Interpreting the norms of rational persuasion

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RESUMEN

En este artículo critico la postura de Johnson según la cual la lógica informal no es epistemología aplicada. Para ello propongo un esquema complejo para la evaluación de argumentos que combina la evaluación del producto lógico con la evaluación del desempeño del argumentador y muestro que tales evaluaciones, así como las normas que involucran pueden expresarse tanto en términos epistemológicos como en términos de persuasión racional. La conclusión a la que llego es que no hay realmente diferencias entre ambas formas de verlas. Ello me lleva al punto central de mi propuesta: que la idea de que debemos decicir cómo definir la argumentación antes de desarrollar una teoría de la evalución está equivocada. Podemos sencillamente observar qué tipo de evaluaciones hacemos de hecho.

PALABRAS CLAVE: epistemología aplicada, evaluación de argumentos, lógica informal, racionalidad manifiesta, Ralph Johnson

ABSTRACT

In this paper I want to argue against Johnson's view that informal logic is not applied epistemology. I propose a complex scheme of argument evaluations that combines evaluation of the logical product with evaluation of the arguer's performance, and show that these evaluations and the norms they invoke can be expressed analogously in epistemological terms or in terms of rational persuasion. My conclusion is that it makes very little difference which we see them as. This leads to the real point of the paper: the idea that we must decide first how to define argumentation before developing a theory of evaluation is mistaken. We can simply look at the kind of evaluations that we in fact make.

KEYWORDS: argument evaluation, applied epistemology, manifest rationality, informal logic, Ralph Johnson.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the book *Manifest Rationality* (2000) Ralph Johnson claims that there are norms of argumentation, and hence aspects of argument evaluation, that are not reducible to epistemology; informal logic is not applied epistemology. Instead, these norms make sense only when the aim of argumentation is seen as rational persuasion; they reflect the fact that the arguer must be rational and be seen to be rational by their audience. This view makes argument evaluation ultimately an evaluation of how well the arguer argues, that it to say, her performance.

I want to make two claims and one distinction with regard to this:

(i) THE POSSIBILITY OF REDUCTION (PR) THESIS

Norms that Johnson says cannot be interpreted epistemologically can be so interpreted, that is to say, there are epistemic analogues of Johnson's norms. Rational persuasion can be translated into the vocabulary of justification.

ii) THE "NO PRIORITY" (NP) THESIS

'Reduction' of something usually implies that what it is reduced to is somehow more basic or conceptually prior, but the issue of priority is largely an academic exercise; one does not need to take a definite view on what kind of norm argumentative goodness is in order to evaluate arguments. Because of these analogues, argument evaluation itself can be isolated from conceptual disagreement about how to define argumentation.

iii) THE "GOOD"/"WELL" DISTINCTION

There is a distinction between an argument's being good and an arguer arguing well – corresponding to the product/process ambiguity of "argument" – that rational persuasion tends to blur. I claim that there are similarly two senses in which we may be rationally persuaded. I propose again that we do not need to take a definite view on which we should be evaluating but work on the basis that argumentation's being good in both ways is superior to being good only in one. I will propose a continuum of evaluative judgments that we may make.

Most of this paper is concerned with setting out and justifying this list of evaluative judgments. The two senses of rational persuasion implicated in these judgments will be shown to be evaluable against epistemic norms. In order to show this I need to utilize some epistemological concepts that are not often mentioned in

argumentation theory: objective and subjective justification, and the closure principle. I will also be using a version of Perelman's concept of a universal audience to show that one of the senses of rational persuasion that I entertain, although it is audience-independent, can indeed be seen as a case of rational persuasion.

The PR Thesis should naturally fall out of this: whichever sense of rational persuasion we mean, whatever evaluation we want to carry out, and whatever judgment we make, can be given in epistemological terms. *A fortiori*, so can the norms Johnson mentions. A direct engagement with Johnson's arguments to the contrary is undertaken in the last part this paper.

I do not pretend in this paper to give an account of argument evaluation as such or say exactly how arguments are to be evaluated. This must be found elsewhere.

2. THE OBJECTS OF EVALUATION

There are two things (I will refer to these as argument$_1$ and argument$_2$) that we sometimes refer to by the word "argument" and that we are interested in evaluating.

An argument$_1$ is the logical product: a premise-conclusion complex. The relation between the premises and the conclusion of an argument$_1$ is completely mind-independent and determines whether or not the argument is valid or invalid; what the arguer believes to be the relation between the premises and conclusion is irrelevant. We can diagram the structure of the argument$_1$ as a box and arrow diagram with each premise in a box of its own, and an arrow that groups these premises together and points to a box with the conclusion inside. There will only be one arrow and one semantics for the arrow, namely logical entailment.[1]

An argument$_2$ characterizes argument as a process: currently, the fashion is to characterize this process as a kind of discourse or speech-act complex. This is mind-dependent in two ways: with regard to the propositional content of the speech-acts and with regards to their conditions of satisfaction.

The propositional content is mind-dependent because it captures not only the premises and conclusion, but also how the arguer takes these to fit together, or in other words, their reasoning. Thus, evaluating an argument$_2$ with regards to its propositional

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[1] Perhaps relations other than logical entailment exist between premises and conclusion that can justify the conclusion to some degree. Issues concerning the possible support relations and how these are to be evaluated are a subject to be explained elsewhere. The point is only that whatever relations link the premises to the conclusion exist objectively and depend solely on the premises and conclusion and not, for instance, on the arguer's own conceptions or intentions.

content is a different evaluation from evaluating the argument$_1$. To say that there is a logically correct, truth-preserving route from premises to conclusion does not necessarily mean that the arguer took that route — the argument$_1$ is good but the reasoning, and consequently the argument$_2$, is bad. We cannot in this instance say that the arguer has argued well.

This does not mean that the reasoning cannot be represented as an abstract object and evaluated accordingly; we can abstract from the process a static structure where these reasons and their believed support relations are represented by an argumentation-structure constructed from the arguer's own point of view. Like the argument$_1$ this can be diagrammed by a simple box and arrow diagram, but unlike the argument$_1$ the semantics of the arrow may not be logical entailment and there may be more than one kind of arrow.

In the ideal case, this structure will have the same structure as the argument$_1$ (i.e., be structurally identical or isomorphic to the argument$_1$) and each inferential link will have the same strength as in the argument$_1$. In other words, the diagrams will be identical. One is still evaluating an object here, or to put it slightly differently, we are evaluating acts of arguing in the intransitive sense of the word "acts." Isomorphism of the argumentation-structure to a deductively valid argument (whether or not this is the argument$_1$, reasoning that does not map onto the argument$_1$ still potentially being valid) indicates that the arguer has at least got the structural part of her argumentation right but does not guarantee that she has got the inferential strength right[2]. She may not think that the conclusion follows conclusively from the premises, so the arrow in her argumentation-structure will not denote logical entailment, and yet the premises actually do logically entail the conclusion. The same boxes and arrows will occur on the argument$_1$ and argumentation-structure, but the meaning of the arrow will be different. In such cases I say that they are isomorphic but the inferential links have different strengths. Also, we cannot rule out the possibility that even if she does mean by the arrow what she considers to be logical entailment, she may be radically mistaken in her view of what logical entailment involves.

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[2] Not too much should be made of this innovation; its purpose is to allow the analyst to evaluate the arguer's success in persuasion without importing psychological elements into the notion of argument itself. I reject as misleading the idea that whether an argument is deductive or inductive depends on whether the arguer thinks that the inferential strength is conclusive or non-conclusive, but I accept that when the arguer gets this wrong we should have some means of evaluating her acts of arguing (but not necessarily her argument qua product) as being in some way defective.

The conditions of satisfaction are mind-dependent simply because certain conditions must obtain for one's performance of speech-acts to be "happy," and these include (probably exclusively, for the speech-acts involved in argumentation) having certain attitudes; e.g., one does not assert felicitously if one does not believe what one asserts. I would also include here conversational norms such as those of Grice; e.g., one does not adduce a reason felicitously unless one has evidence for believing that the reason is true and has probative value[3]. Here, we are evaluating acts of arguing in the transitive sense of the word "acts." Again, though, the arguer's being radically mistaken, e.g., about the probative value of her premise, will not make their argumentative speech-acts any less felicitous. Even a completely irrational person – for example, one whose conception of rationality includes magical beliefs – may argue felicitously and see their arguing as an attempt at rational persuasion. This does not mean that rationality is relative, or that we cannot criticize someone's conception of rationality (on the grounds, for example, that their conception commits them as a consequence to a logical contradiction or to something they would not themselves accept as true), but we cannot criticize them for failing to argue; we can only do that if we take the arguer's obvious (to us) irrationality as evidence of their being insincere rather than simply mistaken. In some cases this may be the right evaluation for us to make, but nonetheless it is the wrong evaluation objectively when the arguer is sincere.

Evaluation of the argument$_1$ and the argument$_2$ qua argumentation-structure seem, on the face of it at least, to be a matter of logic, and although a negative assessment may reflect badly on an arguer's reasoning capacities, it need not reflect badly on them as responsible (i.e., not sophistical) arguers.

Just by looking at the kind of criticisms that we make and how we make them seems to lead to several dimensions of evaluation. Which should argumentation theory focus on? Are we interested in what we ourselves should rationally be persuaded by or are we justified in believing, or are we interested in how well arguers argue, that is to say, their performance?

I want to put forward an approach to evaluation that side-steps this question to a certain extent. If there are different ways in which argumentation can be good, then argumentation that is good in every way will be better than argumentation that is good in only some of these ways. This, surely, should be uncontroversial. So, I propose a kind of sliding scale of goodness without attempting to answer some deep conceptual

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[3] An assertion itself does not need to observe such a Maxim of Quality, but only that what is asserted be sincerely believed, whether for good reasons, bad reasons, or no reason at all. The speech-acts that belong to the speech-act complex thus are taken to be of a greater complexity than assertions simpliciter. Following Bermejo-Luque, I will sometimes refer to such acts as adducing a reason.

and even metaphysical question about what argumentation "really" is.

Let us summarize the possibilities from best to worst:

i)   The arguer has argued well, and the argument is good because the argumentation-structure is isomorphic to the argument_1. Also, the arguer has dealt with objections.

ii)   The arguer has argued well, and the argument is good because the argumentation-structure is isomorphic to the argument_1.

iii) The arguer has argued well but the argumentation-structure is not isomorphic to the argument_1 but is nonetheless isomorphic to a valid argument.

iv)   The argument is good because the argumentation-structure is isomorphic to the argument_1 but she has not argued well either because she does not believe her premises, or she does not take herself to be justified in believing her premises, or she puts forward a conclusion from premises that she does not actually believe support it. (This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of an arguer's possible vices).

v)   The argument is good because the argumentation-structure - though not isomorphic to the argument_1 - is nonetheless isomorphic to a valid argument, but she has not argued well.

vi)   The argumentation-structure itself is defective; the conclusion does not follow from the premises in the way claimed, but it does follow.

vii) The conclusion does not follow from the premises at all, that is to say, the argument_1 is invalid. Ipso facto, it does not follow in the way claimed either, so the argumentation-structure is defective. However, she argues rationally by her own estimation, that is to say, in accordance with her own conception of rationality.

viii) The conclusion does not follow from the premises at all, either in fact or in accordance with her own conception of rationality.

3. THE NORMS OF EVALUATION

We could ask the question "What kind of norms are these?" The answer to this will depend on the answer to the question of what argumentation "really" is. If we consider argumentation to be the argument$_1$, or even the act of arguing in the intransitive sense, then the norms would appear to be logical. If we consider argumentation to be defined as aiming at justified belief, then the norms would seem to be epistemological. If we consider argumentation to be defined as aiming at rational persuasion, then the norms would seem to be roughly those of reasonableness in proper conduct of a certain discursive activity. In this paper I will be confining myself to Ralph Johnson's account of rational persuasion, where arguers must exhibit "manifest rationality" — they must not only be rational, they must appear to be rational to their audience.

As I said above, I do not really want to answer the question of what argumentation really is, and thus I do not really want to say what kind of norms the norms of argument evaluation are. What I want to show is that it doesn't matter that much from the practical point of view, and that we can give an epistemological interpretation of these norms, not in order to argue that the epistemological view is the fundamentally correct view or that epistemological normativity is prior to any other kind, but to show that these different interpretations of the evaluative judgments that we make are more or less interchangeable. This is a problem for Johnson's claim that rational persuasion cannot be reduced to (or, it follows, interpreted as) applied epistemology. I will provide a detailed critique of Johnson's claim later in this paper.

First of all, we need to interpret the distinction between the argument$_1$ and the argumentation-structure as an epistemological distinction. We can do this by using the distinction between objective and subjective justification. Objective justification is the kind of justification we are normally talking about when we talk about justification, namely the premise-conclusion relation in the argument$_1$. For this reason we might call this justification$_1$. When the premises entail the conclusion, then if the arguer believes his premises (which he must if he is arguing sincerely) then the arguer is justified$_1$ in believing the conclusion, it being the right thing to believe (even if she does not know this). If the audience believes the premises, we can also talk of this from the audience's point of view as persuasion$_1$ and as being persuaded$_1$, since the audience has been given an argument that, as a matter of fact, conclusively supports the conclusion.

Being justified$_1$ does not entail that the arguer is arguing well and being persuaded$_1$ does not mean that the audience cannot criticize the arguer for not arguing well; it does entail that the audience is right to believe the conclusion although, if they actually do believe the conclusion, they may yet be irrational due to reasoning incorrectly from the premises to the conclusion. When they believe and are rational in believing what it is right to believe then we might say that they are persuaded by the argument. Even so, since it is still possible that the arguer is not arguing well since the arguer may not do as good a job as the audience of reasoning correctly from the premises to the conclusion, we should not say that the audience is persuaded by the arguer; the arguer has succeeded in her attempt to persuade the audience in spite of herself, for the conclusion does not follow from the premises in the way the arguer herself says or thinks that it does.

Ideally, of course, the premises will support the conclusion in precisely the way the arguer thinks they do, which is to say that the arguer and the audience conceptualize the argument as having the same structure (the audience's reconstruction of the arguer's argumentation-structure will be isomorphic to that argumentation-structure, i.e., it will contain the same premises and combine them in the same particular way) and the same inferential strengths (conclusive relations will not be confused with non-conclusive relations, and vice versa).

Even in this case, the arguer may not have argued well. This is reflected in the conditions above as the difference between cases (ii) and (iv). To argue well the arguer must be subjectively justified in believing her premises and in believing that they support the conclusion in the way she says and thinks. Subjective justification is justification from the arguer's own point of view and is the kind of justification involved in the conditions of satisfaction of the speech-acts of adducing reasons. The arguer aims at being objectively justified and consequently may be criticized if she is not, but there is no infelicity in her speech-act provided that she is subjectively justified.

We can see a couple of ways in which an arguer may fail to satisfy the condition of arguing well.

The first occurs when the premises support the conclusion in precisely the way the arguer says they do but not in the way the arguer privately thinks they do if, indeed, the arguer privately thinks they do at all (the arguer may choose an argument she thinks is persuasive but not rationally persuasive, but then she is not arguing responsibly even if the argument she gives is one that would persuade rationally when made sincerely). To argue in a way the arguer thinks to be effective but less than fully

rational is not to argue well, whatever evaluative judgment we make on her argument.

The second occurs when the arguer is not subjectively justified in believing her premises. This may be because she is deliberately attempting to mislead but not necessarily; she may be sincere in her beliefs while admitting that she does not really have any evidence for them.

Argumentatively speaking, this kind of justification can be seen as the assertibility conditions on acts of arguing; one should not put something forward as a reason for a conclusion unless one justifiably believes it to be true and to be a reason for the conclusion, and to justifiably believe something is to have evidence for it. Thus, it is very similar to Grice's Maxim of Quality[4]. Since it qualifies such acts we might call this justification$_2$ in analogy with argument$_2$. It is the act rather than the product we are criticizing when we say that an arguer has not argued well because not justified$_2$. When the arguer has not argued well, it is her acts of arguing (in the transitive sense), or in other words her illocutions, that I say are defective. This is important because acceptability of premises is generally considered to be part of argument evaluation in both the epistemological and the informal logical accounts, and they sometimes argue that the logical and especially the deductivist accounts ignore this element of argument evaluation, to their detriment. Against this, I would point out that it is not entirely clear that deductivist accounts do ignore the acceptability of premises, since generally they are concerned with whether the argument is sound, but also that what we are criticizing when we say that a premise given by the arguer is unacceptable is the arguer's performance — we are saying that the arguer has not argued well, rather than that there is anything wrong with their argument. Furthermore, they might say that this is a problem of analysis, since it concerns the question of whether the giving of the premise was felicitously performed, and in consequence whether we have a felicitously performed argumentation to evaluate[5].

The situation where the arguer has argued well in the ideal case is represented

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[4] It is the addition of "justifiably" that makes this an assertibility condition rather than just a speech-act condition. The speech-act of adducing a reason has as a condition of satisfaction that whoever performs this speech-act believes that the reason she gives is a good one and does actually support her conclusion, but it is not obvious that she must (take herself to) be justified in believing this or that she must have evidence simply in order to perform the act.

[5] For example, if I tell you that your evidence does not really support your using premise P, or provide counter-evidence against P, then there is very little difference between saying that I am thereby undermining your argument and saying that the speech-act complex does not really amount to a proper argument in the first place. I am saying that you are not really entitled to your premise and that you are wrong in thinking it to be objectively justified, though it is true that this does not necessarily mean that you are insincere or that your argumentation is infelicitous. Ultimately, then, this kind of criticism amounts to an attack on the ethos of the arguer and is not so different from *tu quoque* and circumstantial *ad hominem* attacks where we also say that the speaker is not entitled to assert his premises.

by case (ii) above. Here, it will be the same thing that persuades$_2$ that persuades$_1$, i.e., the argumentation-structure and the argument$_1$ will be isomorphic, which is to say that the argument the arguer takes herself to be giving is the one that objectively justifies the conclusion. Furthermore, the arguer is subjectively justified in giving it, meaning that her argument will actually be what she thinks that it is (as opposed to what she simply says that it is) and be valid in the way she thinks it to be valid.

4. THE TWO SENSES OF PERSUASION

I should elaborate on the different senses of being persuasive being used here. I am not concerned whether the perlocutionary effect of being persuaded is brought about or not, since this is not something to which philosophical analysis can helpfully contribute but is better investigated empirically. The audience is right to be persuaded$_1$ when the argumentation is persuasive$_1$, and right to be persuaded$_2$ when the argumentation is persuasive$_2$, but whether they actually do have the psychological state it is right for them to have is not the issue that concerns me. By persuasive$_1$ and persuasive$_2$ I mean: if one believes the premises, one is (right to be) persuaded$_1$ when the premises and conclusion given by the arguer in the discourse form a valid argument (i.e., the conclusion is justified$_1$ and one has been persuaded by the argument but not necessarily by the arguer) and one is persuaded$_2$ when the argumentation-structure and not only the premises and conclusion given by the arguer form a valid argument (i.e., the premises not only support the conclusion but they support it in the way that the arguer says that they support it — the argument is good in the way that the arguer says that it is)[6]. We need not assume that the arguer is sincere in what she says, which is to

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[6] A position intermediary between *persuasiveness*$_1$ and *persuasiveness*$_2$ is possible where the arguer has got the structure right but the nature of the support relations wrong. Irrespective of an arguer's conception of rationality an argumentation-structure may be isomorphic to an argument that is *persuasive*$_2$ which is nevertheless not the same argument that is *persuasive*$_1$. If this *persuasive*$_2$ argument establishes the conclusion with some qualification while the *persuasive*$_1$ argument establishes it with some other qualification the arguer has argued well if this qualification is weaker than that established in the *persuasive*$_1$ argument on the grounds that when the stronger is established, so also is the weaker, and it is only when the arguer has overestimated the strength of the argument that the arguer has argued badly. Similarly, if the argumentation-structure is convergent while the *persuasive*$_1$ argument is linked, the convergent argument isomorphic to the argumentation-structure may still be good despite the presence of the usually stronger linked argument. Indeed, convergent arguments usually establish their qualifications more weakly than linked argumentation, and, once more, provided that the arguer has not overestimated the strength of the argumentation-structure the arguer will still have argued well, albeit sub-optimally. This follows from the fact that being *persuaded*$_1$ is inferable from being *persuaded*$_2$ given that the *persuasive*$_1$ argument is by definition at least as strong (and will frequently be the same) as the *persuasive*$_2$ argument.

say that a persuasive$_2$ argument need not be justified$_2$. A persuasive$_2$ argument may have false premises, even logically false premises; in fact, this cannot be ruled out even if the argument is justified$_2$. In the case of logically false premises, we can criticize the conception of rationality involved on the grounds that it leads to logical incoherence (through *ex falso quodlibet*). In the case of merely false premises, much depends on one's other beliefs. The aim will be once more to try to show that one's beliefs are logically inconsistent as a whole, thus reducing to the other case. This will not always be possible, though, as we will see later.

The point here is that there may be many valid routes between the premises and the conclusion, and many more or less good ways of combining the premises. When the arguer has a way that is good without being optimal, it will still be the case that the argumentation-structure is isomorphic to a valid argument, but it will not, in these circumstances, be isomorphic to the argument$_1$, which is to say, to the argument that is justified$_1$ and that persuades$_1$. The presence of such an isomorphism, since it implies that there is a valid argument, implies *a fortiori* that there is a valid argument$_1$, and hence that one is justified$_1$ and persuaded$_1$. Note that the audience themselves may reconstruct the argument$_1$ as well as or instead of the argument$_2$ qua argumentation-structure, and because they see that the argument$_1$ is valid they are persuaded by the argument without necessarily being persuaded by the arguer. For an arguer to rationally persuade the audience, the arguer must succeed in the way he intends, which is to say that the audience must reconstruct the arguer's argumentation-structure and be persuaded$_2$ by it, though they may be persuaded for other reasons as well. Then we say they are persuaded by the arguer.

So, being persuaded$_2$ implies being persuaded$_1$ but not vice versa, and to say that the argumentation-structure is isomorphic to a valid argument does not necessarily mean that it is isomorphic to the argument that objectively justifies the conclusion – the argument that persuades$_1$ (i.e., the argument$_1$) might be different from that which persuades$_2$.

For example, consider an argument where the conjunction of premises amount to a complete enumeration and thereby establish conclusively and deductively a general statement. Objectively, this is a deductively valid argument and it is this that I say persuades$_1$ even if this means adding as an unexpressed premise the fact that the

enumeration is complete when the arguer herself does not believe this premise. Unless the arguer realizes that the enumeration is complete she will not see it as such but as an inductive argument; nevertheless, it is a good deductive argument and should be evaluated as such. Although the inductive argument may not be as good as the deductive argument it may still be valid and establish the conclusion, and we should not say that the arguer has argued badly. Or for an example that uses only deductive relations, consider a set of premises for which there are some proofs (i.e., some ways of combining the premises) that utilize all the available premises and some proofs that utilize only a proper subset of the available premises. A redundant premise will not be part of what persuades$_1$; nevertheless, there is nothing actually wrong or invalid with the way the arguer has actually combined the premises. The difference between these situations is represented as the difference between cases (ii) and (iii) above (when the arguer argues well), and also (when the arguer does not argue well) as the difference between cases (iv) and (v).

Being justified$_2$ is not necessarily to be persuasive$_1$ or persuasive$_2$. If she is not justified$_2$ then the arguer may inadvertently give a good argument when she intends to give one that is bad (but that she might think will be persuasive but not rationally so), and when she does she is both persuasive$_1$ and persuasive$_2$. This situation is represented by cases (iv) and (v) above.

If she is justified$_2$ then she may give a good argument she believes to be good yet be mistaken in what she takes to make it good. This situation is represented by case (vi) above. She may still be justified$_2$ when she gives a bad argument she believes to be good because of a mistaken inference, not only when she has made an error in performance (which error she could rectify when it is pointed out) but also possibly because of a mistaken conception of which premise-conclusion relations are valid (what I have called a mistaken conception of rationality). This situation is represented by case (vii) above. In case (viii), the argument will not be what the arguer thinks that it is, the argument will be invalid, and the reasons the arguer adduces for her conclusion are poor even by her own lights, failing to satisfy even her own conception of rationality. I suggest that we say of this case both that her argument is not good and that she has not argued well.

What should be clear by now is that having a good argument and arguing well are not the same thing. The arguer may argue well despite her argument being invalid, because by her own conception of rationality with its own conception of the

consequence relation the argument is valid — she is subjectively justified but not objectively justified. Likewise, an arguer may argue badly despite her argument being valid because by her own conception of rationality with its own conception of the consequence relation the argument is invalid — she is objectively justified but not subjectively justified. Being justified in both ways does not make the case ideal, however, for it does not guarantee isomorphism of the argument$_1$ and argumentation-structure, as should be clear — it guarantees only isomorphism of the argumentation-structure to *some* valid argument.

None of the conditions that I have so far considered offers a norm that seems distinctively dialectical and concerned with manifest rationality *as opposed to* logical or epistemological norms. To evaluate an argument you have to consider the structures involved and the justifiedness of the premises, and these are logical and epistemological evaluations respectively. However, I have also shown how this is perfectly congruent with viewing argumentation as rational persuasion. As the NP Thesis says, there is no real need to give either priority, for the evaluation is carried out in the same way and our evaluative judgments can be interpreted either way. We do not need to resolve any deep conceptual problems in order to analyze and evaluate arguments.

Two problems remain before the PR Thesis itself can be considered to be established. One is that justification$_2$ does not seem to take the audience into account, yet it is still to be characterized as rational persuasion. Another is that the rational persuasion view demands, or at least typically has, a dialectical tier, and there is no epistemological analogue for this requirement. The rational persuasion view seems to outstrip the epistemological view. The next two sections deal with these problems in turn.

5. RATIONAL PERSUASION AND THE UNIVERSAL AUDIENCE

It might be argued that a view that concentrates on rational persuasion of an audience can make no sense of the distinction between a good argument and arguing well. I disagree. A belief that is justified both objectively and subjectively is more rational than one that is justified in only one of these ways, or to put it another way, what I believe is rational and my believing it is rational. The same, I contend, goes for persuasion: persuasion is more rational when the arguer gives an argument that is sound and that she justifiably believes to be sound, and she justifiably believes this, I would contend further, if she believes that it would rationally persuade a universal audience.

I argue well when I am subjectively justified, and I am subjectively justified when I produce an argumentation-structure that is rational from my own point of view and not by appealing, for instance, to the emotions of my audience. But because the conditions of satisfaction on the speech–acts concern only internal psychological states, what counts as 'rational' is an entirely subjective matter and it is possible that I believe that appeals to certain emotions and perhaps to certain patterns of inference that are actually invalid to be rational.

This might seem to take us away from the speech-act of rational persuasion aimed at an audience into a more introspective pursuit of internal consistency. But there is a way of seeing this as an attempt to rationally persuade by adapting Perelman's concept of a universal audience. By taking the universal audience as the embodiment of the arguer's own conception of rationality (in phenomenological terms, we might call it the eidos of the actual audience after their prejudices and non-rational biases have been 'bracketed' to leave only what is rational), persuading my universal audience then amounts to justifying subjectively my standpoint and inducing my universal audience thereby to take my reasons as supporting my standpoint. As a matter of empirical fact my universal audience and your universal audience can be expected to be largely the same, but there is nothing in principle to stop them from being completely different. This makes sense of the claim that the universal audience is the theoretical construction of the arguer (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1958). Of course, the arguer will believe that her conception of rationality is correct and that both forms of justification (from the arguer's own point of view applied to her current argumentation, the distinction between these forms being impossible for her to make) are satisfied by the same argumentation; hence, it would not be wrong to say that it aims at justification in the objective sense, and thus it is responsible criticism to say that the conception of rationality is faulty when it is so, just as it is responsible criticism to criticize a premise even though it is conceded that the arguer justifiably believed she was entitled to it. So, although arguing well depends on the arguer's conception of rationality rather than the audience's it can still be characterized as an attempt at persuasion in the usual sense of that term.

This being so, apart from case (i), all the nuanced differences between these different evaluative judgments can be interpreted epistemologically. It may be questioned whether it is really necessary to satisfy the conditions of case (i) for an argumentation to be good. Once more, I will not really give a definitive answer to this, but rather make the observation that an argumentation that does is better than one that does not.

6. THE DIALECTICAL TIER AND THE CLOSURE PRINCIPLE

The inclusion of case (i), it might be thought, favors interpreting argumentation as aiming at rational persuasion; it is because one must respond to objections in order to be seen to be rational, that is to say, because it is argumentation that does this that qualifies as the paradigmatic cases of rational persuasion that Johnson focuses on, that this condition should be satisfied. There is no need for a dialectical tier if we interpret the norms logically or epistemologically, the argument goes[7].

Again, I disagree: to say that a dialectical tier is needed, or is desirable, is equivalent to saying that justification's being closed under entailment is desirable. This closure principle should be familiar from brain-in-a-vat scenarios and other skeptical hypotheses. If you know p and you know p→q, then you know q[8]. If you don't know q, then you don't know p either. But the conjunction of p and other known propositions implies the contradictory of every logically incompossible proposition, yet it seems over-demanding that unless you know all of these propositions to be false then you do not know that p is true.

If there are reasons for and against a given standpoint (which must be the case if there is disagreement or controversy over the standpoint in the first place) or equivalently, if the epistemic situation regarding the standpoint is one of mutual defeat, then although a new argument in its favor may tilt the balance one way or the other it will not in general resolve the mutual defeat. To do this we must also offer defeaters for the arguments against the standpoint and explain where and how those arguments go wrong, and if there are potential defeaters for our new argument, try to defeat those defeaters.

If we are to take the view that we must show all these con-arguments and defeaters of pro-arguments to be false (what one might call a strong interpretation of the closure principle) then these defeaters must be rebuttals; a rebuttal of p has "Not-p" as a result. However, undermining defeaters attack the inference and what they show is not that a proposition is false but that we are not committed to it, i.e., they have "No commitment p" as a result. This corresponds to a weaker interpretation of the closure principle.

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[7] This might seem to be especially so if we evaluate the argument according to the standards of monotonic logic, for once a conclusion has been established by an argument that is good by these standards, no other information seems to be relevant. I think this view of monotonic logic is misleading, however; new information cannot make a valid argument invalid, but it can affect whether we use the argument to establish the conclusion or reject a premise.

[8] A reviewer for another journal informs me this interpretation of the closure principle is non-standard. The standard but arguably inferior principle is that if you know p and $p→q$, then you know q.

By definition, argumentation that satisfies the stronger version is more rational than argumentation that satisfies the weaker version and is more exemplary of rational persuasion, but in practice satisfaction of the weaker version is probably far more common and is sufficient to resolve mutual defeat.

Johnson's idea that persuasion, to be rational, must have a dialectical tier, turns out to be much the same as the idea that perfectly rational persuasion is closed under (known) entailment. In the context that argumentation paradigmatically occurs, that is to say, when there is controversy and hence arguments pro and con, this seems like a very reasonable requirement, at least for those objections that have actually been given; in order to resolve the mutual defeat rational persuasion must be closed in at least the weak sense. Closure in the strong sense is supererogatory although obviously to be preferred if available.

Here is an example. Suppose I argue $\{p, p{\rightarrow}q\} \vdash q$ and you come up to me and say: "r is inconsistent with $\{p, p{\rightarrow}q\}$, but you do not know whether r, therefore by the closure principle you do not really know whether p, and therefore you do not really know q. It is a bad argument, or at least it will be ineffective against anyone who holds r. You are not manifestly rational." Two responses now offer themselves. Better is a direct rebuttal: "r is not true (and I know this)."[9] To convince you of this I will have to try to show you that the falsity of r follows from propositions we share; I rebut the proposition itself. I characterize this as "strong" because the objector sets a very stringent condition on my knowledge-claim that p, namely that I must know r to be false.

Suppose now that I concede that I do not satisfy this condition, but that I do satisfy a weaker condition. Suppose I say "Yes, I do not know that r is false, so my knowledge is not closed under entailment. But my knowledge-claim does not have to satisfy a condition as strong as this, but only that I do not believe that r is true. I can be simply uncommitted about r, and my knowledge will be closed under entailment where I have considered whether r. So, although I do not know that r is false, it is up to you to show me that it is false, which is to say that it is up to you to establish a claim to know that r is false." Now we may further suppose that the objector does indeed give an argument by which he claims to know that r is false. At this point I must say "Your conclusion does not follow from your argument," or in other words, I must undermine your inference; here I rebut your knowledge-claim, rather than the proposition itself. To

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[9] This also seems to be a rebuttal: "It is not the case that if r is true then p cannot be true, and I know that it is not the case that if r is true then p cannot be true. They are not inconsistent." Generally this will not occur, for we suppose the objector to be logically competent. This response allows that r may be true and may have some probative value against my argument.

convince you of this I will have to try to show you that your inference is invalid (according to the objector's interpretation of the → operator), or that your holding r is itself inconsistent either with other beliefs that you hold (but that I may not hold — if we both hold them this would amount to the same thing as a rebuttal) or (turning the closure principle against you) with a proposition that you do not know to be false.

Because it is the knowledge-claim rather than the proposition itself that is being challenged when undermining, the arguer may argue *ex concessis*, and this is why it is the objector's beliefs and conception of rationality that are at issue. In a rebuttal I must believe my premises to be true and my inference to be valid, which is why (to be effective) these must be shared between arguer and objector.

Again, this counter-argumentation should be justified both subjectively and objectively. The arguer is being rational from his own point of view when she responds to those objections that she considers rational interpreting the → operator as whatever consequence relation her conception of rationality endorses. For perfect objective justification, the arguer responds to every logically possible objection and the → operator is ordinary deductive entailment (whether she knows these things or not).

Even so, this is not guaranteed to persuade the actual audience who may, like the arguer, have their own conceptions of rationality and consequence. In principle, then, anything at all may be counted as an objection. All objections that derive from defective inferences can be rebutted on the grounds of leading to logical incoherence. It is more difficult when the objections derive from false premises and assumptions[10]. Such cases are paradigmatic of ones that look to be obviously bad to one person yet obviously good to another, and lead to the fiercest opposition between arguers, *ad hominem* argumentation, and accusations of question-begging and poisoning the well.

It seems to me irrational to try to rationally persuade an audience with whom there is simply not enough common ground on which to build a persuasive case. Johnson famously claims that an arguer has a dialectical obligation to respond even to bad objections, but it seems to me that with many such objections this is simply not possible. That is to say, you can offer con-argumentation against their false premises, but you do not really intend to persuade them because you know that by arguing you will not resolve the mutual defeat.

This seems to be a genuine case of argumentation but not a case of rational persuasion or even of aiming at rational persuasion. Is this, then, a counter-example to Johnson's definition of argumentation as persuasion that is not only rational but also

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[10] Since this is a criticism of whether we justifiably use a premise, this case reduces to other such cases, which is to say that it is, or at least could be taken as, a criticism of the act.

seen to be rational? Perhaps. But there is a certain sense in which the arguer by this means is making his rationality manifest and trying to show his arguing to be rational. What we need to accept, I think, is that sometimes showing something to be rational amounts to trying to induce in the other one's own conception of rationality or more modestly to give that conception substance through argumentative exchanges in which it is contextually defined. In other words, when we try to show that something is rational, we try also to show what rationality is, or at least lay upon it the constraint that whatever it is, this particular argument is to count as an example of it.

7. INFORMAL LOGIC AND APPLIED EPISTEMOLOGY

What I have done is shown that by construing argumentative goodness as rational persuasion, or at least as manifest rationality, informal logic 'reduces' to epistemology. This is contrary to what Johnson says in (2000: 281-82) where he gives five reasons for rejecting this reduction. We are now in a position to consider these in detail.

A.   He says (2000: 281) that «I can know a proposition to be true without its being the conclusion of a good argument. [...] also neither the premises nor the conclusion of an argument must be known in order for the argument to be a good argument. It is further clear that both argument and knowledge are dependent on reason and rationality.» Certainly, some propositions may be known non-inferentially but all that this shows is that epistemology is not reducible to informal logic and not that informal logic is not reducible to epistemology; informal logic reduces to that part of epistemology concerned with inferential justification. It is also true that one can give a good (deductively valid) argument without arguing well because we do not know (or justifiably believe) the premises, but this shows only that insofar as it is concerned with evaluating arguer performance informal logic is not reducible to formal logic, and not that it is not reducible to epistemology; the acts of arguing are nonetheless evaluable against an epistemic criterion, viz., subjective justification. To a large extent Johnson accepts this because he says (2000: 338) that «for the arguer to attempt to persuade by means of a premise that the arguer thinks is false and therefore does not himself accept is [...] tantamount to abandoning the telos of rational persuasion in favour of all-out-persuasion.» He calls this the truth requirement, but clearly what is referred to here is a subjectively justified belief. Finally, I fail to see the significance of his final comment unless perhaps he supposes that one can only reduce to something absolutely basic, but even if we concede that epistemology is reducible to

reasoning and/or rationality, it does not follow that informal logic is not reducible to epistemology.

B.   He says (2000: 281) that «argument is dialectical, whereas neither belief nor knowledge can properly be characterized in that way.» Certainly, argument qua process is dialectical or at least dialogical, but this does not make argument qua product dialectical, and more importantly it does not make the norms against which we evaluate the rational persuasiveness of the argumentation dialectical.

C.   He also says (2000: 282) that no structure corresponding to the dialectical tier appears for knowledge. But the closure principle does provide such a structure.

D.   He says (2000: 282) that «with respect to belief, it is not clear that the arguer must believe the truth of the premises of the argument. One can develop a line of reasoning for the sake of argument.» Presumably, he means to contrast this with arguing rationally, where you must believe your premises to be true. However, although you must believe your premises to be true to be fully rational, you can be persuasive$_1$ and persuasive$_2$ without these beliefs. Also, I have said that in the dialectical tier you may argue *ex concessi* to defuse objections based on premises you do not actually believe yourself; you may argue rationally "for the sake of argument."

E.   He wonders (2000: 282) how useful such a reduction is. But this is a pragmatic argument against actually carrying out a reduction and is not a reason why informal logic should not be reducible to epistemology.

It should be noted that in the epistemic view being proposed in this paper the criteria are audience-independent but arguer-dependent. In this it contrasts with Biro and Siegel's view where the criteria are both audience-independent and arguer-independent and Pinto's where the criteria are audience-dependent and arguer-independent (Johnson 2000: 272-80). I endorse Pinto's standards (Johnson 2000: 277)

WE1: The premises must be reasonable to believe.

WE2: It must be reasonable to infer the conclusion from the premises.

but not the interpretation of "reasonable to believe" as "reasonable for the audience to believe." Instead it should be "reasonable for the arguer to believe," and this is already implied as soon as we identify being rational as the telos of argumentation and given theoretical explication in the speech-act (and possibly assertibility) conditions of adducing reasons.

This being so, one wonders why Johnson is hung up on truth as an additional

requirement, and even whether he really means truth. In A above it turned out that for all that Johnson said the requirement was to be subjectively justified, that is to say, to satisfy WE1 (as I interpret it). He argues further for this being a truth requirement on the grounds that if I justifiably believe some premise p and p is false then any argument I make on its basis is not a good argument though it may appear to be good to the arguer and to the audience: «If he or she believes the premise is false, the evaluator has a compelling reason for not accepting the premise» (Johnson 2000: 338). It seems to me that this only means that the evaluator is subjectively justified in not believing p, and this must mean that the evaluator believes p not to be objectively justified while the arguer contradictorily believes p is objectively justified. They cannot both be right, even if they are both subjectively justified and not guilty of any irrationality. Therefore, when we are evaluating an argument, it is still valid to criticize the arguer for a false premise even if we concede that they are not irrational in believing that premise, because we are saying that they have a mistaken belief about their own justification. Remember that the arguer is aiming at being objectively justified when she argues sincerely, so the criticism would be that she misses something she is aiming at. This does not make truth itself a requirement. On the other hand, you could just as easily argue that being objectively justified is normative because this is our best way of believing truths and avoiding falsehoods. Again, I do not want to be committed on which norms are prior.

Johnson may object that this misconstrues the role of the evaluator as being inside rather than outside of the discourse. But we may be skeptical whether it is possible to take such a role — Hamblin famously argues otherwise. Hamblin's point, repeated by Pinto, that in making judgments about truth in the dialectical situation is only to express agreement or disagreement and not to impose an external standard, is a good one. Certainly we may agree with Johnson (2000: 279) that "I accept p" does not mean the same as "p is true," having different truth-conditions, but it is a condition of satisfaction of saying "p is true" that I accept p, and it is this that changes the dialectical situation, that marks p as a concession made by the speaker. Expressing a belief is unique insofar as when you express it you ipso facto express the fact that you have it, that is to say, if I say "p is true" I am expressing not only that p but also that I believe that p (Broome 2009: 9). They may not be equivalent, but they are concomitant. Hence, I don't think that Johnson's critique (here described only very briefly) of this reduction succeeds.

8. CONCLUSION

My conclusions can be summarized as follows:

1. The rationality involved in showing oneself to be manifestly rational is rationality from one's own point of view, that is, the point of view of one's own conception of rationality whatever that might be (this follows from the fact that all the speech-act conditions involved are internal conditions). This can be expressed as what would rationally persuade a universal audience and when successful shows the arguer to be subjectively justified and in a minimal sense to be arguing well.

2. To be persuaded by the arguer is the same as saying that the arguer succeeds in her intention to persuade, and such acts require not only that their intended results be brought about but that they be brought about in the way intended. This means that to rationally persuade an audience, the audience must find the argumentation-structure to support the standpoint in the same way and to the same extent as the arguer says (but not necessarily thinks — sincerity is not assumed here)[11].

3. Showing argumentation to be manifestly rational is simultaneously to propose that a conception of rationality should be such that this argumentation is to count as an example of rational persuasion. Thus, some examples of argumentation or counter-argumentation may be intended to alter the other's conception of rationality, and conceptions of rationality can be responsibly criticized (roughly, on the grounds of logical incoherence, though how we do so is explained elsewhere).

4. If the inference-scheme is simply shown not to establish what it is alleged to establish in a particular objection, then the objection is undermined. This leaves the other's conception of rationality intact but is sufficient to resolve the mutual defeat. An objection can thereby be shown not to follow from the objector's own conception. This can be so even if the arguer herself does not endorse the objector's inference-scheme or even believes it to be invalid. Thus, if the other's own conception of rationality includes appeals to emotion

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[11] Or perhaps to a greater extent, but not to a lesser extent. This does not rule out the possibility of the audience finding alternative and perhaps better routes – routes that establish the standpoint to a greater extent – from the reasons the arguer adduces to her standpoint. The idea is basically to treat the argumentation-structure as what in the philosophy of action is called an action-plan after Goldman (1970). Only if everything happens as the actor intended it to happen does the final result qualify as having been brought about intentionally. This goes equally for the act of persuading, which is an intentional act.

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that are then used as the basis of an objection, it is still reasonable for the arguer to argue *ex concessis* that the objection does not follow from such an appeal; he may accept its validity provisionally "for the sake of argument" to expose internal inconsistencies in the opposing position.

5. Rebuttals and underminings form the dialectical tier of an argumentation, and the dialectical obligations involved in the dialectical tier find their epistemic underpinning in the closure principle, here interpreted as closure under known entailment according to the arguer's own conception of entailment. Given that rational persuasion must aim at a resolution of the mutual defeat, it must at a minimum undermine the objections of its actual audience. It must also undermine objections that the arguer herself believes to have weight; these she attributes to the universal audience, who she also wishes to rationally persuade.

6. It is only by showing some kind of internal inconsistency in the other's set of beliefs that one can convince the other that their objection is wrong, and in many cases where objections are based on substantial premises there will not be any such inconsistency. There are no dialectical obligations to respond to such objections where there is no intention to rationally persuade. Such an attempt would almost inevitably talk past the other, and it cannot be a requirement of rationality to engage in this kind of talk, although of course we can talk this way as an attempt to explain one's view, rather than as an attempt at rational persuasion. On the contrary, it seems question-begging because one will inevitably end up trying to argue from premises that you know the audience will not accept.

7. One may still argue (or perform a speech-act that is very like it) without intending to rationally persuade, intending instead only to explain one's point of view or express one's conception of rationality.

8. The NP Thesis is true. It makes no real difference to our evaluation of argumentation how we interpret our evaluative judgments or how we define argumentation. In a sequel to this paper, I will develop a substantive theory of evaluation that tells us how we reach the evaluative judgments that here I have been concerned only to interpret.

9. The PR Thesis is true. There is no argumentative norm that seems to be *distinctively* dialectical. This does not mean that there is no dialectical normativity, or that such normativity is derived. The question over which

norms are the most basic and which are derived from which is academic.

10. Johnson's objections against the PR Thesis are unsound. Informal logic is not shown to be different (in the sense of having different norms) from applied epistemology.

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