation in the logical and ontological sense that the named part in a synecdoche (single case in the anecdote) manifests qualities that, through it, can be known to belong to the whole. For example, an anecdote of *one* case of bad service at a given restaurant does not ontologically or logically represent *all or most* cases of service at that restaurant (much less service at restaurants in general) regarding the merit of the service. While original and intriguing, the suggestion that an anecdote is a rhetorical synecdoche does not help to establish that there are non-fallacious anecdotal arguments.

In the Leff/Oldenburg paper, the anecdotes used by Hilary Clinton were taken from a speech she gave at the Democratic National Convention in 2008, in which Clinton endorsed Barack Obama's candidacy for the U.S. presidency and urged her followers to campaign for Obama. Clinton told of a single mother with cancer, who had adopted two children with autism; a young Marine who had waited months for medical care and begged her to take care of him and 'buddies' who were still in Iraq; and an

impoverished boy whose mother, working at minimum wage, had had her hours cut by her boss. Hilary Clinton cited her encounters with these vulnerable supporters, saying that she had been fighting for them and asking her audience to join that struggle. Leff and Oldenburg regard these anecdotes favourably, citing Clinton's rhetoric as reinforcing the idea of collective effort for better health-care. Indeed, the cases are moving and the rhetoric is appealing. But the logical gap between the attitudes of these vulnerable people and the attitudes of Americans at large remains. In this context the term "reinforces" here may be taken in two ways. The vivid and memorable anecdotes *reinforce* Clinton's appeal, as persuasive rhetoric. But these anecdotes do not *evidentially reinforce* any general claim about American attitudes to health care. Some need and want it desperately; some think they will never need it; others are proud of their ability to cope without it.

Oldenburg and Leff say that anecdote is "situated in the unstable ground between induction and narrative." (This claim, though intriguing, is rather vague: it is unclear just where that 'unstable ground' is.) An anecdote can instantiate an established principle or claim or support a generalization, they claim. Instantiation is fine; I contend and will argue in a subsequent section of this essay. But any claim or implication that there is logical support from an anecdote for a generalization is otherwise. Indeed, effective rhetoric using the anecdote may be persuasive. Through an anecdote, an audience may be persuaded to accept a general claim, perhaps one about the character of the arguer. But even if an anecdote is effective in this way, the logical gap between the particular and the general remains: and justification of a general claim has not been achieved. Generalizing from an anecdote is hasty. Although notions such as rhetorical synecdoche, holistic insight, and an 'unstable ground' are intriguing, they do not enable us to jump over the gap.

Other Uses of Anecdotes in Arguments

Fallacies of hasty generalization are by no means the end of a story about anecdotes in arguments, because there are other uses. Oldenburg and Leff were rightly and appropriately concerned to move beyond logical issues regarding anecdotal argument and attend to further possible uses. Anecdotes may focus our attention, draw interest, amuse us, introduce a topic, suggest hypotheses, offer counter-examples, and provide illustrations. These functions are significant and valuable, and not fallacious. I consider the last of these uses here, as they pose logical, as distinct from rhetorical, questions.

Establishing a fact and thus a possibility

An anecdote is a short narrative about something that happened or was done. As noted, anecdotes are often told due to their unusual or humorous nature. Reflecting on some oft-told anecdotes in my husband's family, these features stand out. One, for instance, concerns a cousin who at the age of twenty went from her home country of Holland to spend a summer with an English family. The English family gave her the use of a horse. On her return to Holland, she proudly told her relatives how generous the English family had been: the horse they gave her was so young – it was only 20! The point of this family anecdote seemed only to be that the young woman was lacking in knowledge of horses and that lack was rather at odds with her interest in riding them. Another family anecdote concerned an older cousin who was married to the mayor of a small city. Due to his role, they often had evening guests in their home, and this was sometimes inconvenient. As the mayor's wife she was hostess and yet she needed to retire early to keep up her health. Her solution was to simply leave the social gathering to go to bed. As she left she would say to her husband, "Are you coming too, or should I take a hot water bottle?" That was the hint: it was time for guests to depart. The point of this story seemed to

be that the mayor's wife was forthright and assertive in standing up for her interests, in an amusing way.

Anecdotes are short narratives recounted by someone, who is in effect offering testimony to the effect that the events of the narrative did occur. When deciding whether to accept that person's testimony, we should consider the usual factors bearing on its reliability. Is the person generally reliable? Is he or she competent regarding the claims contained in the anecdote? Would he or she have any special interest in having the anecdote accepted? (For example, could it be part of a sales pitch by someone who receives a commission?) And does the anecdote itself contain false or implausible claims or assumptions? If we accept an anecdote as true, we grant both the reliability of its raconteur and the reasonable nature of its claims.

If we accept anecdotes as providing premises of arguments for generalizations about character, these arguments would be fallacious as hasty generalizations, given that no one's character can be reliably interpreted on the basis of their single judgment or behavior in one circumstance. Still, if accepted, the anecdotes suffice to establish singular facts about people and events. 'This happened; it was like this; it was actual.' And so it was possible: these people were capable of doing these things. Consider now a story about the achievements of a single social action group in establishing a multi-million dollar facility. They started; it seemed unrealistically ambitious; their efforts succeeded beyond all expectation. A narrative of the group's success cannot show that another such group could do a similar thing, but it does establish a possibility. This sort of argument uses the anecdote as the basis of an inductive analogy. 'In case #1, a small group of people did X; case #2 is relevantly similar to case #1; therefore in case #2 a small number of people could achieve something relevantly similar to X.' The second claim here will often be implicit.

Showing that a hypothesis would merit investigation

A significant sort of example here concerns health. I'll invent a case; its realism should be obvious. Suppose that a person started

consuming an apricot gell and found that after several months of such consumption, his cycling speed had increased by 10%. He then proclaimed a causal relationship and launched a marketing campaign for the apricot product on this basis. Obviously a *post hoc* fallacy is involved in his presumption. But now suppose further that others using the product had similar experiences, so that the argument for the gell's effectiveness seemed to be supported by further anecdotes. (Perhaps now we have arrived at that unstable ground between narrative and induction?) Pulling a number of anecdotes together, could we say that we have an argument not for the causal hypothesis directly, but for its being reasonable to investigate that hypothesis? A case can be made here, and the anecdotes are a key element of it. The merits of the case would depend in part on how the various narratives were selected. If, for example, all the improved cyclists were friends of the marketer, the argument from multiple anecdotes would be weaker than if they were simply customers of his enterprise, interviewed after their use of the product. A key issue is whether the anecdote cases are likely to be representative of the cases covered by the generalization.

Anecdotes can be used to illustrate or exemplify and clearly there are better and worse illustrations or examples. I can easily give an example of a poor example. (Hopefully this is a good example of a poor example.) Let us say that I have established that inflation is at a rate of 8.1 percent, and I am giving an example of a family sorely affected by that. I describe a low income single father of eight children, several of whom require specialized diets. The man is shopping during the present period of inflation and is unable to obtain the groceries he needs for his family. The case will provide a suitable anecdote in the sense that it will be moving, memorable due to its distinctive features, and factually plausible as a case where need is present. Nevertheless, it will amount to a poor illustration of a family affected by inflation because of the man's unusually large number of children and the special needs of several of them. Such a family could have troubles regardless of inflation and in a period of inflation would be likely to have more difficulties than most other families. The anecdote tells of something unrepresentative and it is a poor example because of its

unrepresentative character. In this case, we can explain why it provides a poor example to illustrate the claim about inflation. But to understand that it is a poor example, and why it is a poor example, we rely on our general background knowledge of families (for instance, regarding number of children) and facts about the cost of specialty foods. It is background general knowledge that we use to deem the example a poor one. Another case, featuring a family of five, would be more representative of family requirements generally and would thus provide a better example.

We do not understand the particular simply as particular; we apply our background knowledge and beliefs to it. To exemplify or illustrate one needs not simply an example but a well-chosen one. These reflections on the merits of examples point back to Louis Groarke's claim that induction does not proceed mechanically. It does not, in the sense that through background knowledge we screen which cases best serve to illustrate which generalizations, and which generalizations are promising to explore when a number of different anecdotes seem to back them up. Induction is in these respects not purely mechanical.

Refuting a universal claim by counter-example

When an anecdote is used to provide a counter-example to a generalization, the context is indeed one of argument, but there is no fallacy involved. The argument goes like this: 'X is an A and is not B, so the claim that all As are B is false.'

An argument of this type is deductively valid against a universal claim. If all As are said to be B, and X is an A which is not B, then the universal claim is refuted. When the claim that X is an A and not a B is developed in an anecdote, and that anecdote is accepted as true or warranted, then it has played a function in argument, providing a crucial premise used to refute a universal claim. Clearly there is no fallacy here. To question such an argument, one could dispute the details of the anecdote or the interpretation of the questioned claim as universal as distinct from general. (A claim of 'most' will obviously not be refuted by one particular counter-example.) The anecdote may be questioned on various

grounds including those of implausibility, inconsistency, or unreliable testimony. Such lines of questioning address the acceptability of the premise in a counter-example argument. Another flaw that could appear in arguments of the type ‘refutation by counter-example’ is that of misinterpretation of the claim to be supported or refuted. Suppose, for example, that an anecdote of good service in a restaurant is cited against a claim that *all* service in that restaurant is poor. Then the anecdote would refute the claim. But a more careful interpretation could well be that the claim intended was that *most* service in that restaurant was poor. In that case, the argument against it would be unsuccessful. The ‘most’ claim, a generalization rather than a universalization, would not be refuted. Most can be X, while one or a few are not X.

Illustrating a general or universal claim

It is a logical error to use the particular to justify the general, but it is not a logical error to use the particular to illustrate or exemplify the general. If we allege that the fallacy of anecdotal argument has been committed, we assume that a particular anecdote has been used in an effort to justify a universal or general claim. The matter is different if we take the general claim to be accepted and the particular anecdote used to illustrate it. (Battersby 2016) Indeed, this relationship is common, perhaps due to the greater interest and intelligibility of concrete stories as distinct from relatively abstract generalizations. As an example, consider a news story about inflation that begins with a claim that inflation has reached 8.1% and then tells a story about a man shopping for vegetables who is unable to buy the food he needs for his family. If the claim of 8.1% inflation were to be inferred from the anecdote, we would have the fallacy of anecdotal argument. But if, instead, the anecdote serves to illustrate an already established claim, there is no fallacy. Anecdotes are useful in such contexts: the impact of a relationship in a familiar setting can give the audience a sense of its impact and significance.

Consider the general claim ‘older women are more stigmatized than older men for having grey hair.’ Now, for example,

grey-haired LL was dismissed from her job as television anchor at the age of 58 whereas her grey-haired male predecessor LR was allowed to continue in the position until he was 77. The second claim illustrates the first, which is stated as something known or granted in advance. We can speak here of an example, an instance, an exemplar, a case in point, or an illustration. The case of LL and LR provides an example, or instance, of discrimination based on age and gender. There is no attempt to arrive at a generalization from this case; the generalization is presumed when the case is cited as an illustration of it. Issues of interpretation may arise here: whether a case is cited in a quest for justification or as an example or illustration can be hard to tell, in practice. Is the general claim known or accepted in advance? That is the question.

There is a relationship between this argumentative move and that of universal instantiation in formal logic. If all A are B, then this A is B. When this particular instance of an A is specific and familiar and details can be stated or recalled about it, then citing it is to good rhetorical purpose and likely contributes to understanding. A complaint about much philosophical writing is that there are too few examples offered to contribute to that sort of understanding. Rhetorically, anecdotes contribute interest and impact. The case will often serve to remind the audience of what the generalized claim amounts to in concrete term.

Leff and Oldenberg were right to emphasize that anecdotes can play many roles in argument. I submit that they were wrong about one such role: the establishment of general claims on the evidence of particular cases.

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6.

Logic, Parables, and Argument

Abstract: We explore the relationship between argument and narrative with reference to parables. Parables are typically thought to convey a message. In examining a parable, we can ask what that message is, whether the story told provides reasons for the message, and whether those reasons are good reasons. In exploring these questions, we employ as an investigative technique the strategy of reconstructing parables as arguments. We then proceed to consider the cogency of those arguments. One can offer arguments through narratives and, in particular, through parables, but that doing so likely brings more risks than benefits, from an epistemic point of view.

Some take the view that narratives and arguments fall into mutually exclusive categories, on the grounds that narratives are stories and arguments are attempts to support claims by offering reasons for them. That sort of dichotomous contrast is exaggerated, though: there is ample evidence of overlaps. A narrative may contain one or more arguments, as in a case where legal speeches or intellectual discussions are contained in a novel. Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* provides an obvious example. On the other hand, a work that is primarily argumentative may contain one or more narratives, as in the story of the Sun and the Cave or the Ring of Gyges, in Plato's *Republic* and the short narratives in some of Jean-Paul Sartre's books. Some narratives play important rhetorical roles in contexts where arguments are offered, adding interest and vividness. From narratives one can extract propositional claims that in other contexts serve as the premises or conclusions of arguments. And despite the bad reputation of "anecdotal arguments," a story

about an individual case can show that something exists or is possible, or provide a counter-example.¹

Further questions about narrative and argument have special significance and interest. Here we are concerned to explore the following question. Can a narrative serve to provide an argument for a claim that can reasonably be taken to be its “point” or conclusion? This question concerns the potential relationship between the point of a narrative, as emerging from the story told in that narrative, and the conclusion of an argument, as emerging from reasons or evidence stated in its premises.² In this essay, we explore this question with reference to one type of narrative, the parable.

Parables are of special interest and, due to their relative brevity, provide convenient material for theoretical analysis. Because parables are often used in teaching contexts, it makes sense to explore just how we could find *good reasons* within such them. To regard a parable as having a message and as providing reasons (potentially good reasons) to support that message is, in effect, to regard it as offering an argument. People often change their minds on the basis of stories such as parables, and we can ask whether they do that for good reasons.

To be sure, interpretive, logical, and epistemic difficulties often arise if one seeks to extract an argument from a narrative-

1. See Govier and Jansen (2011), p. 75-88.

2. It is one thing to extract claims from narratives, or even to extract arguments from narratives. It is another thing to extract from a narrative an argument that putatively expresses the point or message of that narrative, as supported by the events recounted in the narrative. Thanks to Gilbert Plumer for relevant correspondence on this matter. We take it to be quite obvious that one can extract claims in the first sense here, but far less obvious that one can derive an argument from a narrative, in the second sense. Broader questions about the relation between narrative and argument are of great interest but cannot be considered here. These include whether there is such a thing as a distinctive narrative type of argument (as distinct type in the way, say, that abductive arguments are a distinct type), and whether there is such a thing as narrative rationality, which is distinctive from the rationality characteristic of arguments.

even a short one such as a parable or fable.³ The interpretive issues that arise when one tries to construct an *argument* so as to capture the point of a *story* are many and complex. It may be alleged that argument and narrative are quite distinct *genres* and a story will be “killed” if cast into argumentative form. Compared to logically stated arguments, stories tend to be vivid, memorable, and emotionally appealing. From the point of view of logical cogency, there is a trap here: we risk persuasion on the basis of vividness and appeal, as distinct from relevant reasons. When a solution works in some narrative (often a fictive one) we may infer that it would be realistic outside that narrative, an inference that would be logically mistaken.

Seeking to derive from a narrative an argument with explicit premises and conclusion is an approach employed here as a method of inquiry. We do not adopt this approach due to any theoretical commitment to the claim that *all* narratives *ought* to be recast as arguments. Rather, we adopt it as a kind of investigative tool. If we can plausibly derive an argument from a narrative such as a parable, we can assess the merits of that argument, and scrutinize it to consider whether the narrative offers good reasons to support its message. If we cannot plausibly derive an argument, or can derive only a very weak argument from the narrative in question, that outcome undermines the view that the parable or story supplies a message supported by *good reasons*. Parables are a convenient and appropriate form of narrative in this exploration because they are short and are characteristically understood as conveying a serious message.

1. Definitions: Narrative, Argument, and Parable

We take these definitions to be broadly in accordance with ordinary usage and, if not definitive from a scholarly point of view, adequate for our purposes here.

3. Ayers (2010). See also Faigley and Selzer (2009), Fisher (1984) and Reissman (2008), and Spigelman (2001).

Narrative

In a narrative, a sequence of events is described from a point of view that is often but not necessarily that of a person who has experienced it and serves as its narrator. The *narrative has a kind of form*; sense is made of the events, which are shaped into a story with a beginning, middle, and end.⁴ Typically there is a sort of plot in which a problem arises; as the story goes on there is some kind of outcome as the problem is resolved or ends in some way. In many narratives, events are sequenced in a realistic temporal order; however there may be deviations, as in the case of a story about time travel or novel with frequent flashback scenes. (Ayers 2010) Often, but not necessarily, events are causally linked in a narrative account. A narrative may be an autobiographical account; there is a narrator who is recounting a *story* of something that happened to him or her and may in some contexts be said to be “telling his or her story.” This notion is presumed in Spigelman (2001) and in Faigley and Spelzer (2009). Narrative accounts are typically particular, about what happened in one case. However, one could have a general narrative account of a sequence of events, as in an evolutionary explanation or historical account of economic problems leading up to a revolution. Liszka (2003) claims that general narratives about processes in nature may, in effect, justify claims about conservation ethics. Narratives may be fictional or non-fictional. Many stories are vivid and absorbing, but a narrative account need not have these features. One might, for example, offer an account of a board meeting which, though boring, would still amount to a narrative in the basic sense that it described events leading to some outcome.

4. We cannot pause to analyze further this commonly made statement which, despite its triteness, seems open to the objection that anything has in some sense or other a beginning, middle, and end.

Parable

A parable is a short simple story typically told of specific events and characters likely to be familiar and readily understood by the intended audience. It might, for instance, be about a man disturbing his neighbour in the middle of the night, a person helping a wounded stranger, a wandering son returning to his father, a stranded traveler constructing for himself a raft to cross a river, or some other specific and concrete thing (see Munson (1976), Cartwright (1999), Parker (2011)). Many parables are religious in nature; Jesus of Nazareth is especially renowned as one who sought to teach by parable. However, there are parables within other religious traditions as well as non-religious moral parables—and even philosophical parables, as we shall see. The parable is one type of narrative and considerations pertaining to it do not necessarily apply to narratives of other types.⁵ A parable has a *message*, often referred to as its *lesson*. (Good novels and short stories are less didactic.) Often the message of a parable goes unstated and is implicit. The story of something specific and particular is told so as to convey or suggest a more general claim.⁶ In religious parables the message is broadly spiritual in nature, often concerning the relationship between God and human beings or moral relationships between people.

Some New Testament passages commonly described as parables would not count as parables in our sense of that term. A well-known example is the so-called parable of the mustard seed as expressed in Mark 13: 31–32. Here Jesus is asked to what we shall liken the kingdom of heaven, or to what we should compare it. His answer is:

It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth; but when it is sown,

5. Munson (1976). See also Parker (2011) and Cartwright (1999).

6. Our preliminary survey suggests that the implicit message is more characteristic of Christian parables in the western tradition than of secular parables and parables within Hinduism and Buddhism.

it groweth up, and becometh greater than all the herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.⁷

In this version of The Mustard Seed there is no story, so it is not a parable in the sense defined here. What we have instead is a figure of speech—a statement that the kingdom of heaven is *like* a growing mustard seed.

Argument

The point of an argument is not to tell a story that goes in some direction to a resolution but rather to *provide reasons* to support a claim that is in question. Arguments are often made in efforts to rationally persuade some audience that a claim or claims are rationally acceptable. They may also be put forward in contexts of deliberation or inquiry, when arguers explore reasons to consider the extent to which claims can be given rational support.⁸ In an argument one or more claims are made *to offer evidence or reasons* for a further claim or claims. The claims offered as support are premises of the argument and the claim to be supported is its conclusion. The term “argument” is not a success term. It is quite possible to have a poor argument, in which premise claims are put forward as supporting some conclusion for which they offer only weak support or no support at all. It is one thing to say that a discourse expresses an argument and another to say that it expresses a good argument.

Important for our account here will be the fact that many arguments may be reasonably deemed to have implicit conclusions or premises. If one understands an argument to have implicit material, one should be able to give interpretive reasons for adding that

7. See also Luke 13: 18–19, where the “parable” is stated in more narrative terms, and we have an analogy between the kingdom of heaven on the one hand and the very small, but growing, seed on the other.

8. See Govier (1999) and Govier (2010) for defence and elaboration of this account of argument. Compare also Johnson (1996), especially Chapter Six.

material, from the context or wording of the stated material. For present purposes, we presume that at least one premise or conclusion claim must be explicitly expressed in order to have an argument. Any claim that we take to be an implicit conclusion or premise is marked in our presentation of an argument by *. We do not allow here for the possibility that *all* of an argument could be expressed visually or through some other non-verbal means. A picture of a gleaming new car is not itself an argument, on our view, though such a picture might be said to provide the premise of an argument to the effect that “you should buy this car,” provided there are appropriate verbal indicators.

The logical core of an argument is constituted by its premises (explicit and implicit), indicators of its line of reasoning, and its conclusion or conclusions. To display the logical core of an argument, we standardize, stating the argument’s premise(s) and conclusion(s), employing indicator words to show which statement(s) are used to support which others, and marking implicit claims with *.⁹

2. An investigation, and some logical issues

With reference to parables, the question of arguments can be posed in this way: if we learn from these stories (as is commonly presumed) do we simply learn a lesson as *illustrated* or *suggested* in the parable? Or do we, rather, learn that lesson in some way that incorporates *reasons* that are offered in its narrative and can be plausibly and fairly articulated in an argument?¹⁰ In such an argu-

9. To speak of the logical core of an argument is not to ignore the fact that there may be other important elements present when arguments are articulated in discourse. These include emotive indicators; counter-considerations introduced by such terms as ‘even though,’ ‘while,’ and ‘despite the fact that’; introductory material; asides such as jokes or illustrative anecdotes or elucidatory remarks; and attempts to rebut actual and potential objections to the premises, conclusion, or line of reasoning.

10. We have selected cases with reference to our primary interest in the relation of narrative and argument.

ment, the lesson would appear as the conclusion and the reasons given by the story of the parable would appear as the premises.

As plausibly as we can, we will proceed here to derive arguments from a number of parables. We will then examine logical and interpretive problems, reflecting on the implications of our results for the broader issue of learning from stories, and the relationship between narrative and argument.

From a logical point of view, basic questions arise concerning the notion that rationally compelling arguments can be derived from narratives.¹¹

First, *the scope of the conclusion*. As mentioned already, typically a narrative is particular, being an account of events in a singular actual or fictional case. If one seeks to derive from such a narrative a general or universal conclusion, is the result simply an anecdotal argument? Is there a fallacy of hasty generalization? If a narrative is used simply to show that one instance exists, these issues do not arise.¹² But if the case within the narrative is to *represent* further cases, we need to ask what those further cases are, and how (if at all) the narrative can acquire the needed representative quality. Questions of this type arise whether we interpret the representation as analogical (how good is the analogy?), by instance (do we have a hasty generalization?), or symbolical.

Second, there is the matter of *fictive assertion*. In an argument, premises are asserted and when the argument is evaluated, one checks whether those premises are true or rationally acceptable. If the narrative is about a fictional case, that epistemic approach seems inappropriate. One might try to dodge the issue of truth by thinking in terms of the rational acceptability of the

11. These will be illustrated by our efforts regarding examples here, and we will return to these general logical points at the end of our paper.
12. These issues have been explored in Govier and Jansen (2011). Michael Stigl interestingly suggests that the message of a parable should be interpreted according to the context in which the parable is offered and, in particular, the specific question to which it is an answer. That approach would be fitting when a parable emerges from an oral tradition. We do not adopt it here because the parables we discuss are teaching parables that appear to be offered to a general audience.

premises.¹³ However it is not clear that the problem of fictive assertion is thereby fully resolved, given that the larger question of what it is to rationally accept claims made in fiction remains unanswered. An alternative approach, and the one used here, is to state the premises in conditional form so as to minimize ontological commitments. Third, there are questions of *representation*. Just how does the story of a parable represent something else? Our consideration of parables so far suggests three distinct relationships for representation. These are:

1. *Analogy*. The parable is about some concrete phenomenon X; the intended message or lesson is about some more abstract phenomenon Y, where Y is said or presumed to be *relevantly similar* to X, which is to say similar in aspects relevant to the credibility of the conclusion or message. X is the analogue and Y is the primary subject. The presumption underlying the argument is that the claim made about X can also correctly be made about Y. If there is an argument in such a parable, it is an argument by analogy.
2. *Symbolism*. The items and events in the parable are symbolic of something else. For example “a master” in a story may symbolize God and “a feast” may symbolically represent the riches of heaven. It’s important here to note that symbolic representation is not that of analogy, although there can be overlaps. Symbolism need not be based on relevant similarity. An item S may symbolize a characteristic W without in any way resembling W, as when a pen symbolizes an author and a sword symbolizes a war. How to assess symbolism from a logical perspective is, to say the least, unclear.
3. *Instantiation*. The items and events in the parable are instances, or cases of something. A figure in a teaching

13. This is the view taken in Govier (2010) though not for reasons connected with fictive assertion.

role is an instance of “the teacher” and a figure in a learning role is an instance of “the student”, for example.¹⁴

3. Discussions of parables

We begin our exploration of these questions by examining three accounts of parables and the claims emerging from them. In considering these accounts, we present examples relevant to the understanding and assessment of the claims made.

3.1 A.H. Parker

In *Light Denied*, a recent work on the parables of Jesus, A.H. Parker interprets parables in a broadly argumentative way. On his account, a parable “puts forward an illustrative package that consists of an argumentation along the lines that *if such and such a situation pertains then commonsense dictates that so and so will follow.*” We note here that these conditional claims do not in themselves amount to arguments; they may be said to be “argumentative” in the sense that they seem like the sorts of claims one might incorporate into an argument. The problem of fictive assertion is avoided when one adopts this approach, since the premise is understood as conditional.¹⁵ Parker states that parables function as two-dimensional speech-forms in that they describe “a particular scenario but only so as to make reference in some way to something quite other.”¹⁶ That comment alludes to the representativeness problem, which (disappointingly) is avoided by Parker. He

14. We note that an instance may come to serve as a symbol, if it is widely accepted as a stand-in for a class. The royal couple, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge are an instance of young European royalty; their publicized tour across Canada in July, 2011 may also serve to make them a symbol of young European royalty.

15. We have benefitted from this suggestion.

16. Parker (2011).

only handles the particular scenario, omitting the “something quite other”, which he is unwilling to address.¹⁷ A parable’s illustrative package (for Parker it is “if... then” “logic”) is very literal and specific. For example Parker identifies the “logic” of *The Insistent Neighbour* (which we discuss later under the title *The Bothersome Neighbour*) to be that “[i]f the neighbour was successful in getting what he needed, *then commonsense suggests that it was not due to friendship but to his shameless persistence.*”¹⁸

On Parker’s account, a further step, *interpretation*, is required to understand what Jesus meant, spiritually and morally, by that story and by other stories such as those of the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son.¹⁹ (We have called this the problem of representation: just *what* does the parable represent, and how does it do that?) For our purposes, it is this further step of interpretation that is of special interest, as it is directly related to the question of whether there is a central message or “point” which can be regarded as a conclusion supported by reasons.

Contrary to Parker, in some parables, what happens is contrary to what one would expect from a commonsense perspective. An example is the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20: 1–16), in which people who work very different numbers of hours are all paid the same amount by their employer. This parable seems to work as an analogy; the analogue is that of a land-owner who chooses to pay late-arriving workers the same amount as those who have been working all day. The analogy is not stated in fully explicit form in the text; however there is a clear textual justification for it earlier in verse 1, which says “For the kingdom of heaven is *like unto* a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.” The parable is developed over sixteen verses, the last of which says, “So the last shall be first, and the first last...” The message

17. Parker (2011), p. 10.

18. Parker (2011), p. 60.

19. Parker (2011) makes it clear that this step has many problems. See Ch. 9 for further discussion.

of this parable is that people who repent and begin to serve the Lord late in life deserve the same reward as those who began to serve him early in life. Contrary to Parker, the way in which the landowner is paying his workers seems strikingly unlike common sense, and the memorability and interest of the parable are mostly due to that fact.

While we find Parker's account helpful with regard to the issue of fictive assertion, his failure to address the representativeness problem is disappointing. In addition, his view that the literal message of a parable is accord with common sense fails to fit some significant cases.

3.2 *Ronald Munson*

In an older textbook on informal logic, Ronald Munson included a chapter discussing analogy, parables, fables, and illustrative examples. He begins with analogy, noting that an analogy may be purely illustrative or may serve as the basis for an argument. In any analogy, there are two things said to be similar; these are the primary subject and the analogue to which that primary subject is compared. It is the primary subject that is the main topic of interest and the analogue is brought in for expository purposes. In an illustrative analogy, Munson says, the analogue is described as a way of making the primary subject more intelligible and interesting. In a good illustrative analogy, the analogue is "fitting" to the primary subject (in other words, is relevantly similar to it), vivid and more familiar than the primary subject, and not misleading. Insofar as it is purely illustrative and not argumentative, an analogy has no role in providing logical support for a conclusion. The illustrative analogy, says Munson, is an expository device as distinct from a logical device.

Having discussed illustrative analogies, Munson moves on to consider parables and fables. He defines parables as simple stories told to illustrate or explain certain principles or attitudes, saying parables are analogies presented in dramatic or fictional form. Munson claims that the analogy underlying a parable is often not made explicit; the parable has to be interpreted by the reader "in a

way that straightforward and explicit analogies don't have to be."²⁰ On Munson's account, parables have a message, which is their "point". That message, about a primary subject, is presented in an analogy. However the analogy does not provide the basis for an argument: for Munson parables do not express arguments. They do not seek to provide reasons for the message conveyed. Rather, they are expository devices that serve well when they are vivid, memorable, offer short dramatic narratives, and are not misleading. Since a parable will be a story, it is likely to be more entertaining and remarkable than purely descriptive or logical exposition. It may have a use in writing that aims at demonstrating norms of behaviour or attitude. On this account, parables could be supplements to argumentative discourse but would not by themselves provide arguments.

Here is Munson's own example of a parable.

The Parable of the Stonemasons

A knight was traveling to London, and as he passed through the town of Ely he came upon three stonemasons busy at their work. "What is it that you are doing?" the knight asked. "Why, Sir," the first answered, "I am smoothing a stone." "I am fashioning the keystone for an arch," the second said. "And you?" asked the knight, turning to the third mason. "I am building a cathedral," he replied.²¹

Note: this is a secular parable. The message here would seem to be that the third mason is right, and (by analogy, on Munson's account), one should describe one's work in the broadest and most inspirational terms.²² Though some parables amount to analogies, on reflection "analogy" does not quite fit the stonemason story. The message of this parable is about work and the masons are

20. Munson (1976), p. 326.

21. *Ibid.*, 327.

22. What we have here is probably better understood as a symbolic instance than as an analogy. The masons are doing work; what they are doing is, then, an instance rather than an analogue if we think the point is about the understanding of work, generally.

working: what they are performing are *instances* of work, not *analogues* of it.

Contrary to Munson, however, some parables can be cast, with relative ease, as arguments. Consider, for instance, the well-known Hindu parable of the blind men and the elephant.

The Parable of the Blind Men and the Elephant

Four blind men went out to see an elephant. One touched the leg of the elephant and said, “The elephant is like a pillar.”

The second touched the trunk and said, “The elephant is like a thick club.” The third touched the belly and said, “The elephant is like a big jar.” The fourth touched the ears and said, “The elephant is like a big winnowing basket.” Thus they began to dispute hotly amongst themselves as to the shape of the elephant. A passer-by, seeing them thus quarrelling, said, “What is it you are disputing about?” They told him everything and asked him to arbitrate. The man said: “None of you has seen the elephant. The elephant is not like a pillar, its legs are like pillars. It is not like a winnowing basket, its ears are like winnowing baskets. It is not like a stout club, its trunk is like a club. The elephant is the combination of all these—legs, ears, belly, trunk and so on.”

In the same manner, those who quarrel (about the nature of God) have each seen only some one aspect of the Deity.”²³

There seems here to be an *analogy* between the elephant and God, and between the blind men seeking to know the elephant and limited human beings seeking to know God. The point, or message, is that when disputes arise in each of these contexts, their sources lies in the limitations of those seeking to know.

If we set out to standardize an argument here, we could generate the following result:

1. If four blind men investigated an elephant and touched different parts, they would begin to dispute about the shape of that elephant.

23. Page 355 of a PDF book called Tales and Parables of Sri Ramakrishna downloaded on July 20, 2011 at <http://www.archive.org/details/TalesAndParablesOfSriRamakrishna>

2. If these four blind men began to dispute about the shape of the elephant, their dispute would be due to their having experienced only one aspect of it.
3. People who dispute about the nature of God are like these four blind men.²⁴
Therefore,
4. People who dispute about the nature of God have experienced only limited aspects of God.

Munson would say that there is no argument in this parable: on his account the message is asserted and the analogy is illustrative only.²⁵ He would say that one should not look for reasons for a message.²⁵ To be sure, we could assess the aptness of the analogy as an expository device and that alone. One point supportive of Munson's view is that the conclusion, (4), may seem more plausible in its own right than it is with "support" from the analogy of the blind men and the elephant. But a point against Munson's non-argumentative line of interpretation is that this story about the elephant and the blind men does seem to provide some account of the nature of disagreement about matters of religion. The blind men are instances of persons lacking the capacity needed to make a discovery they seek.

In some parables the narrative serves to illustrate a point, or remind us of something we already know, rather than to provide *reasons for a claim*, as one would do when offering an argument in its support. But it would be premature to stop our investigation of parables with the idea that they are all illustrative analogies. Contrary to Munson, some parables represent by symbolism or

24. This premise is not marked as implicit because it is explicit, in the final statement.
25. One may believe that there is an argument by analogy, on the grounds that these blind men are LIKE limited human beings (with respect precisely to their limitation) and the analogy provides the basis for an argument. One could also maintain that the blind men are actually an INSTANCE of limited persons seeking knowledge, and that there is an inference from this putatively representative instance to the quests by beings who are limited in other ways.

instantiation, and some appear to provide support for a message. While appreciating the fact that Munson included the topic of parables in his informal logic textbook, we find his account unduly restricted due to its failure to consider the argumentative significance of some parables and its concentration solely on analogy, as distinct from instantiation and symbolism.

3.3 Nancy Cartwright, in the tradition of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing

Nancy Cartwright has recently explored the notions of fable and parable, using them to understand how models work in science.²⁶ Her account is developed from eighteenth century discussions by Lessing. Both Lessing and Cartwright say that a parable differs from a fable insofar as its lesson is not written in, but must be inferred. A fable comes with “the moral of the story” stated right there, whereas with a parable, the audience must supply the message. Interestingly, while this notion that a parable must have an *implicit* message fits parables in the western tradition, it does not seem to fit many Hindu and Buddhist parables, in which the message is often explicitly stated and may even be given in the title of the parable. The parable of the Blind Men and the Elephant provides one example. Another is the Parable of the Raft.

The Parable of the Raft

A man is trapped on one side of a fast-flowing river. Where he stands, there is great danger and uncertainty—but on the far side of the river, there is safety. But there is no bridge or ferry for crossing. So the man gathers logs, leaves, twigs, and vines and is able to fashion a raft, sturdy enough to carry him to the other shore. By lying on the raft and using his arms to paddle, he crosses the river to safety. The Buddha then asks the listeners a question: “What would you think if the man, having crossed over the river, then said to himself, “Oh, this raft has served me so well, I should strap it on to my back and carry it over land now?” The monks replied that it would not be very sensible to cling to the raft in such a way. The Buddha continues, “What

26. Cartwright (1999).

if he lay the raft down gratefully, thinking that this raft has served him well, but is no longer of use and can thus be laid down upon the shore?" The monks replied that this would be the proper attitude. The Buddha concluded by saying, "So it is with my teachings, which are like a raft, and are for crossing over with—not for seizing hold of."²⁷

In this parable, the message is explicit in the statement of the Buddha. The parable may be understood as offering an analogical argument; that analogical argument would be that in *just the same way that* it would be silly to carry a raft once it had served its purpose, it would be unnecessary to hang onto the teachings of the Buddha, once they have served their purpose. On the other hand, one might say that, for anything at all, once it is not needed, one should no longer hang on to it. The story of the raft could be taken as a reminder or illustration that if something is no longer needed, one might as well discard it. The Buddha is saying that, and claiming that such a reminder would apply to his own teachings.

When the message of a parable is implicit, extracting it can be tricky. Cartwright notes that a parable is more open to interpretation than a fable. Both fables and parables use the particular and concrete, in narrative form, to approach the general and abstract.²⁸ Like parables, fables are short concrete narratives put forward to convey a general message. That message is typically prudential or moral. Often the characters in fables are animals functioning to represent certain human traits—as when a fox represents cleverness, a small bird weakness, or a lion, strength.

Discussing fables, Lessing said interestingly that fables succeed by “reducing” the abstract to some particular. It is through something particular and concrete, he said, that we are able to know intuitively something general and abstract. The concrete par-

27. Available online at https://heavencanwaitcardsandgifts.blogspot.com/2010/03/buddhist-parable-of-raft_06.html Accessed July, 2011.

28. If we reject (on the grounds explained above) the idea that the message of a parable is always implicit, whereas the message of a fable is always explicit, it is not obvious just how we would distinguish parables from fables. Perhaps there is no hard and fast distinction.

ticular is able to represent the abstract and more general. (This comment seems to apply to many parables as well, and specifically to Lessing's own parable of the rings, to be considered later. In that parable three rings represent the three distinct religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.) The concrete expression of a general lesson provides a needed particular *that is a case of the abstract truth in question* and enables us to understand it.

Cartwright discusses one of Lessing's fables in which a marten eats a grouse. The moral of the story is "the weaker are prey to the stronger." The marten represents the stronger and the grouse, the weaker. The abstract claim that the weaker are prey to the stronger is "fitted out" by the fable, which represents it in a concrete and readily comprehensible form. Cartwright comments that there is not an analogy here; nor is there exactly a case of symbolism. It is not that the grouse symbolizes a weaker creature or is similar to a weaker creature; rather (relative to the marten) the grouse is *an instance* of a weaker creature. The abstract relation of weaker/stronger could be instantiated in other ways in other contexts. If, for instance, we were dealing with labour/management relations, labour would be exploited or oppressed, due to its relative weakness in economic and political power. Obviously the victory of the stronger would not be displayed by management literally *eating* labour as the marten ate the grouse!

In fables and parables, the story told is one in which characters and dilemmas are representative of something else. Unlike Parker, Cartwright does not seek to avoid this question. She notes its central importance. One must ask: what is that something else? What does the parable or fable represent, and how is that representativeness achieved? In a fable, the "moral of the story" is stated, providing readers with reliable clues about what is to be represented. In a parable, there are not always obvious clues. We must infer the represented content from the discourse in context. In the scientific context, Cartwright says, abstract theoretical terms apply only given the applicability of their more concrete models. Many of these models in science, Cartwright maintains, are more like parables than models in their lesser degree of explicitness. We do

not always know how to abstract from a given particular. Often representativeness is achieved by instantiation.

Representativeness achieved by instantiation is illustrated in the famous Christian parable of the Good Samaritan. For that reason, it's illuminating to consider this parable in the context of Cartwright's discussion.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked [on him], and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion [on him], And went to [him], and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave [them] to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise. (Luke 10:31-33 New King James Version)

In this parable the man set upon by thieves serves to represent (by instantiation) people in need of help, and the generous Samaritan represents (again by instantiation) all those who help strangers in need, acting kindly and generously toward those in need. The parable offers an answer to a question put to Jesus by a lawyer who asked how to inherit eternal life. To inherit eternal life, you should love the Lord with all your heart and soul and strength and mind and your neighbour as yourself, the lawyer says. He then asks Jesus who counts as your neighbour. The parable of the Good Samaritan is given in reply to that question. In the parable a man showed mercy and kindness to a needy man who was a stranger. The response: the neighbour was the one who showed mercy on that stranger; Jesus said "go, and do thou likewise."

It is indeed a moving story. We can ask about this story: are there *reasons* given, for treating needy strangers with kindness and generosity? If we seek to construct an argument on the basis of the parable, we can derive the following:

1. * If supposedly holy people (the priest and the Levite) were to ignore an unknown and needy person on a road, they would not treat that person as a neighbour.
2. If a person who was of no special status and did not know an unknown and needy person on a road were to treat him with mercy and kindness, that person would treat the needy person as a neighbour.
So,
3. What matters about being a neighbour is not one's status or one's prior knowledge of a person.
4. What matters about being a neighbour is treating another with mercy and kindness when that person is needy and one encounters him.
5. * It is good to treat a needy stranger as a neighbour if one encounters him.
Therefore,
6. * One should treat other people, when they are in need and one encounters them, as one's neighbours with mercy and kindness.

This parable has great appeal. As noted, the representation is by instantiation: the man set upon by robbers is an instance of a needy stranger and the Samaritan is an instance of a helping person who has encountered the needy stranger. When set out as an argument, as above, this parable does not obviously provide a poor argument. The hypothetical wording in premises (1) and (2) avoids the problem of fictive assertion. Claims (3) and (4) are distinct conclusions derived from the conjunction of (1) and (2). They then link, along with (5*) to support the main conclusion, (6*). Due to the fame

of this parable, the instances have become symbols; charities often employ the word “Samaritan” in their name.

The first stage of this argument appeals to strong moral intuitions about a hypothetical case, to support a normative conclusion. The added premise (5*) articulates the norm embedded in the term ‘neighbour,’ used here so as to combine descriptive and evaluative judgments. The implicit conclusion (6*) is inferred from (5*). The logical problems that might be alleged here would involve the scope of the conclusion and the interpretations of kindness and generosity and what it means to encounter a needy stranger. These are timeless questions.

4. Some further examples

The dilemma of charm (in a story) versus logical cogency (in a good argument) is illustrated by the following example of a parable of Sri Ramakrishna. The parable is called “What you are after is within yourself.”

What You are After is Within Yourself

A man wanted a smoke. He went to a neighbour’s house to light his charcoal. It was the dead of night and the household was asleep. After he had knocked a great deal, someone came down to open the door. At sight of the man, he asked, “Hello! What’s the matter?” The man replied, “Can’t you guess? You know how fond I am of smoking. I have come here to light my charcoal.” The neighbour said, “Ha! Ha! You are a fine man indeed! You took the trouble to come and do all this knocking at the door! Why, you have a lighted lantern in your hand!”

What a man seeks is very near him. Still, he wanders about from place to place.²⁹

The message of this parable is stated in the title and final sentence, and would seem to be universal; the reference to “a man” would

29. Page 350 of a PDF book called Tales and Parables of Sri Ramakrishna downloaded on July 20, 2011 at <http://www.archive.org/details/TalesAndParablesOfSriRamakrishna>

appear to be to any man. Yet the story is about a particular man carrying a lantern at night and seeking a light, to smoke. Representation would be by instantiation. If we were to regard this parable as offering an argument with a general conclusion, that argument would involve hastily generalizing from the highly specific situation of a man wandering about in the dark, with a lighted lantern, to a universal human quest (implied in the expression “what *a man* seeks”). The charm and wit of the story seem to disappear if we cast it in argumentative form, and the logical argument we would derive from it is weak at best. Thus it may seem interpretively preferable, and more charitable, to leave the parable as a story. If the parable states a lesson, so be it, but no *good reason* is given for that lesson if we take the lesson to be general one.

Here is a narrative in the parable of the Bothersome Neighbour (Luke 11: 5–8), which we attempt to represent as a standardized argument. Premises and conclusions taken to be implicit are marked with *.

The Parable of the Bothersome Neighbour

And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.

The parable seems to be analogical in nature. Here we represent it as having two explicit premises, as well as one implicit premise connecting the relationship between two friends to the relationship of God and humans. The conclusion that God will help a person who persistently asks for his help has also been added. We would justify doing this by the context in which the narrative appears. (Jesus is talking about the relationship between God and human beings who seek things from God.)

1. A friend might refuse help to a person if it were inconvenient to offer it.
2. Such a friend would give help to this person, even in inconvenient circumstances, if the person persistently requested it.
3. * God is like this friend.
So,
4. * God will give help to a person if that person persistently requests it.

The narrative of the man bothering his neighbour provides the first two premises. Here (3*) and (4*) are written in. With the addition of (3*) and (4*), we have a pretty clear argument from analogy.³⁰ Given problematic nature of (3*), it is not plausible to deem this a good argument; we will not comment further on its cogency at this point.

In the following example of a secular parable, taken from Lessing's play *Nathan the Wise*, representation proceeds by symbolism. In Lessing's play the main character, Nathan, offers the Parable of the Three Rings in response to a question from the Muslim, Saladin, as to which religion is best—Judaism, Islam, or Christianity.

The Parable of the Three Rings

In the Orient in ancient times there lived a man who possessed a ring of inestimable worth. Its stone was an opal that emitted a hundred colors, but its real value lay in its ability to make its wearer beloved of God and man. The ring passed from father to most favored son for many generations, until finally its owner was a father with three

30. If we read further in the text, through verses 9 and 10, we find “ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” This text seems more to represent through symbolism than analogy. It does not really constitute a narrative but an argument based on the general claim that (1) a person who seeks will find, so (therefore) (2) a person who seeks God will find God.

sons, all equally deserving. Unable to decide which of the three sons was most worthy, the father commissioned a master artisan to make two exact copies of the ring, then gave each son a ring, and each son believed that he alone had inherited the original and true ring. But instead of harmony, the father's plan brought only discord to his heirs. Shortly after the father died, each of the sons claimed to be the sole ruler of the father's house, each basing his claim to authority on the ring given to him by the father. The discord grew even stronger and more hateful when a close examination of the rings failed to disclose any differences.

"But wait," interrupted Saladin, "surely you do not mean to tell me that there are no differences between Islam, Judaism, and Christianity!" "You are right, Sultan," replied Nathan. "Their teachings and practices differ in ways that can be seen by all. However, in each case, the teachings and practices are based on beliefs and faith, beliefs and faith that at their roots are the same. Which of us can prove that our beliefs and our faith are more reliable than those of others?" "I understand," said Saladin. "Now continue with your tale." "The story is nearly at its end," replied Nathan.

The dispute among the brothers grew until their case was finally brought before a judge. After hearing the history of the original ring and its miraculous powers, the judge pronounced his conclusion: "The authentic ring," he said, "had the power to make its owner beloved of God and man, but each of your rings has brought only hatred and strife. None of you is loved by others; each loves only himself. Therefore I must conclude that none of you has the original ring. Your father must have lost it, then attempted to hide his loss by having three counterfeit rings made, and these are the rings that cause you so much grief." The judge continued: "Or it may be that your father, weary of the tyranny of a single ring, made duplicates, which he gave to you. Let each of you demonstrate his belief in the power of his ring by conducting his life in such a manner that he fully merits—as anciently promised—the love of God and man.

This parable seems to present an argument in favour of tolerance and charitable living. The messages are stated in symbolic form by the judge. Lessing maintains that quarrelling over who has the true faith is wrong-headed and that, given our inability to discern who is right, we ought to instead live our lives so as to merit the love of God and man. The judge reasons that their quarrelsome behav-

our shows that none of the sons has the true ring. The ring represents the true faith, and the sons represent adherents to the three religions of the book: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

We've extracted two arguments from this parable. These arguments represent what the judge said to the three sons. The first captures the reasoning that none of the sons has the true ring. The second captures the argument that, even if one of the sons has the true ring, we cannot know which one does, so each son should live a life that merits the love of God and man. The second argument uses a premise from the first, an aspect that is reflected in our numbering.

Argument 1

1. If the owners of the three rings are full of hatred and strife, they do not own the original and true ring.
2. * The original and true ring represents the true faith and the sons possessing the rings represent the adherents to the three religions of the book (Judaism, Christianity, Islam).
3. The adherents of the three religions of the book are full of hatred and strife.
Therefore,
4. * None of the adherents of the three religions of the book has the true faith.

Argument 2

5. *Even if* one of the sons has the original ring, then we cannot discern which son that is.
6. If we cannot discern which son has the original ring, then each son should demonstrate the power of his ring by conducting his life so as to fully merit the love of God and man.

2. * The original and true ring symbolically represents the true faith and the sons possessing the rings symbolically represent the adherents of the three religions of the book.
7. We cannot discern which religion has the true faith.
Therefore,
8. * The adherents of the three religions of the book should demonstrate their faith by conducting life in a manner so as to fully merit the love of God and man.

Both arguments hinge crucially on (2*), the premise stating the symbolic relationship in which the original ring represents the true faith and the sons represent the adherents of the three religions of the book. The first argument basically takes the valid form of *modus ponens*. The first premise is taken from the story, which is given a summary in a conditional statement, and the third premise is factually true, with the conclusion validly inferred, given (2*). In the second argument, there is a longer story to be told. Premise (6) comes from the story, but even within it can be said to need support. Premise (7) will clearly be plausible to humanists, but may be deemed to need support based on some epistemological account implying that religious knowledge is not possible.

Hesketh Pearson's book *The Life of Oscar Wilde* includes a story by Wilde, who compared metal filings to human beings in regards to whether or not we have free will. In an interview with Denis Dutton for the first issue of the journal *Philosophy and Literature*, the Argentinean novelist Jorge Luis Borges mentioned Wilde's parable as a case of a philosophically rigorous short narrative.³¹ (Borges qualified his comments by reminding Dutton that despite his interest in philosophy, he, Borges, was not a philosopher.) Here, analogy is used as the basis for a rather clever parable.³² We contend, however, that the parable is less philosophically successful than Borges supposed.

31. Dutton and Palencia-Roth (1977).

32. We do not judge the parable to be a philosophical success, as our analysis will indicate.

The Parable of Magnets and Filings

Once upon a time there was a magnet, and in its close neighbourhood lived some steel filings. One day two or three little filings felt a sudden desire to go and visit the magnet, and they began to talk of what a pleasant thing it would be to do. Other filings nearby overheard their conversation, and they, too, became infected with the same desire. Still others joined them, till at last all the filings began to discuss the matter, and more and more their vague desire grew into an impulse. "Why not go today?" said some of them; but others were of the opinion that it would be better to wait till tomorrow. Meanwhile, without their having noticed it, they had been involuntarily moving nearer to the magnet, which lay there quite still, apparently taking no heed of them. And so they went on discussing all the time insensibly drawing nearer to their neighbour; and the more they talked, the more they felt the impulse growing stronger, till the more impatient ones declared that they would go that day, whatever the rest did. Some were heard to say that it was their duty to visit the magnet, and that they ought to have gone long ago. And, while they talked, they moved always nearer and nearer, without realizing that they had moved. Then, at last, the impatient ones prevailed, and, with one irresistible impulse, the whole body cried out, "There is no use waiting. We will go today. We will go now. We will go at once." And then in one unanimous mass they swept along, and in another moment were clinging fast to the magnet on every side. Then the magnet smiled—for the steel filings had no doubt at all but that they were paying that visit of their own free will.³³

This philosophical parable is intended to show that belief in free will is an illusion. Its argument may be represented as follows:

1. If metal filings were personified they would all have the desire to travel towards a magnet.
2. If personified metal filings had a desire to travel towards a magnet, they could think that their doing so was due to their choice and free will.

Yet

33. Pearson (1978).

3. * If personified metal filings travelled toward a magnet, they would do so as a result of the physical laws of magnetism.
Therefore,
4. If personified metal filings thought that their movement toward a magnet was due to choice and free will, they would be wrong.
5. * Humans are like the personified metal filings in that they are physical objects fully subject to physical laws.
6. * Objects fully subject to physical laws cannot have choice and free will.
Therefore,
7. * If human beings believe they have choice and free will, they are wrong.

Here, the argument hinges on an analogy, which we have made explicit in (5*), and on the claim in (6*). In the context of an argumentative discussion about whether human beings have free will, premise (6*) is contestable. It is true that filings move toward a magnet due solely to the operation of the laws of magnetism, which are physical laws operating regardless of any “choice” on the part of the filings. But whether human reflections are similar with regard to their choices should not be simply assumed in the sixth premise.

In an article on moral education and moral reasoning in traditional African cultures, Polycarp Ikuenabe provides a paraphrased parable about the wrongfulness of deliberately harming other people.³⁴ Ikuenabe argues that in traditional African cultures morality is taught informally through folklore, myths, and parables. On his account, in these cultures, moral thinking is understood as something that should be practical and fruitful. Though conveyed by elders with a concern for community cohesion, moral thinking is not authoritarian. Situations will vary and individuals will have to

34. Ikuenabe (1998), p. 37-38.

reason for themselves as to what to do. It is because every situation is different that one must reason about guilt, shame, and affronts to the community. Ikuenabe describes the story of the son and the slave one used to teach a moral lesson against harming someone out of jealousy and greed.

An African Parable: The Son and the Slave

A woman had a son and a slave, both of whom were of the same age. She treated her son better than the slave. The woman would usually prepare meals and dish them differently into the plates of her son and the slave. She usually gave her son a better portion than the slave. As the son and the slave grew up, the slave excelled in everything in the community. The slave had more strength and energy and worked harder on the farm. Whatever the slave touched with his hands turned out well. The same could not be said for her son. The woman became jealous and wanted to kill the slave. On a fateful day, she prepared a meal and dished it into the plate of the slave and her son. She decided to kill the slave by putting some poison in his food. As a coverup, she decided to make the slave's portion more handsome and attractive. When the son came in to get his meal, he secretly opened the slave's plate and found how attractive the slave's food was compared to his. He thought that his mother must have made a mistake; it could not happen that the slave's meal would be better than his. So, he decided to eat the slave's meal that had been poisoned by his mother. Immediately after eating the food, he became sick. His mother became apprehensive and asked him which portion of food he had eaten, and he replied that he had eaten the portion on the slave's plate that was more attractive and handsome. His mother was distraught, and the boy later died from the poisoning.

According to Ikuenabe, the main message here is that one should not seek to harm another person. The story does give a reason by providing an illustration of that possibility.

1. If a woman sought to poison a slave in her household, she might inadvertently poison her own beloved son.
2. A woman would not wish to poison her own beloved son.

So,

3. A woman should not poison a slave in her household.
Therefore,
4. * A person should not seek to harm another.³⁵

In this standardization, we can see the representation proceeds by *instantiation*. The woman is a case of a person who would harm another; the slave is a case of the person that some other person wishes to harm; the son is a case of a person that that person would not wish to harm. The conclusion seems to be derived by inference from one instance to a generalization. If we generalize only to prospective victims in proximity of the harmful act, the generalization may appear plausible. If (as in the conclusion represented here and as implied by Ikuenabe's account) a general message of non-harm is inferred from that instance, the emerging generalization is rather implausible. If the story were told to show the *possibility* of unintentionally harming one person when intending to harm another, a derived argument to that effect would be cogent. But that modest conclusion is sufficiently banal that we could say it does not need support by argument at all.

Concluding comments

From the examples discussed here, readers may reach their own conclusions about the feasibility and plausibility of deriving arguments from parables. A parable is a short narrative presented to offer a message and we can ask what that message is and whether the narrative provides reasons for it. If we find reasons, they can be expressed as propositions and as the premises of an argument in which the message of the parable is the conclusion. Our work here shows that for many parables it does make sense to extract a

35. Gilbert Plumer in correspondence has suggested that the scope of this conclusion be restricted; the argument would then be considerably improved. We welcome this suggestion but find no hint as to how to restrict the conclusion's scope. The issue points to basic interpretive problems.

message and reasons for it. With some twisting and bending, we can construct an argument in standardized form. When we have an argument in that form, we can evaluate it. From the fact that one can derive some sort of argument from a narrative, it does not follow that that argument is a good one. We can proceed to assess the cogency of the argument we extract.

The questions raised here in the context of parables also apply to myth, legend, and the stories in which traditional knowledge may be cast. As we acknowledged earlier, argumentative representation of a narrative may “kill” the original story. However, if we are reflecting on a narrative in contexts where one is supposed to *learn* from it, analysis in terms of reasoned support is appropriate. Epistemology trumps narrative style and interest when we wish to evaluate the credibility of a message, and it is from that perspective that we have considered logic and parables. In a parable, there is a story about one thing and a message about another. As explained earlier, key questions arise in three areas: the scope of the conclusion, fictive assertion, and representation.

The problem of scope of the conclusion clearly arises in many cases. What we say about the argument offered in a parable will vary depending on the generality of the conclusion we attribute to it. Interpretation is crucial and involves contextual considerations, these being especially apparent for implicit material. If one restricts the scope of the conclusion so that only the possibility of some scenario is claimed, many parables can be said to represent cogent arguments. Given the teaching context in which many parables are stated, restrictions of scope to only a few cases, or to a single case, are not interpretively plausible. A parable carries a message or lesson insofar as it applies to a range of cases and not solely to the events described in its story. What is the intended range? That is a matter of interpretation. The frequent use of parables in moral and religious education makes it reasonable to understand the scope of the conclusion as fairly broad. The issue of intended scope arises for all parables and is especially clear here for the Good Samaritan and the Son and the Slave.

The problem of fictive assertion seems manageable: we have handled it here through conditionalization, taking a hint from the work of A.H. Parker.

Not surprisingly, what is central is the aspect of representation. As we understand in theory, and as is apparent from our examination of examples, representation can be attempted in three different ways: analogy, symbolization, and instantiation. The parables considered here illustrate problems arising for each representative strategy. With *analogy*, the general issue is that the things compared are likely to differ in respects highly relevant to the conclusion. (The very fact of trying to draw an analogy between something concrete and something abstract makes that likely.) If a wedding feast is an analogue for heaven, or an impatient neighbour an analogue for God, problems about relevant similarity clearly arise. With Wilde's magnetic filings, the analogue and primary subject (personified magnetic filings and deliberating human beings) are presumed to be similar in ways (being fully subject to laws of physical causation) that are question-begging in the context. With *instantiation*, we have the potential for generalization from a highly specific and unique instance that is vivid and memorable but unrepresentative of a broader class. This is the same sort of problem that arises with regard to anecdotal arguments.³⁶

Being hesitant to claim expertise on the matter of *symbolic representation*, we have said relatively little about that matter. If a message and its reasons are given through a symbolic representation so that an argument contains in its premises some such claim as "the landowner symbolically represents God", then in attempting to assess that argument, we will be involved in trying to reach some verdict on that claim, which is not one of analogy or instantiation, but something else entirely: symbolic representation. We begin to ask: How does X symbolically represent Y? How can a claim to the effect that X symbolically represents Y be assessed from a logical point of view? We do not pretend to know the answer to such questions. The nature and "merits" of

36. See Govier and Jansen (2011).

symbolic representation as it appears here are not a matter of logic, but if such symbolism is crucial to arguments providing reasons for some moral or religious position, then we cannot entirely avoid the topic. Awkwardly, this somewhat imponderable matter is crucial for our considerations. In a number of standardizations, we have included a premise stating the intended symbolic representation of the parable. We have stated that premise while admitting our inability to clarify it further.

Now, our debts are being called in. Being unable to spell out a symbolic premise, we are unwilling to deem such a premise acceptable or unacceptable. Rather, we will deem it “not amenable to logical assessment.” Such a verdict on a crucial premise reflects on the epistemic status of the argument as a whole, making us unwilling to deem that argument cogent.

To sum up the results of our investigation, we maintain that some narratives, in particular parables, can be interpreted as providing arguments for a claim that is their “point” or conclusion. We find, however, that such arguments are rarely cogent. Such arguments do not seem to have a distinctively narrative form: some are analogies, while others appear to be deductive arguments or generalizing inductive ones. Conveying a message in the form of a story is attractive but logically risky and questionable, insofar as the form and interest of the story will often distract us from attempting any task of logical assessment. We are easily misled into accepting a message claim when there are no good reasons given in the narrative. One can offer arguments through narrative, but doing that has more risks than benefits, from an epistemic point of view.

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7.

Teaching and Learning, Stories and Arguments

ABSTRACT: This paper explains and illustrates a method of argumentative reconstruction that may be used in the teaching of stories. Without maintaining that argument is superior to narrative or that all narratives should be cast as arguments, I illustrate the benefits of this approach for critical thinking and discussion that ensue when one seeks to articulate the message of a narrative and the reasons offered in the narrative to support it. The examples discussed here are parables.

Stories are studied and enjoyed for many reasons. We seem to learn from stories, and stories provide important subjects of teaching. We often view certain stories as conveying a message or lesson; when we do so, it is important to reflect on what message the story conveys, and the extent to which the story provides reasonable support for that message. In this essay, I use argumentative reconstruction to explore central issues about teaching stories and learning from them. These reflections point to a broader topic: that of the relation between narrative and argument. The examples discussed here are parables, which are especially suitable given that they are relatively short and typically have a didactic role. The approach I recommend could also be applied to short stories and even to novels, though with greater difficulty.

Narrative and Argument

A narrative has a kind of form, in which sense is made of events, which are shaped into a story with a beginning, middle, and end.

Typically there is a plot in which some problem arises; as the narrative continues, it moves toward an outcome in which the problem is resolved, or terminates in some way. Often the order of described events is realistic and temporal, although there are exceptions, as in flashback scenes or stories involving temporally disjointed sequences. Events chronicled in narratives are often, though not necessarily, causally linked. Many narratives are about particular events, though we may find general narratives as, for instance, in evolutionary accounts of how a trait or tendency could have developed to have survival value.

From this account we can see immediately that an argument is not a narrative. The point of an argument is not to tell a story that moves in some direction toward a resolution but rather to provide rational support for a claim that is in question in some context. An argument is put forward in an effort to rationally persuade some audience that that claim is rationally acceptable. In an argument, one or more claims are put forward to offer evidence or reasons for that claim. The claim to be supported is the conclusion of the argument; the claims put forward to support the conclusion are the argument's premises. In addition to their stated premises and conclusion, arguments may have implicit material – material presumed and unstated, indicated by what is explicit. The term 'argument' is not a success term: there are poor arguments in which premise claims support a conclusion only weakly or not at all. (Govier 2010)

Thinking Critically about Narratives

Though narratives and arguments are distinct in important ways, I maintain here that it can be epistemically and pedagogically useful to engage in argumentative reconstruction of a narrative. When we reconstruct a narrative as an argument, we articulate its message as a conclusion claim, and set out, as premises, any reasons the narrative may provide for that message. Pedagogically, this approach to narratives offers opportunities for considering various interpretations of the narrative and thinking critically about them. We are

led to ask whether the story conveys a message, what that message is about, and with what scope and level of certainty the message is put forward. We will then ask how the story is able to support that message – what grounds are provided for it. Argumentative reconstruction provides a systematic framework useful for reflection about the meaning and impact of the story.

Compared to logically stated arguments, stories are often vivid, memorable, and emotionally appealing. But from the point of view of logical cogency, there can be traps here. A narrative may move convincingly toward the resolution of a particular problem, leading us to hastily conclude that its account offers some kind of general solution to that sort of problem. When we are moved by stories, we risk persuasion on the basis of interest and narrative appeal, as distinct from relevant reasons for the conclusion reached. We may, for instance, mistakenly infer generality from an unrepresentative account of a particular case. A recounted anecdote is likely to be more memorable, though less reliable, than general statistics. Narratives can shift our opinions and beliefs in valuable ways, but their vividness and interest can mean that such shifts occur for little sound reason. The argument reconstruction approach is designed to encourage reflection so as to avoid or limit these sorts of epistemic problems.

The examples discussed here are parables. A parable is one type of narrative — a narrative in which a specific story is told about a concrete case to convey a message about something more general and abstract. Parables are short concrete narratives told to support a general message. That message is usually (but not necessarily) of a religious or moral nature. The parables of Jesus of Nazareth are especially well-known in the Western intellectual tradition. As will become apparent here, parables are also found in non-Christian religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism.

In putting forward this approach, I am not contending that argument is superior to narrative. I do not wish to claim that narratives can or should be viewed as generally reducible to arguments, or as presupposing arguments. Nor, obviously, do I pretend to offer any general theory of literary criticism. I do not maintain, either, that there is some specific type of argument that we might refer to

as ‘narrative argument’. Rather, I am developing the approach to illustrate a way in which we may usefully consider what a narrative means or ‘is saying’ (what it claims) and what reasons for that claim can be derived from the story told. The approach has potential for teaching since the need to state conclusions and premises clearly provides opportunities for discussing interpretative issues, and parables taken from different cultural and religious traditions can support multicultural pedagogy.

What is the Story ‘About’? Two Levels

Consider this story of the Rabbi and the Tyrant.

An old Jewish story tells of a despot who decides his dog must learn to speak. He reviles the Jewish community living under him but admires their Rabbi for his wisdom and erudition. One evening the tyrant summons the rabbi. “You are one of the smartest people around,” the tyrant begins. “I don’t like you or your people but I need help,” he continues. “See this dog at my feet – I need you to teach him to talk. If you succeed I will be kind to your people. If you fail – God help you all.” The Rabbi strokes his beard for a long moment. “Teach your dog to talk – not easy — it will take a long time and a lot of money ... give me five years and three thousand Dinars and I will do it.” The tyrant agrees, but not before he repeats his threat. The Rabbi goes home and knocks on the door with excitement. “Bluma,” he tells his wife, “look! I have three thousand Dinars!” “That’s wonderful!” she exclaims. How did this happen?” The Rabbi tells her. Bluma’s face turns grey. “What have you done? You can’t teach a dog to speak! We are done for.” “Slow down, Bluma” the Rabbi replies. “Five years is a long time. Maybe the dog will die, maybe the tyrant will die, or maybe the Messiah will come. We’ll see. (Eisikovits 2012)

What is this story about? On a concrete level, the answer is straightforward: it is about a rabbi in need who gets temporary relief because he is paid after promising to teach a dog to talk. But like all parables, this story is not only about the concrete events chronicled on its surface. Obviously there is something else that it

is about: in this case the more general phenomenon is the practicality of a temporary solution in circumstances of need. In the concrete story, the rabbi defends his implausible promise to the tyrant on the grounds that what he is paid will provide valuable temporary relief and circumstances could change (the dog or the tyrant could die; the Messiah could come) so as to make that temporary relief all that is required. On a concrete level, the story is about a rabbi and a tyrant; on a more abstract level, it is about the value of temporary relief from one's difficulties. The conclusion of an argument derivable from this narrative is that *temporary solutions can be of value when one is in hard circumstances*. The apt *general* description of what the rabbi is doing is that he is buying time, when he is in difficult circumstances.

Consider another example, the familiar Christian parable of the Good Samaritan. This parable offers an answer to a question put to Jesus by a lawyer who was asking how to inherit eternal life. The lawyer knew, and reported to Jesus, that to inherit eternal life, one should love the Lord with all one's heart and soul and strength and mind, and one's neighbor as oneself. But then his question was 'who counts as one's neighbor?' The parable provided Jesus' answer to that question.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

(Suppose that a traveler was set upon by thieves and left lying on the road, beaten and vulnerable.)

And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour

unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him. Go, and do thou likewise. (Luke 10: 31 – 37)

On a concrete level, the Parable of the Good Samaritan is about this good-hearted Samaritan who helped the beaten traveler lying on the road in need. Other travelers had neglected to help the injured man. On a more abstract level, this story is about helping persons in need. If we seek to set out the parable as an argument, here is a plausible result. (The * marks material taken to be implicit in the original.)

1. If supposedly holy people (the priest and the Levite) were to ignore an unknown and needy person on a road, they would not treat that person as a neighbor.
2. If a person who was of no special status and did not know an unknown and needy person on a road were to treat that person with mercy and kindness, that person would treat the needy person as a neighbor.
So,
3. What matters about being a neighbor is not one's status or one's prior knowledge of a person.
And
4. What matters about being a neighbor is treating another person with mercy and kindness when one encounters him and he is in need.
Furthermore,
5. * It is good to treat a needy stranger one encounters, as a neighbor deserving mercy and kindness.
Therefore,
6. * One should treat other people, when they are in need and one encounters them, as neighbors deserving mercy and kindness.

As a moving story, this parable has great appeal. When we set it out as an argument, there are obvious rhetorical losses: it is no longer the *story* of the generous Samaritan surpassing the Levite and the priest in kindness and generosity. In the argumentative reconstruction, the story has not entirely vanished: it appears in hypothetical form in premises (1) and (2), which are used to support claims (3) and (4). These are claims about what is not necessary, and what is necessary, to be a neighbor. In the story (and often in ordinary life too), the term ‘neighbor’ is used with some evaluative weight – the normative presumption being that it is a good thing to act well as a neighbor. Statements (3) and (4) combine to support (5*) which, in turn, supports the final conclusion (6*). ‘Who is my neighbor?’, the lawyer asked Jesus. The answer is that your neighbor is the person whom you encounter who is in need, and whom you assist, just as the Samaritan assisted the man who fell among thieves.

In a parable, the story is explicitly about one thing, but implicitly about another. Parables convey messages about something more abstract and general than what they explicitly deal with, and when we reflect on them, a large part of our reflection will be about what that other thing is. In *The Good Samaritan* the concrete story, S, is that of the Samaritan and the man who fell among thieves. Here, as in other parables, the concrete narrative represents something larger than itself. When we consider the meaning of *The Good Samaritan* we will look beyond the concrete story told for a more abstract and general message about some other thing, X. Just what is the story more deeply about? What is this something, X, that is represented? In an argumentative reconstruction, the conclusion of the argument should be articulated so as to reveal what X is; the conclusion will be a claim about X.

Representation

What is explicitly represented at the concrete level of the story, S, is what the parable is literally about; the X that is implicitly represented by the story on that concrete level is what S is, more deeply,

about. In parables and many other narratives, the story represents something outside itself, something larger and more abstract than itself. What is that? The story of the Rabbi and the Tyrant is not about whether dogs can talk, or whether tyrants were prejudiced against Jews or whether the rabbi's wife had confidence in his financial skills. Nor is the story of Good Samaritan about robbery in the days of Jesus or (at least not primarily) about the hypocrisy of priests. These non-fundamental elements appear in S, but not in X.

Not only do we need to ask what X is, we need to reflect on how S represents X. Given that a concrete story S represents something more abstract, X, we may further ask just *how* it does so. That fundamental question is explored in several other treatments. (Govier 2010, Govier and Ayers 2012, Cartwright 1999, Munson 1976) There are three different modes of representation. These are:

1. What is described in S is an instance of X. For example, the rabbi is an *instance* of someone with a problem needing temporary solutions. The good Samaritan is an *instance* of a good neighbour.
2. What is described in S is an analogue of X. For example, in another Christian parable, of the Prodigal son, the father rejoicing in the return of his formerly sinning son is taken to be *analogous* to God forgiving a repentant sinner.
3. What is described in S is a *symbol* of X. For example, a feast might symbolize heaven, or a sword might symbolize war. There are many bases on which symbolism may be established: by convention and tradition, as a relation of part to whole, and by emotional resonance, for example.

Different questions will arise about the adequacy of S as a means of representing X, and these questions will vary depending on the mode of representation. If what is described in the story is

an *instance*, from which there is generalization, we need to think about how adequate and typical that instance is. If the representation is based on an *analogy* between S and X, we need to consider relevant similarities and differences between the phenomena described in X and in S. A symbolical representation is something else again and is harder to spell out. Pedagogically and analytically, the challenge is to try to articulate what symbolizes what, and explain why one is judging that it does so. There are apt to be useful discussions about such matters: for example a wedding might symbolize joy, or unity, or success, depending on the context. In the parables considered so far, representation was by instance: the rabbi is an instance of a person in need, requiring temporary relief from his problems, and the good Samaritan is an instance of a man displaying kindness and mercy in a neighborly way.

Here is an example in which the representation is by means of analogy.

The Parable of the Blind Men and the Elephant

Four blind men went out to see an elephant. One touched the leg of the elephant and said, “The elephant is like a pillar.” The second touched the trunk and said, “The elephant is like a thick club.” The third touched the belly and said, “The elephant is like a big jar.” The fourth touched the ears and said, “The elephant is like a big winnowing basket.” Thus they began to dispute hotly amongst themselves as to the shape of the elephant. A passer-by, seeing them thus quarrelling, said, “What is it you are disputing about?”. They told him everything and asked him to arbitrate. The man said: “None of you has seen the elephant. The elephant is not like a pillar, its legs are like pillars. It is not like a winnowing basket, its ears are like winnowing baskets. It is not like a stout club, its trunk is like a club. The elephant is the combination of all these – legs, ears, belly, trunk and so on.”

In the same manner, those who quarrel (about the nature of God) have each seen only some one aspect of the Deity.” (Ramakrishna 2011)

An analogy is drawn here between the four blind men and religious believers. The compared case or analogue (blind men) and the primary subject or main topic of consideration (religious believers) are said to be similar in the respects that they are limited in ability to determine the nature of what they are disputing about; due to their limited capacities they can acquire only partial knowledge of that thing, and hence they disagree with one another about its nature. These aspects are similar to features of religious believers trying to know the nature of the Deity. The similarities are relevant to the point of dispute, common to the phenomena in the story about the blind men and the more abstract phenomenon of disputes in the area of religion. The blind men disagree because of their partial knowledge; what to be inferred, given the analogy put forward in the parable, is that religious believers disagree due to being in the same condition – their limited capacities mean that they can only have partial knowledge.

The argumentative reconstruction looks like this:

1. If four blind men investigated an elephant and touched different parts of it, they would begin to dispute about the shape of that elephant.
2. If these four blind men began to dispute about the shape of the elephant, their dispute would be due to their having experienced only one aspect of it.
3. People who dispute about the nature of God are like these four blind men.
Therefore,
4. People who dispute about the nature of God have experienced only limited aspects of God.

Religious disagreement (a relatively abstract phenomenon) is represented here by an analogy with an imagined concrete phenomenon, that of blind men disagreeing about the nature of an elephant. As in previous examples, the issue of reconstructing an argument that clearly has false premises (due to the fiction) is addressed by stating the premises in a conditional form. It is not claimed

that four blind men investigated an elephant, touching different parts of it; that claim would almost certainly be false. Rather, it is claimed that IF four blind men had investigated an elephant, they would have had different evidence and reached different conclusions about the nature of the elephant. This is the technique of fictive assertion. (Govier and Ayers, 2012) The conclusion of the argument states an explanation of religious disputes, based on that analogy. For the analogue, limited knowledge seems a plausible explanation; the message of the parable is that limited knowledge is a plausible explanation for the primary case as well.

Issues of Scope

Apart from the issue of what X is and how S represents X, for an argumentative reconstruction we need to consider the conclusion claim made about X. Of special significance is the scope of the conclusion claim. Is it about *all, most, many, some, or a few* cases? Or is it about just *one* case? Focusing on issues of scope is a way of considering specifically what we think the story is telling us; these issues are key to our understanding and exploring them will deepen discussions of narrative import. Often a narrative will plausibly support a conclusion about ‘some’ case or cases while being quite inadequate if considered as support for a conclusion about many or all. Consider, as an example, the following Hindu parable:

What You are After is Within Yourself

A man wanted a smoke. He went to a neighbor’s house to light his charcoal. It was the dead of night and the household was asleep. After he had knocked a great deal, someone came down to open the door. At sight of the man, he asked, “Hello! What’s the matter?” The man replied, “Can’t you guess? You know how fond I am of smoking. I have come here to light my charcoal.” The neighbor said, “Ha! Ha! You are a fine man indeed! You took the trouble to come and do all this knocking at the door! Why, you have a lighted lantern in your hand!”

What a man seeks is very near him. Still, he wanders about from place to place.(Ramakrishna 2011)

The story is of one particular man carrying a lantern at night and yet going to wake a neighbor to find a light for his cigarette. One might take the parable to support a universal conclusion, suggested by the categorical wording “what *a man* seeks *is* very near him.” Such a conclusion could get only very weak support from a story about a single and singular case. Does the parable show that when human beings seek something, what they seek is always close at hand? Surely not. Such an implausible claim could hardly get credible support from a particular instance, as described in the story. The chap in the story is in a highly specific and rather unusual situation. The case is more plausibly and charitably construed as supporting the more restricted claim that what a man seeks is *sometimes* close at hand.

Thinking back to the story of the rabbi and the tyrant, should we interpret it as implying that it is *always* useful to buy time when one is in a difficult situation? Or is it saying that it is *sometimes* useful to do so – useful, that is, in a significant range of cases? If the former, the claim seems easy to refute and difficult to support with a cogent argument. If the latter, the claim is more plausible and easier to support. However that interpretation reveals immediately a need to reflect on what the range of cases is.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, is the message that we should help *all* those who are needy? Or only *some* such people – those, perhaps, whom we encounter in our daily lives as the Samaritan in the parable encountered the injured traveler lying on the road? This question of scope points to a highly significant ethical issue about universalism and, in particular, universalism within Christianity. Do our moral obligations of concern and care extend to all human beings in need or only to those needy human beings with whom we are in some way in contact in the course of our lives? My point here is not to urge an answer to this question, but to note its importance and show how it is immediately exposed when the approach of argumentative reconstruction is used to direct reflection on the parable. Is its message about *all*

who are in need, or about *some* (those we encounter) who are in need? In teaching contexts, focusing on this sort of question would be illuminating and provide a good basis for discussion.

This question is about the abstract message. But to consider it, we must return to the concrete story. There, we reflect on which of its elements are purely incidental and which are more central. In the concrete story, the travelling Samaritan came across the wounded stranger, who was lying on the road; that man was quite literally in the Samaritan's path; the Samaritan rose to the occasion and generously helped the stranger. In other words, the Samaritan *encountered* the wounded stranger. The wounded stranger was not someone at a distance, about whom the Samaritan had heard mediated accounts. The issue of scope is one of conclusion content. It is interpretively and pedagogically of great significance, as illustrated in this case.

The Relevance and Sufficiency of Premises

When we have articulated the conclusion (message) to be derived from a narrative, the next stage is to seek in that narrative the reasons for that conclusion. The conclusion is about a general phenomenon X; the story, S, as told is about something concrete that represents X. When the argument is set out, it will reveal a need to link S with X. This need will vary, depending on the mode of representation. If representation is by instance, the inference to X will depend on generalization and we will have to reflect on the typicality of the concrete case, with reference to the general conclusion. If representation is by analogy, the issue is the relevance of similarities and differences between the analogue (S) and the primary subject (X). In the case of remote analogies, there may seem to be a large gap between premise and conclusion content, and the insertion of premises taken to be implicit provides a useful critical tool. It is harder to pin down symbolical relationships, save to say that we need to struggle to articulate them, explore the basis for them, and consider various alternatives.

This technique is useful and revealing in the following parable originating with Oscar Wilde. (Pearson 1946, Dutton 1995)

The Parable of Magnets and Filings

Once upon a time there was a magnet, and in its close neighborhood lived some steel filings. One day two or three little filings felt a sudden desire to go and visit the magnet, and they began to talk of what a pleasant thing it would be to do. Other filings nearby overheard their conversation, and they, too, became infected with the same desire. Still others joined them, till at last all the filings began to discuss the matter, and more and more their vague desire grew into an impulse. "Why not go today?" said some of them; but others were of the opinion that it would be better to wait till tomorrow. Meanwhile, without their having noticed it, they had been involuntarily moving nearer to the magnet, which lay there quite still, apparently taking no heed of them. And so they went on discussing all the time insensibly drawing nearer to their neighbor; and the more they talked, the more they felt the impulse growing stronger, till the more impatient ones declared that they would go that day, whatever the rest did. Some were heard to say that it was their duty to visit the magnet, and that they ought to have gone long ago. And, while they talked, they moved always nearer and nearer, without realizing that they had moved. Then, at last, the impatient ones prevailed, and with one irresistible impulse, the whole body cried out, "There is no use waiting. We will go today. We will go now. We will go at once." And then in one unanimous mass they swept along, and in another moment were clinging fast to the magnet on every side. Then the magnet smiled – for the steel filings had no doubt at all that there were paying that visit of their own free will.

The conclusion, implicit here, is that human beings do not have free will. When, after deliberating and making choices, they believe themselves to have free will, they are making a mistake. Given the philosophical nature of this conclusion, it is most plausibly interpreted as being about all human beings, rather than just some. The story is about magnetic filings; these are physical entities that do not have free will and that are drawn to a magnet by physical laws. In the argumentative reconstruction of this parable,

we find our premises within the concrete story; in the story, the magnet smiles at the delusion of the filings who are represented as believing that they have acted on the basis of their deliberations as to what to do. The point is that the deliberations of the magnetic filings are irrelevant to what they actually do, because they are drawn (“swept along”) to the magnet according to physical law.

The parable is put forward as an analogy for the deliberations of human beings, and their significance for what human beings do. The remoteness of that analogy makes it particularly obvious that we need especially to consider in just what respects human beings are presumed to be similar to these magnetic filings. Obviously Wilde never meant to assert that iron filings talked to each other. In what follows, conditionalization is used to avoid the problem of fictive assertion. Here is an argumentative reconstruction of the parable, in which the basis of Wilde’s analogy is made explicit in (3*). (4) is not marked by * because it is, in context, strongly implied in the sentence about the magnet smiling.

1. If metal filings were personified they would all have the desire to travel towards a magnet.
2. If personified metal filings had a desire to travel towards a magnet, they would think that their desire to go to the magnet was based on deliberations and choice.
3. * If personified metal filings travelled towards a magnet, they would do so as a result of the physical laws of magnetism.
Therefore,
4. If personified metal filings thought that their movement towards a magnet was due to deliberations, choice and free will as distinct from physical laws, they would be wrong.
5. * Human beings are like the personified metal filings in that they are physical objects fully subject to physical laws.
6. * Objects fully subject to physical laws cannot have

choice and free will.
Therefore,

7. * If human beings believe they have choice and free will, they are wrong.

(3*) and (4) here are drawn from the last sentence of the parable, in which the magnet is represented as smiling about the deluded idea of the filings who presumed themselves to have free will. (5*) makes explicit the analogy on which the parable depends, this being the analogy between the filings (analogue) and human beings supposing themselves to have free will (primary subject). In the reasoning set forth above, claims (1), (2), and (3*), support (4), which is then conjoined with (5*) and (6*) to support the final conclusion, (7*). (6*) articulates the philosophically controversial claim on which the parable depends, the claim that objects fully subject to physical laws do not have free will. This claim is necessary for the argument to go through to its conclusion, and its role makes it apparent that the reconstructed argument is fallacious. It embodies the fallacy of begging the question. One might think that the parable provides a convincing refutation of any free will doctrine, but one would be mistaken to do so.

The problem is highlighted when we recall that many of those who believe in free will would deny the controversial claim (6*) because they would interpret free will and physical laws so as to make them logically compatible with one another. When we spell out (6*), we can see that the argument is question-begging in the sense that it assumes in that premise a more general version of the claim that it purports to prove. Given the question-begging nature of this argument, we can see that the parable of the magnets and filings does not provide a convincing narrative case against free will. Rather, in assimilating the actions of human beings to the physically caused motion of iron filings, the story *presumes* that free will is impossible in a physically ordered universe. If we were tempted by the charming parable to move to the conclusion that free will is impossible, we would be reaching that conclusion on the basis of the interest and memorability of this philosophical

parable, as distinct from any accurate reasoning presented by it. Setting out the argument enables us to clearly see that point.

Here is another parable, this time from the book of Genesis:

The Seven Fat Years and the Seven Lean Years

And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed: and behold, he stood by the river. And behold, there came up out of the river seven well favored kine and fatfleshed; and they fed in a meadow. And, behold, seven other kine came up after them out of the river, ill favoured and leanfleshed; and stood by the other kine upon the brink of the river. And the ill favored and leanfleshed kine did eat up the seven well favoured and fat kine. So Pharaoh awoke. And he slept and dreamed the second time: and behold, seven ears of corn came up upon one stalk, rank and good. And, behold, seven thin ears and blasted with the east wind sprung up after them. And the seven thin ears devoured the seven rank and full ears. And Pharaoh awake, and behold, it was a dream. (Genesis 41: 1 – 7)

The Pharaoh has a dream in which seven sleek and fat cows come out of the Nile. They are followed by seven ugly, gaunt cows. The ugly cows eat up the fat ones, but are not fattened by doing so, and remain ugly. The Pharaoh wakes up, puzzled. He then falls asleep again and has a second dream in which seven heads of grain, healthy and good, sprout from a single stalk. These healthy stalks are then scorched by the east wind; there follow seven dry and skimpy stalks. To interpret his dreams, the Pharaoh seeks out a young Hebrew reputed to be an authoritative and reliable interpreter of dreams. That was Joseph, who said:

What God is about to do he sheweth unto Pharaoh. Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. And there shall arise after them seven years of famine, and all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine shall consumer the land; And the plenty shall not be known in the land by reason of that famine following; for it shall be very grievous. And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God and God will shortly bring it to pass. (Genesis 41: 28 – 32)

In this story, the two dreams convey the same message, a warning that abundant ('fat') years, for a country, will be followed by scarce ('lean') years. Joseph advises that God has provided this warning and that, accordingly, the Pharaoh should arrange to have part of the harvest saved and stored so that it can be used in time of famine. The Pharaoh takes his advice and puts Joseph in charge of all of Egypt so that appropriate savings are accomplished. The prophecy comes true and the land of Egypt is saved from famine. Joseph's success enables him to reconcile with the brothers whose jealousy had exiled him to Egypt in the first place.

In the story, the Pharaoh is warned by a reliable source that hard times are coming and, prudently heeding that warning, he protects his country by saving the resources of the fat years so that they can be used in the lean years. We might suppose that representation here is by instance: fat cows would seem to be *instances* of wealth and nutritional sustenance, as are healthy stalks of grain. But later in the story, representation seems to be by symbolism: the ugly cows consume the fat ones but do not benefit from it. Their failure to benefit symbolically represents waste in the years of plenty. So too does the fact that the wind blows away the healthy stalks, of which nothing is left. The fat cows and the healthy stalks of wheat symbolize times of abundance. The point is not that there exists any concrete phenomenon of cows eating other cows (in a way that would be highly unrealistic even for fiction) but rather that the hardships of bad times are so damaging as to destroy any residue of the good times – whether physical resources or memory.

Here is an argumentative reconstruction:

1. A pharaoh was warned by a reliable source that seven abundant years would be followed by seven lean years.
2. If this pharaoh were wise, he would save some resources from the abundant years to be used in the lean years.
3. This pharaoh was wise.
4. This pharaoh saved resources from the abundant years to be used in the lean years.

5. By heeding reliable warnings and saving resources from the abundant years, this pharaoh saved his country from famine in the lean years.
Therefore,
6. A leader should heed reliable warnings and save resources from abundant times, to be used in scarce times.

Note that in the reconstruction, the message of this parable has been interpreted as universal. Joseph interprets the dream as a warning that good times will be followed by hard times. The story is about the particular Pharaoh, but what is said can plausibly be taken to apply to any leader of any government. We now go on to ask how well (if at all) the parable can support this universal message.

Interestingly, the concrete story as represented in the reconstruction recalls the logical move ‘universal instantiation.’ In formal systems, this is a step through which one is able to universalize from just one instance, provided that there is nothing specific and distinctive about that one instance that would differentiate it from other instances within the scope of the conclusion.. To arrive at the conclusion on the basis of the story told, we take *Egypt* of the Pharaoh as representative of *any country*, and the *Pharaoh* as representative of *any leader of any government*. Clearly here, the issue is not whether the number of years is seven, whether the cows came out of the Nile, whether cows can eat each other, or whether lean cows are ugly. Nor is it whether the reliable interpreter was Joseph, a Hebrew in the land of Egypt. Fundamentally, the story is implicitly about (X) the advisability of saving in good times, for scarce times. It is explicitly about the Pharaoh, his dreams, and Joseph, his wise steward. Often a universal interpretation of the message of a parable would be rash. But here it does not seem to be so, given the vicissitudes of life and the experienced reality that conditions of abundance as affecting human beings are subject to change. The issue of generalization appears in the inference from (5) to (6). It is this inference that needs to be discussed

if we wish to assess the advice emerging from the story of the seven fat years and the seven lean years.

Summary and Conclusion

What I am proposing here is a method that can be used for certain sorts of teaching and learning about some narratives. The steps used are, basically, the following:

1. Identify what the story, *S*, is about, as it is explicitly told;
2. Identify what topic, *X*, the concrete story is more abstractly and implicitly about;
3. Articulate what the story implies or claims about *X* and represent that claim as the conclusion of an argument;
4. Identify in what manner the concrete story *S* represents the more abstract phenomenon *X*;
5. Assess the plausibility and adequacy of that representation;
6. Articulate reasons for the conclusion claim by generating conditional premises based on the story *S*;
7. Assess the relevance of those premises to the conclusion.
8. Paying careful attention to the scope of the conclusion, assess the sufficiency of the premises as supporting grounds for it.

To proceed through these stages, one will need to work out (presumably in class discussions and exercises) an interpretation of the story. The need to state an argument will directly pose important questions as to whether the story is stating or implying a message; what that message is; how – and how well — the story represents the subject of the message; and whether the story offers good reasons for the message. The same parable or story might be inter-

preted as expressing different arguments; one could compare and contrast the merits of these. The approach, while perhaps nonstandard, shows a way in which critical thinking themes and techniques might be included in the teaching of literature.

Again, point of my account here is not to reduce narrative to argument, but to provide a strategy for considering just what message is to be extracted from a story and what sorts of reasons the story can provide for it. If, on the basis of stories, we change our minds about important topics, we owe it to ourselves to reflect carefully on what sorts of reasons those stories can provide for the conclusions we reach.

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8.

Issues of Logicism and Objectivity

ABSTRACT: This essay treats several themes central to Harald Wohlrapp's discussion of the notion of conductive argument. Central to the exploration are two issues. The first is Wohlrapp's notion of Govier's account as flawed by what he considers to be logicism. The second is his charge that key terms employed by Govier and others in efforts to provide assessment guidelines for conductive arguments are misleadingly quantitative in their implications.

In his book *The Concept of Argument* Harald Wohlrapp offers an account of the role of argument in human life. In life, we need orientation, a sense of how to go on. Sometimes our old theories are not adequate and we need new theory. When a new theory is proposed, there is a kind of gap that we may call a gap in orientation. This is where argument enters the picture. Wohlrapp's theory is substantial and ambitious. I concentrate here only on aspects of his account that are relevant to the treatment of pro and con argumentation, a type of what has been called conductive argument.

Though initially intrigued by my efforts to describe and explore conductive argument, Harald Wohlrapp later concluded that my treatments were seriously flawed and that an alternative approach can serve to replace that problematic and much contested conception. Much of the difference between our approaches concerns what he deems to be a *logicistic* approach (referred to here as *logicism*) on my part (see pp. 255-256)¹.

1. All page numbers refer to Harald R. Wohlrapp, *The Concept of Argument: A Philosophical Foundation*, translated from the German by Tim Personn in cooperation with Michael Weh.

Logicism

By logicism, Wohlrapp does not mean formalism. Nor does he allude to the thesis of logicism in the philosophy of mathematics. The problem of *logicism*, on his account, is that it would have us articulate the premises and conclusion of an argument in just so many words, neglecting the fact that with conductive arguments, one finds “an extension of logical reasoning.” (256) A formalist would insist that the premises and conclusion of an argument be translated into the symbols of a formal deductive system, and the argument as formally represented should be evaluated for its deductive validity according to the rules of that system. Neither in practice nor in theory have I ever endorsed such an approach; nor does Wohlrapp imply that I endorse it. What he finds to be *logicistic*, and as such, objectionable, is something else, something short of formalism as commonly understood. It is the representation of an argument as constituted of claims amounting to premises and conclusion—what he refers to as a PPC model of an argument. What is involved in this representation of an argument is extracting from spoken or written discourse claims (premises) cited as providing reason for a further claim (conclusion), so that one has articulated a product of explicit statements that one can scrutinize and assess. I would add that there can of course be sub-arguments, multiple conclusions, more premises, and so on. Wohlrapp would of course acknowledge that sort of point. ‘PPC’ is used by him as a label for the approach of articulating the premises and conclusion in order to evaluate the logical cogency of an argument. He finds this approach artificial and “as restrictive as a tight corset.” (255)

Harald Wohlrapp thinks that informal logicians have been unduly influenced by traditions of formal logic when they take such an approach—as they characteristically do. For him, PPC models are a legacy of formal logic and not a positive legacy at that. I would urge that the identification of statements as premises and conclusions is a pre-formal task. Even if one insists on formalization, as a formalist would do (and as I do not and never have), one needs to know which statements would need to be formalized,

which claims are being made and put forward as reasons for just which other claims. Only after having identified premises and conclusions will one undertake the task of formalizing them.

One potential problem with the PPC approach is that the natural language discourse can be misinterpreted, so that the claims explicitly stated and deemed to be premises and conclusions are not accurately drawn from spoken or written discourse. For example, a person might fail to detect irony in a discourse and erroneously deem a sarcastic side remark to be a premise. Or she might fail to understand that a rhetorical question, in the context in which it appears, is a way of asserting the conclusion of the argument. Whether a particular version of premises and conclusions amounts to a correct interpretation of some discourse can be discussed, and proposed renditions of the premises and conclusion can be corrected if they are deemed to be erroneous. If amendment is appropriate, an arguer or interpreter can go through a process with a discussant to explore that issue. That is to say, if person #1 represents a speech as expressing some particular PPC argument and person #2 thinks #1 has made a mistake in so doing, #2 can say that to #1 and they can proceed to discuss and explore the issue, referring back to the original discourse in its context to seek a better interpretation that is acceptable to both. If more discussants arrive on the scene, they can contribute further questions and suggestions. There is nothing about representing claims as carefully articulated premises and conclusions that will forbid or cut off such a discussion. I submit accordingly that the allegedly tight corset is not as tight as Wohlrapp seems to suppose.

However, this is not the core of the problem. Wohlrapp's concern is not with the possibility of mis-identifying or misstating premises and conclusions. This is not quite what is at stake in what he terms a logicistic approach. On his view, the issue is not one of misinterpretation. Rather, it is much deeper; he has a dialogical model of argument and is concerned with process, not product. A PPC model (referred to in some texts including my own as a standardized argument) represents a product rather than a process.

The paradigmatic role of such a product representation of argument presents a problem for Wohlrapp because it is the central

feature of an approach that does not suit his overall theory with regard to the suitability of a thesis to serve as new orientation. On his account, argument should be thought of not as an argument (PPC) but rather as argumentation, a process within which various arguments (considerations purporting to justify or object to a thesis) can arise, be developed, criticized, and if appropriate, amended. (We may note here that in explaining the matter, it seems as though smaller *arguments* are constituents of the larger and broader social process of *argumentation*. I think this impression merits careful study.) On Wohlrapp's account, after a discussion, the first thesis put forward may be changed and successor theses can be stated and discussed. Within such a process, he interestingly points out that what tradition would regard as *conclusions* can even affect what tradition would regard as *premises*, in at least this sense: if discussants adapt their sense of what claim is at issue, they may adapt also the selection of claims that could support it. (Note that to make this point, Wohlrapp uses the notions of premises and conclusions that he has rejected as being, in a sense he deems objectionable, logicist.)

But the fact that Wohlrapp's account stresses *process* does not suffice to establish the incorrectness of the many accounts, including my own, that focus on arguments as *products*, constituted of premises and conclusions. His account is not one in which the argument as product with premises and conclusions is the central focus. That focus reflects his decisions and interests. However it does not show that the different product approach he brands as 'logicistic' amounts to a deep error (253-255). In fact, as noted here, there persist some indications that PPC structures will be spotted and evaluated by Wohlrapp himself at key points, as when he refers to a state of *arguments* for and against the thesis, the emergence of new *arguments*, or the quality of *arguments*.

The second alleged problem with the PPC approach, for Wohlrapp, is that it leads to a kind of straitjacket or tight corset. It is too fixed; it is limited and limiting; it is not open, on his view. And yet, as we have seen, the fact that one begins a discussion by considering an explicit claim to be a premise or conclusion does not prohibit or cut off discussion about the status or accuracy of

that claim. When there are discussants, they can amend, revise, or reject that claim or amend their ideas about its role in an argument. When a solo thinker is understood as evaluating claims in a kind of dialogue with him or herself (such an extension is needed, to preserve the conception of argument as dialogical), that person can assess his or her understanding of what is claimed and amend his articulation of premises and conclusions. The PPC approach is less fixed and limited than Wohlrapp maintains.

Seeking to avoid logicism, which he regards as profoundly mistaken, Wohlrapp develops his own approach to pro and con arguments. He urges that employing a process approach such as his will mean that the somewhat mystifying conception of a conductive argument can be replaced. With regard to what, on a standard model, would be regarded as premises, he urges that discussants seek further information as to their relevance and credibility. (Persons seeking, in a PPC framework, to evaluate the reasons put forward for a claim can also, of course, also evaluate stated premises for their relevance and credibility.) Wohlrapp comes to recommend retroflexivity: premises are understood with reference to the conclusion, which in turn is understood with reference to them. Relevance may be considered in this light, he says.

As to the pros and cons that have been features of some so-called conductive arguments, Wohlrapp takes them to come from different frames in which an issue might be understood. For example, people looking for a person to mind their child for a few hours when they were out might understand their quest for a babysitter (translated misleadingly as ‘nanny’) in terms of reliability, convenience, or even as a kind of social worker project within which they hoped to provide a troubled young person with opportunities for change. From these different perspectives, a husband and wife might reason differently towards different positions as to whom they should hire. For example, the wife might regard reliability and competence as paramount considerations; for the husband, a kind of social work perspective might prevail.

Wohlrapp’s counsel, in argumentation contexts where there are pros and cons, is that one should seek to dissolve the strict oppositionality of those considerations, balance various interests,

and reconcile the various frames that have led to the apparent oppositionality of pros and cons. This reconciliation can be done in various ways: one may *reject* a frame on the basis of criticism; establish a *hierarchy* of frames; *harmonize* frames; or *synthesize* them. Presumably all discussants would have to agree as to what the different frames were and how they were reconciled. Wohlrapp allows that there is not always a clear conclusion to a discussion of this type. On this view, what was regarded as a pro and con conductive argument represents a stage of argumentation at some point in time when supporting reasons and objections for a thesis are still on the table.

From a subjective perspective, a thesis may seem attractive, seem to close a theoretical and practical gap, and be able to motivate acceptance. However, while there are still open objections to that thesis, it will not have validity in the sense in which Wohlrapp defines that term. The term “objection” is used broadly in Wohlrapp’s account. Objections will include criticisms, counterarguments, and attempted refutations. A thesis is not valid if there are arguments against it that have not been heard and considered: there are different frames within which the issue may be construed, and the frame differences have not been overcome if there are open objections. But while an issue may remain open in the sense that there remain open objections, the question is in principle resolvable by a discussion strategy in which discussants move ahead with reasons, always willing to put their own orientation systems up for new consideration.

There is a kind of micro-macro contrast to be drawn here between Harald Wohlrapp’s approach and that of many others, including myself. Like most others who have pursued themes of informal logic in papers, textbooks, and academic monographs, I have generally taken a micro approach, extracting from a discourse some particular PPC product and raising questions of interpretation and evaluation of one or other particular argument from that starting point. In contrast, Harald Wohlrapp has taken a macro approach, offering insights on the nature of science, social relationships, the nature of subjectivity and objectivity, and other broad topics. Given the ambitious and highly integrated nature

of Wohlrapp's theory, I find it hard to assess one aspect of his approach at a time. I recall Isaiah Berlin's fox and hedgehog². The fox, Berlin said, is interested in many little things; the hedgehog is interested in one big thing. Perhaps at this point that I am more like a fox and Wohlrapp is more like a hedgehog. But there is a sense in which this contrast is an exaggerated one. The fox and the hedgehog will need to coexist and cooperate.

What can the fox say to the hedgehog, if she senses a risk that she will be overwhelmed by the hugeness of things? She can say, "wait a minute, hedgehog, just what are the details here?" I think we all have to be foxes some of the time. In fact, there is ample evidence that Wohlrapp can show fox-like capabilities when he deems them appropriate. When we are considering the merits of reasons offered for a claim, we need our fox-like skills. I would maintain that PPC representations of arguments are valuable when we are doing close analysis of specific cases. In fact such analyses can be found in Wohlrapp's work. One can see this in his detailed discussion of the Hüppe-Merkel debate about an embryo's right to life (324–345) and that concerning the position of the monarch in the French Revolution (209–229).

Objectivity

Apart from the fundamental issue of stated premises and conclusion, there is a major contested theme in the area of objectivity. Wohlrapp seeks in his account to incorporate both subjective and objective aspects in the validity of a thesis. On the subjective side, a thesis will appear valid when it provides insight into how an orientation gap may be closed, and when it can motivate acceptance (presumably by seeming to provide that insight). These aspects, however, do not guarantee the reliability or rationality of a thesis.

2. "The fox knows many things but the hedgehog knows one big thing." The notion is highly tempting, but on reflection one does have to allow that Harald Wohlrapp is both a fox and a hedgehog. His substantial theory is developed with close examination of many examples. Berlin's treatment may be found in *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History*, edited by Henry Hardy.

The criterial or objective side requires something else: the absence of “open objections”. When all objections to a thesis have been answered or in some way dismissed (shown, perhaps, to be irrelevant?), there are no open objections, and the thesis will be valid from the objective point of view as well as the subjective one. This validity is not a fixed quality of the thesis, for it may change when new arguments for and against it arise. The notion that a thesis could simply be valid in and by itself, and independently of any definite fixable stage of any argumentative process, is one that Wohlrapp resists. Theorists including myself have sometimes referred to *weighing* the significance of various considerations understood as counting for or against a claim. Such implications of objectivity, perhaps even quantitative in nature, have been found objectionable by Wohlrapp and some others. Literal weighing and balancing are quantitative and objective, whereas the *weighing* and *balancing* of considerations are surely not. Arguably, the notion of *weighing* in contexts where we deliberate about pros and cons is metaphorical, as too are such notions as *balancing*, *counting*, and *adding up*. These and similar expressions are common in ordinary parlance and in philosophical writing about ethics, logic, policy and law. Are these expressions metaphorical? They certainly lack any literary liveliness and are surely not vivid metaphors. Do they amount to dead metaphors? As dead metaphors are they harmless in any connotations they might retain? We may note here that the expression “dead metaphor” is itself a metaphor, likely dead. But for those who would push the notion of metaphorical status to its limits, arguably living still. The notion of the deadness of a metaphor merits further study. Or are such expressions as ‘weighing’ and ‘in balance’ live metaphors? Or at least metaphors sufficiently alive to preserve their capacity to mislead? The matter is disputable.

One can largely avoid talking of weighing considerations by adapting one’s language so as to speak of “greater importance” and “more significance”. If one thinks that there are misleading quantificational aspects in “weighing”, one can speak in other ways. One can say, as we often do, things like “x should count for more than y” but then of course one speaks of *counting* which, inter-

preted literally, would also be quantitative. A former professor of mine, a brilliant man trained in Scotland in the analytic tradition, used to speak of factors *counting* against a claim, or *counting* in its favour. I never understood *counting* in this context as implicitly quantitative and implying objective measurability due to such implications. This was many years ago. Was I perhaps simply young and naïve at the time? I don't think so.

One strategy in response to critics who object to such putative metaphors is to protect oneself by adopting different language. If I were to rewrite my textbook *A Practical Study of Argument*, I would adopt this strategy. But I would adopt it only as a protective measure and not based on conviction or any acknowledgement that such people are correct. I actually think that they are not. I would say that such expressions as “this factor is *outweighed* by another” or “his absence *counts* as evidence for his disinterest” or “in the *balance*, the second account seems best” are dead metaphors if they are metaphors at all. There is no firm criterion that will allow us to pronounce an expression to be a metaphor, or to be a live or dead metaphor. Let me just say that there is, at least, a case to be made that notions such as “outweighing” and “balancing” in contexts of deliberation are either dead metaphors or not metaphors at all. I do not seriously believe that ‘frame’ in “frame of reference” has physicalistic implications. My point is only that these terms and my own seem to be on a par so far as metaphorical status goes. Wohlrapp is happy enough with ‘frame’ and unhappy with ‘weighing’. He needs to explain the differential status he gives to these expressions.

It is indeed difficult to avoid all terms that could, by some critic or other, be understood to have objectivist overtones. Even the word ‘open,’ apparently approved by Harald Wohlrapp for use in the discussion of argumentation, can be so interpreted. So too can references to the *strength* or *force* of arguments. When we speak of other things being *equal*, does ‘equal’ have misleading quantitative implications? If one claim is said to *support* >another, is the notion of *support* physicalistic and quantitative in its connotations? Does it misleadingly suggest that an estimation of the adequacy of *support* should be made by an engineer? I don't think so.

We can, however, see that a hostile critic could raise such issues. The strategy of avoiding language that (even arguably) has objectivist implications will not be easy to adopt, because much of the language of thought and deliberation can be alleged to have those implications.

Which expressions descriptive of deliberation and judgment are metaphorical? When are metaphors dead and when are they not? If alive, when are metaphors misleading and when are they not? Can dead metaphors be brought to life? If so, what is the significance of that phenomenon? And how significant are translation issues in such contexts? I can only leave these questions open while pointing out that they arise for many terms and not just the *weighing* of various pro and con considerations in argumentative contexts. I raise these points here because of their general interest. They are relevant to Wohlrapp's comments on my efforts with the notion of conductive argument, perhaps less obviously so to his own account of objectivity—unless, that is, we begin to resist the notion of a frame as too physicalistic and implicitly quantitative.

Adopters of my textbook, *A Practical Study of Argument*, typically trained in analytic philosophy, were sometimes resistant to the notion that there could be such things as conductive (pro and con) arguments for which the text provided no precise method of assessment³. Some instructors resisted the very notion of conductive argument. Others recognized conductive arguments as a type, but wrote urging me to include further directions for an assessment. Attempting to accommodate their demands, I was pressed to move in that direction. The phenomenon of desiring a method of an algorithmic sort is of some interest. Many philosophers press for methods that can lead us to answers we regard as objective; we tend to do this even when that quest is inappropriate. One line of thought should clearly be resisted: we conclude that if there is no algorithmic route to solution, the problem in question does not

3. Wohlrapp uses the fourth edition of my *A Practical Study of Argument*, noting shifts from one edition to another. The latest edition, the seventh, appeared in 2010, with an enhanced version (correcting minor numbering errors) appearing in 2014. The fourth edition was published in 1997.

exist. Finding many passages in editorials, speeches, and serious books and articles, in which people cited supportive and countervailing considerations in close proximity, I found conductive arguments including both pros and cons. I acknowledged that there was no clear path to the assessment of those arguments. This situation struck many philosophers as highly unsatisfactory, providing some with a reason to deny that such arguments existed at all, insisting that they be recast in some other way—perhaps as a series of arguments that could be shown to be deductively valid if suitable premises were added to the stated ones.

Why the lack of a general method for assessment in the context of conductive arguments? From my own perspective: topic specificity and context relativity. Why the lack of objectivity in such assessment, apparent in several editions of my text-book and found so objectionable by academic users? Looking back, I would answer: the apparently subjective nature of *significance* or *importance*. From one perspective a consideration may be of great importance; from another, it may scarcely matter. For example, the consideration that a project will cost two hundred dollars may constitute a decisive objection to undertaking it, for a struggling non-profit group. From the perspective of a wealthy philanthropist considering a donation to the group, this consideration will be of little or no significance.

Wohlrapp would say that these perspectives are based on different frames. Still, I want to urge that some considerations really *are* more important than others. Perhaps this is a case where Wohlrapp would say different frames can be ranked: a frame in which costs are considered definitive can be ranked below another frame in which legal rights are definitive; then perhaps that frame can be ranked lower than another in which moral rights are definitive. On his account, such a ranking would be objective when there are no open objections to it.

If one follows Harald Wohlrapp, the problem of conductive arguments including both pros and cons will go away. I submit, however, that this problem will be replaced by others. Such fixed PPC structures are products, not process, and as products they are not the focus of analysis in a process account. People may call

such products ‘arguments,’ as we have been doing for a very long time. But on Wohlrapp’s account these products are not appropriate objects of attention. We can make them disappear by focusing on process. When we do, there is no need for conductive “arguments” as discussed by myself and others. In fact, if we agree with Wohlrapp that “logicism” is generally objectionable, there should be no need for other “arguments” based on premises and conclusions, whether those be deductive, analogies, inductive generalizations, or inferences to the best explanation.

One would like to find an account of argumentation providing a stance between relativism and objectivism couched in the materialistic language of weights and measures. Wohlrapp understands his account to occupy this space, allowing that what is valid from both subjective and objective perspectives may change. He says, for example,

A criterion is commonly understood to be something that can be questioned and assessed from the perspective of a disinterested observer. Things are different, however, with respect to assessing a state of argumentation. Although the absence of open objections is truly a kind of criterion, someone has to become involved in the matter in order to be able to assess whether it obtains; this kind of involvement must be deeper than, for example, hermeneutic efforts at interpreting a text. (285)

It may appear at one stage of a discussion as though a thesis is valid in the sense that there are no open objections to it. But that could change. For many issues and problems, different people take different perspectives or frames, as Harald Wohlrapp would put it. We speak of pros and cons precisely when there are different ways of looking at an issue that calls for decision, and when insisting on a single perspective would amount to tunnel vision. There is no one perspective that is demonstrably the “right” or “most appropriate” one. It makes sense to consult, to think and deliberate together. This is a point that Wohlrapp emphasizes, and I agree.

Conclusion

I urge at this point that it is still reasonable to understand arguments as having premises and conclusions that can be adapted, rejected, considered and revised, by persons deliberating in quest of reasonable decisions. There are matters of judgment, and we can have reasons for our judgments. There are indeed valuable, and indispensable, processes of argumentation. Many are involved when we encounter gaps in our knowledge and explore together how best to fill those gaps. On these points, Harald Wohlrapp's reflections have much to offer. What I do not accept, and do not find in a complete sense even in his highly original and thoughtful account, is the claim implied in his resistance to what he calls "logicism": that a premise/conclusion analysis is objectionable and can be eliminated.

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9.

Argument as Product, Argument as Process

Abstract: A standard and important distinction is that between argument as a process in which people explore and discuss differences of belief and argument as a product with premises put forward to support a conclusion. Formal and informal logicians have focussed on argument as product. However, recent developments in the theory of argument have shifted to place emphasis on process. Accounts of Christopher Tindale, Daniel Cohen, and Andrew Aberdein defend such a shift. After considering their accounts, I nevertheless maintain that product accounts are epistemically central and should remain so.

Many uses and many distinctions exist, for the term “argument” and related terms such as “arguing,” and “arguers”. A standard distinction is that between argument in the sense of a quarrel and argument in the sense of premise claims put forward in a quest to rationally justify a conclusion claim. Another is the distinction between argument considered as a process in which parties explore and discuss a difference of belief, and argument as a product in the traditional logician’s sense, with premises and conclusion. While both formal and informal logicians have concentrated on argument as product, there has been a recent shift of interest to argument as process.

Before further considering examples of the product/process shift, it is worth noting that product accounts have not, and cannot, fully ignore aspects of the context in which an argument appears. They will need to consider it to identify the claim put forward, ‘the point’ of the discussion – in other words, the conclusion. Why are people considering this claim? What is at issue? Why is it at issue? Background information about time and place may also be rele-

vant for various reasons, one being the need to fill in indexicals such as “here”, “today” and “then.” In addition, it may be necessary to consider whether the context is one of business, science, law, or family deliberations. Furthermore, if one identifies a conclusion and premises put forward in its support, one may judge that the argument product so identified has a missing premise; at that point, contextual matters about the arguer’s beliefs and background are relevant to the determination of that missing premise. For example, if an arguer’s wording and manner suggest considerable confidence in the claims that he is putting forward, one may add a universal statement as a missing premise. Otherwise one may opt for a more qualified claim. Deriving an argument product from a broader discourse is no simple matter; it requires reflection and analysis. Those who deny that the context in which an argument is put forward is considered when arguments are analyzed as products have neglected to recall these aspects.

An Approach to the Question of Narrative Argument

Christopher Tindale links a product/process shift to his interest in narrative argument and in moving beyond the premise/conclusion structure in accounts of arguments. (Tindale 2017) Whether narratives can work as arguments will depend on how the conception ‘argument’ is construed, he says. A logical approach, focussing on premises and conclusion as abstract propositions, leaves out too much, on his view.

“This approach effectively tears away the product from the process in which it was produced. When the argument is then analyzed it is so on the basis of the statements involved and without sufficient regard for the situation that produced it, along with those participating in that situation. Treating arguments in this detached static way amounts to a failure to recognize the dynamic nature of what is involved.” (p23)

“The static sense of argument sees arguments as products with no essential connection to the argumentative situation from which they arose. They are inert pieces of discourse, connected

statements that can be judged “good” or “bad” merely in terms of their structures. (This is clearly the case with the traditional model and still the case generally with informal logic models.) By contrast, a dynamic sense of argument sees arguments as social events, personalized by those engaged in them. They are alive with meaning and movement and should only be judged “good” or “bad” in light of consideration of the entire argumentative situation including the participants.” (p25)

Referring with approval to the narrative paradigm defended in Fisher 1984 Tindale moves beyond logical and epistemic criteria to endorse notions of rhetorical reasonableness and narrative rationality. In the latter, there is a focus on good reasons, but these are rhetorically understood so that rational persuasiveness is not understood ‘merely’ in logical terms.

There are considerable challenges to the notion of narrative argument if one attempts to mold a story into premises and conclusion; these challenges are especially acute if one seeks a cogent argument that has a narrative form as distinct from deduction, induction, or analogy. If an argument had a narrative form, there would be point or a message to the story, that being the conclusion, and the plot components of the story would somehow provide premises offering support for that conclusion. This mode of interpretation is often awkward, and the argument resulting from it is open to obvious logical criticisms. On a broader conception of argument as process, such challenges disappear because one no longer attempts to express the argument as premises and a conclusion. If argument is understood as a social event in which two or more participants are engaged in attempts at persuasion, there emerges a broader framework into which storytelling can easily fit. The entire situation of interchange and discussion is to be considered, on a process account, and of course that situation may of course include stories. It often does. In a process account it is easy to accommodate a notion of narrative argument; the anecdote or story is told and is one element of the interchange that is proceeding. Aspects such as jokes, background facts, excuses, apologies, even qualities such as vocal tone, stance, background noise, and appearance may also be considered as elements of the argument as

process. (In fact it is not clear what aspects of the situation would not be included.) Considering argument as process, is to bring an abstract idea into a lived experience, according to Tindale 2017.

Tindale broadens the concept of rationality with the shift from product to process, moving from the logicians' sense (soundness in formal logic, cogency in informal logic) to 'rhetorical rationality.' A concern here is that, understood from the perspective of considering the merits of reasons, narratives could mislead due to intrinsic interest and distracting vividness and concreteness, and could exemplify such fallacies as hasty generalization or false analogy. People who put forward arguments typically seek to persuade, but persuasiveness as such is not sufficient for good argument in the logician's sense, according to the standards of either formal or informal logic. Persuasiveness is not necessary for soundness or cogency either: as is clear when we reflect on the criteria offered by formal logic (true premises and deductive validity) and by informal logic (acceptable premises, relevant to the conclusion and taken together sufficient to give good grounds for the conclusion). Rhetorical rationality is different from logical rationality: for rhetorical rationality, persuasiveness could be sufficient.

Rhetorical rationality will involve persuasiveness, but that is not rational persuasiveness as judged by logical or epistemic criteria. It is something else, to be apparent somehow in the process of arguing. That process will be subject to judgment — presumably in terms of such aspects as fairness and politeness. (Details remain to be spelled out.) In a footnote, Tindale states that he will leave for another discussion the question of how to judge arguments considered in terms of process. He suggests that an audience perspective would require an argument to withstand critical assessment via an appropriate set of questions — which would not arise from nowhere, but rather from a community.

The notion of 'process' at this point seems to be very broad and in fact too broad to be clear or realistic. Would the process include the temperature? Time of day? Physiologies of the participants? Information about the audience, whether present or not?

Tindale's defense of argument as process is based on the claim that a process account examines a dynamic phenomenon

rather than a static one. Thus “logic has a life”. (The presumption is that logic should ‘have a life,’ in the sense presumed here.) On this account, to be sure, there are abstract ideas and people are reasoning, but these are brought into “lived experience” which (it is presumed) is where they need to be. Arguers and their audiences are not ignored and should not be ignored in a process account. In a process account, the arguers receive attention, which they deserve, because it is people who are in a discussion and seeking to persuade. Claims and propositions are not discussing or arguing with each other; it is people who are doing this when they interact in an argumentative discussion. More than a purely logical (formal or informal) situation, there is a rhetorical situation when people argue and this situation must be taken into account.

One can agree that people must be taken into account, but does this consideration replace consideration of soundness or cogency? I submit that it should not. I confess that I do not find compelling Tindale’s reasons for shifting attention from product to process in the evaluation of an argument; indeed, on my understanding they border on being question-begging. We are not told why the dynamic is more deserving of attention than the static, the active more than the inert, or the concrete more than the abstract. Emotive associations of key terms such as ‘dynamic’ (positive) and ‘abstract’ (negative) seem to replace reasons, in the account. As for lived experience, statements and claims are elements of my own lived experience and from his writings and my personal acquaintance I submit that they are also aspects of Tindale’s personal experience. I would urge that their presence and role in our experience cannot reasonably be denied. In lived experience, people hold beliefs, make claims, seek and consider evidence and reasons that might support those claims, and evaluate the relevance and sufficiency of proffered reasons, which can be and are articulated and considered.

Daniel Cohen is another theorist who has urged shifts away from product accounts of argument. Cohen considers what it would be for an argument to be “fully satisfying”. (Cohen 2013) He is interested in contexts in which people argue with each other and do it well – do it, he says, “virtuously.” There are many facets

of argumentation; Cohen's interest is in what makes for a satisfying argument, one that is fully satisfying for its participants, who might, after the fact, say "now that was a good argument". Emotional, ethical, and even aesthetic aspects of a situation could bear on such a judgment – and, of course, the qualities of the people involved would also matter. These people would have to attend to each other, be fair-minded, listen, and carefully assess qualifications, counterarguments, and objections. Explaining these considerations, Cohen says that for the idea of an argument that is fully satisfying, we cannot think of arguments as abstract structures of propositions. Rather, we must think of them as including arguers and spectators.

If we are indeed interested in what makes an argument fully satisfying for those who engage in it, I agree with this comment. These aspects of argumentative interchanges seem to be matters of personality, style, context, and rhetoric – as well as the content of premise and conclusion claims. But this broadening of considerations leaves open the question of whether and how considerations of soundness or cogency retain importance for judgments about the merit of arguments. Cohen moves past judgments about premises and conclusions, in accordance with his own specific interests, but his account does not show that such judgments have lost their relevance.

Considerations Stemming from Virtue Argumentation Theory

Within informal logic, a cogent argument is one in which premises are acceptable, relevant to the conclusion, and provide good or sufficient grounds for that conclusion. Accounts of cogency along these lines appear in many widely used texts, including my own. As is widely recognized, criteria for cogency differ from criteria of soundness in formal logic. For an argument to be cogent, its premises must be rationally acceptable, relevant to the conclusion, and provide sufficient reason for that conclusion. Soundness requires true premises and a deductively valid link between

premises and conclusion. The premise/conclusion link is watertight in the case of deductively valid arguments. It may in differing senses be strong in inductive arguments, abductive arguments, conductive arguments, and analogies. With limited exceptions, questions of cogency have nothing to do with the character, behaviour, or circumstances of the arguer.

Broadly speaking, informal logic and formal logic have in common the product focus and the denial, contrary to some Virtue Argumentation theorists, that the merits of arguments are to be judged by considering the character or ‘virtues’ of arguers. Informal logic incorporates significant shifts away from the norms of formal logic, considering arguments expressed in natural language without need of formalization, and denying the requirement of deductive validity for a cogent argument. But it is similar in its product focus: both formal and informal logic focus on premises, conclusions, and the inferences from the former to the latter.

Theorists interested in argument are of course free to select their focus of attention. If one is interested in developing a virtue theory of argumentation, then one will wish to consider the characters of persons engaged in an argumentative discussion and their manner of interacting. With such a focus, the standards for a good argument may be defined in terms of the intellectual and ethical virtues of arguers. In such accounts, attention to product concerns about premises and conclusions will be supplemented or perhaps even eliminated. But when that happens, much is omitted: questions concerning the meaning and acceptability of premises, their connection to the conclusion, and the kind and degree of rational support they provide to that conclusion. Analysis in terms of arguers’ characters may replace logical analysis to evaluate an argument’s soundness or cogency but much would be given up along the way. To question this focus as a *substitute* for product evaluations is not to deny that arguers’ characters are highly important politically, ethically, and legally. For all the interest such issues of character may have — whether arguers are humble or arrogant, openminded or dogmatic, liberal or conservative — these characteristics do not determine the logical and epistemic merits of their arguments. These questions of merit are about premises,

inferences, and conclusions – about arguments as products and their capacity to justify claims.

Exceptions regarding the relevance of character and virtue to epistemic merit concern judgments about premise acceptability in cases where the basis for judging that acceptability is the say-so of the arguer. Within informal logic, qualifications concerning the *ad hominem* fallacy have been made on this basis. Suppose that our only basis for claim X is that Smith said so and was an eyewitness to the event in question. Now suppose further that Smith has poor eyesight, a poor memory, and is frequently intoxicated. With such characteristics, he cannot be a reliable eyewitness. Accordingly, a claim to the effect that X occurred should not be accepted solely on Smith's say-so. The evaluation of the cogency of an argument premised on such a claim made by Smith will be negative, due to his personal characteristics as they bear on premise acceptability. In such a case, abilities of an arguer are relevant to judgments about the cogency of his argument, even when that argument is judged as a product, with no bow to the concerns of a virtue theory of argument. As an arguer, Smith will lack credibility because he is unreliable in his perceptions, and this lack of credibility can correctly be the basis for a negative judgment as to the cogency of his argument. Its premises are not acceptable if they need to be accepted on his say-so. It is not fallacious to incorporate considerations about an arguer into judgments of cogency in this sort of case. Accounts of *ad hominem* should take this kind of exception into account, and they do.

Other considerations about the *ad hominem* concern versions of the *tu quoque* fallacy. Suppose that Jones argues that people should not eat meat, for reasons having to do with the suffering of animals on factory farms. But let us then stipulate that Jones herself eats meat, some of it from animals raised on factory farms. She does not practice what she preaches. In this context, she may be said to lack credibility in an ethical sense: her actions are not consistent with her principles. If the premises of her argument had to be accepted solely on her say-so, one could argue that they would not be acceptable due to a lack of moral credibility. The matter is complex because those premises might be rationally acceptable

for independent reasons; perhaps Jones is basing her case on common knowledge about practices in factory farms, for example. In that case, she can be hypocritical for failing to practice what she preaches. She can, perhaps, be judged to be of good moral character despite her hypocrisy on this issue. These arguments will be about Jones herself, not about the consumption of meat. The topic shifts from the eating of meat to the moral character of Jones, the arguer. An important point about that shift is precisely that it is a shift, a deviation away from the original topic. At the same time, however, Jones' argument against eating meat may be deemed cogent. While it is *prima facie* undesirable to be a person who does not practice what she preaches, it is entirely possible for such a person to put forward a cogent argument.

In a virtue account, the primary evaluative focus will not be on arguments as products. Instead, it will be on the characters of arguers as displayed in the process of argument. Aberdein 2007 notes that some alleged facts about arguers are relevant to the persuasive (*sic*) force of their arguments. This claim is correct, as argued here. Aberdein seems, however, to employ those qualifications about the *ad hominem* as a kind of softener for a virtue account of the merits of an argument and at that point doubts should arise. Indeed, recent qualifications of the *ad hominem* show that characteristics of arguers are sometimes relevant to judgments about the cogency of their arguments. They are relevant to the acceptability of premises if their acceptability depends on the say-so of the arguers. I agree. But what should be drawn from this point? It stops short of warranting a full-fledged virtue theory of argumentative merit. The fact that *some* virtue aspects are relevant to *some* judgments regarding argument cogency does not mean that virtue aspects will always be relevant to cogency judgments, much less that they will be sufficient for them.

Working toward a shift away from product accounts of cogency to a virtue theory of argument, Aberdein cites Richard Paul 2000. Paul listed the virtues of the true critical thinker: intellectual courage, empathy, and integrity; perseverance, faith in reason, and fair-mindedness. The general worth of these qualities cannot be denied. Aberdein states that they should track truth

preservation: arguers with these virtues will be disposed to accept or propose arguments which tend to preserve truth. Such arguers will tend to put forward arguments that are valid or strong, he says. If this is so, then their product arguments will likely be sound or cogent.

Aberdein claims that that virtue-based judgments of arguers will likely be coherent with judgments as to cogency because the arguers' virtuous qualities will 'track truth' or, in other words, tend to be truth-preserving. According to Aberdein, arguers who are more virtuous as compared with the less virtuous, will tend to offer and accept more cogent arguments. This claim is plausible enough in general. But what is crucial here is to understand that it presupposes independent criteria for judging cogency. Judgments about cogency evaluate the quality of reasons offered in support for conclusion claims; they judge the rationality of arguments based on standards of logic and epistemology, not ethics or politics. However well truth-tracking may work, judgments of argument (product) cogency should not be replaced by judgments about arguers' virtue as displayed in the process of argument. In fact, they cannot be so replaced.

To know that virtuous arguers tend to give good arguments, we need to know what a good argument is. To this end, informal logic has provided norms of cogency. Virtue argumentation theory presupposes such norms and should not be understood as replacing them. Although I share Aberdein's admiration for such qualities as intellectual integrity and faith in reason, I would nevertheless dispute his understanding of their role in the assessment of arguments.

Several authors have commented on such matters, urging that standards of cogency retain their importance for evaluating arguments. Biro and Siegel 2006 stated that what makes an argument a good one has to do with its ability to justify belief in its conclusion, and that property does not depend on the beliefs or characteristics of arguers. The *argument* (product judged for cogency) and the *arguing* (argument as event or process) are distinct. Biro and Siegel pertinently submit that arguing-based accounts thus leave no room for criticizing an argument if it succeeds in persuading. If an audience accepts one's bad argument, then that argument was

persuasive and, due to its success, might be said to be rational in a rhetorical sense. But it may fail to be sound or cogent. Considerations of persuasiveness are not what will settle issues of logical and epistemic merit. People may be persuaded by bad arguments and fail to be persuaded by good ones.

Another pertinent account is that of Gascon 2015. He maintains that judgment regarding the merits of arguments should be based on informal logic standards of cogency, applied to argument products, while norms relevant to becoming and functioning as a good arguer can be derived from virtue theory, which can advise us as to argue reasonably. On his view, the analytic study of arguments remains an important enterprise, though it does not provide the whole picture about argumentative interchanges. Such interchanges can be respectful or disrespectful, timely or disruptive, feature open-mindedness or dogmatism. These features of an interchange are interesting and highly important in such contexts as conflict resolution, but they do not determine the logical or epistemic merit of arguments as products.

Bowell and Kingsbury 2013 have also urged that an agent-based account of argument cannot replace a conventional account. A similar stance is taken by Godden 2015 and Bondy 2015. Bondy said that arguers having the relevant virtues is conducive to their producing and accepting good arguments. But to make this claim one needs an independent account of what features of arguments make them good ones.

Situations exist wherein virtuous arguers offer cogent arguments: we have merit in both aspects. And situations exist in which non-virtuous arguers offer arguments that fail to be cogent: we have de-merit in both aspects. These situations fit nicely with the views of virtue argumentation theory. But there are two other possible combinations; virtuous arguers may offer bad arguments, and non-virtuous arguers may offer good ones. These situations do not fit with the standards of virtue argumentation theory. Although examples should be unnecessary at this point, let me provide some. A virtuous arguer offering a bad argument? A woman might be honest, fair-minded, serious and conscientious but nevertheless offer an anecdotal argument against a proposed policy,

submitting a vivid story as to how a proposed approach failed in just one case and putting that story forward as a general reason against the policy. She might do this conscientiously, in all seriousness. She might even do it rather frequently, being influenced by people's apparently admiration for her stories and her telling of them. Her arguments, though hasty generalizations, might be 'rhetorically rational' in the sense of being highly persuasive and convincing to her audience. A non-virtuous arguer offering a good argument? A person of grandiosity, self-deceptive and lacking in intellectual and moral integrity, might argue on the basis of accurate and relevant data that people are influenced by his speeches. His premises might be accepted by him for bad (self-indulgent) reasons but nevertheless be true, relevant, and sufficient to warrant his conclusion. He might be systematically flawed in his interpretations of many matters, but accurate about his own influence, given his tremendous interest in the topic of his personal appeal and success. Such a man would lack argumentative virtue, but he could sometimes offer good arguments.

In short, good people can offer bad arguments and bad people can offer good ones. Criteria for judging people's virtues, even their epistemic and argumentative virtues, are distinct from criteria for judging their arguments. The characteristics of arguers are one thing; the logical merits of their arguments are another.

Why are product accounts and the associated evaluations important? They assess the merits of arguments as regards justification of claims. It is in this context that we consider the truth or acceptability of premises and the strength of connections between them and conclusions. Prior to such consideration, we identify premises and conclusions. That means carefully scrutinizing a discourse to determine what is at issue, what is being claimed, and what reasons or evidence are put forward to support it. Examining an argument in this sense is basic to epistemic considerations as to what claims merit acceptance and what do not. It is crucial to critical thought and rationality – a point that should not have to be made in this context, but that, strangely, needs to be stated — and even merits repetition.

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10.

Considering Credibility

Abstract: Regarding testimony, a general question can be raised: what justifies our reliance on what other people tell us? There are also questions about reliance on testimony in particular cases, as when the premises in an argument depend for their acceptability on the sayso of the arguer. I explore in this essay the notion of sayso. We need not rely on an arguer's sayso if his or her premises are common knowledge or are defended elsewhere. In cases where there is reliance on sayso, the arguer's cognitive capacities are relevant to the acceptability of his or her premises. There are faulty reasons for questioning credibility, such as those based on gender, race, and social class. I explore the relevance of identity considerations and lived experience to credibility in contexts where there is dependence on sayso.

The topic of testimony is central and fascinating in epistemology. Testimony in the broad sense is what people tell us when they make claims putting them forward as true. Broadly, testimony does not presume a specific context such as a court of law, qualified expertise, or religious experience. Rather, it is simply a matter of people telling each other things. To learn language and basic facts about the world, we believe each other and rely on each other. Doubt presupposes belief, in the sense that doubt can be considered and explored only by relying on language and beliefs that remained unquestioned. (Wittgenstein 1969) It could even be argued that trusting other people for beliefs is an *a priori* matter in a rather Kantian sense, as a condition of experience. Unless there is some reason for doubt, we credit what others tell us and accept it as true. To check up on one person, we rely on others. It is not plausible to claim that trust in the testimony of others is induc-

tively grounded: such an account would be circular. (Coady 1992, Govier 1997)

Regarding belief founded on testimony, there are two basic questions to be distinguished. One is the broad epistemological question as to what, in general, justifies our acceptance of testimony. The other is what justifies accepting a particular claim based on testimony. To the first question one answer is induction: on this account it is argued that things generally work out when we accept what we are told by others, and we have learned about that reliability from experience. An alternative response is that because acceptance of what others tell us is presumed by our functioning in this world, acceptance of testimony must be accepted as fundamental, as basic as deduction and induction. To check up on some people, we rely on others. (Coady 1992) Our default stance regarding testimony is trust and acceptance of what others say. Generally, we take it for granted that people know what they are talking about and are sincerely expressing their beliefs when they make assertions. Most of the time, we take people at their word. That is to say, generally and as a basis for functioning in the world, we believe people. (Anscombe 1979) Although philosophical analysis has tended to concentrate on believing claims, but there is an argument to be made that believing people is more fundamental.

There are, of course risks in simply trusting what people say when they tell us things. In many circumstances there are reasons for doubt. (Coady 1992, Govier 1997) These reasons will vary with contexts. Broadly speaking, though, they can be divided into two categories: the content of the claim and the character of the person asserting it. Regarding the claim, these reasons have to do with its consistency or plausibility given other knowledge and beliefs. Claims that are highly implausible ('my car can go 250 km per hour', 'my dog really enjoys carrots', 'his mother had 26 children') should, and likely will, be regarded as doubtful due to their content. Such claims are incredible in the sense that they are hard or impossible to believe given considerable evidence against them. The other source of doubt relates to the person making the claim. There may be some reason to doubt that person's competence or honesty regarding claims of this type; he or she may be

deemed not to be simply believable in the context due to epistemic or ethical defects. This aspect brings us to the topic of credibility. When we find reason for doubt, the default condition for trust and acceptance is overcome and we do not simply trust what the person tells us. Our trust is not simply granted; we reflect on the matter first, considering the content of the claim and the credibility of the person making it. We may accept the claim after reflecting on it, as we may decide that there are reasons, after all, to accept the word of the other person. (Govier 1993b). But that will be trust after reflection as distinct from the implicit trust that characterizes the default case. (Govier 1997)

As discussed here, credibility is worthiness to be believed. In this sense, credibility is distinguished from persuasiveness: there are many aspects relevant to a person's persuasiveness that have nothing to do with her epistemic or ethical worthiness. Persuasiveness may be enhanced by a pleasant voice, attractiveness, and attire, for instance; these aspects typically have nothing to do with the accuracy of the claims a person puts forward or her sincerity and honesty in asserting them. We often take credibility for granted; we believe people when they tell us things unless there is reason to doubt them. Credibility considerations may arise very generally regarding assertions, not solely in the context of the premises of arguments. Here, however, I will concentrate specifically on credibility considerations as related to argumentative contexts and in particular on the acceptability of premises. In general, a person's qualities, even those bearing on her credibility in a normative sense, are not the basis for judging the soundness or cogency of her arguments. Exceptions should be made for cases in which the acceptability of premises depends on the arguer's say-so and credibility is at issue. This sort of exception has been allowed by many analysts, but an implied question seems to have received relatively little treatment.

More needs to be said about 'say-so.' What is say-so? And when do premises need to be accepted on an arguer's say-so? Presumably not all the time: but when?

An Arguer's Say-So

When a person asserts a claim, he typically intends that claim to be accepted by others. Let us call these others his audience. Now, even apart from the default condition, there are various reasons the audience could accept his claim. It may be common knowledge. It may be something readily verified in the context in which it is put forward. Or it may be something already known or believed. In these cases, its acceptability does not depend on the characteristics or behavior of the person asserting it: such matters quality of his eyesight, interpretive skills, memory, and analytic ability are not relevant to its acceptability. The fact that this person, with these features and character, is the one putting forward that claim as a premise is not relevant to judgments about the cogency of his argument, because the acceptability of the premise derives from factors distinct from him. He is asserting the premise (in speech or writing) and is saying something, so there is say-so and there is, to be sure, a sense in which he is putting himself behind the claim when asserting it. But he need not do that for the claim to be accepted and acceptable by his audience. When considered, the claim turns out to be acceptable for independent reasons. Thus reliance on say-so is not an aspect of the case. Because it is not, the credibility of the arguer does not bear directly on the cogency of his argument: the virtues of the arguer are distinct from the merits of his argument. And there are many such cases; generally, the characteristics of arguers are distinct from the cogency of their arguments.

But when say-so matters, for premise acceptability, we have a bridge over the distinction between arguers' characteristics and the cogency of their arguments. For reasons sometimes epistemic, sometimes ethical, not every person who makes a claim is worthy of being believed. There are also many cases that are not of this type, and where the arguer's say-so does matter. A person may be telling about her own experience or about something she saw or heard; she may be recounting the narrative of another or describing an account in a book or lecture. To accept what she says we need

to believe her, and to believe her we need to find her worthy of belief. Epistemically, her abilities will matter. If she has inadequate eyesight, hearing, memory, or interpretive and analytic skills, she will not be a reliable source of knowledge. Ethical qualities count too. If, for example, this person is known to exaggerate or lie, or to interpret events solely as they would bear on her own self-interest, she will not be a credible source. And so far as arguments are concerned, that lack of credibility will mean that premises should not be accepted on her say-so. Further support will be needed; in an argumentative context, this would naturally be a sub-argument.

Good Reasons for Questioning Credibility

There are good reasons for questioning a person's credibility: indeed there are many such reasons. The adequacy and accuracy of a person's perceptual abilities is an obvious one. If someone is making a claim about what he saw or heard (or otherwise perceived, consider taste or smell), and his perceptual abilities are not normal, they cannot be relied upon. For example, a man might claim to have seen a driver look away from the road before driving his truck into a building. The reasonable acceptability of that claim would presume accurate perceptions of the driver's posture and gestures. In a case where the claimant's vision was poor, his credibility on such a matter would be low: the claim should not be accepted on his say-so. The significance of various factors will vary depending on the content of the claim.

Other good reasons to question credibility concern skills. Though perceptually astute, a person might lack skills relevant to the matter at hand. For example, if a person has no plumbing expertise, his acute visual perception of a washing machine would not suffice to give him credibility as to what was wrong when the machine did not work. Technical skills would be needed in the case, and if he does not have them, this man's lacks credibility on the matter. If he offers a verdict on the failure of the machine, he is not a credible source. And for credibility, not all relevant skills are technical. Highly relevant in many cases are what we

can call interpretive skills – ability to spot developing or diminishing trends, or understand such matters as irony, sarcasm, and deception. These abilities are highly relevant in such areas as discourse interpretation, forecasting, and political commentary. For instance, if a commentator has repeatedly erred in his political predictions, there is reason to judge that he lacks interpretive skills relevant to credibility on such matters and his credibility will be negatively affected. Claims on these matters cannot reasonably be accepted on his say-so.

Bad Reasons for Questioning Credibility

Bad reasons have been much discussed under the topic ‘Epistemic Injustice’, following Fricker 2007. The themes were anticipated in Govier 1993a, an essay written in the wake of the hearings prior to the appointment of Clarence Thomas to the U.S. Supreme Court. Anita Hill, who had been an intern of Clarence Thomas, questioned his suitability for the appointment, alleging sexual harassment. Hill’s concerns were dismissed; evidence was that her credibility was questioned due to her gender and race. These and other writings point to some of the many bad reasons that may function to undercut our sense that others are credible. Negative stereotypes regarding gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, religion, and social class abound and may function consciously or unconsciously to undermine the credibility of many claimants. These features of a person do not systematically lessen their abilities or honesty and should not negatively affect their credibility. Such characteristics as gender, race, social class, and ethnicity do not make a person less worthy of being believed. Features such as quality of dress, accent, and pitch of voice are irrelevant from the point of view of epistemic and ethical norms, though they often function negatively regarding persuasiveness.

Of special interest at this point is a line of reasoning to the contrary, urging that identity considerations of gender, race, or sexual orientation actually are relevant to credibility assessments regarding certain sorts of claims. The underlying presumption of

such reasoning is that only certain kinds of people are in a position to know certain kinds of things. That is, if one is not an X, then one cannot know claims of type x (Tx). For example, it may be argued that if you are not Aboriginal, you cannot know how Aboriginal people feel about colonial practices. Or if you are not a lesbian, you cannot know how lesbians feel about their adolescent experiences. If you are not Black, you cannot know how Black people understand the facts about Africville, near Halifax, or the legal evidence that slavery was a part of Canadian history. The operative presumption here is that if you are not the right kind of person, then you should not make claims about these kinds of things because they fall outside the areas where you have authority. You are thought to lack authority because it is granted only to members of a group (an identity group), of which you are not a member. Your identity will mean that you lack credibility on the topic.

But these examples are stated in an unclear way, so as to blur the important distinction between feeling and knowing. One type of person cannot feel or understand the feelings of the other type of person; that claim is hard to question. There is a sense in which it is reasonable to maintain, not only for groups but for individuals, that one person never knows how another person feels. A heterosexual person never knows how a lesbian woman feels about her best women friends, for instance; is there an underlying sexual potential or tension in these relationships? The one is not a lesbian, the other is, and the differing group identities restrict understanding, in the sense of knowing how the other feels. But identity is not as relevant as we might think at this point: there is, after all, a fundamental sense in which no one person ever feels as another person feels. It is significant at this point that we are not in the context of propositional knowledge. The non-lesbian woman may be in a position to have knowledge about relevant matters (not how it *feels*) due to aspects distinct from her own sexual orientation and intimate experience. She may, for instance, be the mother of a lesbian person, or a clinician, or an academic researcher and may for these reasons have had extensive exposure to accounts of experiences and attendant struggles over sexual orientation, relationships and identity.

One cannot feel another person's feelings or know how another feels, but that is not to say that one cannot have knowledge of claims about related matters and have things to tell. Knowledge has various sources and may be possible for various reasons. Given this, I would contend that to question a person's claim to knowledge specifically on grounds of identity goes too far.

The Authority of Lived Experience

We do not normally question a person's authority about the nature of his own experience. If a man says he is angry with his wife, we allow that he knows how he feels; he is angry. We can proceed to ask him many questions about this anger: just what she has done to make him angry, why he is angry, how angry he is, whether and how he might be expressing his anger in words or actions. But we generally assume that he is the one to say what he feels; he is, as it were, an authority about his own feelings. This allowance strikes me as a matter of the etiquette of interactions, or the ethics of privacy, as much as one of epistemology. (Bayne and Spener 2010) For it is not impossible for a person to be wrong about his feelings in the sense of misdescribing them. (Gertler 2021). This matter is often discussed under the title 'in corrigibility.' We are not incorrigible with regard to the nature of our own experiences. We can be incorrect. A man who describes himself as angry might instead be jealous, or anxious. And he might come to acknowledge this. If questioned by a counsellor, a man might come to realize and admit that he has been misinterpreting his own mental state: really what he is feeling is jealousy. Such an insight could be therapeutically useful. The professedly angry person might, reflecting on the circumstances that would make jealousy an appropriate emotion, come to understand that jealousy is not fitting in the case. He was not angry; he was jealous. But with insight, he is no longer jealous, because he has come to understand that there are no grounds for jealousy. (D'Arms and Jacobson 2000) A person is a credible authority on his own emotions because no one can presume to know better. Yet alternate descriptions can be suggested and he

may come to acknowledge them. If so, he has allowed himself to be corrected; he was corrigible, not incorrigible, though he remains the most credible person on the matter. His credibility in this area is established by social custom and deference, not by an epistemology that allows incorrigibility as to the nature of one's own experience.

I sense in recent philosophy and social life a tendency to grant more sweeping credibility to persons, stemming from deference to their lived experience. Such authority is often granted to matters beyond the area of lived experience. A pertinent example is that of victims' experiences. Suppose, for instance, that a person has been trapped beneath a building that collapsed due to an earthquake, and has survived for several days in great discomfort, with no food or water. How this felt, what it was like, and the emotions resulting from the experience – these are for that person to say. She will, as a victim, deserve empathy, consideration and respect. Though even as a victim she may be corrigible on the matter, she will have to grant any corrections or re-interpretation; the authoritative word on what she has gone through will be hers alone. Socially we grant that authority to lived personal experience. But this authority is rather often extended to associated matters beyond personal experience, and there are pitfalls here. A victim of an earthquake may wish to have a say on such matters as the prosecution of careless contractors, the financing of rebuilding, or the conduct of lawsuits. And indeed she should have a say on such matters; her voice is important and should be heard. But her victim status does not give her privileged access in the sense of excess credibility on those further topics. Being a victim does not give her special access to knowledge in these areas, although of course her voice should be heard. Similarly, a rape victim is not more credible than others on matters of prosecution, sentencing, rehabilitation, or parole of perpetrators. We grant credibility on the matter of experience, but we should not extend that credibility to broader related matters in such areas as engineering standards or social policy.

So far as credibility granted on grounds of personal experience is concerned, there are two noteworthy *caveats*. First, the testifier does not have infallible knowledge as to the nature of

his livid experience because there are ways in which he may go wrong. He does have privileged access in the sense that success re-descriptions or other corrections stand only if acknowledged by him. Second, any extra credibility based on that privileged access does not extend beyond the realm of personal experience.

What about cases when a claimant has personal experience, but is generalizing from it, as in the following:

1. 'Other students will attack you if you come out as a lesbian. I know, because that's what happened to me.'
2. 'Twain is more readable than Dickens. I spent the last two winters reading all of the works by both of them, and that's what I found. There's no comparison.'
3. 'At these company meetings, policy proposals get much more attention if they are put forward by a man, rather than a woman. I've been living with this situation for many years now, and that's what I've experienced.'

In these cases, a person is describing what she has experienced but she goes beyond her experience to make a general claim, based on that experience. She is assuming that her experience is typical or representative, or the experience that other people would have. 'What I went through, I know, and what others go through will be like what I went through, so I know that too.' The underlying assumption is that the other cases will be like hers. Clearly, that assumption is open to question. For that reason, credibility granted to claims of experience should not be extended to such generalizations.

A Puzzle

Another kind of generalizing about credibility issues is puzzling. It arises concerning past mistakes. Suppose that a person has put forward a claim that turns out to be mistaken and, through this, has shown himself to be unreliable in his interpretation of a given situation. He has demonstrated that he can go wrong and, let us

say, seriously wrong about an important situation. Suppose, for example, that this person is a documentary film maker who produced and released a film stating that the government of a particular country is stable and successful. Then, mere days after its release, that government fell and systemic corruption and abuse were exposed. The man continues in his career, with subsequent documentaries produced, advertised, and widely distributed. But there are critics. One insistent critic points to the earlier film and its deep errors, claiming that, given this failure, the film maker is not a credible source. The allegation is that because of his demonstrably flawed interpretive skills, illustrated in this case, he is not a credible source. This critic is arguing that because he was wrong once, he is not competent in this area, he could well be wrong again, and he lacks credibility. Her argument at this point recalls Descartes' reasoning about the deceptiveness of sense perception; given that it has deceived us (even once, it appears) we should never entirely rely on it. (Descartes 1641, 1993) Considering the issue, I find myself pulled in contrary directions.

This line of reasoning has some appeal; its plausibility would depend in part on what is meant by entirely relying on something. If it means 'avoid all sceptical questions about it', we can credit the reasoning. Never avoid all sceptical questions. And I feel a pull in the opposite direction: is the critic herself reasoning incorrectly, committing the fallacy of hasty generalization? Is she labelling a person not credible for life, based on one past mistake?

If the critic's reasoning is that because a person made a serious error in the past, he could never be correct about that sort of thing again, clearly her reasoning is flawed. Of course he could be correct; he could be correct time and time again. But her point is not about correctness, not quite. It is about credibility. How credible is he on matters similar to those involved in his previous error? He made such serious interpretive errors about that place show in the old documentary. But it was all long ago. He could have honed his skills, learned from experience, improved. These things are possible. That is not in question; rather the question is whether such improvements should be presumed. At this point both epistemic and ethical factors need to be considered. Epistem-

ically, there are matters of the extent and accuracy of observations, and the ways they are considered as to their coherence and significance. Is this film maker one who counts on comments made in bars and quotes the predictions of local taxi drivers? Such practices would surely be error-prone; perhaps he used them initially and then learned not to. But perhaps not. When considering his credibility in later projects, the critic might look for evidence of the sorts of practices that misled him in the past. Or perhaps she suspects that this analyst is sloppy and careless; that he fails to reflect carefully on his evidence, its sources, and his own judgments. If she had compelling reasons to see such flaws in his early work, she will look for them in subsequent work and be unwilling to accept him as a reliable source. All this is to say that the man does not have full and ready credibility here. There are aspects to examine and reflective persons in his audience will examine them. Reflecting on the puzzle, I am pulled to the questioning side.

Concluding Comments

Although there are many contexts in which we accept claims simply on trust, there are also many in which considerations about the credibility of the claimant arises. Reflections on credibility are appropriate when we need to accept claims based on the sayso of the speaker; when that is the case, characteristics of arguers bear on the acceptability of their premises and thus on the cogency of their arguments. Here we have discussed issues of credibility that concern cognition: the speaker's ability to be accurate about the matter at hand. As we have seen, there are both good and bad reasons that may be cited when questioning these aspects of credibility. Credibility may also come into question for ethical reasons pertaining to matters of character pertaining to honesty, sincerity, hypocrisy, or conflict of interest. These matters will be the topic of the next chapter.

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11.

The Tu Quoque and Moral Credibility

Abstract: To argue against a practice on the grounds that an arguer defending it does not engage in it is to commit the fallacy of tu quoque. Considerations shift from the issue at hand to claims about the character of the arguer; this is a distraction. Interesting qualifications arise concerning the tu quoque fallacy, in which practical inconsistency is at issue. Judith Shklar argued, importantly, that allegations of hypocrisy are in many contexts all too easy and distract from important issues, harmfully diverting attention. I discuss Scott Aiken's exploration of moral authority and the considerations Tracy Bowell has advanced regarding the broader fallacy of 'what-about-ism.' This broader fallacy has been considered in contexts of international relations. I maintain that the moral credibility of an arguer is relevant to the cogency of his or her argument only when premises need to be accepted on the arguer's sayso and there are good reasons to dispute the arguer's capacity for judgment.

Here is a simple version of a frustrating situation. A substantially plump doctor tells you that you should lose weight. Yes, you have some extra pounds, but appearances suggest that she is far heavier than you are. She has some arguments about health risks, and themes about heart health and diabetes ring familiar to you. But you find the situation maddening and frustrating in a way and the thought goes through your mind: who are you to be telling me this? She is conspicuously fat and has not done what she is telling you to do. Who is she to be giving you this advice? In your temptation to speak back with some degree of anger in the case, there lurks a logical temptation: the temptation to commit the fallacy of *tu quoque*. If appearances are to be relied upon, this doctor does not practice what she preaches. She offers advice (weight should be controlled) and offers reasons to support that advice (known health risks of

overweight and obesity), but there appears to be clear evidence that she does not follow her own advice. 'Do X' she says, not doing it. If you reason that, due to her apparent hypocrisy, something is wrong with her argument, then you have committed the fallacy of *tu quoque*. If the inconsistency or hypocrisy marks a flaw in her character, then it is relevant to her character and not to the argument itself. The original argument was not about her character, it was about health risks and what those are is a scientific question rather than a personal one.

There are situations, for example elections, where the character of a person can be a major issue, even the main one. But a shift from the original problem to one of the arguer's character is a diversion from the subject at hand, and a distraction. Now you may be wrong about the hypocrisy of this doctor. It could be that she has tried to lose weight and for some reason is unable to do so. She may have a metabolic disorder. It may be that she has already lost weight, and you are in no position to know that. And there are other possibilities. But in terms of weight, health, and the cogency of her argument, these considerations are not relevant. They are about the doctor herself. The *tu quoque* is a fallacy of relevance. The cogency of an argument put forward depends on the acceptability of the premises and support those premises provide for the conclusion. The doctor's premises are based on scientific knowledge and their acceptability does not depend on her sayso; thus her credibility –whether intellectual or moral – is not a factor in determining the cogency of her argument. To that issue her credibility is irrelevant.

The *tu quoque* is rightly regarded as a fallacy of relevance because it shifts attention away from the argument put forward to the proponent of that argument. It distracts from the issue at hand, in this case the relationship between health and weight. This example appears to be a straightforward one of a person arguing for a prudential or moral principle P and not practicing P herself. If there should be plausible excuses for not practicing P, the *tu quoque* allegations do not signify hypocrisy after all. That matter may need to be discussed when the character of the arguer is the topic of discussion. Perhaps it was not possible for her to practice what she

is preaching and she has an exonerating excuse for not doing that. These considerations would be relevant to claims about her character; but so far as the cogency of her argument is concerned, they do not matter. (Govier 1980) If a discussion shifts from the original issue to that of the character of the arguer – however important her character might be in some context – the considerations, there has been a diversion; they are not relevant to the original argument.

Complications about Hypocrisy and Character

Evidence can be misleading: a person may have excuses for not practicing what she preaches. Furthermore the relationship between the preaching and the practice may be contestable. There can be issues of mismatch as to levels of generality. If a conclusion is ‘you should lose weight’, we can ask whether that is a recommendation that the arguer would wish to apply to every overweight person. Likely not: very young people, people with a history of eating disorders, and those approaching death from cancer, would presumably be exceptions, exceptions not made explicit in the initial statement of the argument. The intended scope of a proffered principle may be narrower than is initially apparent. (Kapstein 2002)

It can also be the case that the scope is broader than apparent. The critic may understand the arguer to be presuming a position of rather general moral authority when she urges an action upon her listener, and he may, as critic, cite actions of the arguer that would undermine that moral authority. (Aiken 2008) ‘Who are you to say? Aren’t you the very one who did X?’ – where X is something the critic judges to be wrong and inconsistent with the arguer’s proffered advice. The Vatican is often said to lack moral authority due to its failure to take seriously and handle effectively the many allegations of sexual abuse that have been brought to its attention. This lack of moral authority may be alleged in contexts when the Church speaks out against different issues – for example, poverty or war. This more general allegation is that because of significant moral failings in one area, an arguer (who may be serving as an

institutional spokesperson) lacks the moral authority to speak out on the (presumably comparable) area dealt with in her original argument. In such cases the arguer is not exactly criticized for failing to practice their own principles; instead she is claimed by the critic to lack moral authority due to actions or policies regarding other matters of moral significance. Such a line of reasoning would seem to underlie the following:

- ‘The West has lost the moral authority to criticize Iran.’
- ‘Rishi Sunak benefits personally from tax loopholes, so he is in no position to put forward measures to limit them.’
- ‘The U.S., with its polarized citizenry and former president facing criminal charges, is in no position to host a summit on democracy.’

These are ‘you too’ arguments that lack the specific form of the *tu quoque*, as described above, because the faulty actions and flaws of character alleged do not follow exactly the pattern ‘arguer does not practice what she preaches’. Yet these critical arguments are similar to the *tu quoque* in that a person or agent faced with moral judgment or advice responds with a shift to the topic of the actions and qualities of the arguer, with a ‘you too’ quality shifting away from the original topic: ‘if I(we) are in the wrong, you are too; who are you to criticize us?’; ‘You lack credibility, moral authority, here because you are flawed yourself.’ The presumption is that to speak out against a perceived wrong, one needs moral authority. At this point the generality of ‘doing something wrong’ shifts away from the original *tu quoque* formulations in the direction of ‘what aboutism’. The critic is in effect saying ‘You give X attention; Y is at least as bad as X; Y should get attention; you ignore Y; therefore you are in a morally flawed position and lack credibility.’ As in the *tu quoque* the critic seeks to undermine the arguer’s moral credibility and shift attention away from the original topic and argument. When he succeeds, the original topic is forgotten and ignored; the focus becomes the moral character of the arguer.

There are many forms of inconsistency. A person may be logically inconsistent by claiming both P and not-P or, less obviously, by claiming P and Q, where Q either presupposes or entails not-P. For the *tu quoque* and moral credibility another kind of inconsistency is most relevant, the kind having to do with action and professed or presumed commitments. A person who recommends a moral principle P and does not act according to that principle, is practically inconsistent. So too is one who commits to such a principle through identification and association and does not live up to its implications in practice. These practical forms of inconsistency serve as the basis for allegations of hypocrisy, cited as defects of character and evidence against moral credibility.

In a recent article Tracy Bowell discusses ‘what-about-ism’, noting that it shares qualities with *tu quoque*. (Bowell 2023) An arguer is criticized on the grounds that they have done or condoned something wrong, something broadly similar to the act(s) that they as arguer pointed to. The implication of the criticism is that they should have spoken out, or done something about, these other wrongs. Bowell points out that other fallacies may be present in the context of what-about-ism, mentioning in particular the red herring and false dilemma. (We could also consider false analogy and two wrongs.)

Some Damages of Distraction

In her book *Ordinary Vices* Judith Shklar has much to say about allegations of hypocrisy. (Shklar 1984) Such allegations, she maintains, are an especially available and facile form of criticism, and their appeal allows for ready distractions from a problem raised by an arguer. Shklar maintains that it is common in public discourse for persons involved in a discussion to differ in values. Given such differences, they might argue about the values themselves but an easier thing to do is to charge one’s opponents with not living up to their professed values – of having practices that do not comply with their principles. In other words, to launch into a *tu quoque*. Due to the ease of such allegations and (in many contexts) their

emotional appeal to an audience, a critic can frequently succeed in shifting the topic away from the original issue to that of the actions, lifestyle, and character of the arguer.

As Shklar argues, such a shift is undesirable for several reasons. The original topic will go neglected as attention moves away from it to personalities; the original subject may have been of considerable importance. For example, suppose that a scientist expressing his concern about climate change, should argue on the basis of temperature changes and CO₂ levels that restrictions should be placed on the building of highways and airports. Now suppose that this person travelled by air to speak at a conference on the matter and critics accuse him of hypocrisy, of not abiding by the limits he advocates for others. He has travelled by plane and by doing so has contributed to CO₂ emissions. If attention shifts to attacks on this scientist and his lifestyle, it moves away from the subject of building airports and highways, away from what could and should have been an important debate.

Issues of personality may come to dominate debate, overwhelming issues of substance so that what should have been weighty considerations escape attention. A highly significant further pitfall with these allegations of fault and blame is that they tend to evoke and stimulate animosity, leading to poor relations and contributing to polarization. Even a person with a sterling record of action and character may come under scrutiny and harsh judgment. And there is a third aspect too. If a person's character is to be judged, then failure to conform to professed principles is only one aspect of that; it is not sufficient to define it. *Tu quoque* is dangerous because of the over-simplification and polarization it encourages; it is also superficial and reductionist on its own level.

The same may be said of many of the broader allegations that can be deemed 'what-about-ism', which uses allegations about credibility in a quest to shift attention. These shifts distract, most often banefully. Person A raises a problem in which B is involved; B alleges that A doesn't have authority to raise it because A has committed or endorsed a moral inconsistency amounting to hypocrisy; then attention shifts to the character and practices of A, away from the original topic. The problem initially raised drops

out of the picture and instead, the lifestyle and actions of A capture attention.

These dynamics are present in debates about foreign affairs and issues of international law. An article by Sienho Yee (Yee 2004) argues that ‘you did similar wrongs or worse’ is often urged in contexts where nations and their agents are accused of criminal wrongdoing. Yee maintains that such arguments fail to show that the actions or policies addressed in the original argument were not wrong. He acknowledges that to that point they are irrelevant. However, he argues that inconsistencies identified would be relevant to other issues, for example that of issue of fairness regarding punishment. Arguments to the effect that verdicts in international courts amount to Victor’s Justice do not suffice to exonerate an accused agent accused of serious offenses such as war crimes. Yet they deserve attention due to their political importance. Logically, the actions of A are not shown to be right, or excusable, because B has done, is doing, or would do, something similar or worse. Rhetorically, and politically, though, such arguments often are significant and shift the direction of debate.

This topic is extensively explored by Robert Knox in an article on imperialism, hypocrisy, and the politics of international law. (Knox 2022) Knox maintains that the conflict between liberal ideals and real politics means that it is often easy to question a nation’s commitment to its own professed ideals. International law rests on presumptions of sovereignty and also on presumptions of reciprocity, which facilitate claims and counter-claims regarding hypocrisy. ‘If these things are wrong for us, the things you people do are similarly wrong for you.’ Knox provides the example of equality: most liberal nations are committed to norms of formal equality; yet facts on the ground belie such norms. Often in international politics one finds claims of hypocrisy followed by counter claims about the hypocrisy of the other. Each seeks to defend itself and shift attention away from criticisms of its practices by accusing the other of a contradiction between action and professed values. Knox never lapses into fallacies of *tu quoque* or what-about-ism; he never says that the wrongs or alleged wrongs of B mean that the accused wrongs of A are not wrongs after all.

The wrongs of B do not excuse or diminish those of A. Yet, Knox contends, accusations of hypocrisy should not simply be written off: the faults one is accused of may be real and important.

Scott Aiken interprets allegations of inconsistency in a moral position as relevant to whether an arguer has moral authority. (Aiken 2008) He cites as examples criticisms of Al Gore for travelling in airplanes and Noam Chomsky for profiting from successful capitalist investments. (I note that the Canadian environmentalist David Suzuki has similarly been criticized for living in large and luxurious house in Vancouver, where land for housing is a scarce resource.) Such attacks leave an opportunity for what Aiken calls *tu quoque* judo: Gore, for instance, might respond that the absence of alternate travel arrangements just shows that he is right: things are that bad. Aiken points out that there are contexts where moral authority is needed and deficits in that area are significant. *Tu quoque* is a fallacy of relevance, on his account, and he acknowledges that its use creates “a culture of deliberative hostility.” Still, moral authority – or credibility – remains for Aiken a central concern. “I do not seek marriage advice from someone I know who beats his wife.” If you come to distrust someone due to a real or perceived moral flaw, Aiken states, you will also distrust that person’s arguments. All right: descriptively that is probably true. But the connection between the personal qualities of an arguer and the logical merits of her argument has not been explained. The relevance problem underlying the *tu quoque* fallacy and what-aboutism has not been resolved has not been resolved.

In these discussions, the fallacious aspects of *tu quoque* and what-about-ist attacks are acknowledged; even so, it is allowed that such attacks may make valuable contributions to debates by pointing out analogies, introducing problems, having relevance to other issues, and pointing to problems of credibility and authority. Yet the underlying questions remain. What is moral credibility? What is moral authority? And what are their importance for judgments about argument cogency?

Moral Credibility and Moral Authority

Various factors are relevant to moral credibility. These include honesty and sincerity, integrity, and practical consistency. For the lack or perceived lack of such qualities, arguers are often attacked and, as noted, these attacks often shift attention away from arguments put forward to arguers themselves. Character is a matter of what Aristotle in his Rhetoric called *ethos*, and as he maintained, *ethos* is a key element in rhetoric and very significant for persuasiveness. Arguers need to show themselves to be the right sort of person to be putting forward the view for which they argue. If they are known to be, or appear to be, dishonest, insincere, or practically inconsistent, they will not be the right sort of person. Or, as Aiken 2008 states the matter, they will lack moral authority.

It is not clear whether Aiken would regard moral credibility and moral authority as the same thing. The latter sounds rather stronger than the former, as ‘authority’ suggests a rank in moral standing higher than that of one’s audience, whereas ‘credibility’ is consistent with equality regarding that matter. Does one need *moral authority* to criticize the actions or practices of another? Aiken seems to assume that that is the case, and that charges of hypocrisy will upset it.

I will impose an interpretation here, according to which moral authority exceeds moral credibility, which is a necessary condition of it. Let us say for now that persons who lack moral credibility regarding a certain range of topics lack the moral authority to speak on those topics because of their low moral credibility. The fact that they are dishonest, insincere, or fail to live up to professed norms makes them lack moral credibility and, as a result, moral authority. Such persons, on this account, would be in no position to speak out in criticism of others; they lack *ethos*; and as a result, persuasiveness. Their moral failings being known and public, they will be unable to convince their audience. These are matters of ethics and social psychology, not logic.

But what about logic? These considerations say nothing about the cogency of the person’s argument; they are about character and

persuasiveness, which are other matters. So far, nothing said links personal character to argument cogency; the status of *tu quoque* and whatabout-ism as fallacies of relevance remains unchallenged. Is there a way of connecting considerations of character and considerations of cogency?

- That person is just not reliable.
- Don't listen to her.
- She is in no position to say that.
- Who is he to be telling us what to do?

Many more such comments can be envisaged. But they share a fundamental problem in that they *presume* a strong connection between character and cogency, expressing in various ways the notion that a morally flawed person cannot be the proponent of a cogent argument. What is presumed is exactly what needs attention: just how does character connect with cogency? Such comments are question-begging.

Insight might emerge from introducing a third term here. A plausible candidate at this point is 'judgment.' Can a person with reduced moral credibility have good judgment? If not, and if judgment is needed for the construction of their arguments, this might give a link between character on the one hand and argument cogency on the other. A person might have bad judgment on some topics but more seriously she might have bad judgment in general, due to hastiness, preoccupation with some themes at the cost of ignoring others, prejudice, or considerable ignorance. Such a person might, for instance, be prone to speak out hastily and then defend what was said against all criticisms, reasonable or not. Here we will focus on allegations of bad judgment on some specific topic, not those of bad judgment in general. (In my view, examples of the latter do exist.)

Regarding judgment, cogency, and character, one might construct an argument along the following lines:

1. The author of acceptable premises with regard to a topic

T, as required for argument cogency, must have good judgment regarding such matters as T.

2. A person who has good judgment regarding such matters as T must have moral credibility as regards those matters.
3. X does not have moral credibility on such matters as T.
So,
4. X does not have good judgment regarding such matters as T.
Thus,
5. X cannot construct acceptable premises regarding T.
Therefore,
6. X's argument on topic T is not cogent.

This line of argument links character and cogency as relativized to a specific topic. One could construct a comparable argument about judgment in general, requiring a premise to the effect that some arguer simply lacks good judgment, whatever the topic of concern might be. For now, though, we will focus on a less general allegation regarding bad judgment.

To consider such arguments further, we need to explore the central conception 'judgment'. Obviously, a fundamental question at this point is 'what is judgment?' a question by no means easy to answer. Then the key point, based on an interpretation of 'judgment,' is the opening premise: is it true that *good judgment* on a topic is required for the construction and selection of acceptable premises on that topic?

What is judgment? It is the capacity to arrive at a reasonable conclusion about a matter that is in some doubt—a matter concerning which supporting evidence and reasons do not lead to a straight 'yes or no' answer. To reach a decision on such a matter, a person needs to consider, honestly and fairly, evidence and reasons; relevant norms and consequences and decide what aspects are most significant in the context of a decision. Reflection on such matters

is required; there are no rules that can simply be applied to generate a conclusion in the case. Even if rules seem to apply, there are several possible rules that could be applied, and different selections would yield different results. One needs to determine and select what is relevant, understand why some aspects are irrelevant, eliminate them from consideration, and carefully arrive at an interpretation of the case. Terms like ‘insight,’ ‘discernment’ and ‘wisdom’ come to mind. (Dewey 1910)

Regrettably, it is an easy matter to construct realistic examples of bad judgment. Here are some:

1. John bought a house, arranging for a mortgage at a rate of 4.5%, which was standard at the time of his purchase. He failed to consider the possibility that interest rates would rise. When they rose to 6.0%, he was unable to make his payments and eventually lost his house.
2. Anita was on government committee and found that her staff were accused of careless treatment of confidential documents. She appointed her former campaign manager to investigate the problem, failing to appreciate that that person would be seen as partisan and too close to her to be a reliable reporter of problems in her office.
3. Juan changed his surname without consulting his parents and was surprised and shocked when they criticized his action and his relations with them worsened.

These examples are of cases where relevant considerations are not taken into account. There are also, of course, cases where irrelevant or marginally relevant considerations are taken into account and mistakenly deemed to be highly significant, while available relevant matters were downplayed or even ignored.

4. Sultana read a newspaper report describing a recommendation that boys begin kindergarten at age 5 rather than age 4, on the grounds that boys are slower to learn and mature, on average, than girls of the same age. She held

her rather advanced son back a year on these grounds, only to find later that he is restless and bored in school.

5. Eric's grandson Sam won a prize for basketball at his small private school. Eric concluded that Sam is highly talented at the sport and enrolled him in a summer training program for skilled athletes. Sam could not keep up with the others and became discouraged and unhappy as a result. Eric failed to note that being outstanding at a small school does not establish a likelihood of being outstanding in a broader context.

Do the qualities needed for good judgment include those required for moral credibility? If a person lacks moral credibility on some topic, being dishonest, insincere, biased in their consideration of evidence, or pragmatically inconsistent, does that show or imply that they have bad judgment on that matter, as stated in premise 2 of the argument envisaged here? If so, and if the premises selected for that argument are reliant for acceptability on the arguer's sayso, then they could be rejected as unacceptable on logical grounds. A link between the arguer's character and the cogency or non-cogency of their argument would be established along the lines of the argument above.

Note that such a link would be relevant to judgment about the cogency of the argument only if the arguer's sayso was required for an assessment of their premises. Assuming that it was, and assuming and understanding of judgment and moral credibility along the lines proposed here, an arguer's lack of moral credibility on some matter could mean that they lacked good judgment on that matter. If we grant this assumption too, we would have an argument on the above lines connecting an arguer's moral character with the cogency of their argument. This would result from a logical analysis as distinct from an ethical or rhetorical one. But to get this result we have made two assumptions that are open to some question. First, that the premises of the original argument do have to be accepted on the basis of arguer's sayso. For many ethical arguments, norms and needed descriptive facts would be blatantly

obvious and that sayso would not be the basis of evaluation. We have also granted that moral credibility on some matter is a necessary condition of having good judgment on that matter. Given some indeterminacies in both these notions, that connection too is open to question. For these reasons, I submit that the connection between character and cogency is limited at best. The force of *tu quoque* and whataboutism lies for the main in rhetoric, not logic.

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