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Arguing Forever? Or: Two Tiers of Argument Appraisal

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ARGUING FOREVER? OR: TWO TIERS OF ARGUMENT APPRAISAL

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Abstract:

In this paper I explore Ralph Johnson's proposal that in addition to premises and conclusion every argument should have a dialectical tier in which the arguer addresses objections to the argument, and considers alternative positions. After exploring several reasons for thinking that Johnson's proposal is a good one, I then raise a number of objections against it and move ahead to respond to those objections, which I do by distinguishing making out a case for a conclusion from offering an argument for it, and distinguishing supplementary arguments (responding to objections and considering alternative positions) from one's main argument. I contend that it is not realistic to see arguers as having an obligation to respond to all objections and to address all alternative positions; we must somehow discriminate those which need and merit a reply from those which do not.

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In his recent book on informal logic, Ralph Johnson has argued for a two-tier structure of argument appraisal. The first tier is the familiar one of premises and conclusion: an argument is evaluated, at this level, on the basis of how well its premises support its conclusion. For present purposes, we can call this the logical tier. There are varying views of what good argument is, on this basic level.[1] Johnson's view on this matter is close to my own, which is no coincidence since mine was originally based on the one that he and Tony Blair put forward in their 1977 book, *Logical Self-Defence*.[2] On this view, the premises of an argument provide good support for its conclusion provided that they are rationally ACCEPTABLE to the audience for whom the argument is intended, RELEVANT to that conclusion and, when considered together provide sufficient or good GROUNDS for the conclusion. These conditions can conveniently be referred to as the ARG conditions. If they are satisfied, an argument may be said to be good or *cogent*. What is noteworthy and original about Johnson's recent view is not what he says about the conditions of cogency on the *logical* tier, but rather his claim that another level of argument appraisal is needed. This second *dialectical* tier concerns how well the argument addresses objections and alternative positions.

Johnson sees the purpose of argument as rational persuasion. Premises are put forward *so as to support* the conclusion; they are intended to *render it acceptable* or *provide a justification for it*. When we offer an argument we put forward premises in order to offer evidence, or rational support, for the conclusion that we seek to render acceptable. The fact that in an argument premises are put forward to offer support for a conclusion implies that in the context in which the argument is put forward there is disagreement, or a possibility of doubt, about the conclusion.[3] If there were no such disagreement or possible doubt, there would be no need to offer support for the conclusion and no point in doing so. Thus, Johnson says, right in the identification of the premise-conclusion structure which is the logical core of an argument, there is implicit reference to its *dialectical context*, a context in which the conclusion requires support. Johnson concludes that argument has an intrinsically dialectical character.

On these grounds, Johnson claims that the "real structure" of argument is more complex than logicians and philosophers have traditionally supposed. Arguments must have not only a logical tier of premises and

conclusion, but a dialectical tier as well. Johnson contends that few of the arguments typically considered by logicians and philosophers are complete, because most include only one tier. For the task of rational persuasion, we need more than a few premises or "reasons" set forth in favor of the conclusion. We need replies to objections to that conclusion and the argument(s) for it, and a consideration of positions alternative to it. A good argument must not only be cogent in the sense of satisfying ARG or similar conditions; it must be dialectically adequate, satisfying criteria of evaluation on this second tier.

To quote Johnson:

> Generally, we evaluate a product in terms of whether it serves the practice. This would suggest that arguments should be judged by how well they serve the practice of argumentation. Hence it is not enough to ask: does the evidence support the conclusion, but as well: does the argument deal with and defuse well-known objections, differentiate itself from other positions on the issue and respond to them? My suggestion is that such material would constitute what I have called the dialectical tier.[4]

> ... for any argument ... there will be those who disagree with the conclusion. That is, there will be others who-viewing the issue under consideration and the evidence-will come to a different conclusion. To persuade rationally in such a set of circumstances it is not possible to ignore these alternative positions. The arguer must make some attempt to deal with them, and as such will form a second-tier argumentation.[5]

An argument is cogent, in the logical sense, if and only if its premises offer good support for its conclusion. I have maintained that the conditions for logical adequacy on this logical tier are ARG. Tradition had it that an argument was good if and only if it was sound, and it was sound if and only if its premises were true and it was deductively valid.[6] But in many contexts, neither ARG cogency nor traditional soundness will suffice for rational persuasion. Because there are people who may disagree with the conclusion (and, presumably, also, on occasion, with the premises or links in the core argument) an arguer needs to counter alternative positions and reply to objections to his or her core argument. Only when an arguer has added this dialectical tier to the core argument does he or she have a *complete* support for the conclusion. For example, a complete argument against Canada selling a CANDU nuclear reactor to China would have to include not only a cogent core argument in support of the conclusion that such a sale is wrong or unwise, but replies to objections to that core argument and a discussion, and responses to, alternative positions.

There has been considerable discussion of conditions of soundness or cogency of a core argument on the logical tier. But there has been no comparable discussion for conditions of adequacy on the dialectical tier. Johnson suggests three "criteria," which are:

1. How well does the argument address itself to alternative positions?
2. How well does the argument deal with objections?
3. How well does the argument handle consequences?[7]

Johnson suspects that some fallacies belong naturally to the second tier, claiming that *ad hominem* and straw man (or straw person, if you prefer) arise when alternative positions are not dealt with well, and that slippery slope arises when considerations of consequences are not dealt with fairly.

Although I have some problems with the way in which Johnson has proposed the dialectical tier and his "criteria"

of adequacy for it, I think his basic point is extremely important. Before moving on to suggest criticisms and amendments to Johnson's view, I would just like to explain why these ideas strike me as promising and worthy of consideration.

First, let us consider the two-tier proposal from the point of view of theory. Assume, for the moment, that the ARG conditions have been accepted as conditions of cogency. In that case, in a cogent argument, the premises are rationally acceptable to the audience; they are relevant to the conclusion; and they offer good grounds for the conclusion. But an argument can be cogent in this sense, and its conclusion can nevertheless be false. How so? One possibility is that its premises may be acceptable in the sense that they are consistent, compatible with common knowledge and prevailing expert views, not contradicted by known evidence, and so on and so forth; yet they may turn out to be false. Another is that acceptable premises may give good grounds for the conclusion while nevertheless not logically entailing it, thus being consistent with its falsity. So if we use ARG or similar conditions for cogency on the logical tier, we must admit that even the cogently supported conclusion allows for the possibility of alternative positions on the issue. Since the existence of a cogent argument for a conclusion does not entail the truth of that conclusion, it has to be acknowledged that while I have a cogent argument in favour of a claim C, others may have cogent arguments against C and in favour of some alternative position. The ARG conditions of cogency permit this possibility because acceptability is not truth, and good relevant grounds are not entailment. To rationally persuade others of a conclusion, or to justify it from a theoretical point of view, one will have to do more than put forward my cogent argument with its premises and conclusions. Both rational persuasion and theoretical justification (if it is to be thorough) require that one counter objections and respond to alternate positions.

Now consider the issue of a dialectical tier from a different point of view. Suppose one does not accept the ARG conditions. Suppose that one employs for logical appraisal the traditional conception of soundness, according to which a good argument has true premises which deductively entail its conclusion. There are, I believe, serious problems with such an account, but for the sake of completeness, let us consider it. Can the dialectical tier can be avoided if our standard from evaluation premise-conclusion support is that of traditional soundness? One might think so. One might claim that given the truth of those premises, and given that they do entail the conclusion, the conclusion is then *demonstrated* to be true. It might seem that there is no more to be said.[8]

Nevertheless the case for such a tier can certainly be made. Suppose that for a particular argument, the premises are true and entail the conclusion. It remains that case that, in many contexts, what is at issue is the *rational persuasion* of an audience. And an audience may not accept those premises, even though they are true. Against true premises, an audience may raise objections, and against a valid argument with true premises, they may again raise objections. To convince people that one's true premises *are* true and that one's valid argument *is* valid, one will have to reply to those objections. In the face of objections, rational persuasion would require showing that one's sound argument *is* sound; that its premises are true and that the truth of those premises and the falsity of the conclusion imply a contradiction. Thus, even if one has put forward an argument which is in fact sound in the traditional logical sense, that does not eliminate the need for a dialectical tier, because those to whom the audience is addressed may continue to resist the conclusion, holding to a favoured alternative position of their own. One can stamp one's feet and pound the table and muster one's authority as a logician and philosopher, insisting loudly that these recalcitrant people *should* change their minds and *should* be rationally persuaded because the argument is *valid* and its premises are *true*. But given that people are *not* so persuaded, if one wishes to rationally persuade them, one will have to say more. Is it ever the case that arguments with true premises and valid entailments fail to persuade people? I think that it is. Even mathematical proofs don't do the trick all the time, though admittedly this is a special case which deserves special attention. So even if one were to

assume-as I do not-that a successful argument is one which categorically and unconditionally *demonstrates* the truth of its conclusion, the move to a dialectical tier may be necessary for rational persuasion. The case becomes more complex if we are considering the sort of ideal rational persuasion that is needed for theoretical justification, but I think it can still be made.

Leaving issues of theory and moving on to practice and pedagogy, there is also much to be said for Johnson's position from this point of view. Thinking of argument as having a second dialectical tier links the practice of arguing to an open and flexible form of thinking in which we are made to consider how *other people* think as well as how we ourselves think. If, to offer a complete and adequate argument for a position, we have to reply to objections to our conclusion and our argument for it, then we have to consider and reflect on those objections. If we have to consider and respond to alternative positions on a subject, we have to think about an issue or problem as do others who disagree with us. We have to recognize that there are views other than our own. We have to try, at least for a time, to understand and entertain the alternative views held by other people and to look at the phenomena as they do. Only after understanding objections and alternative views can we respond to them. Recognizing the dialectical tier and insisting that a full complete argument requires the incorporation of such a tier has the practical consequence of linking argument with open-mindedness, flexibility, and attention to views other than our own. This has epistemic value in broadening understanding and providing grounds and incentives for correcting our own views. It also has ethical value in furthering empathy and respect for other people and in countering tendencies to dogmatism.

An appreciation for the importance of thinking flexibly and acknowledging the existence of objections and alternative views may be gained from a study of Deanna Kuhn's *The Skills of Argument*.[9] In this book, Deanna Kuhn describes the results of extensive interviews with 160 people ranging in age from 14 to 70. These people were of varying educational levels (divided for the purpose of analysis between college and non-college) and occupations, and of both sexes. Kuhn's primary interest was in thinking abilities; on her view, thinking is closely tied to arguing. Kuhn assumes, plausibly I think, that when we think about something, we work through reasons for and against various claims. In effect, she believes that when we *think* we consider arguments. When we think to ourselves, we consider and accept or reject various arguments. When we think with others, we often argue back and forth, considering various claims and accepting or rejecting various conclusions for various reasons. Kuhn sought to explore thinking abilities by looking at skills of argument in her subjects, as they discussed with interviewers three complex, unresolved causal questions. She chose issues that are open in the sense that there is neither a known answer nor any single method of arriving at one. The questions explored were 'what causes failure at school?,' 'what causes recidivism-the return of ex-prisoners to a life of crime?,' and 'what causes unemployment?.' Johnson thinks that Kuhn's book is about explanation. I think it is about argument: the arguments are about which explanations are better or worse, and why.

At one stage of the interview process, subjects were asked to state a position or theory different from the one they held themselves. Notably, between thirty and forty percent of subjects were unable to do this. Fully half could not state an objection, or counter-consideration, to their own view. It seemed that these people could not imagine and articulate a position different from their own. They were asked to think of the issue or problem as someone else might think of it, to try to look at the world in a way different from their own, and in the interview they apparently could not do that. To give an idea of the problem at its most serious, here is a small sampling of inadequate responses:

> (a) They might say that . . . hmmm . . . whatever ideas there are . . . I mean, I tried to cover a lot of angles, so I'm trying to think what other ideas there are . .

(b) I don't know. I seem to have covered everything.

(c) I think they'll say the same thing I would say. It's the atmosphere (criminals return to.)

(d) I have no idea. But I'm sure that they would have every argument in the book, every possible argument, and still would not persuade me.[10]

Such inflexibility, dogmatism, and lack of imagination are truly discouraging.

Kuhn comments that the problem is absolutely fundamental: when we do not understand other positions, we do not fully understand our own position. Suppose that I believe that lack of education and job-appropriate training is the cause of unemployment. To fully understand what I believe, I have to know what claims I am rejecting when I accept that hypothesis. I am rejecting such claims as that racism, corporate down-sizing, automation, globalization, over-time practices and laziness are causes of unemployment. I am also rejecting innumerable complex multi-cause theories. Not to know what other positions are held, or might be held, on this issue is, in effect, not to understand what I myself think about it.

Kuhn also explored the implicit epistemologies held by subjects. These fell into three basic types: Absolutist, Multiplist, and Evaluative. From the *Absolutist* perspective, there are experts who can know the answers to questions because they know the pertinent facts. Subjects who presumed some version of Absolutism expressed certainty about their own knowledge claims; they typically identified their own views with those of the experts, reasoning in effect as follows: 'The experts are right; I have the same view as the experts; so I am right.'

> Could someone prove you were wrong? No, because I think I'm right.[11]

Somewhat contradictorily, many acknowledged that other views could also be 'right.' From the *Multiplist* perspective, there is no expert certainty. Multiplists were sceptical about expertise, believing that the experts disagree and for this reason experts could not hold the right answer to questions. Multiplists valued 'real' knowledge from personal experience, as contrasted with purely 'academic' knowledge and tended to think that studying and trying to acquire more information would make one know less, not more. Their ideas were a product of personal experience and were 'owned,' being tied to identity. A sense that x causes y would emerge from a person's own life, would seem true in and of that person's life and would be thus seen as true to him or her. According to the Multiplist, everybody has his or her own story and his or her own point of view; there is a kind of "equal legitimacy of beliefs."

> (Interviewer) What could you say to show that this other person was wrong? (Subject) I couldn't be able to tell. I believe my beliefs. See, I'm entitled to my belief if I feel like it's right.[12]

Multiplists were indifferent as to whether different points of view could ever be reconciled. From this perspective, there is no correct answer and no need to seek one. People do disagree; everyone has his own point of view and can 'prove' things are right from that point of view. Discussion might enrich or develop one's views, but nevertheless one's 'own view' continues to exist as a firmly attached personal possession.[13]

From the *Evaluative* perspective, there is no absolutely certain knowledge, although there are degrees of certainty. Those who implicitly subscribed to an Evaluative epistemology believed that they personally had less knowledge than experts. Experts know more than people who have not devoted special time and attention to reflecting on a question-but still, experts are not certain, because there are too many factors to consider. In addition, experts often disagree with each other. But there is a point in studying further and acquiring more information; by doing this we will come to know more. Observation, examination, and analysis contribute to

knowledge; because an expert will have done more work, he or she may be expected to know more. According to Evaluative epistemology, there could be new evidence that would give a person reason to change his or her mind about an issue. There can be genuine interchange between people with different views. Argument offers the most promising means of convincing or at least influencing the thinking of another.

Of the 160 subjects in Kuhn's study, 46 were entirely Absolutist in their responses. Another 40 were predominantly Absolutist. Some 61 subjects were entirely or predominantly Multiplist. Only 13 out of 160, or *less than ten percent* were predominantly or entirely Evaluative.[14] I presume that virtually all philosophers, indeed virtually all intellectually sensitive people, would hold some version of the Evaluative epistemology. It is the only one of the three epistemologies which is not committed to contradictions and the only one which makes sense of the fact that we might, after attending to arguments, change our minds for good reasons.

On the Absolutist view, there are facts to be known, experts know them, and a subject knows just as much as the experts. Argument is unnecessary. On the Multiplist view, there is no point in arguing; each person has his or her own personal view, which emerges out of life experience, and is not going to change because someone else has a different view emerging out of a different life experience. Only on the Evaluative view does argument have a purpose. If Kuhn's work is to be believed and if university and college students are similar to the subjects in her sample, then few students presume an epistemology which allows for argument as a meaningful way of sorting out differences and working out a position on a complex topic.[15]

To find argument meaningful, people must hold an implicit epistemological theory that treats it as worthwhile.

> In other words, people must see the point of argument, if they are to engage in it. If knowledge is entirely objective, certain, and simply accumulates, as the absolutist believes, or if knowledge is entirely subjective and subject only to the taste and wishes of the knower, as the multiplist believes, argument is superfluous. There is no need or place for the comparing weighing and evaluation of alternative claims that lie at the heart of skilled argument.

> Only if knowledge is seen as the product of a continuing process of examination, comparison, evaluation, and judgment of different, sometimes competing, explanations and perspectives does argument become the foundation upon which knowledge rests. Knowledge is never complete or finished, but rather remains open to further argument.[16]

In Kuhn's study, the few subjects who presumed an Evaluative epistemology scored significantly higher than others in skills related to stating and countering alternative theories.

One can certainly feel discouraged when reading about these results, which indicate epistemological naivete at best and incoherence at worst. On the other hand, one might feel encouraged at the evidence that it is necessary and worthwhile to teach people about arguments. In Kuhn's study, graduate students in philosophy were the only occupational group whose training seemed to correlate with skill in argument. (They did fabulously well.) Her work thus gives support to the view that arguing, evaluating arguments, and addressing different positions can be directly taught.[17]

I have introduced Deanna Kuhn's work here because of its significance for informal logic generally and also because it seems to me to support Johnson's arguments in favour of a dialectical tier. The dialectical tier points to the need to consider alternative positions on an issue and respond to those positions. If we believe, with Deanna Kuhn, that thinking well requires understanding that there are often *alternative* proposed answers to the same

question and being able to reflect on the merits of our own beliefs *as compared to the beliefs of others*, then we have additional reasons to welcome Johnson's introduction of a second dialectical tier.

All this being said, I nevertheless find certain difficulties with the way in which Johnson has stated his ideas. I shall describe these difficulties and then propose an alternative terminological framework which avoids at least some of them and highlights some further implications of Johnson's proposal. My difficulties are as follows:

1. Johnson's proposal implies a substantial conceptual revision in philosophical and logical thinking about what constitutes an argument. Premises and conclusion will no longer be enough; what we have for centuries thought was an argument turns out not to be one after all.[18] That revision is certain to be confusing to many people (I think informal logic has enough trouble already without seeking to detach the notion of argument from the premise-conclusion structure) and, as we see later, the demand that a complete argument has a dialectical tier as well as premises and a conclusion has some awkward internal consequences. I would prefer to acknowledge the importance of responding to objections and addressing alternative positions while nevertheless preserving the notion that the logical core of an argument is its premises and conclusion.

2. No argument can include within itself replies to objections to itself. There are two reasons for this: one logical, the other temporal. The logical reason is that an argument is one thing; objections to it, another; responses to those objections yet another. Johnson points out that an argument can include a consideration of an anticipated objection.[19] It is true that these can be put forward on the same occasion, but I would prefer to describe this by saying that the arguer puts forward his or her main argument *and* a supplementary argument responding to an anticipated objection. The temporal objection to Johnson's terminology is that objections typically are raised *after* an argument is put forward. First an argument is put forward; then people raise objections against it; then the arguer may reply to those objections. Thus to think of an argument as including replies to objections to itself is to jump ahead of the game.

3. It would be extremely cumbersome, if possible at all, for an argument in favour of a conclusion to include within it responses to or rebuttals of *all* alternative conclusions, or positions. This would be cumbersome because on many questions there is a large number of possible alternative positions.[20] Insofar as an alternative conclusion emerges from objections to an argument urged and therefore after that argument has been put forward, this would be impossible, for reasons of time frame.

4. In view of these considerations, it would be objectionable to label an argument incomplete because it does not address all objections and consider all alternatives. Such a standard of argument adequacy presumes the logically objectionable notion that an argument can incorporate replies to objections to itself; furthermore, it is not viable or practical because it sets demands too high.

5. The fallacies of *ad hominem* and straw man, which Johnson suspects occur on the dialectical tier may readily be found on the logical tier, as can be seen from textbook examples, including some in Johnson and Blair's own text.[21] In trying to argue against the Canadian sale of a CANDU reactor to China, I might use as a main premise that the Canadian government is motivated by greed and a desire to keep the troubled Canadian nuclear industry alive. If I were to do this, I would use an *ad hominem* argument on the logical tier. This sort of thing often happens. Similarly, slippery slope fallacies can be committed on the logical tier.

6. It is not clear what Johnson means by exploring the consequences of an argument, or position. His reference to slippery slope fallacies suggests that he means *causal* consequences. In this sense, the 'consequences' of my position that Canada should not sell a nuclear reactor to China would be the *effects* that would follow if the

Canadian government accepted my argument and conclusion and did not sell the reactor. The obligation to consider consequences would mean that for a complete argument against selling the CANDU to China, I should include a consideration of what would happen if Canada does not sell it. This seems plausible enough. But conclusions do not have 'effects' in this sense. We might modify the 'criterion' to refer to implications as well as consequences. But I prefer another approach. If a position is suspected of having adverse consequences or unwanted logical implications, that would count as an *objection* to it. If, for dialectical adequacy, arguers must address objections to their conclusions or arguments, that obligation would handle consequences or implications. There is no need to have a separate 'criterion' or condition regarding consequences.

7. What Johnson calls "criteria" for dialectical adequacy are not criteria, because they offer no guidance as to how we can tell whether (successful) replies to (enough) objections or alternative positions have been offered. I should prefer to think of these as initial statements of conditions of adequacy.

8. There is no reference in Johnson's account to the possibility of amending, or the possible need to amend, a conclusion or argument in the light of reflections on objections and other positions.

9. If we understand Johnson to be requiring that *all* objections raised against a conclusion or argument, and *all* alternative positions must be addressed on the dialectical tier, his standards for an adequate and complete argument will be unrealistically demanding.[22] The process of back-and-forth arguing continues over time, sometimes for a very long time. I might make out a complete case for conclusion C, on November 30, 1997 only to discover that someone studied it on December 1, 1997 and launched a new objection against it. After laboring for years to reply to *all* objections and consider *all* alternatives, after just one day I shall have failed to offer a 'complete' argument. Given the ongoing dialectic nature of argument on some issues, a more flexible and realistic condition regarding objections and alternatives should be developed. There are degrees of completeness and there is an important sense in which the dialectical tier will never be absolutely complete.

10. Johnson suggests plausibly that in assessing the dialectical tier we ask how well the argument "deals with" objections and how well it "addresses itself" to alternative positions. These conditions seem to set the right questions for evaluation on the dialectical tier, but they leave open the question of what it is to deal *well* with objections and to *adequately* address alternative positions. If we think of a central argument as being supported by *supplementary* arguments (put forward later in time) which seek to reply to objections and consider alternative positions, then how *well* those tasks are carried out will depend on the merits of the supplementary arguments. These may be assessed not at all, on the logical tier only, or on two tiers. To assess them not at all would mean in effect that an arguer will be deemed to have dealt well with objections and alternative positions if he or she even mentions them and says anything whatever in response. I reject this possibility, which seems to me unsatisfactory in its own right and clearly contrary to Johnson's intentions. If they are assessed on two tiers, then *their* supplementary arguments supporting them again have to be assessed, suggesting the possibility of a regress.[23] One might suggest that supplementary arguments countering objections and addressing alternative positions require *only* a logical tier, and are to be assessed by the standards (ARG or traditional soundness) used for the logical tier of the main argument. However, that consequence is not entirely satisfactory for reasons already rehearsed: a supplementary argument that is cogent may face alternative positions to its conclusion; even one that is traditionally sound, even as rigorous as a mathematical proof, may not strike the audience as sound.

It seems to me that there are reasons to say that the logical tier is more fundamental to the argument. (For one thing, it is the conclusion that identifies the position and thus sets the range of alternative positions.) Having said all this, I still think that Johnson is on to something extremely important with his two-tier theory. I would like to

propose some terminological and substantive amendments and additions in the direction of developing an account preserving the spirit of Johnson's ideas, but avoiding some of these difficulties.

First of all, terminology. The arguer is the person who puts forward an argument; his or her audience is those other people whom the arguer wishes to rationally persuade of a conclusion. In the arguer's *main argument* he or she puts forward one or more premises in support of a conclusion. The main argument may contain sub-arguments in support of premises; the premises are intended to support the main conclusion, which states the arguer's *position* on an issue or question which he or she presumes to be of concern to the audience. The process of arguing happens over time. It typically includes the putting forward of a main argument; the raising of objections to that argument and the stating of positions alternative to that expressed in the conclusion by members of the audience who see matters differently and do not accept the arguer's argument or conclusion; and responses by the arguer to those objections and alternative positions. There may be further responses by audience to the arguer and by the arguer to the audience. In principle the process of arguing can go on indefinitely.

Other things being equal (and this phrase may be very important) the arguer has a *dialectical obligation* to respond to objections and alternatives put forward by the audience. He or she does this by offering arguments to buttress or revise aspects of the main argument. These additional arguments may be called *supplementary* arguments. Some are supplementary *reply* arguments in which the arguer attempts to respond to objections raised, and some are supplementary *counter* arguments in which the arguer attempts to address alternative positions. The words "reply" and "address" are used advisedly here, to allow for the possibility that the arguer may, after reflection, not wish to *rebut* an objection or *refute* an alternative position. In the process of arguing back-and-forth, the arguer in his or her supplementary arguments may take either of two basic directions. On the one hand, he or she may seek to *rebut* objections and *refute* alternative positions, defending his or her own conclusion and main argument, as originally stated. On the other hand, the arguer may wish to acknowledge the correctness or partial correctness of some objections and some alternative positions, and amend his or her argument and conclusion accordingly.

In building a case for a position, an arguer will typically have to do far more than simply state his or her main argument with its premises and conclusion(s), and present it to the audience. In addition, the arguer will have to deal with objections and alternatives by offering supplementary reply arguments and counter arguments. Instead of speaking, as Johnson did, of arguments being complete or not complete with reference to the two tiers, I prefer to speak of building a case for a position. In recognition of the difficulties of time and how many objections and alternatives the arguer should respond to, I suggest a distinction between making an *exhaustive* case for a position and making a good case for a position. Both require reference to a time. An arguer has put forward an *Exhaustive Case* for a position at a given time, t, for a position if and only if he or she has:

1. stated a cogent main argument for that position; and 2. attended to all objections that have been raised before time t to the main argument and position, and all alternatives to the position that have been stated before time t, and has represented them fairly and accurately; and 3. for every such objection either (a) rebutted that objection with a cogent supplementary reply argument or (b) offered cogent supplementary reply arguments amending his or her main argument and/or position in the light of the objection. and 4. for every such alternative position either (a) offered a cogent supplementary counter argument, refuting the position, or (b) on the basis of cogent supplementary arguments, revised his or her position in the light of that alternative.

The term "argumentation" has, I regret, been co-opted by other theorists, but I should like to call the main

argument plus the supplementary arguments the arguer's *argumentation*.[24]

We should note that even an arguer with an Exhaustive Case for his or her position at a given time may later come to have a case which is in some respects incomplete, because the process of back-and-forth arguing may go on indefinitely. Argumentation articulated and distilled at a given time, as a product of this process, may be surpassed at a later stage. Even an Exhaustive Case is not absolutely so, because its exhaustiveness is tied to a time. Thus, when a position requires argumentative support, that is to say when there is actual or possible controversy about it, we can never be sure that we have completely and definitively supported it by argumentation.

In the interests, which Johnson and I share, of developing realistic standards for the evaluation of arguments and argumentation, I would like to suggest that an arguer can make a Good Case for his or her position without making an Exhaustive Case for it. What is a Good Case? Like an Exhaustive Case, a Good Case requires that the arguer have a cogent main argument for his or her position. Like an Exhaustive Case, a Good Case requires that the arguer fairly and accurately represent all the objections and alternative positions that he or she considers, and respond to those by offering cogent supplementary arguments in which either there is rebuttal or refutation, or the original position is amended. Like the Exhaustive Case, the Good Case requires reference to a time, in acknowledgement of the fact that after a main argument and supplementary arguments have been put forward, more objections may be launched and fresh alternative positions may emerge. But *unlike* the Exhaustive Case, the Good Case does not require that the arguer respond to *all* objections and *all* alternative positions. In the interests of efficiency and realism, it allows for discrimination.

Thus we arrive at the problem of saying just which objections and alternative positions the arguer should address, in order to have a Good Case. There will be a need to *discriminate*. I cannot pretend to solve this problem, but I will try to say something about it in the hope that my preliminary remarks may be of some use. Somewhat different considerations arise, depending on whether we are dealing with *objections* or *alternatives*, so I shall discuss the two separately.

First, objections: how to discriminate? Which objections need to be attended to? Several possibilities for selection suggest themselves: objections that are easiest for the arguer to answer; objections that are most difficult for the arguer to answer; objections that are the most telling, in the sense of counting most significantly against the position and main argument; objections that are taken most seriously by the audience; objections that are put forward by the most influential or prestigious people. These factors may sometimes go together, obviously; for instance, objections put forward by the most prestigious people may, for that very reason, be those taken most seriously by an audience.

As a rough guide I suggest that to offer a Good Case for a position, an arguer must reply to all *dialectically significant* objections that have been raised against his or her position. What makes an objection *significant* in a dialectical sense? One factor is that the objection is logically serious; if it were to hold, the position would be refuted or the argument would be shown worthless. Another is that it is taken seriously, or seems, so far as the arguer can tell, to be taken seriously by the audience to whom the argument is addressed.[25] Even if an arguer thinks that an objection is entirely silly and frivolous, he or she should respond to it if the audience seems to find it important. We may hope that objections will tend to be taken seriously insofar as they are either 'telling' (if correct, they would undermine the main argument or position in a fundamental way) or are put forward by people who are influential, because of their relevant credentials.[26]

What about the selection of alternative positions? If we allow that an arguer need not attend to *all* of them, to

offer a Good Case, but we insist that an arguer does need to attend to *some* of them to offer a Good Case, then just which alternative positions should that arguer address? Underlying this question is a deeper theoretical question. Just how many alternative positions are there, on a given issue? From a purely theoretical point of view, the answer would seem to be that there is an indefinitely large number, possibly even an infinite number. Of course the answer to this question will depend on how we specify what counts as an alternative position. In the interests of brevity and practicality-and note that these two factors are often linked, a fact which will become important in our deliberations-I will not pursue this issue here. Given that the purpose of argument is rational persuasion, I will consider the alternative to a position to include only positions that are held, or might plausibly be held, by someone included in the audience to whom the Case is being put forward.

A position is alternative to that of the arguer if and only if it entails the contradictory of his or her position. That is, if the conclusion of an arguer's main argument is C, his position is C. Then any view held within the audience that entails not-C counts, for dialectical purposes, as an alternative to C. In this sense of "alternative position," there may be only a few alternatives to a position, sometimes only one. But there may well be a sufficient number of alternative positions that it is unrealistically onerous to expect an arguer to address all of them. In most contexts, if he or she were to do so, no one would have the time or patience to follow the argumentation.

So we come back to the question: on what basis should a selection be made? To offer a Good Case, an arguer must address and respond to the *significant* alternative positions on the issue he is discussing. But what makes an alternative position *significant*? Again, various considerations suggest themselves: the intellectual integrity of the alternative; the ease or difficulty with which the arguer can address that alternative and respond to it; the extent to which the alternative position is held by members of the audience; and the prestige and influence, within the audience, of the people who adopt that alternative. All need to be considered in establishing significance.

An arguer may put forward a Good Case, at a given time, for his or her position without putting forward, at that time, an Exhaustive Case for it. The difference is that to offer an Exhaustive Case at a given time, the argument must address *all* objections that have been raised before that time, and *all* alternative positions held before that time, in his audience. By contrast, to offer a Good Case at a given time, the arguer need only address all the objections and alternatives that have been raised and are *significant* at that time. Saying what will count as significant and *why* is obviously difficult. Various factors need to be considered and weighed against each other.

Activity on the dialectical tier may extend indefinitely. There are likely to be objections to supplementary arguments and fresh alternative positions that emerge from discussion and debate. The arguer may amend his or her position in the light of criticism and consideration of alternatives. Others may amend their positions too. Thus arguing can go on forever, and new arguments and argumentation may be expected to emerge at any time. How acceptable is this consequence?

The implication of indefiniteness does not strike me as entirely unattractive. It links a dialectical conception of argument with fallibilism. Despite the appeal of the mathematical proof or the vision of the absolutely definitive argument, most or all of the issues worth arguing about cannot be definitively and absolutely settled, ever. Thus, the idea that the merits of a case for a position are not definitively settled at any point in time seems to me not unrealistic. Of those issues we argue about, there are few, if any, that we would see as definitively, finally, resolved-as settled forever because someone put forward a Good Case. Yet a major concern is that from a pedagogical point of view, this indefiniteness may seem exhausting, unattractive, and practical.

The ARG conditions for cogency and assessment at the logical tier already admit of indeterminacy, point to a need for reflection and judgment, and pose problems of application. Far more so do the conditions for evaluating

the success of argumentation at the dialectical tier. When we recall Deanna Kuhn's results, indicating that most people hold an epistemology implying that there is no point in following even a brief and simple argument, these consequences of introducing a dialectical tier seem disturbing and pedagogically impractical. Kuhn's work indicates a need to teach people to be aware of a distinction between their own thoughts and what reality is like, to think through alternative positions, and to consider objections to their own positions and arguments. But Kuhn's work also suggests that most people will be little disposed to accept the idea that arguing can-and in some cases should-go on indefinitely. Quite apart from patience, there is limited space and time for argument, even in contexts of academic discussion, such as conferences where one's paper is supposed to be only twenty minutes long.

To illustrate this point, and to avoid trying your patience today, I will now stop. Time is passing, discomfort may be setting in, and supplementary arguments to my supplementary arguments can be stated later.

Notes

1. See Trudy Govier, "What is a Good Argument?", *Metaphilosophy* 1992; Robert C. Pinto, "Logic, Epistemology and Argument Appraisal," and Derek Allen, "Assessing Arguments," both in Ralph H. Johnson and J.Anthony Blair (eds.), *New Essays in Informal Logic* Windsor: Informal Logic, 1994; and Ralph H. Johnson, *The Rise of Informal Logic* (Newport News, VA: Vale Press 1996), Chapters 5,6, 9 and 16, for pertinent discussions.

2. Ralph H. Johnson and J. Anthony Blair, *Logical Self-Defence* (Toronto: McGraw Hill-Ryerson) 1977.

3. No one need actually disagree, though this is most commonly the case. Argument may be used as a method of inquiry, to explore the reasons, or lines of justification that may be set forward to support beliefs that we hold. In this sort of case we envisage possible doubt or possible disagreement.

4. Johnson, *The Rise of Informal Logic* 111.

5. Johnson, *The Rise of Informal Logic* 264-265.

6. Discussed in Trudy Govier, *A Practical Study of Argument* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth 1996; fourth edition) 73 - 75; and in Trudy Govier, "What is a Good Argument?."

7. Johnson, *The Rise of Informal Logic* 265.

8. A number of feminist philosophers have criticized the practice of logic and critical thinking as being rigid, dogmatic, confrontational and unduly adversarial. (These views have been explored in many writings, including Jennifer Wheary and Robert H. Ennis, "Gender Bias in Critical Thinking: Continuing the Dialogue," a paper which was the basis of a talk given at the Fourth International Conference on Thinking, MIT, Boston, July, 1994 and also in Trudy Govier, "Non-adversarial Conceptions of Argument," in Frans H. van Eemeren, Rob Grootendorst, J. Anthony Blair, and Charles Willard (eds.) *Perspectives and Approaches* Volume I, Amsterdam: International Centre for the Study of Argumentation, 1995.) While I believe that one can employ the tools of logic and critical thinking without exhibiting these characteristics (which I, together with the feminist critics of the practice of logic and critical thinking would deem to be undesirable), I would acknowledge that some who

teach and practice the skills of argument are determined to achieve all-out intellectual victory and have exhibited some of the vices feminist philosophers have criticized. The idea that discussion can and should end, because one has "demonstrated" one's conclusion in (traditionally) sound argument would be a case in point.

9. Deanna Kuhn, *The Skills of Argument*. (New York: Cambridge University Press 1991).

10. Kuhn, *The Skills of Argument* 109-110. I have inserted the letters (a) and so on.

11. Kuhn, *The Skills of Argument* 175.

12. Kuhn, *The Skills of Argument* 183.

13. Kuhn, *The Skills of Argument* 187.

14. Kuhn, *The Skills of Argument* 196.

15. Kuhn's work strikes me as thorough and careful and it is well regarded. See, for instance, the review by Jonathan Baron in *Informal Logic* XIV, no. 1 (Winter 1992), 59 - 67. Johnson has claimed, in correspondence, that Kuhn's work is not about argument; rather, he believes, it is about explanation. I think Kuhn's subjects are being asked to put forward causal explanations of phenomena and to give evidence for and against causal claims. They are, in effect, being asked to give arguments for and against explanatory hypotheses. On my view, Kuhn's work is both about argument and about explanation.

16. Kuhn, *The Skills of Argument*, 201-2.

17. Kuhn, *The Skills of Argument*, Chapter 1.

18. Johnson, in correspondence, points out that philosophical tradition is somewhat contradictory on this point. The great philosophers do typically try to respond to objections and positions of others. Yet good arguments are described in textbooks as arguments which are sound in the traditional sense, making no reference to dialectical practice.

19. Johnson, correspondence, February, 1997.

20. One might argue that for each conclusion there is only one alternative position, and that is the logical contradictory of that conclusion. On this view, if I argue that Canada should not sell a CANDU reactor to China, the only "alternative position" is that Canada should sell the CANDU reactor to China. We can insist that logical space be bifurcated in this way. However, I do not think such a bifurcation of logical space usefully represents the dialectical space of various alternative positions which exist for most issues. (Compare Trudy Govier, "Are There Two Sides to Every Question?," in Trudy Govier (editor) *Selected Issues in Logic and Communication*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth 1988, 43 - 54.) I do not think a simple bifurcation would be Johnson's intent either, since he refers to alternative positions in the plural. Here, I assume that an elementary bifurcation can be broken down further. Consider the bifurcation: Canada should sell the CANDU reactor to China; Canada should not sell the CANDU reactor to China. Consider the affirmative; it can be divided much further. We should sell the reactor for political reasons; we should sell it because it is in our own economic self- interest; it is permissible to

sell it because it is the safest kind of reactor; we should sell it because if the Chinese do not use nuclear energy, they will use more coal and worsen the global warming situation; we should sell it because if we do not, someone else will sell them another kind of reactor ..... these all represent different positions . . . I would say that substantively and dialectically, these positions are sufficiently distinct from each other that they deserve to be differentiated. Analogously, if my position is that we should not sell the reactor because of the risk of lasting environmental damage as in Chernobyl, then my position is distinct from another negative position, for example, that we should not sell it because the Chinese government has a poor record on human rights.

21. I offer such examples in Chapter Six of *A Practical Study of Argument*. Fourth Edition.

22. Johnson does not want standards of that type. See, *The Rise of Informal Logic*, 263.

23. I assume that an infinite regress is undesirable and that for practical purposes, even an indefinitely long regress is rather undesirable. But realistically, I think that is what we are looking at.

24. I have in mind, of course, the pragma-dialectical theory promulgated so energetically by Frans van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst of the University of Amsterdam. They speak of "argumentation theory," whereas Canadian and American theorists, before the Dutch influence, tended to speak of "theory of argument." See, for instance, Frans H. van Eemeren, Rob Grootendorst and Francisca Snoeck Henkemans, editors, *Fundamentals of Argumentation Theory: A Handbook of Historical Backgrounds and Contemporary Developments*. Mahway, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates 1996, Chapter Ten. Despite this strong trend in theory of argument (or argumentation) circles, I do think there is some basis in English usage for restricting "argumentation" to refer to a whole case built up, with a main argument (premise-conclusion structure) and supplementary arguments.

25. A more 'objectivist' direction might be taken here. We might identify objections as significant in virtue of their logical credentials-the truth or acceptability of claims made, the cogency of arguments, the logical relationship between those objections and the main argument. This route could be attractive and might offer possibilities for simplification. I did not take it here because (a) I am trying to develop Johnson's view, in which the rationale for the dialectical tier is that the arguer, in offering an argument, is fundamentally and above all else trying to rationally persuade his or her audience that his or her position is correct and (b) what appears to be more objective might in practice turn out to be less objective because it would depend on the arguer's own personal judgment as to what was acceptable, true, valid, cogent, or logically significant; the arguer might very well be biased in his or her own favor. The more dialectical account may appear more subjective because of its deference to what people actually say and believe. But it is arguably less subjective, because it is inter-subjective. It requires the arguer to go outside himself or herself and attend to the views of other people.

26. One would hope that people are influential because they are in some sense expert or have credentials based on relevant factors, and suggesting that they would know better than others. (Though that is often not the case.) There is no guarantee that people influential in the audience are influential because of their intellectual credentials on the topic in question: people may be influential because they are well-liked, entertaining, media personalities, rich, powerful, or whatever. But we return to the fact that the context is dialectical That is the whole point of having the second tier. If the arguer wants to rationally persuade his audience, he or she will have to address those objections that are influential, for whatever reason.