Truth and the Virtue of Arguments

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ABSTRACT In a 2006 paper I claimed that the virtue arguments or inferences must have is not that they be truth-preserving, but that they be entitlement-preserving (in Brandom's sense of that phrase). I offered two reasons there why such a conception of argument virtue is needed for a satisfactory treatment of defeasible arguments and inferences. This paper revisits that claim, and assesses the prospects for a more thorough defence than was offered in that paper.

INTRODUCTION

In a 2006 paper entitled "Evaluating inferences: the nature and role of warrants", I began by examining David Hitchcock's account of the warrants which license inferences – an account in which he identified warrants with a certain type of covering generalization whose antecedents and consequents are satisfied respectively by the premises and conclusions of arguments. One of the questions raised by Hitchcock's account concerns the status which such a covering generalization must have if satisfying it is to be sufficient to mark the premise/conclusion link of an argument or inference as a good one. Is it enough that the generalization be true or "for the most part" true? Must those employing the argument or making the inference know, or have reason to believe, that it is true or for the most part true? In particular, I asked whether we should we say that for an argument or inference to be good, it *suffices* that the covering generalizations which Hitchcock identifies with warrants be truth-preserving or truth-indicative (having consequents which are satisfied *whenever* their antecedents are satisfied or which *for the most part* are satisfied when their antecedents are satisfied). I suggested that the answer we give to that question will depend on what sort of *virtue* we expect arguments and inferences to have.

In addressing the issue of argument virtue, I invoked the idea of an argument's *justificatory potential*, an idea that I explained as follows:

> ...arguments or inferences with justificatory potential will be those in which premises which it is *reasonable* to embrace render a conclusion *reasonable* to embrace. Such arguments need not be *truth*-preserving, but they will be *entitlement*-preserving [in Brandom's sense of that phrase].

And I suggested that justificatory potential in just that sense is what we ought to take the virtue of arguments and inferences to consist in.

Substantially the same idea of argument virtue can be found in Goldman (2003. p. 58), when he suggests that

> what makes a good argument good is its suitability to produce justified belief in its conclusion by means of justified belief in its premises. In other words, a good argument is that can *transmit* justification from the premises to the conclusion (and justification vis-à-vis the premises does not require prior justification vis- à -vis the conclusion).[1]

However, it is important to note that earlier in that same paper Goldman had said (p. 52):

> I endorse the idea that goodness of argument or argumentation is profitably viewed, perhaps *best* viewed, from an epistemological perspective…. I do not claim exclusivity for the epistemological perspective on argumentation. Other approaches are also instructive. I make only the more modest claim that the epistemological approach is particularly fruitful and can provide a unified framework for studying many dimensions of (factual) argumentation. [Emphasis added.][2]

Notice that the key epistemological term in my account is the word 'reasonable', whereas in Goldman (1997, 1999, 2003) and Feldman (1994, 1999, 2005) the key epistemological term is usually (but not always) 'justified'.[3] I prefer the word 'reasonable' because it has an established set of uses in ordinary language as well as in legal discourse, whereas it should be clear – in light of the careful examination and criticism of the variety of uses of the expression "epistemic justification" catalogued by William Alston (2005, chapter 1) – that in these contexts the term

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[1] Emphasis added. It's worth noting that in a final section Goldman (2003 p. 61) observes that "[i]n previous work, … especially *Knowledge in a Social World* (Goldman, 1999; also see Goldman, 1994), I interpreted norms of argumentation in terms of another epistemic goal: the goal of truth (true belief)". He asks "What is the relationship between the present, justification-oriented discussion and my earlier, true-belief oriented treatments?" He answers (p. 62), "The relationship is pretty straightforward. On the account of justification I favour [that is to say, a reliabilist account of justification], and on many other existing accounts as well, justified belief has an intimate link to true belief."

[2] See, for example, Goldman 1992, which on p. 159 recognizes both the fairly traditional "logical" notion of good argument (as one which is deductively valid and contains only true premises) and on pp. 159-60 an "epistemological notion" of good argument drawn from Feldman 1994. Goldman says (p. 159), "Although I don't agree with Feldman in faulting the logical notion of good argument, I do agree that an epistemological sense of good argument is (also) extremely important….", and in the remainder of 1992 paper he employs the epistemological sense in order to give an account of "interpersonal justification" – as he does again in Goldman 1999 (chapter 3).

[3] I have been criticized (Lumer 2005a, p. 199) for using the word 'reasonable' in my key formulations on the grounds that "'reasonable' is very, very vague". I note that in the recent defense of their objective epistemic approach to argumentation, Biro and Siegel (2006, p. 92) characterize epistemic theories as maintaining that the central aim of arguments is to yield "knowledge and reasonable belief",3 and even Feldman in his textbook (1999, p. 109) offers definitions for the deductive and inductive "strength" which an argument has for a person which require that "it is reasonable for the person to believe all the premises" (my italics).

'justified' is a term of epistemological art whose use requires explicit commitment to some *specific* theory of what it consists in. I simply don't want to become embroiled in a complex set of issues which don't have to be resolved in order to make the points I want to make.

2. FINE-TUNING THE ISSUE

In order to get clearer concerning what may or may not be at issue, consider Feldman's (1994) attempts to formulate an "epistemological account of good argument". His first attempt (p. 178) runs as follows:

> E3. An argument is a good argument for S if and only if
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> > (i)   S is justified in believing the conjunction of all the premises of the argument
> > (ii) the argument is either valid or cogent, and
> > (iii) the argument is undefeated for S.[4]

Feldman is not satisfied with E3 because he thinks there are considerations which "make it clear that the premise/conclusion connection in good arguments must satisfy some epistemological condition." As a result, he offers the following revised definition:[5]

> E4. An argument is a good argument for S if and only if
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> > (i)   S is justified in believing the conjunction of all the premises of the argument
> > (ii) S is justified in believing that the premises are "properly connected" to the conclusion, and
> > (iii) the argument is undefeated for S

2.1 Subjective versus objective epistemic theories

These definitions make the goodness of an argument relative to an individual, and – as Goldman points out (1997, p. 160) – implicitly make it relative to a *time* at which the premises are justified for that individual as well. Lumer (2005b, pp. 228-229) characterizes Feldman's 1994 definition of good argument as "subjective in the sense that the goodness of an argument is defined as relative to a person"[6]. Conceding (p. 229) that "a pure subjective account" such has Feldman's

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[4] Where (a) 'cogent arguments' had been previously defined (p. 163) as those which are "deductively invalid but whose premises make probable their conclusion" and where (b) an argument is said (p. 177-78) to have been defeated for a person "when the argument formed by adding [that person's] relevant background evidence to the premises of the argument, and leaving the conclusion unchanged, results in an argument that is not cogent."

[5] In the edition of his textbook published 5 years later, the key concepts in terms of which arguments are to be evaluated are *deductive strength* and *inductive strength*. His definitions of *those* terms (Feldman 1999, p. 109) resemble definition E3 in Feldman 1994 in that the premise/conclusion link of "strong arguments" need not satisfy an epistemic requirement.

[6] Lumer (2005a, p. 194) calls such criteria 'gnostic criteria', contrasting them on pp. 194-95 with plausibilist criteria (in which "[t]he argument's reasons are true or, in uncertain arguments, acceptable on some database d"), "prosbatic" criteria (which require that "the addressee justifiably believes the reasons"), and responsibilist criteria (which require that "[t]he *arguer* justifiedly

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has a "prima facie advantage", he insists it has several disadvantages which his own hybrid account, having both an objective and a subjective component,[7] is designed to correct. For purposes of this paper I will not attempt to deal with the details of Lumer's hybrid account.

Biro and Siegal (2006, p. 95) distinguish between objective epistemic theories (OET) and subjective epistemic theories (SET) of argument quite differently:

> *OET*: Fallaciousness is a property of arguments in a context and is independent of the beliefs of their users.

> *SET*: Fallaciousness is a property of arguments in a context and (at least sometimes) depends upon the beliefs of their users.

On the basis of their distinction, in note 9 they take the account offered Feldman 1994 to be an objective epistemic theory.

2.2 The characterization of premise conclusion link in epistemic theories of argument

There is a certain looseness in Feldman's final formulation of the second premise of his definition of good argument. In a more recent discussion contrasting the epistemological theory with the consensus theory of argumentation, Feldman (2005, p. 278) says about the epistemological theory: "a plausible account is that it holds that a proper argument is one that has justified premises and proceeds by justified patterns of inference. Obviously, there are details that need to be worked out concerning this approach. For example, there are difficult questions about whether a pattern of inference is justified for a person only if the person has a justified belief to the effect that it is a proper pattern or whether some weaker condition will suffice."[8]

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believes in the reasons"). On p. 199 he identifies Feldman and myself have developed gnostic criteria, and characterizes himself has having proposed "a plausibilist-prosbatic criterion for good argumentation". Lumer defines 'argumentatively valid argument' in plausibilist terms and adds prosbatic adequacy criteria for determining whether a valid argument can be used for rational convincing."

[7] Lumer (2005b, p. 225) writes, "One of the major problems an epistemological approach to argumentation has to resolve is the relation between the objectivity and subjectivity of argumentation", a problem which he claims has led to "competing conceptions of good argumentation among champions of the epistemological approach." He describes his solution to this problem as follows (p. 226), "It consists in distinguishing (argumentative) validity and situational adequacy. Argumentative validity is a property of the argument itself; it guarantees that the requirements of objectivity are fulfilled; argumentative validity must imply that the thesis is objectively true or acceptable, which does not depend on a subject. Situational adequacy, on the other hand, is a relation between the argument and a situation (characterized mainly by the addressee's justified beliefs at the given time). Situational adequacy has to guarantee that the requirements of subjective epistemic accessibility are fulfilled: the argument's reasons must already be justifiedly believed by the addressee, he must know the epistemological principle, the complexity of inferential relations has to be adapted to his inferential abilities, etc." Lumer (2005a, p. 199) tells us that his notion of argumentative validity "is his generalized concept of a *sound* argument" (emphasis added).

[8] Later on same page he also suggests that "there is no necessary connection between the thought that the idea of a good argument is to be understood in epistemological terms" and any particular rule for when a premise is "proper". He says "One could stick to the general epistemological framework, yet argue that a proper premise to

For my purposes in this paper, I suggest we settle for something like the alternative implicit in Goldman's (2003, p. 58) comment that "a person won't be justified in believing [an argument's] conclusion unless she appreciates or recognizes the connection between the premises and the conclusion, or sees how the conclusion can be derived from the premises."

I would also suggest we be cautious about adopting the wording suggested by Feldman - that a good argument which is not deductively valid is one whose premises make their conclusions probable (1994, p. 162) or is one which follows "a pattern such that all arguments following that pattern have a conclusion that is probably true if the premises are true" (1999, p. 85).[9] Such wording seem to take 'probable' to refer to a property the conclusion, rather than to the relationship which the conclusion has to a certain set of premises. It also invites questions about which *sense* of the word 'probable' is being invoked (an epistemic sense like that set out in Sellars 1964, or some variety of a frequentist sense, or some form of Bayesian or subjective probability, and so on)

I am strongly inclined to view the relationship of probability in the sense of chance to arguments which are not deductively valid along the somewhat different lines suggested by Hacking's interpretation of Peirce's account of the role of probability in argument evaluation. Peirce (whose final view appears to have been a dispositional or tendency account of probability in general – see Hacking 1990, p. 208), held that

> [a] piece of evidence which yields likelihood always yields that likelihood by a process which would more often yield truth than the reverse; and every process which is known to give truth more often than the reverse gives likelihood. [Quoted by Hacking (1990, pp. 208-209) from Peirce (1982-, vol.1, p. 400).]

Citing Peirce (1982-, vol. 2, p. 294), Hacking (1990, p. 209) attributes to him the claim that

> If [the genus to which an argument belongs] is such that the conclusion is usually true when the premises are true, it [the *argument*] is merely *probable*.

Hacking comments,

> When the premises are quantitative, we may be able to replace "usually" by a numeric probability. That does not mean that the conclusion has a probability of such and such.

> Rather: the conclusion is reached by an argument that, with such and such a probability, gives true conclusions from true premises.[10]

If we follow this manner of speaking, then it will be proper to speak of *probable* arguments, but misleading to call the conclusions of such arguments 'probable'.[11]

Though I open to the possibility that somewhat different approaches to the probability of conclusions – for example, Hahn and Oaksford's (2006) project of developing a Bayesian apparatus for the evaluation of arguments – may someday prove viable, for the time being I would subscribe to what Biro and Siegel (2006, p. 98) say about the principles of reason assessment:

> The specific principles of reason assessment are many and varied. One sort involves the probability calculus, which provides principles for determining the strength and appropriateness of probabilistic belief. The calculus of formal logic provides principles for determining validity. There are also content- specific principles, which make use of content-specific information - for example, to judge the strength of the reasons for believing that a patient has a particular disorder, one must know something of the relevant physiology and biochemistry. There are a wide variety of principles of reason assessment, ranging from the subject-neutral principles of logic to the subject-specific principles governing reason assessment in the special fields.

3. REASONS FOR THE CLAIMING THAT ARGUMENT VIRTUE HAS AN ESSENTIAL EPISTEMOLOGICAL DIMENSION

In my 2006 paper I attempted (pp. 295-96) to motivate my account of argument virtue in terms of justificatory potential by arguing that that we could not successfully talk about arguments that don't guarantee the truth of their conclusions, nor properly formulate those conclusions, without taking epistemological considerations into account. A first argument (p. 295) turned on the fact that such arguments are always defeasible, and that a consideration can defeat such an argument only for those we know it to be, or have some reason to believe it to be, true.[12] The second argument (p. 296) turned on two claims: (a) that to avoid paradoxes which can arise by joining two or more conclusions arrived at by defeasible inferences, it is essential to mark such conclusions with terms such as 'probably,' 'presumably,' 'possibly,' or 'almost certainly' and (b) that the use of such

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[10] There may be problems with *any* attempt to identify the degree to which premises support a conclusion with a sense of 'probability' which obeys the laws of the probability calculus. See Freeman's (2006, pp. 26-27) account of L.J. Cohen's criticisms of the attempt to understand degrees of nondeductive support as subject to the rules of the probability calculus.

[11] In Pinto 2006, I claimed that whether a practice is good depends on how well its "outputs" serve the role or roles it plays, and I myself appealed to something like *this* idea of probability in judging whether an *inferential practice* is fit to be relied upon. I claimed (p. 304) that "for any inferential practice whose outputs belong to a particular series of doxastic attitudes (*being certain* that *p*, *presuming* that *p*, *expecting* that *p*, for example), typical purposes won't be served unless there is a substantial likelihood that *p* is true or close to the truth in the range of occasions in which the practice is appropriate."

[12] A similar point is made by Feldman (1994, p. 182) when he writes, "...if there are good nondeductive arguments, then it is (almost) inevitable that we make argument goodness relative to individuals. This is because background knowledge must play some role in the evaluation...."

markers indicates when and how it is *reasonable* to use those conclusions as the premises of further arguments (an idea drawn from Toulmin[13]).

I continue to think that both those arguments have merit (though there is probably be less than universal agreement regarding premise [b] of the second argument). But even conceding their merit, they are not sufficiently general to support the claim that ascertaining the goodness of arguments *always* requires attending to epistemological considerations, since they do not apply to arguments and inferences that are deductively valid.

What resources, if any, are available to make a case for the claim that epistemological assessment is, in every case, essential to the determination of whether an argument or inference is a good one?

3.1 Appeals to the "central aim" or to the "standard function" of arguments[14]

Biro and Siegel (2006, p 92) have claimed that **"**it is a conceptual truth that the central aim of arguments is to yield knowledge or reasonable belief." In what is perhaps a more cautious framing of roughly the same idea they had said (Biro and Siegel 1992, p. 92),

> This approach [the epistemic approach to fallacy and argumentation] founds itself on the claim that it is a conceptual truth about arguments that their central (not, of course, their *only*) purpose is to provide a bridge from known truths or justified beliefs to as yet unknown truths or as yet unjustified beliefs".

And Lumer (2005b, p. 219) writes,

> … the criteria for good arguments in the epistemological theory of argument have been designed in such a way as to fulfil a very specific function, namely the standard function(or more precisely: they are designed to fulfil several closely related functions).

and goes on to explain "standard function in" the following terms:

> The *standard input* of arguments is that one of their linguistic expressions is presented to a linguistically proficient, open-minded, attentive and discriminating addressee who does not yet have a sufficiently justified belief in the thesis. The *standard output* of arguments is that the addressee justifiedly believes that the thesis is true or acceptable (or that he has a better justified belief in the thesis). The standard function, i.e., the relation between standard input and standard output, may be termed *"leading to justified belief"* or to *"rationally convince"*

Both Biro & Siegel and Lumer recognize that arguments can and do have many purposes or functions other than what they claim is the "central" or "standard" one.

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[13] See the remark in Toulmin *et al.* (1984/ 1979, p. 87) that that the insertion of such modal qualifiers "has the effect of indicating what *sort* of reliance the supporting material entitles us to place on the claim, C".

[14] My own views on the uses of argument are set out in Pinto 2011, where I maintain that "arguers need not intend any effect beyond that of making it manifest to their hearers that there is a reason for doing some particular thing, and second that when an arguer is in fact trying to induce an effect above and beyond rendering a reason manifest, the effect intended – the use to which his or her argument is put – need not be that hearers do what the stated reasons are reasons for doing."

On what basis do they support the claim that their favoured purpose or function is "central" or "standard"?

Biro and Siegel want to give that claim the status of a "conceptual truth" in the epistemic approach to argument. Perhaps the most charitable reading of this move is to take what makes the relationship between arguments and the aim of yielding knowledge or reasonable belief *conceptual* is not the concept of *argument* but rather the concept of an *epistemic approach* to argument. But if so, that leaves open the question of why we should adopt an *epistemic* approach to argument – a question that Siegel and Biro do in fact address in the concluding section of their 1997 paper (which I will discuss in section 3.3 below). [15]

Lumer (2005b, p. 216, but see also 1991, p. 99-100) seems to appeal to the notion of what arguments are *designed* for:

> Arguments have many functions, they can impress, bore, amuse people, etc. The *standard function* of arguments shall be the function for which good arguments have been designed in the theory of argument, namely to lead to justified belief.

I take it that by "designed in the theory of argument" Lumer means "designed according to the theory of argument which I am advancing". But that only leads to the question of why his sort of theory of argument should be preferred to other theories of argument.. And Lumer does in fact attempt to answer that question in the final section of Lumer 2005b (which will also be discussed in section 3.3 below).

A slightly different consideration along similar lines can be found in the implication Weinstein (2006) wants to find in my suggestion (Pinto 2001, p. 34) that "arguments are invitations to inference". Weinstein (2006, p. 70) observes:

> The focus on inference enables [Pinto] to make significant contributions to the notion of argument appraisal. Argument seen as 'an invitation to inference' calls for assessment in terms of the reasonableness of the premises and the inference seen in respect of a range of doxastic attitudes, construed to be broader than belief ([[Pinto 2001], chapters 2 and 3).

This alleged implication is problematic, however, given that formal logician's typically claim that the value of *inferences* is to be evaluated in terms of "soundness" (in terms of whether the arguments that correspond to inferences are deductively valid and have true premises, or whether they are [in Feldman's useful term] cogent and have true premises).

3.2 Arguments from our intuitions about examples

Feldman (1994) attempts to show that the "the logical conditions for being a good argument are not sufficient" through examples. The first example presented (p. 165) is of two arguments, where it is clear that *one* of them must be "logically good" (both are deductive deductively valid and one of them must have true premises), but *neither* of which is, he claims, a good argument:

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[15] As well, the concluding section of their 1992 paper, acknowledging the existence of conceptions of argument besides the epistemic conception, argues (p. 99) that these other conceptions "will fail to touch its essential normative heart, and will to that extent be deficient as general theoretical accounts of argumentation".

Suppose I'm on a canoe trip deep in an uninhabited wilderness and I've been completely out of contact with society. Suppose further that I know that there was an election while I was away and that my neighbor voted. However, I have no information about whether she voted for candidate A or candidate B. Now, consider these two arguments:

Argument 5

(1) Either my neighbor voted for A or she voted for B.
(2) She did not vote for A.
(3) Therefore, she voted for B.

Argument 6

(1) Either my neighbor voted for A or she voted for B.
(2) She did not vote for B.
(3) Therefore, she voted for A. (Feldman, 1994, 165)

About this example Feldman says (p. 166)

> The reason that neither is a good argument in this context is that neither provides me with any reason to believe its conclusion....That is because, as I see it, the point of arguments, or at least the point of thinking about arguments, has something to do with figuring out what to believe.

Moreover, he offers a second example which calls into question the adequacy of "logical accounts":

> Reasoning similar to the foregoing suggests another objection to logical accounts, namely, that good arguments need not have true premises. Suppose that I have a good inductive argument for some conclusion. I then produce an argument using that conclusion and other know truths to deduce correctly some further proposition. This second argument can be a good one, even if one of its premises – the inductively supported conclusion of the first argument- is in fact false.[16]

As I read these passages, I take their point to be that our intuitions about such examples call into question the adequacy of a purely "logical" notion of good argument. Feldman himself says that "[t]hese considerations are designed to provide motivation for looking for a more epistemological notion of what a good argument is."

In Pinto 1994/2001, I argued that the standard logical criterion for evaluating arguments "is not a very useful or revealing standard for judging arguments – that being sound is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for being a good argument" (p. 21). I said (p. 23) that there are two kinds of considerations to which we might appeal to support that claim: (a) testing it against our intuitions or (b) clarifying the contexts, goals and circumstances of appraisal, and determining which criteria best serve those goals. Though I conceded that the second sort of consideration is "by far the stronger and more decisive", I relied in that paper almost exclusively on considerations of the first sort. In what follows I

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[16] In Pinto 1994/2001 (p. 25) I employed a very similar argument to support the claim that truth is not a necessary condition of premise adequacy.

want to consider whether there are viable considerations of the second sort which support "a more epistemological notion of what a good argument is".

3.3 Arguments which appeal the superiority of epistemic theories of argument to other sorts of theory.

(a) *Biro and Siegel* (1992, p. 85) claim that argumentation has an "essential normative dimension" – manifested in the fact that we can we can analyse "both successful argumentation and failures in argumentation (fallacies)" – and argue that

> [i]n order to capture that dimension…, argumentation must be understood as a means to acquiring *knowledge*; consequently, fallacious arguments must be understood as suffering from epistemic failures. More broadly, such epistemic failures are failures of rationality, and share the normative dimension of that latter notion.

The paper then proceeds to characterize "descriptivist" attempts to deal with fallacies in section 1, to outline an epistemic theory of fallacies and argumentation in section 2, and to explore the connection between argumentation and rationality in section 3. It concludes with the claim (p. 99) that

> …descriptivist accounts…will fail to touch [argumentation's] normative heart, and will to that extent be deficient as general theoretical accounts of argumentation.

Siegel and Biro (1997) attempt to carry the argument in Biro and Siegal 1992 forward via (a) a response to criticisms of the epistemic approach, (b) criticism of the pragma-dialectical approach, and closer consideration of the concept of fallacy. The paper closes with methodological remarks about "appropriate criteria by which theories in this domain should be judged". The statement of those criteria runs as follows (p. 289):

> First, we believe that it is important, as far as possible, to have a unified account of the different sorts of failures arguments are heir to. This requires a theory whose central explanatory concepts are at a level of sufficient generality. At the same time, these concepts must not be pitched at a level so general that they fail to distinguish the failures of interest (those properly called 'fallacy') from other failures of arguments, e.g. unpersuasiveness. Throughout our defense of our theory, we have tried to show that only epistemic concepts satisfy this double requirement.

There is much to be gained from careful study of the case that Biro and Siegel make, but the force of that case will be somewhat limited for those who, like me,[17] do not take fallacy theory to be as central to the study of argument as Biro and Siegel do.

(b) *Lumer* (2005b, pp. 238-39) concludes the presentation of his theory with a section entitled "Justification of the Epistemological Approach to Argumentation." In this section he attempts to justify the epistemological approach as superior to what he takes to be its two main competitors: the *rhetorical* approach (he mentions Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, but also – curiously – Hamblin and Johnson & Blair) and the *consensualistic* approach (he mentions Habermas and van Eemeren &

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[17] See my very brief remarks about the role that fallacies should play in our "critical practice" in Pinto 2001 (p. 63 of chapter 6 and p. 123 in chapter 12)

Grootendorst). He describes six advantages of his approach over the other two. I will comment on only on the first, described on p. 237, which take to be the most significant of the six. Its first part runs as follows:

> *More truths*: It [the epistemological approach] designs good arguments as instruments that guide people to acquire justified belief. If such arguments are used in the proper way, the output is not only that the addressee believes something new but that he justifiedly believes it. This implies that this belief is acceptable: true or at least truth-like or probably true. This is guaranteed by relying on epistemological principles that are justified by their particular relation to the truth definitions of the respective theses. And true (and often also truth-like) beliefs are helpful for orientating ourselves in the world and for choosing the best course of action; they are much more helpful than false beliefs....

I take it that he is trying to say that arguments which satisfy his theory's criteria for a good argument will have conclusions which are "acceptable" and are therefore true, probable or "truth-like". This claim *may* hold, since Lumer's approach includes his criteria for "argumentative validity" – his "generalized concept of a *sound* argument" (Lumer 2005a, p. 199) – which require an evaluator to determine whether each premiss of an argument is *true* or at least *probable*. Whether the claim does *in fact* hold depends on whether the "epistemological principles" which link premises to conclusions *guarantee* that conclusions drawn from such premises are always either true, probable or truth-like – a complicated issue on which I won't attempt to pronounce.[18] He also, in this part of the description, offers a reason for valuing arguments that have, or are likely to have, true conclusions: true beliefs are more helpful than false beliefs are "more helpful" guides for action.

Conclusions that are probable may, of course, be false. And the latter part of the description of the first advantage addresses this fact:

> ...admitting uncertain arguments extend the set of knowable propositions to a degree that is necessary and sufficient for practical matters. It does so with the help of risky procedures, which, however, are still efficient In addition, admitting uncertain arguments extends the set of knowable propositions to a degree that is necessary and sufficient for practical matters. It does so with the help of risky procedures, which, however, are still efficient. Of course, as a consequence, even the output of epistemologically good argumentation may be a false belief. But, because of being based on epistemological principles, the rate of true or truth-like beliefs among all practically important beliefs resulting from epistemologically designed argumentation is the highest obtainable for humans. In any case, it is much higher than the rates for argumentation designed according to the rhetorical or consensualistic approach, because these approaches lack any direct connection to truth conditions.

However, at no point in Lumer's discussion of the comparative advantages of the epistemological approach is there any acknowledgement that successful human action typically depends on the cooperation of others, and that obtaining such cooperation often requires persuading others and overcoming differences of

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[18] See Goldman's remarks about the relationship between justification and truth quoted in note 1 above. Though it is clear to me that the relationship between justification and truth holds on a reliability account such as Goldman's, and though it is clear that Lumer (1991 and 2005b) *attempts* to formulate "epistemological principles" of "acceptability" which guarantee that conclusions are either either true or probably true when premises are true, the complexity of his account of the origin such principles makes it difficult (for me, at least) to judge whether or not he succeeds.

opinion – requirements that rhetorical and consensualistic approaches so obviously address. A truly illuminating comparison of these three approaches would address the *relative importance* of what these three different approaches have to offer.

Moreover, Lumer (2005b, pp. 236-239) makes no attempt to show that his epistemological approach is superior to more traditional logical approaches – unlike Biro and Siegel (1992, p. 86-87), who give reasons for discounting a traditional logical approach to argument evaluation (on the grounds that it sheds no light on the so-called informal fallacies).

3.4 Overview of the reasons canvassed so far

Of the considerations canvassed so far in section 3, the only considerations that seem to me to offer truly unproblematic support for the claim an epistemological approach to argument is *required* are the first of the two arguments I set out in my 2006 paper and the intuitive considerations found in Feldman 1994 (and described in section 3.2 above). To my surprise, after surveying this material I find myself somewhat inclined to Goldman's view that an epistemological approach to argument virtue serves some important purposes – if fact, the purposes I am most interested in - whereas alternative approaches to argument virtue serve other legitimate purposes, though ones which interest me less.[19]

4. CONCLUSION: TWO OBJECTIONS TO EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO ARGUMENT

In the issues of *Informal Logic* devoted to the epistemological approach argument are two papers (Huff 2005 and Hoffman 2005) which raise interesting objections to that approach. Consideration of those objections will, perhaps, help to put in perspective some of the issues involved in defending an epistemological approach and to clarify the *sort* of epistemological approach whose value I myself want to defend.

4.1 Huss on "Useful Argumentation"

Huss 2005 (p. 261-62) puts the main point he wants to defend as follows:

> …if we are concerned primarily with developing a normative theory of argumentation that yields real-world advice that people can actually use when engaging in argument, then the epistemological approach is inferior to the consensus approach. Or, at the very least, if we want to have a theory of argumentation that yields useful advice, then the epistemological approach does not really have the advantages over the consensus theory that it is purported to have. In other words, when we understand the normativity of argumentative standards in the right way, there is no reason to turn to the epistemological approach. [20]

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[19] I should not be surprised at my attraction to this view, since in Pinto 2001 (p. 37) I myself had observed that "[w]hen we appraise arguments, we can do so from several points of view."

[20] He makes it clear that he takes Biro and Siegel (1992 and 19997) and Goldman 1999 as representative of the epistemological approach.

Huss makes is very clear (p. 262) that "for the most part" the view he wishes to defend "is the same as van Eemeren and Grootendorst's pragma-dialectical procedure for adjudicating a critical discussion" – or more accurately a *variant* on that view which does *not* include the idea that

> [a]n ideal model aims at providing an adequate grasp of argumentative discourse by specifying which modes of arguing are *acceptable to a rational judge in view of a certain philosophical conception of reasonableness* {van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992, p. 7, emphasis added by Huss].[21]

By focusing on the role of arguments in "critical discussion" – which in the view of van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992, p. 13) "centers around resolving differences of opinion by means of argumentative discourse" – Huss situates arguments in a context whose goals are very different from the goals of the contexts in which Goldman (1997 or 1999) and Biro and Siegel (1992 or 1997) are considering them.

The case that Huss mounts depends on two claims set out on p. 263:

(a) First, that the main point of difference between the consensus and epistemological approaches lies in the fact that for the consensualist

> [the] standards of argumentation are *internal* standards. They are internal to the discussion in that they depend only on the thoughts of those who partake in the discussion. They are different from *external* standards, which tell us that particular propositions or inferences are either acceptable or unacceptable, regardless of what the participants think. This is the main point of difference between consensus theory and the epistemological approach. The epistemological approach insists on external standards, which are themselves subject to the standards of knowledge or epistemic justification

(b) And second that

> this insistence on external standards is the main reason why the epistemological approach fails to offer useful advice to those engaged in argument.

Though I have some sympathy for the claim the standards of argument ought to be viewed as "internal" to the on-going debates of a broader cognitive community,[22] I

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[21] A second, but less important, divergence lies in the fact that Huss frames his discussion in terms of what discussants *believe,* while van Eemeren F.H. and R. Grootendrost (1992, p. 10) demand an *externalization* "achieved by starting from what people have expressed, implicitly or explicitly, instead of speculating about what they think or believe."

[22] Chapter 1 of Pinto 2001 (pp. 8-9) ended with the words: "Appraising an argument requires one to step into the dialectical interchange, become party to it, become a participant in it. Informal logic, insofar as it seeks to be an art of argument appraisal, would turn out to be the very art of arguing itself." And the summary of that book's five central ideas on its final page (140) includes the following two claims:

> (2) The articulation and elaboration of standards for the appraisal of arguments and inferences is in no sense a fait accompli; rather, it is an on-going process that is also an intrinsic and essential component of arguing and of reasoning
> (5) Our standards and our reasonings achieve objectivity and intersubjective validity to the extent that we succeed in securing broader acceptance of those standards and reasonings through dialectical interchange rationally conducted.

am not at all persuaded by the argument as Huss develops it. My principal criticisms are as follows:

(1) I'm happy to concede that an argument which meets the requirements of the consensus approach should be judged a good one for the purposes of "resolving differences of opinion by means of argumentative discourse". But what is a good argument in that respect need not be a good one in *every* respect. Moreover, an argument which is a good one from the point of view of leading someone to knowledge or justified belief may be a bad one in other respects. Biro and Siegel (2006, p. 99) themselves say:

> Of course, there are other ways for an argument to be said to be bad [besides failing to be epistemically good]. Most important among these, as noted earlier, is the inability to persuade. A good argument may be bad in this sense, and a bad one, good. Which of these an argument is can be, and often is, a function of the beliefs held by those to whom it is addressed. But being good or bad in this way (or in some others—over-complexity, inelegance, etc.) implies nothing about the epistemic quality of the argument.

And of course Huss himself concedes that (p. 265) that "there is something to be said for the epistemological approach, I think, if our only concern is to make after-the-fact evaluations about pieces of argumentation."

(2) Huss's discussion of the initial advice that an advocate of the epistemological approach might give strikes me very much a straw man. He writes:

> The advice seems to look something like this: "Make sure that all of the propositions you use are epistemically justified and make sure that all of your inferences are (roughly) truth-preserving." The problem with this piece of advice is that if each of the participants to a critical discussion honestly believes everything they say and honestly believes that all of their inferences are valid (in the broad sense), then they will act *in accordance* with this advice, regardless of whether it is offered. They won't *follow* the advice, however, because to follow a piece of advice is to make sure that you do things you might not ordinarily do or to make sure that you don't do things that you might otherwise be tempted to do.

I concede that *honest* participants in a discussion usually *are* sure that the propositions they use are *true* and usually *are* sure that what they present as reasons for believing something are *good* reasons for believing it. But *being* sure that something is the case isn't the same as *making* sure that it's the

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More recently, Mercier and Sperber (2011) have presented an admittedly controversial theory of reasoning as "argumentative" in which the poor performance in standard reasoning tasks by those who reason in isolation is explained by the lack of "argumentative" context.

Even Lumer, who had said (2005a, p. 204) that "the foci of the epistemological approach have been monological argumentation directed towards an audience and solipsistic inquiry by argumentation" because "[c]ognizing essentially is an individual activity," later (2005b, p. 220) points out that by "disclosing one's justified belief by presenting the respective argument to some audience for intersubjective critique….subjective justification is made public and thus can be scrutinized by others who may reveal errors or other insufficiencies. If one's justified belief has passed this test one can be more certain about it".

case. Though it may seem at first a quibble, I think Huff is simply wrong in supposing that participants in a discussion typically "act in accordance with" the advice *to make* sure. Moreover, the advice itself seems to require the impossible: one simply can't make sure of *every* proposition one uses or make sure that *all* one's inferences are truth-preserving. For to "make sure" you must make use of some *other* proposition and perform *another* inference, and so on, ad infinitum[23] – hence the advice Huff imagines is advice that no sensible person would give.[24]

(3) Where 'antagonistic question begging' means using as a premise a statement that your addressee explicity denies, Huss claims (p. 269):

> Due to its emphasis on external standards, it is not clear that the epistemological approach can fully account for the need to avoid antagonistic question begging in critical discussion.

But I don't see any reason why that should be so. And in fact Biro and Siegel (2006, p. 98) discuss an example (an argument labelled 'A2') which fits Huss's definition of "antagonistic question begging", and comment on it as follows:

> a target of (A2) [an argument whose first premiss the target denies] *is* being given a reason to believe its conclusion (assuming, as we think is obvious, that the first premise *is* knowable—or reasonably believable—independently of the conclusion). That the target does not recognize that he is being given a reason, because he does

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[23] As I wrote in Pinto 2001 (p. 135): "The possibility of reaching agreement on any one issue concerning standards, and doing so through rational argument, does presuppose an existing, shared agreement on at least a few other issues concerning standards. Something like what Sellars said about empirical knowledge applies to our discourse about standards as well: it 'is rational, not because it has a foundation but because it is a self-correcting enterprise which can put any claim in jeopardy, though not all at once.' (Sellars 1963, p. 170). Note that this doesn't mean any single group of shared standards must remain in effect throughout rational discourse, or any episode thereof. We can apply Neurath's metaphor of rebuilding a raft at sea to the process of reaching agreement on standards: at an early point in our discussion, you and I may be led by our agreement on point A to reach an agreement on point B; and then at a later stage in our discussion, in light of a variety of factors, we may rationally agree to reject what we previously thought on point A while retaining our agreement on point B."

[24] Here is an example of what I continue to think is *sensible* advice that can be given from an epistemological point of view. In our textbook, Pinto and Blair (1993, section 6.1), we raise the question of *when* we need to make sure that a premise is reasonable to accept – of when we should bother to "investigate the acceptability of a premise". We begin by saying that in many cases premises are unproblematic – there is an enormous number of propositions that most people of our culture "know" to be true (and which, I would add here, it would be unreasonable in most contexts to question). We then (p. 172) list three sorts of circumstance in which it is wise to reflect on whether a premise is reasonable to accept:

(i) when there is *some particular reason for doubting* or questioning it,

(ii) when the premise concerns *unfamiliar or obscure information,* and

(iii) when *a great deal depends* on whether the conclusion we would arrive at is correct.

> not accept (A2)'s first premise, makes for a difficult situation, but one that (A2) cannot be used to remedy. An arguer who fails to appreciate that it cannot is making a mistake, but he is not begging the question.

Though Biro and Siegel don't see A2 as *question-begging* because their definition of that fallacy[25] is different from Huss's, they are quite clear about the fact that using a premise which an addressee denies is a mistake. And the reason why it is mistake is because in such a context it is a bad argument for the purpose of persuading.

I would add to these three criticisms my suspicion that an account like Huff's is insufficiently sensitive to the fact that norms and standards evolve precisely as a result of being challenged in contexts such as critical discussion. As I wrote in Pinto 2009 (p. p. 286)

> .... the *standards* or *norms* in light of which an individual or community assesses whether it is OK for someone to do something [e.g., to draw a particular conclusion from a certain premise] are *implicit* in what they take to be reasons for doing it – implicit because one can *take* something to be a reason without *saying* that it is a reason. Those norms become *explicit* when such takings are challenged and discussion ensues about whether what has been taken to be a reason *ought* to be taken to be reason for this or that. When such discussion transpires, a space opens up in which the difference between our *taking* something to be or provide a reason and its *actually being* or providing a reason makes its presence felt.

4.2 Hoffman's reflections on epistemological approaches

Hoffman (2005, p. 246) writes:

> There is no question that we have to teach certain standards of argument construction and evaluation in order to improve the practice of argumentation. But the question is: is it possible to formulate standards of argument evaluation in a way that an evaluation's result is solely determined by the standards applied, so that whoever used these criteria to evaluate an argument would come to the same result? Can those standards be applied to each and every argument in a way that a clear and unquestionable decision regarding its quality is possible?

I will ignore the fact that, from the point of view of most versions of epistemological approach, what that first question asks for in this passage is unreasonable. On most versions, the acceptability of premises will have to be judged on the basis of the evidence available, and the evidence available will vary from one evaluator to another.[26] However, despite the fact that Hoffman *initially*

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[25] Roughly, their view is that a premiss/conclusion complex is question-begging if and only if one of its premises *can* be known to be true *only* on the basis of prior knowledge that its conclusion is true.

[26] Even Siegel (1999) seems to accept this point. There is a passage on p. 183 in which he claims that "the quality of a given argument is impersonal in the sense that its normative status is independent of the person(s) evaluating that status"; he appends a note (#3) to that passage in which he observes that Feldman "appears to disagree, as his treatment relativises argument goodness to persons." However, Siegel adds, "But I believe that this apparent relativization to persons is in fact relativization to evidence that a given argument evaluator has at the time of evaluation. The latter sort of relativization, according to which the quality of the argument depends on the probative strength of the relevant, available evidence utilized in the premises, is the very hallmark of the epistemic view."

seems to makes the stakes too high, at the very end of the paper (p. 258) he puts what's at stake in less extreme terms:

> The question on which this article focused was whether epistemological approaches to argumentation do indeed provide principles, rules, and standards of argument evaluation that allow us to distinguish clearly between "good" and "bad" arguments. It seems to me without any doubt that the suggestions discussed above allow us to decide at least comparatively which rules and practices of argumentation probably have a more positive impact on the promotion of knowledge than a more negative one. However, the question is whether such a comparative approach is sufficient to allow a non-relative evaluation of argumentations.

What makes Hoffmann's paper interesting is his attempt to argue that there are (p. 258) "three forms of relativism …--dependency on a specific cognitive situation, on available background knowledge, and on a specific belief-value system--" which call call into question whether a "non-relative evaluation" is possible. Let me comment briefly on what he has to say about each of these three forms of relativism.

4.2.1 Dependency on specific cognitive situation

The most intriguing discussion of this aspect of the problem is Hoffmann's attempt in section 2 to critique the first two lines of argument against cultural relativism in Siegel's 1999 paper. Siegel's position is especially interesting to me because he defends an "objective" form of epistemological argument theory while conceding that (1999, p. 189) "one cannot cognize except from within the confines of one 'conceptual' scheme or another" and that (p. 193) "our principles of argument evaluation and criteria of argument quality are local and particular, in the sense that they are *ours:* articulated and endorsed by us, in our particular historical/cultural context."[27]

Siegal's first line of argument turns on the claim, as accurately summarized by Hoffmann (2005, p. 248), that "we are not 'trapped' forever in any specific perspective; we are able to learn and, thus, to transcend any perspective".[28] Hoffmann first comments that "it is hard to imagine that a relativist would deny the possibility of developing and transcending perspectives". That point may well be correct – at least I think no thoughtful relativist would deny it. However, I'm inclined to think Siegel's point is worth making in order to rule out thoughtless versions of relativism. Hoffmann's second criticism of the transcendence argument runs as follows:

> This first argument poses rather a problem for Siegel himself. It is obviously contradictory to claim, on the one hand, "that we inevitably judge from some framework or other" (191) *and,*

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[27] Compare the third conclusion of Pinto 2001 (p. 140): "The initial position from which arguers and reasoners begin lies in the historically contingent practice of criticism into which each has been initiated."

[28] Compare the fourth conclusion of Pinto 2001 (p. 140): "Although as arguers and reasoners we have *started from* one or another historically contingent critical practice, we are not prisoners of such practices, since most of us currently follow practices that we have arrived at by modifying initial positions through rational means."

on the other, that "the quality of the argument is a feature of the argument itself" (184). If we can determine the quality of an argument only by means of a judgment, and if all judgments are determined by the evaluator's framework, we have to conclude that any argument evaluation is relative to those frameworks and not a question of "the argument itself".

Hoffmann is wrong in think there's a contradiction here. When Siegel says "the quality of the argument is a feature of the argument itself" what he means is that whether the argument is good or bad depends on the features of the argument and not on facts about the arguer or the person to whom the argument is addressed –see his account of the difference between objective and subjective epistemological theories as set out in Biro and Siegel 2006 (quoted above at the end of section 2.1).

The core of Siegel's second line of argument runs as follows (1999, p. 193):

> In regarding argument quality as 'impersonal', 'transcultural', or 'universal,' we are not denying that our principles of argument evaluation and criteria of argument quality are local and particular, in the sense that they are *ours:* articulated and endorsed by us, in our particular historical/cultural context. But acknowledging their particularly [sic] does not preclude us from proclaiming their universality: that is, their legitimate applicability to arguments, considered independently of their location.

Hoffman (p. 248) comments as follows:

> It might indeed be possible that the evaluation standards I am using in my particular situation happen to be "universal" standards, but how could I know that? And how could it be possible for anyone to *justify* the claim that her or his standards *are* in fact "the" universal standards?

Notice first that Siegel had not *claimed* either that our current standards are "the" universal standards or even that we can *justify* applying them to arguments independently of the "location" (in space and time) at which those arguments occur. His claim is that it *does not follow* from the fact that our principles of evaluation are "local" in the sense specified that they cannot be or ought not to be applied to arguments generally. Moreover, *I* would argue that we have in fact *excellent* reasons for thinking, of many of our principles of evaluation, that they apply generally or universally – that is certainly true of many principles of formal logic, for many of the criteria used in medicine for concluding a person has this or that disease, for many of the criteria used in chemistry for determining the chemical composition of compounds, and so on. Of course, any judgment that a particular principle is applicable "across the board" is fallible – as any human judgment is.

4.2 Dependency on available background knowledge

On pp. 253-53 Hoffmann calls attention to "background knowledge that influences the assessment of arguments in a concrete situation ". But virtually[29] all adherents of epistemological approach to argument recognize such relativity (there is irony in the fact that much of Hoffman's case for this point is drawn from Feldman 1994, which is a classic early defence of an epistemological definition of argument

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[29] The one *possible* exception I'm aware of is Lumer's hybrid account, as set out in Lumer 2005b, where the determination of "argumentative validity" is spoken of as relative to a "database" rather than as relative to evidence.

goodness). Even Siegel (1999, note 3, as quoted in footnote 26 above) says that relativity to evidence "according to which the quality of the argument depends on the probative strength of the relevant, available evidence utilized in the premises, is the very hallmark of the epistemic view." I cannot see how such relativity poses any kind of threat to epistemological approaches to argument.

4.3 Dependence on specific belief-value systems

Hoffmann (pp. 254-57) offers an extended discussion of a "'real life' argument that was published by the Vatican's Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1987" in defence of the following claim:

> From the moment of conception, the life of every human being is to be respected in an absolute way" (i.e., no one has the right to destroy it)

The argument, he says, "is part of a 2000-year-old history of argumentation, and it is to this day highly influential within public discourse of Western societies". He asks, "But is it a "good" argument or a "bad" one?"

Hoffmann claims (p.255) the he "cannot see how any answer to this question could be justified" based on the views of Biro & Siegel, Lumer or Feldman. And he adds,

> Even if Catholics might claim that all the premises of this argument are true and justified so that it would indeed be a question of *knowledge* that is at stake here, it seems to be *more adequate* to say that arguments of this sort are *based on specific belief-value systems*, that is on networks of belief (i.e. what is representable in form of a statement concerning a matter of fact) and *values* (i.e. behavior guiding beliefs that are based on principles, needs, interests, attitudes, etc.) that are consistent from its bearers' point of view. [The first two instances of emphasis have been added.

It seems clearly true that from an *explanatory* point of view an argument like this one is based on a specific belief-value system. But that doesn't settle the question of what can be said about it from an *evaluative* point of view.

Hoffmann attempts (pp. 256-57) to make a case for rejecting an epistemic approach to evaluating crucial elements of belief-value systems such as the Catholic tradition out of which this argument arises. He points out (correctly, I think) that an epistemic evaluation of this argument turns on whether its premises are epistemically justified.[30] The sticking point, according to him, is how one could possibly determine whether such premises are justified. And on pp. 256-57 he makes a start at offering reasons why they cannot, principally by arguing that the concept of justification as developed by Goldman can't be applied to the sort of metaphysical statements and implicit value judgments on which the Vatican argument depends. But to my mind, these are thorny issues that are not easily settled, and any insistence that metaphysics, theology or issues of value are beyond the pale of rational argument is both premature and counter-productive.

Let me, however, offer several comments about Hoffmann's claim that it would be "more adequate to say that arguments of this sort are based on specific

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[30] He claims that its premises support its conclusion "at least in the eyes of those offering the argument". I myself would say they pretty clearly do support it.

belief-value systems" than to address the question of whether their premises are justified.

1) I know the Catholic intellectual tradition quite intimately. In that tradition great stress is placed on the distinction between what we can accept as based on "reason" and what we must accept on the basis of religious faith. The mainstream has treated truths about the existence and properties of god as things we can know by reason alone on the basis of certain specific arguments. Moreover, the canons of good argument accepted in that tradition (many but not all of which derive from Aristotle) are for the most part not very different from the canons of good argument accepted outside that tradition. I myself after struggling with those arguments for many years – and relying pretty much on the tradition's canons of good argument – came to the conclusion that the proofs for the existence of God recognized in it don't in the final analysis stand up to scrutiny. If am correct in that judgment, then it may indeed be "more adequate" to say the Vatican argument is simply based on a belief-value system because, in this case, its premises are in fact neither known to be true nor adopted on the basis of probable arguments.

2) The subjects of what makes for good argument in the areas of metaphysics and of theology have received little or no attention from those who study argumentation. Moreover, though there has been more than a little study of "practical reasoning", the issue of how to reason well about the "deeper" questions concerning values hasn't to my knowledge received a lot of attention by argumentation theorists (except perhaps by Christian Kock). Until they have been studied in *much* greater detail it will remain premature to suppose that the arguments exchanged in those areas simply cannot be evaluated by an epistemological approach to argumentation.

3) In making the case that "there are arguments whose evaluation will differ depending on social and cultural constraints", Hoffmann (p. 255) cites my mention (Pinto 2001, p. 135) of "the broader cognitive community" and says that I had "already argued that the evaluation of arguments requires us to ask whether it is reasonable to accept an argument '*as a member of an historically contingent cognitive community*'" (p. 133). In both the passages he cites, my aim was to preserve the notion advanced in chapter 1 of Pinto 2001 that the evaluator of an argument should be thought of as a real-life person to whom the argument is addressed, but to do so without falling into a consensus theory according to which an argument is a good one so long as it meets the expectations of the people you happen to be addressing. It was decidedly not my intent to endorse any sort of *cultural* relativism.[31]

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[31] Both Lumer (2005a, p. 193) and Weinstein (2006, pp. 70-71) have misread passages in Pinto 2001 as endorsing relativism concerning epistemic values. It's true that I describe myself (Pinto 2001, p. 128) as having a "continuing flirtation with relativism", and (on p. 54) I identify what I call "sophisticated epistemic relativism" as the only *interesting* form of relativism. However, my considered opinion, stated quite explicitly on p. 139, is that the case for sophisticated epistemic relativism is *problematic*. And the practical moral I draw from the extended discussion of the pros and cons of relativism in section 4.2 of chapter 13 is simply this:

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we cannot operate as though an objectively valid and complete set of epistemic standards is at hand. As a result, not only must we be prepared to encounter disagreements about standards in the context of dialogue, we are also precluded from automatically dismissing a dissenting view about standards as "irrational" or as contrary to accepted rules or practice. Rather, our reaction to disagreement about standards must be to *seek rational accommodation, through dialogue, of those disagreements*. [Emphasis in the original.]

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