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Progress Without Regress on the Dialectical Tier

James B. Freeman

Hunter College of The City University of New York

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Title: Progress Without Regress on the Dialectical Tier
Author: James B. Freeman
Commentary: H. V. Hansen

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I

In a series of publications,¹ Ralph Johnson has maintained that any discourse worthy of being called an argument contains not just reasons given to support some claim—the illative core of the argument—but replies to objections and alternative positions—the dialectical tier. A written or spoken argument, presented in the form of a text, should be properly understood as a product of a dialectical procedure, where a proponent puts forward a thesis and answers questions posed by a challenger. Argumentation begins when the challenger questions a statement put forward by the proponent. Given his reply, the challenger may ask further questions, to which the proponent may reply, this procedure possibly continuing through a number of exchanges. The aim of the proponent is to meet these questions of the challenger and ultimately to persuade her of the acceptability of the claim she initially challenged. This is his goal unless, of course, her questions reveal an inadequacy in the defensibility of his claim—at least as he is currently able to carry out that defense. Such a process or procedure would be incomplete, if the proponent left various questions of the challenger unanswered. The proponent would not have met his dialectical obligations (Blair and Johnson 1987, 54). In (1987), Blair and Johnson likewise see an argument as product as incomplete if "it does not engage the common, known objections to its conclusion and to the premises of arguments supporting it" (Blair and Johnson 1987, 54-55). The proponent still has dialectical obligations, even if there is no embodied challenger. His obligation is to answer the questions presenting these common, known objections, which he foresees the challenger would ask.

In (1992), Johnson highlights how this conception of argumentation leads to a two-leveled conception of argument.

Because we wish to persuade by reason, we recognize that the claim we are interested in must be supported by reasons. This first tier is then composed of the conclusion and the premises which support it. But one-tier is not enough. Rational agents recognize that other reasoners will have taken different positions, or will have a variety of objections to lodge against our position, and so we must provide a second tier—a dialectical tier—in which this wider context is addressed (Johnson 1992, 155).

The proponent puts forward his argument against a dialectical background of opposing points of view, maintained even in the light of the evidence he puts forward on the first tier. We may presume that members of the audience have heard at least some of these objections. To rationally persuade the audience, the proponent must address these objections. How well an arguer reasons concerning alternative positions and objections constitutes part of the evaluative criteria for

argumentation.

II

In (1999), Trudy Govier presents nine objections against Johnson's two-tiered conception of argument, regarding the last two as raising significant problems. The first of these claims that Johnson's position leads to an infinite regress. When, after presenting the initial argument constituting the illative core, one replies to an objection or addresses an alternative position, what is one doing but presenting a supplementary argument? Does this argument consist only of an illative core or does it, in turn, include a dialectical tier? But if an argument, then on Johnson's definition, it would seem to itself involve a dialectical tier. But what about the replies to objections and responses to alternative positions included in this dialectical tier? They would be supplementary arguments to the supplementary arguments. But what about the dialectical tier of *these* arguments? As is evident, we are caught in an infinite regress. "On this interpretation, the dialectical tier would not be a tier, it would be a staircase that mounts forever" (Govier 1999, 233).

Govier's second objection concerns just how many objections and alternatives need to be considered on the dialectical tier. Do we have to consider all or only some? This should pose a dilemma for Johnson. Requiring considering all objections and alternative positions would seem to pose too stringent a burden on the proponent. "For many arguments and claims, there will be a great many of these [objections and alternatives], new ones being formulated all the time" (Govier 1999, 216). But if replies to only some objections and alternatives are needed, how do we discriminate between those which need a reply and those which do not? What grounds let us identify those requiring a reply? "Articulating such grounds will be no easy matter" (Govier 1999, 218).

Govier entertains two approaches to avoiding the regress problem. The restrictive approach requires that only alternatives and objections to the main claim and the arguments given for it, objections against the illative core, are necessary. This would stop the regress, but "It seems arbitrary and *ad hoc* to demand that an arguer's initial argument must be supported by a dialectical tier, yet claim that the supplementary arguments need no such further support" (Govier 1999, 215). "Though supplementary, a supplementary argument *is* nevertheless an argument" (Govier 1999, 234). The conclusion of a supplementary argument may be controversial and the argument open to objections. Exploring these issues may be necessary to developing an overall adequate case for the conclusion.

The other approach is the Benign Interpretation. Here we may ascend the dialectical staircase, replying to alternatives to the conclusions of arguments on the (first stair of) the dialectical tier and objections to these arguments, and ascending to further steps, when challenges are presented. Arguments are open to challenge. By responding and thus developing an argument, we get a stronger, better argument. But, according to the Benign Interpretation, one does not have to have responded to all challenges (and challenges to responses to challenges) *ad infinitum*—the completed infinite regress—to give an argument. "According to the Benign Interpretation, the argument goes forward, and can go forward indefinitely. But that is not to say that it required an infinite ascent before it could be formulated at all" (Govier 1999, 235).

Govier, however, is not sanguine about the Benign Interpretation. It seems to abandon Johnson's position that to give an argument, one must include a dialectical tier. On the Benign Interpretation, as an argument exfoliates, the subarguments presenting replies to the most

recently pressed challenges will not have a dialectical tier. Govier returns to the question— Must the supplementary arguments be dialectically adequate? To say no is to endorse the *ad hoc* restrictive account. To say yes is to be caught in a vicious infinite regress. Govier sees this problem as intractable.

Addressing the discrimination problem, Govier indicates that she favors requiring a proponent to respond to all alternatives to the conclusion. She believes that in general a proponent will be able to discharge this objection. Several alternative positions may share a common presupposition and thus may be grouped together. By arguing against the presupposition one addresses and argues against all the alternatives which presuppose it. Govier comments that in light of such grouping,

There seemed to be between four and eight alternative positions on several issues with which I was familiar and on which I did a preliminary analysis. If this result is at all representative, it seems tolerable to demand that an adequate dialectical tier require a response to all the alternative positions (Govier 1999, 228).

Govier sees intractable problems in trying to discriminate those alternatives which need reply from those which do not. Two approaches, the epistemic—"stipulating that only intellectually credible alternatives require a response," (Govier 1999, 228) and the pragmatic approach, "stipulating that only the alternatives prominent in the audience require a response," (Govier 1999, 228) are possible. Govier finds the epistemic approach flawed because she believes deeming an alternative intellectually credible is the subjective decision of the proponent. The pragmatic approach will be unfeasible if the audience is unknown and inadequate if the audience is slack in its standards of intellectual credibility.

Govier regards an objection as itself involving an argument—a premise/conclusion structure. "Implicitly, if not explicitly, one who raises an objection is either saying 'O; therefore there is something wrong with the conclusion C' or 'O; therefore there is something wrong with the argument put forward in support of C'" (Govier 1999, 229). She categorizes five types of objections, those raised against the conclusion, the argument supporting the conclusion, the arguer, the arguer's qualifications, personal characteristics, or circumstances, and the expression of the argument or conclusion (Govier 1999, 231). Furthermore

Within each category, we may distinguish between strong objections and mild objections. Strong objections allege that the defective feature indicates that the case is false, wrong, incorrect....Mild objections raise evidence suggesting the conclusion may be false or may need qualification, or the argument may be flawed (Govier 1999, 231).

Hence, there are ten different categories of objections and for most arguments a myriad of objections distributed over these categories. We must face the discrimination problem for objections. If we say that those objections which would show the argument or conclusion false or unacceptable need only be addressed, we then need consider only strong objections. Furthermore, by putting forward a claim and arguing for it, the proponent has committed himself to the claim's being true or acceptable and the argument for it cogent (Govier 1999, 232). Hence, strong objections against the claim or against the argument are especially crucial and all such objections should be addressed. Govier is willing to put this forward at least tentatively as a response to the discrimination problem.

III

I believe that Govier's Benign Interpretation is closer to solving the regress problem than she gives it credit. I believe it also provides a framework for solving the discrimination problem. We must first ask whether Govier has represented Johnson's position accurately. In particular, when he says that arguments must contain a dialectical tier, replies to objections and alternatives, has he committed himself to saying that these replies must be *arguments* in their own right, able to stand on their own as separate arguments and thus themselves possessing dialectical tiers? In (1996), Johnson formulates two dialectical criteria this way:

- (D1) How well does the argument *address itself* to alternative positions?
- (D2) How well does the argument *deal with* objections?

(Johnson 1996, 265, italics added) What does it mean for an argument to "address itself" or "deal with" a certain issue? Johnson is obviously speaking informally or intuitively here. But just because of that, we cannot with confidence impute to him the claim that he means that a dialectically adequate argument must contain subarguments—each with its own dialectical tier—in which these alternatives are refuted and objections rebutted.

Again, in (1996) Johnson puts his point this way:

We have seen that the practice of argumentation presupposes a background of controversy....Those who know anything about the issue are aware that there are still others who see things differently. They have objections to the arguer's premises....If the arguer wishes to persuade rationally, the arguer is obligated *to take account of* these objections, these opposing points of view....And so the process of argumentation must have a second tier in which objections and criticisms are *dealt with*(Johnson 1996, 106-107, italics added).

Again, in requiring the arguer to take account of, deal with objections and criticisms, Johnson is not in any obvious way saying that the arguer must produce arguments including in themselves a dialectical tier. In (2000a), Johnson uses the same words to characterize his view:

If the arguer wishes to persuade Others rationally, the arguer is obligated to take account of...objections and opposing points of view....Thus, the process of argumentation must include a second—dialectical—tier in which objections and criticisms are dealt with (Johnson 2000a, 160).

He also speaks of an argument as possessing "a dialectical tier in which the arguer *discharges his dialectical obligations*" (Johnson 2000a, 168). Again, I see no evidence that Johnson is committed to the view that the only way one can discharge one's dialectical obligations is through producing an argument which itself has a dialectical tier.

Given what Johnson has said in characterizing both the illative core and the dialectical tier, we can seriously question whether this is his position. For in the illative core, the arguer gives reasons to support his claim which are open to criteria of logical assessment, e.g. acceptability, relevance and ground adequacy. In dealing then with an alternative position or an

objection, would it not be sufficient to bring reasons against that alternative position or rebutting those objections, all things being equal? Only if all things were not equal, if there were some straightforwardly recognized objection to counting the reasons given on the dialectical tier as good reasons, would there be a need to ascend to a further level. Hence we can question whether Govier's infinite regress problem is a genuine problem for Johnson's position or whether it is a problem for Govier's misreading of Johnson's position, where she has simply read into his view the claim that the reasoning presented at the dialectical tier must constitute an argument in its own right, with a dialectical tier of its own.

Apart from the proper exegesis of Johnson's texts, we may ask whether in some circumstances simply presenting reasons for some claim, without entertaining dialectical considerations, may properly support that claim, render it acceptable to the challenger, justifying her belief in that claim. This is a more basic question for assessing whether the dialectical tier involves us in an infinite regress. Let us ask an even more basic question. Must every statement put forward by a proponent to a challenger be justified by reasons, by premises explicitly given to support that claim or conclusion? The answer is clearly negative, for otherwise we *would* have an infinite regress.² The proponent's argument will have basic premises. We hold that such basic premises will be acceptable for the challenger just in case given the current evidence of which she is aware, there is a presumption for such premises from her point of view. Stating the conditions under which there is such a presumption is beyond the scope of this paper.³

Now consider this very simple case. Suppose our proponent seeks to rationally persuade the challenger of the truth of some claim *C*. Suppose he puts forward the following two premises:

P

When *P* obtains, other things being equal, *C* obtains also.

Suppose there is a presumption for both of these premises from the challenger's point of view. For her, they are acceptable basic premises. Suppose the challenger is aware of conditions R_1, \dots, R_n , each logically possible, such that if any one of them obtained, other things would *not* be equal. But suppose from the challenger's point of view none of R_1, \dots, R_n are real possibilities. That is, suppose from her point of view that there is a presumption for $\sim R_1, \dots, \sim R_n$, i.e. there is a presumption for saying that other things *are* equal. Then why from her point of view should there not be a presumption for *C* in light of the proponent's reasons taken together? Hence, if on the dialectical tier one were either refuting an alternative position or rebutting an objection, it is conceptually possible that a proponent could rationally dissuade a challenger of the alternative or objection by presenting reasons against it, where there would be no reason to ascend to some further dialectical tier. The illative core argumentation at the dialectical tier would be sufficient, at least in this case, to render discounting the alternative or objections acceptable for the challenger.

Of course, all things might not be equal. The challenger may have legitimate questions about whether some R_i obtains. In that case, the argumentation would need to be extended. But this is in line with the Benign Interpretation, which sees argumentation as indefinitely extendable.

IV

What may we say concerning the discrimination problem? What objections necessitate replies? Johnson has already indicated that in his view a proponent need not reply to all logically possible objections. "Clearly, the arguer cannot be expected to deal with all of the possible and-or

actual objections. So how does one specify which ones?" (Johnson 2000a, 166) In (1992) he speaks of the proponent's empirical dialectical situation. Competing alternative positions have been put forward along with various objections to his argument. (See Johnson 1992, 156.) The challenger will have heard of them and as proponent he needs to address them. In (1996) Johnson speaks of defusing well-known objections. (See 1996, 111.)

In (2000a), Johnson captures this in the notion of addressing The Standard Objections. Not only the proponent, but "anyone familiar with the issue will also know the variety of positions and will have heard the various objections and criticisms, some of which will have achieved greater salience than others" (Johnson 2000a, 332). The Standard Objections are precisely these salient objections. Johnson also feels that the proponent must address any additional objections he knows the audience expects to be dealt with or believes his position can handle (Johnson 2000a, 332). But he is not totally satisfied with this characterization, since it is tied too closely with audiences and their vicissitudes.

In (2000b), Johnson approaches the discrimination problem by distinguishing a proponent's dialectical obligations at the construction and revision stages of his argument. At the construction phase, the proponent is obligated to respond to the Standard Objections, together with any further objections—at least serious objections—he might anticipate, even if they are not generally recognized and thus not included in the Standard Objections. At the revision stage, he is obligated to respond to the objections actually brought against his argument as constructed. Should several challengers in effect present the same objection, the proponent need make only one reply. Further, Johnson allows that the proponent has a *prima facie* objection to respond just to the serious objections. This for Johnson means that first "the objection must itself take the form of an argument," (Johnson 2000b, 9) i.e. it must itself be supported by an argument. Secondly the objection "creates the appearance that the argument is false, wrong, or incorrect" (Johnson 2000b, 10). Further should the objections be directed against a premise of the argument, the premise must be crucial (Johnson 2000b, 10-11). This, Johnson opines, may cut the class of actually presented objections down to a manageable size for response.

Johnson sees his response to the discrimination problem raising a host of open questions, including just what is an objection and just what makes an objection strong or serious. What types of objections are there and how may we characterize those which are Standard? Likewise, how may we characterize dialectical obligations or dialectical adequacy? (Johnson 2000b, 15-16) I believe that Rescher's account of formal disputation in (1977) sheds light on a number of these questions, indeed providing us with at least a partial approach to the discrimination problem.

First, formal disputation distinguishes certain types of objections a challenger could bring forward. An exchange begins when the proponent categorically asserts some claim or thesis.

!C "C is the case."

Only the proponent may make categorical assertions. To this move, the challenger may respond with either a cautious denial

†~C "~C is the case for all that you have shown." "Please show C." "Why C?"

or with a provisoed denial

~C/P and †P "*Ceteris paribus*, when P is the case, ~C is the case and P is the case for all that you have shown."

Responding to a cautious denial initiates the development of the illative core of the argument. A provisoed denial clearly contains an objection (to the conclusion of the argument) and the response to it would take us to the dialectical tier.

We may consider both cautious and provisoed denials as objections to the categorically

asserted C. Notice that these objections are distinctly different from what Johnson and Govier might characterize as a strong objection. First, the challenger does not assert them, does not claim that $\sim C$ or that P, but simply raises the question of why these should not be the case. Hence, given the standard view that the burden of proof lies with the one making an assertion, it would seem that the challenger is under no obligation to defend $\sim C$ or P with argument or supporting reasons. Having given an argument for an objection, then, is not a necessary condition for that objection to merit response from the proponent.

Would a proponent always be obligated to reply to the challenger's cautious denial of his initial thesis? I believe that an interplay of dialectical and epistemic considerations enter here and in connection with the other objections a challenger might bring forward. Since the proponent is asserting C, he standardly has a *prima facie* dialectical obligation to defend C. This obligation could be defeated on various epistemic grounds. Suppose C is a matter of common knowledge or by asserting C, the proponent is giving personal testimony. Suppose there is no reason to question C as a matter of received wisdom or to question either the proponent's veracity in asserting C or his capacity to observe that to which he is testifying. In other words, let us suppose that there is an epistemic presumption in favor of C. Then unless the challenger herself can argue otherwise, her cautious denial would be trivial or quibbling and the proponent not under an obligation to respond.

Turning to provisoed denials, Rescher makes the simplifying assumption that the statements of the form X/Y which challenger and also proponent put forward in the course of a disputation are always correct. Obviously in a complete account of which objections a proponent must meet, this assumption would be given up. But we retain it for the sake of our discussion here. Hence, the proponent cannot respond by asserting

! $\sim(\sim C/P)$

When does a proponent have to respond to a provisoed denial? Again, I believe we should appeal to questions of epistemic presumption. Suppose there is such a presumption for $\sim P$. Consider this exchange:

proponent	challenger
! The accused is guilty of stealing the money.	<i>Ceteris paribus</i> , the accused is not guilty, when the witnesses are lying and † the witnesses are lying

Suppose all parties to this disputation know that the witnesses testified under oath. There is thus a presumption that they are *not* lying. Unless the challenger can show that they are, her provisoed denial is dialectically and epistemically ineffective. Why would the proponent have an obligation to meet it?

On the other hand, suppose there is no presumption for $\sim P$. This does not mean that there is a presumption for P, but P at least is a realistic (and not merely an abstractly logical) possibility. It would seem that in this circumstance, the proponent needs to reply. This need would be more acute, should there *be* a presumption for P. Notice that the proviso in this denial might be an alternative to the claim C. For example, if C asserted that an antecedent circumstance instancing some relevant variable caused a phenomenon, P might assert that an antecedent instance of some other relevant variable was the cause.

proponent	challenger
! The plane crash was caused by a bomb exploding on board.	<i>Ceteris paribus</i> , the plane crash was not caused by a bomb exploding on board, when it was caused by wind sheer and † the crash was caused by wind sheer.

Should the instance of the alternative causal variable be a realistic possibility, should there not be a presumption that it does not hold, then the burden would be on the proponent to respond to this provisoed denial. This indicates that structurally, alternative positions are a special kind of objection. Hence we may discuss the discrimination problem just with respect to objections.

Let us assume that the challenger's objection legitimately shows the burden of proof to be on the proponent. If to the proponent's categorical assertion !C, the challenger has responded with a cautious denial †~C, the proponent is required to respond with a provisoed counterassertion C/P & !P.

The challenger in turn may question either conjunct of this response. A challenge to the categorical assertion !P will be either a cautious or a provisoed denial, just as with the categorically asserted initial claim C. A provisoed denial will moot an objection and the issue of whether the proponent needs to meet it is determined by the same questions of presumption and burden of proof which we considered with provisoed denials to the initial claim C.

A challenge to the *ceteris paribus* clause C/P will take the form of a *weak distinction*: ~C/(P&Q) & †(P & Q).

(Compare Rescher 1977, 12.) The challenger in effect is saying

All things being equal, C when P. But for all you have shown all things are not equal, P holds together with Q, and *ceteris paribus* ~C when P & Q.

All things being equal, if the witness testifies that she saw the accused enter the house, then the accused entered the house. But

All things being equal, if the witness testified that she saw the accused enter the house but, not wearing her glasses at the time of observation, she misobserved, then the accused did not enter the house. For all you have shown, although the witness testified that she saw the accused enter the house, she was not wearing her glasses at that time.

Here the qualification Q is an objection and a response from the proponent would take us to the dialectical tier. Again, whether a response is needed depends on whether there is a presumption for ~Q. If there is, then there is no sufficient reason to think that Q is either true or a realistic possibility. Ordinarily, people wear their glasses or will testify under oath only to what they saw when capable of making a reliable observation, e.g. when wearing their glasses. The proponent need not respond. On the other hand, if there is no presumption for ~Q, if Q is a realistic possibility or if there is actually a presumption that Q holds, then the proponent needs to respond if his assertion that P is to count as a rationally persuasive reason for C.

This last remark highlights that the *ceteris paribus* clause enumerates the principle of the inference from P to C. To use Toulmin's terminology, it expresses the warrant of that move in propositional form. The distinction Q then presents a rebuttal. An objection in the form of a weak distinction to the *ceteris paribus* clause C/P then in effect is an objection to the argument from

C/P & !P to !C. Given our simplifying assumption that proponent and challenger are correct in their recognition of *ceteris paribus* inferences, objections to inferences will be rebuttals. The question of whether or not a proponent needs to respond to an objection to an inferential move in an argument is the same as the question of whether or not the proponent needs to respond to a weak distinction.

If the challenger responds to the proponent's categorical assertion !C with a provisoed denial,

$\sim C/P \ \& \ \dagger P,$

we have already discussed when the proponent has a dialectical obligation to respond to the objection $\dagger P$. Given that obligation, the proponent may respond by addressing either conjunct. He may respond to $\dagger P$ with a categorical counterassertion

$! \sim P$

or with a provisoed counterassertion

$\sim P/Q \ \& \ !Q.$

(See Rescher 1977, 10.) He may respond to $\sim C/P$ with a strong distinction

$C/(P \ \& \ Q) \ \& \ !(P \ \& \ Q).$

(See Rescher 1977, 15.) It is open to the challenger in turn to question whichever of these responses the proponent makes. Questioning the categorical or provisoed counterassertion introduces no new considerations. Challenging a strong distinction may involve questioning the categorical assertion either through a cautions denial,

$\dagger \sim (P \ \& \ Q),$

a provisoed denial

$\sim (P \ \& \ Q)/R \ \& \ \dagger R,$

or questioning the *ceteris paribus* clause through a weak distinction

$\sim C/(P \ \& \ Q \ \& \ R) \ \& \ \dagger (P \ \& \ Q \ \& \ R).$

(See Rescher 1977, 15.) Here again, R counts as a further objection, but the question of whether it engenders a dialectical response clearly involves the questions of presumption and burden of proof which we have already discussed.

How may a proponent reply to a weak distinction, something in general of the form

$\sim X/(Y \ \& \ Z) \ \& \ \dagger (Y \ \& \ Z),$

where X/Y is an accepted *ceteris paribus* principle? As with a challenger's reply to a strong distinction, there are three possibilities—a categorical counterassertion to $\dagger (Y \ \& \ Z),$

$! \sim (Y \ \& \ Z),$

a provisoed counterassertion,

$\sim (Y \ \& \ Z)/W \ \& \ !W,$

or a strong distinction,

$X/(Y \ \& \ Z \ \& \ W) \ \& \ !(Y \ \& \ Z \ \& \ W)$

(See Rescher 1977, 15.)

Given that these are the moves in a formal disputation, we have indicated for those cases where the challenger introduces an objection, just when there is a burden on the proponent to meet that objection. The discrimination problem for objections raised within the context of a formal disputation—at least where *ceteris paribus* considerations are not directly questioned but challenged only through distinctions—thus reduces to the question of determining whether there is a presumption that a given objection does not hold or with whether the burden of proof is on the proponent to give reasons why it does not hold. We can meet the discrimination problem through an account of presumption and burden of proof. That indeed is not a trivial undertaking,⁴

which we cannot present here. It is sufficient if our argument has connected the two issues.

By investigating the discrimination problem through the objections which may be introduced in formal dialectic, we also address the infinite regress problem. At each stage, there are a small number of moves open to proponent or challenger—whosever turn it is to contribute at that stage—and each of these moves can be completed in a finite number of steps. Although continuation of the disputation is always in principle possible, there is nothing requiring that to complete a given stage one must have completed an infinite number of stages. Govier's insights behind the Benign Interpretation prove correct.

Clearly, much further work remains, for our discussion has left many open questions. In what way may formal disputation serve as a general template into which we can cast the argumentative process of which arguments are the products? In particular, can we accommodate within formal dialectic all the sorts of objections Johnson and Govier envisage? We have already seen how alternative positions can be included within the class of objections expressible by provisoed denials to the proponent's initial claim or conclusion. What may we say to objections to the reasoning—in the first instance to the illative core of the argument the proponent is presenting to defend his initial claim? These could be objections either to one or more of the premises the proponent brings forward or to the inferential moves from the premises to the conclusion. Concerning objections to premises, Johnson observes that "some...will be housed in alternative positions, though not all need be" (Johnson 1996, 265). But should an objection to a premise be housed in an alternative position, it would seem that such an objection would be expressible in formal dialectic as a provisoed denial of that premise

$$\sim P_i/O \ \& \ \dagger O$$

It would seem that this form would be appropriate given any consideration O constituting a *ceteris paribus* reason for $\sim P_i$ and not merely just for positions alternative to P_i . Where the challenger introduces no such consideration O , then it would seem that the challenger is simply questioning P_i , in effect indicating there is no presumption for P_i . If so, the proponent now has a burden of proof to defend it.

Suppose the challenger would want to object to P_i by claiming that P_i is outright false—it being generally recognized that P_i is outright false? Although the challenger cannot make a categorical assertion

$$!\sim P_i,$$

she may still issue a challenge

$$\dagger \sim P_i.$$

We can look at this as a limiting case from the challenger's point of view of indicating that the burden of proof is on the proponent to defend P_i . Not only is the burden of proof on the proponent to support P_i , it is a burden he cannot discharge.

It might seem that many times an objection to an illative move from one or more premises to a conclusion would take the form of granting that all things being equal, given the premises we may expect the conclusion holds, but all things may *not* be equal in this case, due to some defeater. But such an objection presents a weak distinction

$$\sim C/(P_1 \ \& \ \dots \ \& \ P_k \ \& \ R) \ \& \ \dagger (P_1 \ \& \ \dots \ \& \ P_k \ \& \ R)$$

Again although the challenger may not categorically assert that R , should accepting that R in general be recognized as justified, her weak distinction will raise a burden of proof which the proponent may find hard, if not impossible, to discharge.

That statements cautiously asserted or cautiously denied may be matters of common recognition by those familiar with the issue brings us to Johnson's notion of the Standard

Objections, objections to the position being argued which are generally recognized by those conversant with the issue. If the objection presents a *prima facie* reason to reject the conclusion or a premise, structurally they are provisoed denials. If it presents a rebuttal to a *ceteris paribus* illative move, structurally it is a weak distinction. Now the picture of a formal disputation is of a proponent and challenger carrying out their regulated procedure before an adjudicator or determiner. In deciding who "won" a formal disputation, the determiner will apply both formal (e.g. any reasoning or questioning in a circle?) and material criteria—did the challenger drive the proponent into implausible commitments? (Rescher 1977, 23) As Rescher points out, the proponent's goal in a formal disputation is to give plausible reasons for propositions he categorically asserts, in particular if they are challenged. By contrast, the challenger seeks to drive the proponent to make implausible categorical assertions. "The proponent is ever striving to lead his case towards the secure ground of plausible contentions and the opponent is ever seeking to prevent his reaching any such safe harbor" (Rescher 1977, 24).

Surely, one would expect that should an objection to a position become standard, finding plausible replies would not be trivial. Hence a challenger who failed to raise these objections would be distinctly deficient in her contribution to a formal disputation. Now if a logically good argument may be regarded as modelled on the product of a good formal disputation as Rescher suggests—"In a well-conducted disputation, one will always be able to extract by analysis of the exchanges of the pro-con tabulation a good...argument—a unilateral line of reasoning in support of a thesis" (Rescher 1977, 23-24)—then good arguments will reflect that they are products of formal disputations where the challenger has raised the Standard Objections.

Besides objections to the illative core challenging either a premise or an illative move, Johnson indicates that there may be challenges to an unstated premise, to an implication or consequence, or to a proposition as being unclearly formulated (Johnson 2000a, 328). Clearly, a challenge to an unstated premise could be accommodated within formal dialectic should there be a move open to the challenger to ask the proponent whether he were committed to that premise. His affirmative answer is tantamount to his categorically asserting the premise. Rescher indicates that a challenger may question not just the proponent's categorical assertions but any logical, deductive consequences of any non-empty subset of those assertions. Thus formal disputation accommodates challenges to the logical implications of categorically asserted claims.

We may view problems of meaning as preliminary to argument evaluation. (Questions of acceptability, relevance, and ground adequacy all presuppose that we understand the propositions asserted.) If a proposition within an argument is unclear, we really do not know what argument is before us. Formal disputation may be thought of as a procedure making the simplifying assumption that the contributions of the proponent will always be clearly formulated. As such it would not handle objections of the last sort Johnson mentions. On the other hand, we can think of no *prima facie* reason against expanding the rules of formal dialectic to permit a challenger to ask a proponent what he means.

proponent	challenger
!X	What X (What do you mean by X?)
!X'	

Alternatively, the challenger might spell out two (or more) disambiguations of X:

proponent	challenger
!X !X ₁	Which (X ₁ ∨ X ₂)

We must leave as an open question the extent to which such moves may be incorporated into formal dialectic. Hence, there seems to be in principle no problem in formal dialectic handling these additional types of objections Johnson envisages.

May formal disputation also accommodate the types of objections Govier classifies? In (1999) she tentatively proposes distinguishing objections raised against the conclusion, the argument in support of that conclusion, the arguer, the situation (qualifications, personal characteristics, and circumstances) of the arguer, and the way the argument and its conclusion are expressed (Govier 1999, 231). Clearly, our discussion has shown in what ways formal disputation may handle objections of the first two types. Govier speculates that an arguer may have a dialectical obligation to respond just to strong objections of just these two types. Can formal disputation express objections of the remaining three types? It is not clear how to answer this question for it is not clear what these types of objection amount to,⁵ and Govier does not illustrate them. Objections against the arguer or his or her situation sound like *ad hominem* objections, which have standardly been regarded as fallacious. Recent work in informal logic by Govier and Walton has argued that instances of patterns of reasoning standardly thought uniformly fallacious need not be. Whether any such instances of *ad hominem* patterns would constitute further types of objections and whether formal dialectic could accommodate them raise issues which we cannot pursue further here.

If an objection against the way an argument is expressed raises questions of meaning, we have already indicated how formal dialectic might be expanded to handle such an objection. If the objection does not concern meaning, it is again unclear what Govier means at this point. Are such objections the same as what Johnson calls criticisms? If so, what obligations the proponent has to reply to them have not been worked out. In light of these considerations, we claim that the burden would be on the objector to show that Govier has identified objections which formal disputation must accommodate.

Besides determining the extent to which formal dialectic needs to accommodate the types of objections Johnson and Govier envision, even more general questions arise. What complications would allowing direct challenges to *ceteris paribus* conditions introduce? How may we allow the challenger to accept the burden of proof to establish a presumption for some objection O, especially when there is a presumption for $\sim O$? How then may the proponent be required to respond? May we continue to use this template if we broaden our possibilities for the illative moves beyond those involving *ceteris paribus* warrants? Indeed, what would it mean to have a comprehensive account of illative moves? We must leave all of these questions open. We have attempted to show how we may identify objections which require answers and how these answers do not require completing an infinite regress. Our discussion in this paper suffices then if we have shown how there may be progress without regress on the dialectical tier.

Notes

1. See Blair and Johnson (1987, 45-48), Johnson (1992, 155-56), (1996, 103-12, 262-65), (2000a, 159-75).
2. This assumes, of course, that the argument is not circular. But we set aside such a possibility since we regard such arguments as clearly fallacious.
3. Indeed, developing these conditions in our view requires an entire monograph in its own right. We have presented our answer in (200x).
4. Working out when there is a presumption for a basic premise is the central issue of our (200x).
5. Johnson makes this point about the third and fourth types of objections. See (2000b, 9).

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