THE NORMATIVITY OF ARGUMENTATION AS A JUSTIFICATORY AND AS A PERSUASIVE DEVICE

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1. The concept of argument goodness.

In this paper I will be concerned with a conception of argument goodness as ‘justification of the claim’, where ‘justification’ will mean ‘epistemic justification’, in the sense of the degree of support that an argument is able to confer to its claim. The condition of epistemic justification is somehow implicit in both of the two main current theories of argument evaluation, namely, Pragma-dialectics and the Canadian Informal Logic\(^1\) theory. Pragma-dialecticians’ 8th rule says that “in his argumentation, a party may only use arguments that are logically valid or capable of being validated by making explicit one or more unexpressed premises”, that is, they require validity, as a mechanism that preserves truth. And this kind of epistemic warranty is also present in Informal Logic’s criterion of “sufficient premise support for the conclusion”.

But Pragma-dialectics and Informal Logic also include some extra-conditions of argument goodness that try to give an account of the idea that arguments do not only have justificatory powers, but also persuasive powers. One of my goals in this paper is to show that these “extra-conditions” of argument goodness purport a mixture of these two aspects of argumentation, namely, its justificatory and its persuasive powers, which results in a difficulty in distinguishing between explaining and justifying a belief.

Then, my second goal will be to propose an alternative model of evaluation that it is able to give an account of the persuasive and justificatory powers of argument, and yet, it can preserve the distinction between explaining and justifying a belief. Additionally, this model can also make sense of the normativity involved in the persuasive power of arguments.

On the other hand, one of the most emblematic ideas about argumentation is its relationship with reasoning. Traditionally, the relationship between reasoning and arguing has been conceived as the relationship between a mental process and its linguistic expression. For example, it is common to read that the first concern of Logic is to deal with the normativity underlying reasoning, as the mental processes of drawing conclusions inferentially\(^2\). But in Logic books we are not faced with mental processes, but with arguments, which are supposed to be their expression. By clarifying the relationship

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\(^1\) By ‘Canadian Informal Logic’ I refer to the works of Trudy Govier, J. Anthony Blair and Ralph H. Johnson that constitute the, so called, ARG Theory of argument evaluation. ARG is an acronym by Govier that makes reference to the three main criteria of argument evaluation of this theory: Acceptability, Relevance and Good ground.

between these two aspects of the activity of arguing, namely, its ability to justify our beliefs and its ability to produce beliefs, I wish to raise the question of how far is it adequate to assimilate reasoning with argumentation. In this paper, I will limit myself to stressing that reasoning is only related to the persuasive power of argumentation. But, precisely, this is the aspect of argumentation that books on Formal Logic do not care about. So, as a corollary, I will add a few words concerning the possibilities of Formal Logic to constitute a normative theory of reasoning.

2. The persuasive and the justificatory powers of arguments

In order to make clear the distinction between the persuasive and the justificatory powers of argumentation, let me start by drawing the two following alignments:

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<th>Justification</th>
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One of the key features of argumentation, as opposed to other types of communication, is that when we argue, we do not merely try to communicate our beliefs, but we also try to induce beliefs. But it is also a feature of argumentation that the way we try to induce beliefs is by offering reasons that make these beliefs plausible. This is tantamount to providing justification for them, at least, in the above sense of ‘justification’, whether or not we agree that epistemic justification is the proper normative output of argumentation. In any case, argumentation seems to be constitutively related to justification because in order to determine what counts as a linguistic act of arguing, we can hardly avoid any appeal to the idea of justifying.

On the other hand, our everyday concept of argumentation makes it necessary as well to give an account of the idea that arguments are the explicit form of the type of reasoning process by means of which we make up our minds about what is the case. Thus, argumentation is not only related to justification, but also to the production of beliefs. How, then, should we understand these two aspects?

Let us briefly consider the sort of mental process by means of which we make up our minds about what is the case, given certain considerations. This mental process consists in taking those considerations as reasons generating a belief. I say “generating a belief” because I am not pointing to the mental process of weighting up the value of certain reasons for a given conclusion, but rather to the mental process of coming to believe a proposition because of certain reasons. In particular, such mental processes are constitutive of the power of arguments to generate beliefs.

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3 If we consider that the contents of my beliefs are whatever I think it is the case, the we give a trivial sense to the idea that values and rules can also be ‘the case’: I believe that this picture is beautiful, that certain policy or decision is unfair, that I should do such and such, etc. This consideration will be important in order to avoid criticisms to the view that to argue is to try to increase the plausibility of a claim: it is true that we do not only argue about facts, but also about what should we do or whether something has a certain value, etc. But we can conceive to be plausible as to be close to the case, in the above sense, rather than close to the facts.
This type of mental processes can be distinguished from other mental processes eventually involved in argumentation, like the production of an argument, the recognition of an argument, and particularly, the evaluation of an argument as good or bad. Production, recognition and evaluation do not necessarily require intentional attitudes: there exist rather simple computational mechanisms that, by means of instructions, are able to produce, detect or evaluate at least some types of arguments.

Accordingly, I would adopt Robert C. Pinto’s claim that arguments are “invitations to inference” (Pinto, 2001: 36) in the following way: arguments are the ground on which this invitation is brought about and by which it is conducted. Yet, there is a sense of ‘inference’ that must be ruled out from this conception.

Let us call ‘reasoning’ the process of making up our minds about what is the case, given certain considerations. Pinto is reluctant to call this process ‘reasoning’ because in his view inferring is only one part of reasoning. Other parts of this process, he says, include: “posing questions, propounding hypotheses, analyzing concepts and meanings, etc” (Pinto, 2001: 33). Whether reasoning is just the mental act of drawing conclusions or it also includes these related activities is only a terminological question that it is indifferent to my goals here – actually, elsewhere in the same chapter, Pinto considers whether classical logic could be “a general theory of inference or reasoning” (Pinto, 2001: 38); thus, he would be using the word ‘reasoning’ as a synonym of ‘making inferences’.

In this sense, reasoning is an activity involving beliefs, whereas inferring might be not. We can conceive of ‘inferring’ as obtaining a proposition valued as true from another proposition valued as true by means of an inference rule. The process of following an inference rule can be a purely syntactic activity that does not require any judgement about what is the case. For example, the common expression ‘automated reasoning is made plausible by identifying reasoning with the inferential drawing of conclusions, but this concept of inference is a syntactic one: for example, automated reasoning software programs are able to make inferences just because they follow certain given inference rules as commands4.

In contrast, reasoning involves the making of judgements. But the ability of making judgements and, therefore, of entertaining beliefs, is exclusive to individuals with subjectivity. Whether machines have subjectivity is a controversial issue in a sense in which their ability to make inferences in the above syntactic sense is not. In my view, the oddity of expressions like “convincing a computer” would depend on the assumption that machines do not have subjectivity: for in order to consider susceptibility to persuasion, we must presuppose the ability of entertaining beliefs.

3. Direct and indirect judgements

Let us call ‘direct judgement’ a judgement that constitutes a belief that does not rest on further considerations. For example, I can directly judge that it is seven o’clock when I hear the bells of the church, their sound being the cause of my belief. Or I can directly judge that it is raining if someone says so, or if I see drops of water falling. That person’s words or the falling of drops of water can eventually justify the belief that it’s raining, but their primary role in a direct judgement is to cause my belief, not to justify it: Eventually,

4 See, for example, Portoraro, 2001 or Zhaouhi, 1994:24.
whatever causes my belief can also justify it. But there is a crucial difference between what
causes my belief and the reasons that may justify it: As a cause, the falling of drops of
water generated a mental act that did not exist previously, i.e. my belief that it is raining. As
a reason, the falling of drops of water can justify the belief “it’s raining”. But, whereas as a
cause, the falling of drops of water was enough to produce my belief, as a reason, the
falling of drops of water may fail in justifying that belief—for example, if I know that my
neighbor has plants in her balcony. This is so because causation is a matter of fact, whereas
justification is a matter of right.

Reasons do not belong to the space-time field, and because of that it is pointless to
discuss whether the reason for a belief is previous or posterior to the belief: at first sight,
the reason for a belief would seem to be a precondition for this belief; on the other hand,
the reason justifies the belief, so it seems that we should first have the belief, as a mental
act, and then, its eventual justification by this reason. This antinomy can be solved by
distinguishing between reasons and causes of beliefs; the cause of a belief is what produces
this belief, the justification of a claim can cause a belief, and this belief can, in turn, be
justified.

Analogously, let us call ‘indirect judgement’ a judgement based on the
consideration of something else. For example, I can indirectly judge that I will miss my
flight by considering that I am not going to be able to arrive at the airport on time. Or I can
also indirectly judge that it is raining by considering that certain person says so. In this case
of “indirectly judging that it is raining because certain person says so”, the utterance of the
speaker is not what directly causes my judgement that it is raining but rather it is what
indirectly causes this judgement, because it is a reason that makes this judgement plausible
–for example, because I consider that this person is saying that because she knows it. When
we indirectly judge that something is the case, we come to hold a belief because of a
reason, rather than acquiring a belief because something “caused” this belief.

Yet, indirect judgements also depend on our acquaintance with the world. This
acquaintance motivates the inferences that we make from reasons to beliefs. In that sense,
indirect judgements involve inference steps, but these inferences are not the syntactic
processes mentioned above: they do not rest on inference rules as conditions for the
justification of our conclusions from our premises, but rather on actual inferences as
motivations.

The idea of “inference motivation” might seem similar to Peirce’s notion of
inference as a “habit of mind”:

“That which determines us, from given premises, to draw one inference rather than another
is some habit of mind, whether it is constitutional or acquired.” (Peirce, 1960, vol 5: 227)

But an “inference motivation” does not need to be an already established pattern of
behavior, as a habit does. My acquaintance with the world may motivate my inferring that
such and such is the case even though I have no habit with regard to this particular
question. This acquaintance suffices for motivating this particular inference in absence of a
trustable pattern of inference. It is not the general rule “things like \( p \) enable you to conclude
things as \( q \)”, but rather the particular inference clause “if \( p \), then \( q \)”, as directly judged.
plausible, what suffices for motivating the particular act of inferring that \( q \) once we believe that \( p \).

Our acquaintance with the world motivates our inferring because it causes this inferring as a consequence of making the corresponding inferences seem plausible to us. In that sense, a motivation belongs to the space-time field, insofar it is prior to and causes the act of inferring. But it also belongs to the space of reasons insofar its causal efficiency is determined by our considerations about the plausibility of inferring in this way. It is because I take it that if \( p \), then \( q \) is plausible that I come to believe that \( q \) because I believe that \( p \). But my taking it that if \( p \), then \( q \) is plausible does not need to pre-exist my inferring \( q \) from \( p \). Rather it is part of my inferring \( q \) from \( p \).

Accordingly, we may say that indirect judgements proceed by reasons, but they are not the consequence, the effect, of judging that a given belief is justified. In order to determine the justification of a belief, we have to establish both, the plausibility of the reasons and the plausibility of the inference that licenses the step from these reasons to that belief. In order to justify a belief, the inference has to be considered as a warranted mechanism to obtain plausible conclusions from plausible premises. This corresponds to the idea that justification implies to treat equally what it is equal. The justification of a belief depends on the warranties we can provide to show that we are not treating differently what it is equal and that we are not treating equally what it is different.

Alternatively, when we come to believe an argument’s conclusion because it is justified, we produce another sort of indirect judgement, namely, the judgement that the content of this conclusion is the case because this conclusion is justified, where the inference motivation is to trust that justification. In the absence of this motivation, we will not believe the conclusion, despite having a justification for it. This is the sense in which a motivation is told to have causal powers.

Inferring involves trusting the relationship between reason and conclusion. Because indirect judgements always involve inference steps, they are always judgements about the plausibility of a certain representation. When we indirectly judge, we contemplate the plausibility of a representation which is previous to the formation of the belief and constitutes the content of the ulterior belief, once this representation is (indirectly) judged to be plausible. This is not necessarily so in the case of direct judgements: a direct judgement can be constitutive of the representation itself. Such is the case, for example, when I directly judge that there is an apple on my desk when I see it: the apple causes my belief, my judgement that there is an apple on my desk, which is also the representation of an apple on my desk. But I do not judge about this representation: my coming to believe that there is an apple on my desk is the very same event than my experientially representing an apple on my desk.

According to John H. McDowell, “That things are thus and so is the content of the experience, and it can also be the content of a judgement: it becomes the content of a judgement if the subject decides to take the experience at face value” (McDowell, 1996: 26). By saying that a direct judgement can be constitutive of a representation, I would drop the distinction between experiencing that things are thus and so and judging that things are thus and so, with respect to direct judgements that constitute a representation. According to this, the only way to distrust experience would be through an indirect judgement according to which a given representation, i.e. the content of my experience, would be cancelled because of a certain reason –for example, my knowing that my senses are not working
properly. As McDowell acknowledges, I can also experience something as an illusion, which is a phenomenologically different experience than to experience something and then coming to know that it is an illusion. In the case of experiencing something as an illusion, for example, of seeing something like water on a hot road, the direct judgement is exactly that: the judgement “there seems to be water on the road”. Again, this is a case in which experience is not independent from judgement.

Direct and indirect judgements constitute beliefs about what is the case, but indirect judgements are pivotal on the relationship between something that counts as a reason for the plausibility of a representation and this representation itself, whereas direct judgements pivot on nothing. According to this characterization, we can say that human inference, that is, ‘reasoning’ in the above sense, always involves indirect judgements. For its part, the mental act of attributing truth-values to a representation can involve just direct judgements—as when we come to believe that it is raining when we hear that peculiar noise on the roof. This mental act of attributing truth-values has to do with the idea of holding a belief with more or less conviction, and at the end of this paper I am going to argue that it is crucial for determining the legitimacy of argumentation’s persuasive powers.

4. Argumentation as a persuasive and as a justificatory device

Let me recall the distinction between the reasoning process involved in taking something as a reason to believe a claim and the process involved in the evaluation of an argument. The first process consists of judgements and it has to do with the power of argumentation for generating beliefs, that is, with the persuasive power of arguments. From this perspective, argumentation processes are objects with causal properties, namely, their power to produce beliefs. Argumentation, so understood, is an “invitation to make judgements”.

The second process, argument evaluation, consists in the following of a protocol and it has to do with the determination of the property of ‘argument goodness’. This property gets its content from the characteristics of the protocol actually followed in determining it. For example, due to their different standards, ‘argument goodness’ would be a different property when determined by pragma-dialecticians than when determined by informal logicians, although both of these approaches try to cast our intuitions about argumentation normativity, which includes the idea that good argumentation justifies its conclusions, at least to the minimum extent of making them plausible to a certain degree, to a certain audience or addressee. In that sense I take that to evaluate an argument is, at least in part, to determine its justificatory power.

Whereas evaluation is an explicit process that is not essentially dependent on the actual production of beliefs, reasoning about what is the case can be a non-explicit process that it is essentially dependent on the actual production of beliefs, that is, on the making of judgements.

On the other hand, in both cases the question can be considered from the point of view of its legitimacy. That is, in distinguishing between the persuasive and the justificatory powers of arguments, we do not need to be especially concerned with the empirical conditions that favor the production of people’s beliefs, but rather with the
legitimation relationships that hold between these beliefs. This point is just to acknowledge
that normative relationships hold between beliefs, and not just between propositions. In this
respect, I am just echoing intuitions expressed in sentences like “if you think that \( p \), it is
because you think that \( q \)” or “you cannot really believe that \( r \) and also believe that \( s \)” that
rest on this assumption. But whereas in the case of argument evaluation, legitimation is a
question of the degree of justification that an argument is able to confer on its conclusion,
in the case of reasoning, legitimation depends on the quality of the judgements involved. But,
how should we think of the quality of judgements, so understood?

The persuasive power of an argument depends on a indirect judgement, namely, the
indirect judgment that, given my judgements on the alleged data, the conclusion appears to
me as true/ quite plausible/ hardly plausible/ ...etc. This is essentially a subjective activity
because judgements always refer to a subject that judges. On the contrary, the justificatory
power of an argument does not depend on our judgements about it, but on the truth-values
of its propositions and on the logical relationships that hold between them.

For sure, to make a judgement is not “up to you”; judgements are determined by
how the world actually appears to us. But nothing exterior to this subjective appearance
compels the making of judgements. That is, there is no necessary link between how close to
the case a representation is and how plausible it is judged to be by a subject. In the case of
arguments, this is just to acknowledge that, whereas its justificatory power belongs to the
semantic realm, and because of that it does not ontologically depend on people’s actual
beliefs, judgements are exactly actual beliefs. In order to properly decide on the quality of
the judgement that an argument causes, we would need to link the quality of this judgement
to the justificatory power of this argument. And the question is, how can we do this? How
should we determine the justificatory power of arguments so that it has a bearing with the
legitimacy of its persuasive power? I will offer a proposal in section 6.

My purpose in this section was just to draw the distinction between reasoning, as
indirect judging, and justifying, as establishing the plausibility of a claim. And also, to
show that argumentation is related to both, because it is “an invitation to make indirect
judgements”, and it is also “a means to establishing what the case is”. Additionally, I have
tried to show that supporting a claim does not necessarily involve the induction of the
corresponding belief; nor does it necessarily involve the induction of a belief that \( x \), to
judge that a given argument supporting \( x \) is a good argument. Thus, the justificatory and the
persuasive powers of arguments are not functions of each other in a direct way. We produce
arguments to establish plausibility and also to induce beliefs. But to determine that an
argument is a good one is a different activity than coming to believe a claim because of a
reason. We can come to believe a claim because of a reason without being able to provide a
good argument for that; for example, because we cannot warrant our inference motivation,
although we directly judge it to be plausible. Conversely, it is possible to determine the
justificatory power of an argument without coming to believe its claim; for example,
because we are just following a trustable protocol that does not require understanding
claims or reasons, just knowing the truth-values of the propositions involved.

5. Pragma-dialectics and Informal Logic’s model
How do Pragma-dialectics and Informal Logic manage in order to make sense of the idea that good arguments do not only justify our claims but they also produce beliefs in a legitimate way? On the one hand, they assume that the deep structure of good arguments must render them as valid (Pragma-dialectics); or at least, must show that the premises, explicit and implicit, would provide sufficient support for the claim (ARG account). Thus, good arguments would warrant that if the premises are highly plausible, the conclusion will be highly plausible too. On the other hand, they establish the condition that good arguments have to start from agreed premises; hence, good arguments should also seem good to their addressees. In that way, both theories try to explain the persuasive power of good arguments as a result of its justificatory power. But for they both, the tension appears when they try to give an account of the justificatory and the persuasive power of real everyday arguments.

Everyday arguments are mainly enthymematic. In order to turn enthymematic arguments into valid ones, Pragma-dialectics has to assume that inference licenses are missing premises that have to be added to the argument in order to make it deductively valid. Such missing premises would be part of the real meaning of the argument. Allegedly, the real meaning of the argument includes these unexpressed premises, and it is the meaning actually intended by the persuader, which, in being understood by the addressee, would induce him to believe the claim.

But if we add inference licenses as the missing premises of the allegedly real argument under the condition that they must be already agreed by the addressee then, where would it lay the persuasive power of the argument? Would it just lay in being a sort of reminder? What do we make when we say to someone something like “most people are getting upset because of the way the government is managing this situation, so I think that they will loose the elections”? If we consider that the real meaning of the argument given is something of the sort:

(1) Premise 1: most people are getting upset because of the way...
   Premise 2: if most people are getting upset..., then the government will loose...
   Conclusion: the government will loose the elections,

where both, premise 1 and premise 2 are beforehand approved by the addressee, then the belief drawn by the addressee looks rather like a redundancy; a redundancy about which it is not necessary to persuade anyone who already agrees on premises 1 and 2.

By assuming the view that we have to complete arguments with their inference rules as premises, we warrant that implication relationships will hold between all its propositions. Then, we can determine the degree of support that an argument confers to its conclusion by giving values to its premises. If any of the premises has a low value, then we will say that, despite of the fact that the argument is valid, the argument is a bad one because at least one of its premises is little plausible –for example, the conditional that licensed the step from premise 1 to conclusion in the argument as originally stated. So, effectively, the argument would not succeed in justifying its conclusion. Therefore, this conception of argumentation is suitable for argument evaluation, in the sense of determining the degree of support of conclusions. But it is rather deficient in giving an account of the persuasive power of arguments: to add inference rules as premises that must
be accepted by the addressee if the argument is to be a good one makes a mystery of the persuasive power of arguments. Is it to argue just to remind people their own beliefs, rather than to “induce judgements on them”? 

For their part, Johnson and Blair (1993) consider that the acceptability of the premises is a better criterion than the mere acceptance of the premises by the addressee. But the problem with acceptability as a criterion of argument goodness is that it also makes it difficult to give an account of the persuasive power of arguments, although because of the opposite reasons: In contrast with acceptance, acceptability does not imply the actual acceptance of the premises by the addressee. But, why should good arguments persuade people if they disbelieve their premises? On the one hand, they should, because these premises are acceptable and they imply the conclusion. But should someone do something that she cannot do? 

Johnson (2000) considers that we should add the requisite of the truth of the premises as a condition of argument goodness. But obviously, this new requisite does not solve the above problem.

6. Grennan’s model

Alternatively, in *Informal Logic: Issues and Techniques*, Wayne Grennan considers that it is not possible to incorporate the inference licenses that are actually operative in arguments as the implicit premises of these arguments:

“[C]onsider an argument utterance symbolized as “A, so B”. By definition, the inference claim is “if A then B”. Now suppose we add “if A then B” to the original argument, in an attempt to make the inference claim explicit. The argument form is now “A, if A then B; so B”. But the inference claim for the revised argument is “if A and if A then B, then B”. If we now add this, we change the stated argument again, generating a new inference claim. Thus, an infinite regress begins when we try to make it explicit in the argument” (Grennan, 1997: 69)

Grennan proposes an evaluation method based on the formula:

\[ p(C) = p(P) \cdot p(C/P), \]

where:
- \( p(C) \) is the probability of the conclusion, given the argument, that is to say, the support that the argument gives to the conclusion. According to Grennan, this is tantamount to the value of the argument itself.
- \( p(P) \) is the probability of the premise, and
- \( p(C/P) \) is the probability of the (implicit) inference claim. Grennan argues that this is the definition of the warrant that licenses the step from premise to conclusion within the probability calculus.
This method equals the range of values that an argument can have with the range of values that a premise can have. This may sound peculiar to a tradition trained in Formal Logic, for which one of the most important distinctions is to be drawn between the value of a proposition (true or false, for most of the systems) and the value of an argument (valid or invalid). According to Grennan, the same scale, namely, a scale of degrees of probability, can measure both arguments and propositions. The goodness of an argument is tantamount to a high degree of probability of its conclusion, given the argument. Grennan follows John L. Pollock’s *Nomic Probability and the Foundations of Induction* (1990) in taking probability values as proposition’s truth-values.

Following Grennan’s method, in order to evaluate an argument, we have to determine the values of \( p(P) \) and \( p(C/P) \). The value of the argument, that is, its justificatory power, is the product of these values. This result, \( p(C) \), is a measure of the support that the argument gives to the conclusion.

But notice that all these values can be ascribed by a particular subject as a result of her corresponding judgements. In particular, the value of \( p(C) \) would be the value of an indirect judgement, that is, the judgement that decides on the plausibility of a claim, given the plausibility of the premise. This judgement is pivotal on an inference, “if \( P \) then \( C \)” and on a judgement about \( P \). But, as mentioned above, Grennan considers that “if \( P \) then \( C \)” is not an elicited part of the argument, but the inference clause on which the drawing of the conclusion is pivotal. In that sense, the meaning of the argument that, in being understood, would induce the belief whose content is the content of the claim does not include this inference clause. Rather, this inference would be the motivation that induces that belief. On the other hand, if the addressee gives a high plausibility to \( P \) and to “if \( P \) then \( C \)”, then he is committed to the belief of \( C \). So, the indirect judgement about the argument, that is, the estimation of the plausibility of \( C \), given the argument, happens to be normatively determined by a judgement about \( P \) that settles on the value of \( p(P) \) and by a judgement about “if \( P \) then \( C \)” that settles on the value of \( p(C/P) \). In that sense, the legitimacy of indirect judgements can be linked to the justification that the corresponding arguments are able to provide to their claims. Given the values of \( p(P) \) and of \( p(C/P) \), \( P \) and “if \( P \) then \( C \)” support \( C \) to a certain extent. On the other hand, the value of \( p(P) \) and \( p(C/P) \) can be obtained as the result of our judgements about \( P \) and “if \( P \) then \( C \)”.

Thus, this conception is able to give a separate account of the justificatory and the persuasive powers of arguments that, nevertheless, happens to be able to link the normativity involved in our judgements with the degree of justification that the argument is able to confer to its claim, from the point of view of the persuadee. At the level of the justification, all that has to be considered are the values for \( p(P) \) and of \( p(C/P) \). The product of these values determines the justificatory power of the argument respecting its conclusion. At the level of the judgement, the persuasive power of the argument depends on the persuadee’s indirect judgement about the claim, given the data. By adopting this conception we can give an account of the normative relationships that hold between beliefs:
our judgements about P and “if P then C” normatively determine our indirect judgement about the argument. We cannot make sense of someone’s beliefs if she considers P and “if P then C” as highly plausible and then she refuses to accept P. Normativity on beliefs relationships, on judgements, is, after all, a matter of attributing rationality to their holders.

But, from the above reflection it might seem that, in the case of persuasion by arguments, to explain a belief is tantamount to justify this belief, because the judgements that would induce that belief do also determine its degree of justification: these judgements determine the values that we attribute to p(P) and p(C/P). Yet, in point of fact, there are two reasons why this is not so: on the one hand, as noticed above, the explanation of a belief do always rest on a cause; particularly, the explanation of the belief entertained because of an indirect judgement rest on an inference step which is not effective as a reason but as a motivation to infer, as a cause to believe. On the other hand, we have to distinguish between the values that a person gives to p(P) and p(C/P), that are “subjective” as far as they are the result of her judgements about P and “if P then C”, and the “objective values” of p(P) and p(C/P).

By appealing to objective values, in contrast with the values that the persuadee would attribute, we can distinguish between someone’s reasons for believing a claim and the justification of that claim. The idea is that, although in justifying a claim we cannot get out from the set of our actual beliefs because any of our truth-value attributions are determined by our own judgements, nevertheless, objectivity can be achieved by aiming at the objective truth-values of the involved propositions. To evaluate an argument by “objective truth values” is to determine the degree of justification that the argument confers to its claim. In that sense, acceptance and acceptability as extra-conditions of argument goodness would be in the antipodes of this conception of objectivity. We would have to refuse them as conditions of argument goodness if we want to make sense of the distinction between someone’s reasons to believe x and the justification of x. Maybe, to determine objective truth values can only be done by appealing to the intersubjective, and maybe there is no way out of our beliefs, but to establish the difference between the objective and the subjective is the only way to make sense of the way our subjective reasons for believing do not count as a justification of our beliefs.

In any case, I think that a great advantage of Grennan’s theory is that it enables us to evaluate arguments both from an “objective” point of view, and also from the point of view of the persuadee. And thus, it makes possible to determine the justificatory power of arguments and also to account for the legitimacy of their persuasive power from the point of view of a particular audience or persuadee.


The above remarks try to stress the distance between the justificatory power of the argument, and the legitimacy of its persuasive power. As shown above, reasoning would be related to the persuasive power of argumentation, that is, it would be related to argumentation as an invitation to make judgements.

Our question now is, how far can Formal Logic deal with the legitimacy of our judgements?
According to Pinto, the problem for Logic is that the “background information which motivates the move from premises (or data) to conclusion, and which is essential to its warrant, cannot be rendered explicit because of its complexity and/or its character” (2001: 39). Because of that, he says, “evaluative strategies patterned on classical modern logic” are unable to deal with reasoning, “since those strategies locate the justification of a conclusion precisely in the propositional content of its premises and the rules of inference which license the move from one propositional content to another” (2001:39). For this reason, he contends, it is necessary to develop “a critical practice and a set of techniques for evaluating the inferences that don’t fall under any articulable inference rule” (2001: 44).

In Bermejo-Luque (2005) I have argued that we can always make explicit the inference step that lies behind our inferences: this step is just the corresponding conditional whose antecedent is the reasons, and whose consequent is the conclusion of the argument. Consequently, in my view, the problem for Formal Logic to constitute a normative theory of reasoning would rather be, first of all, that both reasoning and argumentation normativity are a matter of content. In order to decide about the justificatory power of an argument, we have to determine the plausibility the corresponding inference clause that warrants the step from our reasons to our conclusion. But for most cases, this task is alien to Formal Logic: inference claims of real argumentation hardly ever establish formal relationships. (Actually, according to authors like David Stove (1986), Logic does not even decide about truth-values of propositions stating formal relationships: Formal Logic does not say, for example, that modus ponens or excluded middle is true, but rather, it limits itself to sanction inferences based on it, given the interpretation of those formal relationships for a given formal system)

But things get worse for Formal Logic in the case of determining the legitimacy of the persuasive power of argumentation, that is, in constituting a normative theory of reasoning. In order to determine the rationality of a persuadee in coming to believe a claim because of a reason, we need to determine the truth-value that the persuadee attributes to this inference. Rationality as a property of beliefs is a matter of a reasoner’s beliefs. As far as Formal Logic is not concerned with people’s actual beliefs, it cannot determine the rationality of their judgements. Thus, I would claim, Formal Logic is not a normative theory of reasoning.

8. Conclusion

According to Christopher Tindale (1999: 5), the goal of Argumentation Theory is to determine the objectivity of rationality. I have tried to show how we should link the legitimacy of the indirect judgements that argumentation is able to bring about with the way argumentation is able to justify, to support the corresponding claims. As argued in this paper, we should be able to give a separate account of the persuasive and the justificatory power of arguments. I have acknowledged that, in the last resort, what counts as justified may depend just on people actual beliefs. This is so because, although we can draw the difference between that which is the case and that which we believe is the case, we can only determine “objective truth values” by appealing to further beliefs that justify further claims. For their part, defendants of a rhetorical perspective in argument evaluation try to locate the decision about argument goodness in the intersubjective space. They try to recover objectivity by assuming that the criteria to determine argument goodness have to be
grounded on judgements. To their view, the objectivity of rationality depends on the generality attributable to the judgements involved. But this conception of objectivity misses the conceptual distinction between the persuasive and the justificatory powers of argument.

REFERENCES: