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Accounting for the force of the appeal to authority

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ABSTRACT: As appeals to expert authority shift from “fallacies” to “argument schemes,” argumentation theorists are called on to provide critical questions for assessing them. I argue that current treatments focus too heavily on assessing expertise, and not enough on judging trustworthiness. I propose instead a normative pragmatic account of the rational force of the appeal to expert authority, one that emphasizes the expert's actions in constructing his/her own legitimate trustworthiness.

KEYWORDS: appeal to expert authority, argument scheme, authority, expertise, trust, normative pragmatics, testimony

1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I give an account of the argument scheme of appealing to expert authority. My aim is to illuminate why the appeal has the features it has, and in particular, why it has a legitimate *force*. I also will try to put into order, revise, and explain some of the many pointers about assessing the appeal we give to students in our informal logic, critical thinking, debate, and argumentation classes. Before I begin, I'll clear the way by asking and answering: Why argument schemes? Why a theory of argument schemes? And finally, why a theory of the appeal to authority?

2. WE SHOULD BE THEORIZING ARGUMENT SCHEMES!

2.1 Why argument schemes?

"Schemes" are an attractive approach to sorting out some important features of the activity of arguing. Teachers and theorists of argumentation going back at least to Aristotle have proceeded by recognizing recurrent patterns in argumentative discourse and giving them names in order to comment on them more easily. Contemporary textbooks across the different fields contributing to argumentation studies continue to offer students pointers on arguments involving generalizations, causes, analogies and the like, calling them “patterns of substantive proof” (Ehninger & Brockriede 1963: 126), “argument” or “inference types” (Inch & Warnick 2002: 195), “types of reasoning” (Freeley & Steinberg 2009: 169) and “types” or “kinds” of inductive arguments (Govier 2010: 263, 318). “Argument schemes” (Kienpointner 1986; Walton, Reed, & Macagno 2008) is a usefully neutral technical term to bring this approach into focus. In the currently prevailing version of this approach, learning an argument scheme is meant to give the student some

hold on the complexities of argument identification and assessment by helping him identify the core reason which the argument expresses, and by providing him with a set of critical questions to test whether the core reason is defeated. This approach is handy because it takes into account the (informal) logical and also the “dialectical” aspects of argumentation: both the minimum reason whose expression makes an argument the kind of argument it is, and also the way “the same” argument can be expanded, accordion-like, as the arguer replies to real or projected questions and objections about it.

2.2 *Why a theory of argument schemes?*

Why a theory? Just because, I suppose; argument schemes are as valid an object for research as anything else. But I have moreover some hope that an adequate theory of schemes will have some practical impact, and that it will in addition help us meet our responsibilities as teachers.

One line of thinking—stretching from Quintilian to the late Michael Leff—holds that skilled discursive practice will always spill over the boundaries that the maps of theory draws for it; that practice is always more abundant than theory. But even recognizing the illimitability of practice, we can still notice as Robert Craig has pointed out that ordinary argumentative activity contains “meta-discourse,” i.e., arguers' own partly theorized comments on what they are doing (Craig 1996). Arguers approach their activities with some conceptions about argument, and furthermore express these conceptions in their activities as one method of regulating those activities. For example, even as brief a remark as “my first point” or “I close” expresses a proto-theory of argument in order to make an interaction work. A modest argumentation theory can take as its goals:

- to articulate these ordinary conceptions, making them more fully explicit;
- to order them, linking “meta” remarks together into larger structures;
- to ground them, relating them back to principles or empirical evidence;
- and to extend and critique them, identifying indefensible conceptions and perhaps opening new approaches.

It seems reasonable to expect that such a modest theory would have at least some practical impact, helping arguers better manage their activities.

Of course, it probably isn't necessary to do too much conceptual work or develop too abstract a theory in order to succeed as teachers of argument in any field. We are likely better arguers and argument-analysts than almost all of our sophomore students, and can rely on our existing skills and understandings to inch them forward. So the classroom context does not provide many spurs to a more careful examination of the tips and tricks we teach. For the theory of schemes, one unfortunate result of this fact has been the proliferation of partially competing, yet largely undefended, accounts of individual schemes. In fact, it appears that no one who has set out to make a list of critical questions for an argument scheme has ever failed to do so. But if an argumentation theory cannot be wrong, it cannot be right. I suggest to pass the blush test, we as teachers should not only be able to out-argue our students; we should also be able to explain and defend our conceptions to a tougher audience: each other. If nothing else, developing a non-“assertoric,” that

is, well-defended body of argumentation theory would be a good strategy for protecting our terrain against those in our respective disciplines who think that *anyone* can teach argument.

2.3 Why a theory of the argument scheme of appealing to expert authority?

So we need theoretical treatments of schemes!—ones with defenses of some sort, since they might be wrong. There is the beginnings of a valuable literature on the conception of argument schemes in general (Blair 2001; Hitchcock 2010; Walton et al. 2008). In this essay, I aim to extend this literature by exploring what it takes to give an account of one scheme in particular: the appeal to expert (or epistemic) authority.

The appeal to authority provides a useful test case for a theory of schemes, in part because it is an important one; as I will suggest below, the ever-increasing division of knowledge-labor leaves us in ever greater "epistemic dependence" on expert advice for decisions personal (medical, financial) and collective (health, economic policy). The scheme is also easily recognizable, explicitly named in ordinary discourse, and prominent in textbook treatments of logic, rhetoric and dialectic since Aristotle. In contemporary pedagogy, appeals to authority are central within the rhetoric/communication tradition; indeed, some versions of competitive debate rely almost entirely on reading "cards" or quotes from purported authorities. In informal logic, appeals to authority have been shifted from the category of fallacy ("no, unless...") to that of argument scheme ("yes, unless..."). And the appeal is also accepted by proponents of the pragma-dialectical program (Garssen 2001). Finally, the appeal to authority provides a good example of the "assertoric" approach to theory that has occasionally been taken in the past. It appears to be peculiarly easy to generate models of this scheme. Walton's book on the scheme usefully collects over a dozen diverse proposals, largely from informal logic/critical thinking textbooks. His own version lists six critical questions:

- *Expertise* question: How credible is *E*[xpert] as an expert source?
- *Field* question: Is *E* an expert in the field that *A*[ssertion] is in?
- *Opinion* question: What did *E* assert that implies *A*?
- *Trustworthiness* question: Is *E* personally reliable as a source?
- *Consistency* question: Is *A* consistent with what other experts assert?
- *Backup evidence* question: Is [*E*]'s assertion based on evidence?

(Walton 1997). The treatment in one typical debate textbook agrees with Walton on 1, 4, 5 and 6, leaves out 2 and 3, and adds:

- *Reliability*—"a reliable source is one that has proven to be correct many times in the past"
- *Recency*
- *Relevance*
- *Access*—"whether someone offering an opinion is or has been in a position to observe firsthand the matter being disputed"

(Freeley & Steinberg 2009: c. 7). My university library's website proposes among other things:

- Is the book or article well-written and well-edited?
- Does the bibliography seem comprehensive?
- Who is the publisher? What else have they published? Do they have specific types of topics or fields in which they specialize?

bringing their list of items up to 23 (Iowa State University e-Library 2011).

Little of this seems facially bad advice for sophomores—although as I'll suggest below, this intuition may not hold up to closer scrutiny. But the miscellaneous and variable nature of these lists—like Borges' "Chinese encyclopedia"—indicates that there is a need here for the application of some theoretical elbow-grease. In the following, I make a first pass at articulating, ordering, grounding, and extending/critiquing both the core reason which identifies the appeal to expert authority and the critical questions which are essential to test it.

3. AN ACCOUNT OF THE APPEAL TO EXPERT AUTHORITY

3.1 *The core reason*

As has been frequently pointed out in the literature on testimony, we depend on others who know what they're talking about for information as simple as the date of our birth and as complex as global climate change (Coady 1992; Hardwig 1985, 1991). We cannot understand much without others' help, particularly in a technological and culture-laden world that is in large part a creation of others' knowledge. For example, to learn how to use a cell phone, we depend on the expertise of the cell phone designer; to learn how to waltz, we need the assistance of expert waltzers. Even in the formerly skeptical corners of science studies, the critique-al attitude is being displaced by normative theories of legitimate expertise, which recognize that we *ought* to listen to those who know what they're talking about (Collins & Evans 2007). Unless we care to adopt a totally quietistic way of life, we will need to heed the opinions of experts in order to increase our chances of success at activities great and small.

It is only prudent to take expert statements into account; it is stupid, foolish, imprudent to ignore what they say. If we ignore an expert, we will likely endure unfortunate consequences when our affairs, ignorantly managed, go wrong. On top of this, other people, seeing us failing to listen to someone with standing as an expert, may judge that we are imprudent and deal with us accordingly, likely refusing to cooperate with us further. This pair of penalties—poor results and social rejection—means that it is not just legitimate (or “OK”, Pinto 2009) to heed the opinions of experts; in a way, we are forced to do so. Expert statements can be experienced as restrictive, invasive, almost coercive. This feature justifies our calling the appeal one to expert *authority* (Goodwin, 1998). It also justifies distinguishing the appeal to expert authority from other sorts of reported statements that turn up in argumentative discourse. It is reasonable to credit eye-witness testimony, for example. But a witness does not have a recognized standing in society, and so we are not in general threatened with penalties should we ignore what he says.

This then is the core reason given in any appeal to expert authority. The fact that an expert says something is a reason, a forcible reason, for heeding what he says, since otherwise we will be conspicuously imprudent.

3.2 A possible critical question: "Is he an expert?"?

A model of an argument scheme needs to identify its core reason; it also needs to go on and identify and defend as necessary one or more critical questions which pick out the central ways the core reason can be defeated. For the appeal to expert authority, the vital question would seem to arise from the word "expert." Is the person who is expressing his opinion really an expert? Does he really possess the relevant expertise? If not, there may be other reasons to listen to what he says, but we wouldn't be conspicuously imprudent if we failed to do so.

All of the textbook treatments include some variation on "Is the purported expert really an expert?" among the critical questions for this appeal. But I want to suggest that this question is not properly framed, because in fact it cannot be answered.

The catch-22 here has been recognized from classical times. Walton (1997: xiii) points to Sextus Empiricus; Goldman (2001: 85-6) to Plato's Charmides; both sources contain the paradox that it takes an expert to assess expertise. The layperson—the one who needs the expert opinion—cannot tell whether the purported expert knows what he's talking about. The layperson obviously is in no position to test the quality of a purported expert's answers on technical questions. Moreover, he can't even assess the outcome of a purported expert's performance; the patient may die, for example, but without expert knowledge of what constitutes competent performance it cannot be determined whether that was *because of* or *in spite of* what the purported medical expert did. This means that only the expert can judge whether an appeal to expert authority is legitimate. But an expert doesn't need his fellow expert's opinions—or if he does need them, he will not be conspicuously imprudent if, in his best judgment, he decides to put them aside. Thus: a paradox.

The classical paradox has been confirmed by contemporary social scientific work on expertise, which stresses that experts do not just possess quantitatively more knowledge than laypersons; they have qualitatively different methods of managing their knowledge (e.g., Dreyfus & Dreyfus 2005; Ericsson & Charness 1994). Recent work in science studies concurs; in addition to his expressible, propositional knowledge an expert has a deep tacit understanding that can be gained only through years of socialization in a discipline, its activities and its language (Collins & Evans 2007). So not only does the expert know more; he knows more about whether he knows more—a second order information asymmetry (Goodwin, 2010). Walton calls this impossibility of assessing expertise "the basic problem of all appeals to expert opinion as a reasoned form of guidance" (Walton 1997: 114). But if lay assessment of expertise is impossible, then "Is the purported expert really an expert?" cannot be a critical question for the argument scheme of appealing to expert authority.

3.3 Two objections answered

It could be said that laypeople can assess expertise—in fact we do it all the time. We examine the credentials of purported experts: their degrees, titles, awards, publications, certifications, memberships, recognitions by peers, and so on. But while it is certainly prudent to examine such credentials, notice that this doesn't solve "the basic problem;" it only sends the problem up a level. Degrees, titles and so on indicate that one or more other purported experts recognize someone as an expert. But how can laypeople confirm the

expertise of the grantors of the degrees and titles? By *their* degrees and titles? But can we confirm the expertise of the purported experts who granted *them*? An infinite regress seems to threaten; to cut it short, laypeople need some method for identifying experts that doesn't depend on assessing their expertise.

It could also be said—and has been said to me by Fred Kauffeld—that it is possible to assess expertise from the outside, by applying very general tests of methodological rigor. Indeed, we are sometimes able to tell that a researcher in another field is hyping his results or mishandling his evidence. While not doubting the possibility of this sort of “referred expertise” (Collins & Evans 2007), however, it would still not seem a general response to the problem of assessing expertise. At best it will work only for those expert in a neighboring field, as for example we would not expect football experts and physics experts to be in a good position to assess each other. Unless we are going to systematically reject appeals to expert authority exactly where we need them most—when we have no understanding at all of what the expert is talking about—we need to identify an answerable critical question to test the core reason.

3.4 An improved critical question

If we cannot rely on our own, lay assessments of another's expertise, what can we rely on? The most obvious source of information on a purported expert's expertise is the purported expert himself. He gives us his opinion, holding himself out as an expert. Instead of figuring out whether his self-representation is accurate to the state of affairs, we can proceed instead by figuring out whether we trust it. As Collins and Evans put it, we can proceed by “making *social* judgments about *who* ought to be agreed with, not *scientific* judgments about *what* ought to be believed” (2007: 47-48).

Why do we trust what anyone says about anything? As Kauffeld has explained, the most basic reason is that in seriously saying something and opening himself up to a risk of resentment, a speaker has given us grounds for presuming his veracity (Kauffeld 1995, 1998, 2003, 2009). Applied to the case of expert authority, this would mean that if someone openly holds himself out as an expert, we can infer that he is one, because we can reason that he wouldn't risk the consequences of our ire when we found out he was faking it. But as Kauffeld further notes, the presumption of veracity is fragile. There are plenty of reasons to distrust a purported expert's self-representations. The forcefulness of the appeal to authority means that speakers are always going to be tempted to exaggerate or even falsify their expertise in order to increase their likelihood of persuasive success. Further, we know that there are additional temptations to self-deception here, since it is pleasant to stand as an expert in one's own eyes. (This well-known tendency, deemed typically masculine, provides the basis for much of the humor on the Red Green Show.) Finally, there is plenty of room for simple misunderstanding; even a real expert, for example, may be just offering a guess, or speaking beyond his expertise, and expecting also for us to recognize that fact.

There is little that we as recipients of an appeal to expert authority can do to resolve these doubts. The purported expert, however, is in a position to revise what he is doing, in order to reduce these doubts and sustain his appeal's force. To seek our trust in his self-representations of expertise with any reasonable expectation of actually receiving

it, a purported expert is going to have to do something to refine, focus or strengthen the risk he is running in holding himself out as an expert.

There are undoubtedly many ways the purported expert can earn our trust; for example, he might offer a million dollar bond to anyone who can prove that he's a phony. There is no way that a theorist of the argument scheme of appealing to expert authority can give an account of all the practically available methods for inducing trust. But there is one strategy that purported experts can adopt that will be available in every instance, and *that* can be theorized. As a purported expert, he always has at least one thing to lose: viz., his standing as an expert. He may want to preserve his expert status in our eyes; he may want to preserve his reputation for expertise among the public at large, or among his peers; he may even want to maintain his own personal sense of himself as an expert. Whatever the basis of his attachment to his standing as an expert, a purported expert can earn our trust in his expertise by openly taking responsibility for his statements as an expert; by backing or "bonding" his statements with his reputation for expertise. By doing so, he puts us in a position to be confident that his standing as an expert will be lost or at least impaired should things go wrong. This allows us to reason that he would not thus risk his standing as an expert unless he was confident that he is, in fact, an expert. And so it is reasonable to trust him.

So the critical question that should be addressed to every appeal to expertise is not: "Is the purported expert really an expert?" but instead: "Has the purported expert committed his standing as an expert in making his statement? Does he have a standing as an expert that he cares about, and are we confident that he will lose that standing if he turns out to be misrepresenting himself?"

4. CONCLUSION

When an expert says something, we ought to heed it because we would be conspicuously imprudent not to; this is the core reason which when expressed in discourse makes that discourse a token of an appeal to expert authority. In assessing such an appeal, we ought to ask at least one key critical question: Has the expert expressly spoken *as an expert*, backing what he says with his standing as an expert?—and thus, if he turns out to lead us astray, will his standing as an expert be affected? If so, we have grounds to trust his self-representation as an expert, and are subject to the force of the appeal (unless, of course, we can find another way to defeat it).

If this account is accurate, then many of the textbook pointers about the argument scheme of appealing to expert authority remains valid. But the textbooks are giving the right answers to the wrong questions. For example, instead of thinking of a purported expert's credentials as providing evidence of expertise, in this account they serve as reasons for trust. When an expert has a degree, title, award or so on, and when we are confident that the systems for granting such credentials will discipline him if he starts acting badly, then we can be assured that in expressing his opinion to us he is running a serious risk. Credentials therefore function not as signs of expertise as much as guarantees of good behavior.

The advice to check the purported expert for bias—another textbook staple—is also good. But on the analysis I've given here, it is less a separate question than a way to deepen our understanding of the purported expert's motivations. If we find out that the benefits the purported expert may receive if he misleads us are greater than the costs to him of

losing his standing as an expert, our reason for trusting him is diminished. If he doesn't care about his standing, we don't have much reason to credit his self-representation.

The account of the appeal to expert authority I have offered also casts an interesting light on the problem of authority more generally. I have suggested that the appeal gains its force by the way that an expert's statement locks us, its audience, into a corner. After the statement is made, if we move without paying it heed we risk being viewed as conspicuously imprudent. The statement thus has the effect of *blackmail*—the expert isn't threatening us, but is using his standing as an expert to compel our behavior. But as I have also argued that in making the appeal, the expert also runs some risks. To induce our trust in his self-representations as an expert, he has to stake his standing as an expert on what he says; he has to offer his standing as a *bond*. The appeal to expertise as a "blackmail and bond transaction" (Goodwin 2001) is in a way self-limiting; if the expert tries to move from legitimate authority to illegitimate authoritarianism, he is opening himself to consequences. This self-limiting nature of the appeal should relieve at least some of the concerns about the appeal to authority; while forceful, it is not coercive.

Finally, I hope that the account I have developed here of the argument scheme of appealing to expert authority provides an example of the way that a theory of a scheme can:

- articulate more clearly the central reason and key critical questions of the scheme;
- order some of the fragmentary ordinary practical wisdom about the appeal that shows up, e.g. in textbook accounts;
- ground our understanding of the appeal within broader scholarship, in this case on expertise, authority and presumptions; and
- critique leading misunderstandings—here, about the ability of laypersons to directly assess expertise.

So I close with a call to my colleagues in all the disciplines with an interest in argumentation: We should be theorizing argument schemes!

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Commentary on “ACCOUNTING FOR THE FORCE OF THE APPEAL TO AUTHORITY” by Jean Goodwin

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1. INTRODUCTION

Professor Jean Goodwin’s “accounting” is both well-crafted and provocative. I applaud her call for greater attention to argument schemes as a means of providing clear and unambiguous guidance for the assessment of an argument’s strength. In this response, I want to place the “account” in a broader rhetorical context, first by framing a rhetorical approach to everyday argument, and then considering the role of schemes in general, and the appeal to authority in particular.

2. THE RHETORICAL FRAME FOR ARGUMENT

The first consideration is to suggest that the province of argument is perceived, not solely as privileged within a dialectical perspective, but rather, for our purposes, as a sub-set of rhetoric—with all the uncertainties and messiness that discursive strategies may yield in managing conflictive views about what we should become or do as a society. As a result, argument in everyday practice is ever and always much less systematic and ordered than might be imagined within any ideal formulation for its reasoned conduct. Put yet another way, it suggests that the full play of argumentative schemes and scenarios—including messy, sloppy give-and-take—may characterize the actual practice of argument in everyday encounters. This means that formalized procedures, while judicious as ideal aims, are not lost sight of for what they may provide in improving practice, but neither are they seen as dominating the nature of the practice. Hicks and Langsdorf (1999) provide a further justification for being wary of formulaic approaches to “right conduct” in argumentative encounters. Their comment in reviewing “proceduralist theories of democracy” (p. 139) applies to framing everyday argument. They write:

Emphasizing argumentation competence does not mean minimizing citizens’ need for information about the issues that confront us. It does mean stressing the equal importance of competence in deliberating about both the value of procedures used in a deliberative democracy and the value of positions advocated by means of those procedures. Rather than adopt procedural theorists tendency to assume a certain model of human being as equipped with particular reasoning skills, we have argued here that education for argumentation competence constitutes human beings as agents who can choose to engage in deliberation and continue to make diverse choices intrinsic to being an agent. (Hicks and Langsdorf 1999: 158).

A corollary consideration is that differences between and among people, whether in terms of who they are as persons (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, etc.) and what they bring to the argument (e.g., knowledge, commitment to an issue, argumentative skill,

etc.) are recognized for the role they might play, positively and negatively, in adapting the language and style of arguing so as to accommodate differences when and where they matter.

The second major consideration lies in a move from the language of “truth” and “falsity” to that of justification—in the sense of pragmatic choices as to whether one believes they are justified in accepting (as a claim on belief or action) what the social other has advanced. This means that the products of argument are inherently defeasible. To be more precise, this means that the advance of what one claims as a particular “truth” via argumentative discourse remains open to correction—an argument on behalf of belief or action may seem justified at its moment of expression, only to be found wanting at a later time (note that this position assumes one has played fair with respect to requisite research to determine what is knowable at a given moment in time). Two further corollaries are important to add: (a) acceptance of what is said may be agreed to only temporarily—as a first condition of final agreement, while other information is obtained; (b) the reason one might give for acceptance need NOT be shared by others who agree. The standards of evaluation for what constitutes argument leading to acceptance do not need to be common to all participants; we might accept for different reasons.

3. THEORIZING ARGUMENT SCHEMES

I am in essential agreement with Goodwin’s portrayal of the advantages to be gained in characterizing “recurrent patterns” (her language) as schemas. The first question one might ask, however, is “what are the conditions or criteria for the development of a theory?” That is, in theorizing argument schemes, what are the constituent elements of “theory” so that we know when we have one? If we take the standard scientific approach to theory, we are bound to a descriptive account of the object of inquiry, and then to predictions that can be tested as to how that object will work or act within the world. With what certainty can we predict the behavior of either schemes (what impact they have) or the people who use them in argument? To flesh this out, we need to examine “schemes” more closely.

Walton, Reed and Macagno (2008) define schemes as “forms of argument (structures of inference) that represent structures of common types of arguments used in everyday discourse” (p. 1). They include within this “umbrella” definition arguments that are structured deductively, inductively, and abductively. Interestingly, they apply “defeasible” only to the last category—on the presumption that neither deductive nor inductive arguments may be categorized as open to correction. They continue by noting that “such presumptive arguments are necessary but dangerous” (p. 2). Note that I’ve already suggested that everyday arguments are *inherently defeasible*. From a rhetorical perspective, it makes little sense to insist on “truth,” if by that term one means ultimately incontrovertible evidence that a particular claim will stand the test of time. The sense of rhetoric I am advancing here is a classical one: we do not argue about that which is self-evident, but rather about those things we are uncertain, to one degree or another, about. We may operate as if we *knew*, but our beliefs about what we should do are more often premised on an uncertain knowledge of what the future will bring. Using the following argument form as a prototype may help isolate the differences between this position and that offered by Walton, Reed and Macagno (2008; taken from Walton 1997), and, consequently, endorsed by Goodwin:

COMMENTARY

- C.Q.1: Is *a* in a position to know whether *A* is true (false)?
- C.Q.2: Is *a* a honest (trustworthy, reliable) source?
- C. Q. 3: Did *a* assert that *A* is true (false)? (p. 13)

The primary change I would make in this “standard” set of questions is to replace the terms “true” and “false” with:

- (1) Is *a* in a position to know whether a belief in *A* is justified or unjustified?
- (2) Is *a* an honest, trustworthy, reliable source with respect to this issue?
- (3) Did *a* assert that a belief in *A* is justified or unjustified?

This is more than a modest change, as it focuses attention on the relative presumptive weight of the claim being advanced—how defeasible might it be? Further, it avoids the confusion over what sense of “to be true” is being suggested by the standard question: it is never absolutely clear that “true” is truly conceived as epistemic truth or as a contingent truth. I have no quarrel with the latter if that is what is meant—if we understand by truth that it is open to correction with new evidence or insight, then we may be much closer to agreement on the presumptive nature of argument than I’m claiming here. I’ve also reworked the second critical question – a person may be honestly claiming a belief in ‘*x*’ while being at the same time untrustworthy with regard to ‘*x*’s status as a justified claim. In other words, I would not presume that “honest” contains trustworthiness or reliability, as the parentheses might lead one to expect. Moreover, I added “with respect to this issue” for a reason: a person may be perceived to be honest in most cases, but not on this issue (or the reverse). In other words, people are seldom always dishonest or untrustworthy across all issues (with the possible exception of Bernie Madoff). I suspect that the restriction to a specific issue is actually implied in the standard protocol—I simply am adding it to make it clear that the judgment of justifiability is not universal, but rather particular to the mix of contexts, persons, and claims at a given moment in time. Finally, the argument may “fall down” if the second question is answered in the negative (Walton, Reed & Macagno 2008: 17), but it may not therefore be discounted by those listening. That is, from a purely logical perspective, arguments may fail to sustain allegiance to particular rules of procedure or “rightness” without that having any impact on the rhetorical potency of the claim or its likely acceptance. As Taeda Jovičić (2004) points out in proposing a rule-governed protocol for evaluating arguments from authority:

It is easy to show that even in the world of sound arguments, the characteristics of the audience are important for evaluating an argument. *If persons in a group believe that the premises are true, and both know and accept the rules which determine the relation of logical consequence in the argument, and, moreover, accept soundness as the ideal of rationality, then they accept the argument as a good one.* (Jovičić 2004: 2)

Writing in 1968, Douglas Ehninger reminded us that determinations of validity—accepting the soundness of an argument—are premised finally on the receiver’s sense of a moral obligation to acquiesce in the face of a stronger argument. That the rules of logic mandate acceptance is immaterial and, ultimately, irrelevant. One must accept soundness as a moral claim on one’s belief and action. Without that personal commitment, the drive for rational argument fails. Even when accepted, this is not, as Ehninger pointed out in 1970, the end of the argument—arguments may stop at certain points only to be revived

and re-articulated at a later point in time. As contingent claims on our future, they are ever and always open to reconsideration. In returning to the question asked at the beginning of this section, we might say that “theory” in this context, is culturally grounded; rather than seeking predictive behavior based on adherence to rules, we might be seeking a much more general understanding of the interaction between what is asserted and whether one is justified in believing or acting on the assertion.

4. MANAGING THE ROLE OF EXPERTISE

Goodwin argues that “it is only prudent to take expert statements into account; it is stupid, foolish, imprudent to ignore what they say.” While I’m inclined to agree with this as a general claim, I’m not that certain about the consequences of ignoring experts. I’m not sure we will “endure unfortunate consequences when our affairs, ignorantly managed, go wrong” or that this state of affairs means “in a way, we are forced to” acknowledge expert opinion. It may be equally foolish and imprudent to follow the advice proffered, even when the expert is a trusted ally and friend (Bernie Madoff comes to mind once again). It is one thing to take the advice “into account,” and it is quite another to act on it as if it were reasonable and justified. Goodwin’s claim with respect to consequences appears to conflate these two options into a singular sense of failure to comply. If my father were asked to follow the agriculturalist’s advice with respect to farming practices, he would trust his own experience and take the advice only if it agreed with his own sense of what should be done. My point with this example: my father would not be called “expert” in the same sense as the agricultural scientist, but his own experience often contradicted their “best advice”; following it would have been, in his judgment, foolish and stupid. Engineers may be experts at building things, but ask those charged with fixing something when it breaks if the ‘expert’ had ever thought about the ease of repair. As a third illustration—if your doctor asks, “how do you feel about surgery?” will you blithely say “sound’s like a good idea to me” or will you instead suggest “let me think about it”—and plan, as part of that response, to get a second opinion? Expertise is no guarantee that the opinion proffered is the right one for the situation at hand.

A broader sense of expertise also needs to be brought into the conversation. For this purpose, I would recommend considering *The Rhetoric of Expertise* by E. Johanna Hartelius (2011). Recognizing that experts may disagree on subjects of importance, Hartelius begins by framing expertise as a “rhetorical construct” and examining the “rhetorical strategies that experts of various specialties employ to compete for authority and legitimacy” (p. 3). She notes that the defining features of expertise vary according to the purpose involved—an artist conceives of expertise differently than a scientist, and both may offer criteria different from others. Her ultimate goal, in examining political, historical, medical, and informational expertise (e.g., Wikipedia as an expert source), is to uncover similarities and differences across fields with respect to how experts gain audience approval. She raises the same question as Goodwin re. the paradox of how one knows who is or is not an expert: “If it is impossible to judge the special competence of experts, is it wise to trust them?” As her analysis attests, “expertise is rhetorical: a social and symbolic process, a relational logic at once real and imagined, theoretical and pragmatic” (p. 164). I think the work being done within argumentation studies can gain a renewed appreciation for the complexity of expertise by considering the orientation Hartelius pro-

vides. One key advantage—recognizing that experts may seek a public’s participation in the process of coming to know rather than simply requesting deference to an “informed opinion” changes the metrics for determining whether adherence is plausible in a given case. While this is not the conventional form or practice, it invites a dialog rather than simply expresses what to do in a given case. Goodwin’s analysis is close to this point as well, as she proposes the question, “Has the purported expert committed his standing as an expert?” as the better one to ask. One who has invited the audience to engage in activism has put expertise on the line in a way that simply being willing to express an opinion does not.

4. CONCLUSION

In bringing this response to a close, I want to underscore my appreciation for Goodwin’s recognition that expertise relies on trust—as the creation and maintenance of that attribution is itself rhetorically grounded. From a sophist’s perspective, and one can go back to the discourse between Socrates and Gorgias as evidence, knowledge and skill are not automatic guarantors of belief or action—the surgeon who asks about surgery may possess the skill to perform, but if she is unable to communicate that skill in the context of creating trust, the patient may well not submit to the knife. Simply asserting a claim to know is insufficient ground, in and of itself, for belief—even granting that the assertion is plausible is not, by itself, necessarily tied to acceptance, much less action.

As one who teaches feminist rhetoric, I would be remiss if I did not comment on an anomaly in Goodwin’s analysis. I had thought we were beyond the time when an essay would, in arguing for recognition of expertise, limit the language used to the masculine “he/his/him.” One could draw from this, given contemporary views of gendered language, that only males are fit to be referenced in the context of an analysis of expertise. Writing without reference to either “he” or “she” is quite possible; mixing the terms is also an option. Writing with a singular attention to a masculine voice deprivileges the feminine, and perpetuates their silence.

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