

Argument and Context

Argumento y contexto

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Abstract: Is there ever a straight, unqualified answer to the question: Is this argument a good argument? Or does the assessment of the quality of the argument always depend on the context in which it is advanced or evaluated? In this paper we argue for the first alternative. While context is often relevant to evaluating various other aspects of argumentation, it does not bear on the assessment of the quality of the arguments used. We argue for a uniform *epistemic* standard of argument quality, according to which the quality of an argument is strictly a function of the ability of its premises to increase the knowability or rational believability of its conclusion. In arguing for the epistemic view, we note that ‘argument’ is ambiguous and that this ambiguity bedevils discussions of argument evaluation; suggest that rhetorical, dialectical, psychological and other approaches to the study of argumentation typically conflate the quality of an argument with the uses to which it is put and/or its effectiveness in achieving the arguer’s purposes; show that, despite appearances, both legal and scientific arguments are rightly evaluated in epistemic terms; demonstrate that, while the amount of support a conclusion must receive from its premises to be good varies by context, the strength of the argument itself does not; and urge that while what can count as evidence sometimes varies by context — for example, strong but inadmissible evidence in a court of law cannot be introduced — it nevertheless remains strong evidence, despite its inadmissibility. We conclude by urging an ecumenical approach to argumentation in which multiple purposes of arguers are acknowledged and studied using multiple theoretical perspectives, and in which arguments are themselves evaluated in epistemic terms.

Keywords: Argument, argument evaluation, argumentation, context, epistemic theory.

Resumen: ¿Ha existido alguna vez una respuesta directa y no controvertida a la pregunta?: ¿Es este un buen argumento? ¿O la evaluación de la calidad del argumento siempre depende del contexto en el que es avanzado o evaluado? En este trabajo apoyamos la primera alternativa. Mientras el contexto es a menudo relevante para evaluar varios otros aspectos de la argumentación, no contribuye en la evaluación de la calidad de los argumentos usados. Argumentamos en favor de un estándar epistémico uniforme sobre la calidad argumentativa, de acuerdo con la cual la calidad de un argumento es estrictamente una función de la habilidad de sus premisas para incrementar la “conocibilidad” y la credibilidad de su conclusión. Al apoyar la perspectiva epistémica, admitimos que el término ‘argumento’ es ambiguo y que esta ambigüedad propicia discusiones sobre la evaluación argumentativa; sugerimos que los acercamientos retórico, dialéctico, psicológico y otros en el estudio de la argumentación típicamente combinan la calidad de un argumento con los usos por los que se avanza y/o por su efectividad en alcanzar los propósitos del argumentador; mostramos que, más allá de las apariencias, tanto los argumentos legales como científicos son correctamente evaluados en términos epistémicos; demostramos que, mientras la cantidad de apoyo a una conclusión que debe recibir de sus premisas para ser bueno varía según contexto, la fuerza misma del argumento no, y enfatizamos que mientras que lo que puede contar como evidencia a veces varía según contexto –por ejemplo, evidencia fuerte pero inadmisibile en una corte– sin embargo se mantiene fuerte la evidencia, más allá de su inadmisibilidad. Concluimos llamando por un acercamiento ecuménico a la argumentación en el cual los propósitos múltiples del argumentador son conocidos y estudiados usando diferentes perspectivas teóricas, y en el cual los argumentos mismos son evaluados en términos epistémicos.

Palabras clave: Argumento, evaluación de argumento, argumentación, contexto, teoría epistémica.

1. Introduction: Argument Quality and The Purposes of Arguing

In this paper, we question a view that is we think is surprisingly common concerning the right way to evaluate arguments. The view in question, sometimes called ‘contextualism,’¹ has it that we do not, and should not, hold arguments and arguers to a uniform standard; rather, we should take into account the subject matter involved and the purposes, strategies and tactics appropriate to it. We will argue that on a proper understanding of what arguments are, their evaluation is, and should be, uniform in just the way that contextualism questions.

¹ For discussion and references see Siegel (2015).

It was once widely believed by philosophers – or so it has been alleged – that whether an argument was a good one depended solely on its logical properties and that the only reason one could have for criticizing an argument was its invalidity. This is held to explain the once-common characterization of fallacies in logic textbooks as arguments that appear to be valid but are not.² It was recognized, of course, that there is another, obvious, reason for rejecting an argument's conclusion: thinking that its premises are false. But that should not be taken to be a shortcoming of the argument *qua* argument, even if it was something for which its user could be faulted.

Not everyone with an interest in arguments shared this view, of course. Rhetoricians, thinking of arguments as instruments of persuasion, have always emphasized the dimension of effectiveness and have tied their standards of evaluation to that. Psychologists, from a slightly different perspective, have also been interested in the role arguments play in belief-formation. In neither case, though, was the logical merit of the argument the focus of interest: in the first, because effectiveness and logical merit obviously do not track each other; in the second, because a descriptive theory of inference need lay no claim to licensing normative judgments. But it was supposedly common ground among philosophers that in evaluating arguments we needed to pay attention only to their logical properties.³

We endorse this philosophical view of argument evaluation when suitably broadened. Evaluating arguments in terms of their logical properties is too narrow, since arguments can be and often are good even though they fall short of deductive validity. Strong inductive and abductive arguments are cases in point. Argument evaluation is not then a matter of logical properties but rather *epistemic* ones: arguments are good when their reasons/premises increase the knowability or rational believability of their conclusions.⁴

² See Hamblin (1970), Hansen & Pinto (1995).

³ Whether this picture is accurate or more of a caricature is open to question. It certainly does not fit what Aristotle has to say about fallacies. See Biro (1977).

⁴ We have defended this view in several papers, e.g., Biro (1984), Biro & Siegel (1992) and Siegel & Biro (1997).

2. Arguments versus Quarrels

Such a view is, of course, compatible with recognizing that sometimes we use ‘argument’ to mean something to which the above does not apply. Sometimes when people disagree, we say that they are having an argument. When they do, they often use arguments, though not always. Sometimes they just make contrary assertions and bang the table. They can be said to be engaged in a dispute, leading to a conflict and, on occasion, even to a fight, without arguments in the sense of interest here figuring at all.⁵ Let us lump disputes, conflicts, fights and the like together under the label ‘quarrel,’ reserving ‘argument’ for the kind of thing about whose evaluation philosophers have taken themselves to be talking about. Quarrels may be events, as with fights, or states, as with disagreements. Either way, they have a temporal location and duration. The arguments we sometimes use are, however, obviously a different kind of thing: they are abstract objects consisting of the propositions expressed by the sentences we utter in speaking or writing. Let us characterize arguments in this sense, for present purposes, simply as structured sets of propositions that may be deployed both in the acquisition of knowledge and in the justification of claims to it. (Nothing in this talk hangs on the precise details of how this characterization is spelled out.⁶) They are, unlike quarrels, repeatable or, if you prefer, multiply instantiable, as events are not. Further, they need no actual deployment for their existence. (I may kick myself for not having used a good argument I could have in our quarrel yesterday.) Even when they are deployed, that need not be to a second party. I can put one to myself, whereas I cannot quarrel alone.⁷

No doubt, we use different measures in different contexts for what counts as success in a quarrel. Sometimes we want to resolve a dispute, sometimes we have reason to prolong it. Sometimes we want to settle a

⁵ One may be kept awake by an argument people in the next room are having without being able to make out their arguments.

⁶ For example, on whether the target aimed at should be thought of as knowledge or reasonable belief, actual or possible. Such questions are debated in Biro (1977, 1984) and Sanford (1981, 1988).

⁷ One can have a struggle with oneself, being of two minds. Then it is one’s two minds that are quarrelling; it takes two to quarrel, no less than to tango.

conflict, sometimes we want to sharpen it. Sometimes we fight to the bitter end, sometimes we compromise to make peace. We judge the conduct of the parties to a quarrel by the general criterion of how well it serves their declared or presumed aims, aims that may be served by quarrelling, win, lose or draw. Not so with arguments. Their function is exclusively an epistemic one. Whether given to oneself or to another, our interest in them lies exclusively in whether they give us reason to believe their conclusion.

Those who say that we sometimes – or always – judge arguments simply on how persuasive they are – whether they make us believe their conclusion – may be taken to be saying one of two things. They may just mean that even a good argument, that is, one that does give reason for believing something, may fall on deaf ears, and if it does, it may be judged a failure. While this is obviously possible – indeed, sadly common – we still have to ask, what kind of failure? To say that a good argument may fail to persuade is already to concede that that failure is not relevant to our judging it good. No doubt, persuading is sometimes our aim in giving arguments. But whether the argument we give is a good one must be decided on other grounds. There is nothing in any of this that the defender of an epistemic account needs to worry about.

Advocates of the rhetorical conception may, however, be advancing a more radical claim. They may be saying that persuading is the intrinsic goal of arguing and that therefore the goodness of arguments consists solely, or mainly, in their persuasiveness. One problem for such a view is how to make sense of the possibility just mentioned and its reverse, a bad argument falling on all-too-receptive ears. Another is how to understand single-person uses of arguments. When I ask myself what follows from some premises each of which I have reason to believe but have not connected previously, I am not trying to persuade myself of anything.

Similar considerations may be brought against various other conceptions – pragmatic, dialectical, pragma-dialectical – of the role arguments play in the quarrels in which they are deployed and corresponding proposals that they should be evaluated in terms of some other non-epistemic goal, such as the resolution of disputes.⁸ True, these considerations are by

⁸ There are other problems with such conceptions. They are laid out, among other places, in Siegel & Biro (2008). We will not rehearse them here.

no means universally seen as decisive, to say the least, and champions of these proposals will find ways to resist. And, of course, there is a sense in which it must be uncontroversial that one's view of the proper criteria for assessing how successful one is in deploying an argument does depend on what one takes one's purpose to be. If one's goal is to persuade, it is trivial that one must be judged better or worse in deploying the arguments one does according to how well one does with respect to that goal. But such judgments concern not arguments (in our sense) but deployments of them, not the arguments we use but the use we make of them. If it makes sense to say, as it clearly does, that one can persuade etc. with a bad argument and fail to do so with a good one, that must be because the goodness or badness of an argument is an intrinsic property of it and cannot depend on how well its use serves other goals or purposes.

3. Legal and Scientific Arguments: Different Norms of Assessment?

So much for the idea that the criteria for assessing arguments should vary with the arguer's purpose. What about the view that they should be subject-sensitive, varying with the kind of thing the parties are quarrelling about? To make that view plausible, people often point to differences between legal reasoning and scientific reasoning. No one can deny that there are differences here, and important ones. Certainly, if we include in what we mean by 'reasoning' the way in which arguments are presented, these will loom large. Aside from the conventions and etiquette of arguing, which are obviously different in the two fields but are presumably irrelevant to our question, in what different ways can a given argument be presented? Here are some obvious candidates: confidently or tentatively, aggressively or diplomatically, rigorously or sloppily, in detail or sketchily. Most such things have to do with the arguer's manner. Some may sometimes be indicators of the arguer's assessment of the strength of the argument she is putting forward. But they are all capable of varying independently of whether the argument is a good one: confidence in bad arguments is all too common, ti-

midity in putting forward good ones only a little less so. In our terms, such things are properties of quarrels, not of arguments.

Another dimension of variation may be the order in which different arguments, or even the components of a single argument, are presented. This may have to do with different conventions or with different argumentative strategies. Sometimes one is expected to start with a general premise, sometimes with a particular one, sometimes it is more effective to do one rather than the other. While there may be differences among fields in typical expectations, and in which strategy is more common, it is clear that variations along these lines are possible within each of them. It should also be clear that they do not bear on how *good*, as opposed to how effective, the arguments used are.

In our terms, all such things are properties of quarrels or of their participants, not of arguments. Our question, though, is whether any differences among fields remain that would and should influence our assessment of the arguments presented, rather than the ways in which they are presented. Let us approach the question by looking at these two kinds of reasoning, legal and scientific, in turn, to see how we assess arguments in each. If, on a comparison, these turn out to be the same, contextualism is in trouble.

What are the supposedly distinctive features of legal reasoning? One thing that may be cited is that the premises of the arguments given are different from those in other contexts. In legal systems based on statutes, they will be these. In those based on case law, it will be precedent.⁹ With the former, it is easy to see that neither the semantic status nor the logical role of the statute being appealed to is different from that of a fact-stating premise in any other context. There is a statutory speed limit; Speedy drove faster; therefore Speedy broke the law. The properly executed contract calls on Greedy to pay Gullible; Greedy has not paid; therefore Greedy is guilty of breach of contract. Slipping arsenic in another's drink is attempting to commit murder; Lefty slipped arsenic into Righty's drink; therefore Lefty is guilty of attempted murder. With arguments that appeal to precedent, the situation is a bit more complicated, though not by much. Their general form is:

⁹ Few systems are purely of one or the other sort. This does not affect the present point.

- 1) Case A (the present one) is similar (in relevant respects) to an earlier case B
 - 2) Case B was decided in way W
- Therefore 3) Case A should be decided in way W¹⁰

With both kinds of argument, our standards of evaluation are the familiar ones we use outside of the legal context. Are the premises true? Is the argument cogent (good, though not deductively valid, as with inductive and abductive arguments)? Does it commit any fallacy? Do the premises provide reason for regarding the conclusion as true/probably true/justified?

But, it may be said, this misrepresents real-world legal argumentation. Lawyers use all kinds of arguments to win their case, and not all of these have the neat and tidy form of a deductive argument.¹¹ Especially in criminal cases, a good attorney will use any argument allowed by the judge to secure a conviction or an acquittal. Suppose I am defending you and think that an appeal to pity, of the sort Socrates refused to resort to at his trial, will help to get you off. Even if I believe you to be guilty, should I not make use of it? Is that not my responsibility as an attorney? We can allow all that and still maintain that none of it is relevant to the evaluation of the argument used. Some arguments may be permissible, or even prudent to use, in one context but not in another. And, arguably, in a legal context these may include fallacious ones. This is a difference in attitude to argumentation in different contexts. It says nothing about arguments as such. If I resort to a fallacious argument as a matter of tactics, I do not thereby make my argument non-fallacious.

This is not to deny that with some arguments, and with the *ad* variety in particular, whether a given use is fallacious can depend on the circumstances in which it is used. Take *ad hominem* arguments. There are situa-

¹⁰ There is a background premise with this kind of argument (“Cases relevantly similar to ones already decided should be decided in the same way as those”), from which the conclusion derives its normative force.

¹¹ It is interesting to note, though, that while we have suggested that the canonical form of an argument appealing to case law is deductive, it may be seen, at another level, as an inductive inference: “Past Fs have been Gs; This is an F; therefore, this is a G.” So seen, it may be evaluated in terms of the usual canons of induction.

tions in which judging the trustworthiness of a source or the reliability of a witness is the best, perhaps, the only, way in which we can come to a conclusion about some claim. In these cases, a responsibly mounted challenge to character or record is entirely acceptable. Elections amount to a kind of *ad populum* argument and, as long as they are properly conducted, their results can be seen as the conclusion of a sound argument.¹² (At a certain level of generality, jury trials may be seen as another example.) None of this affects how we classify an argument, whether we judge a use of it in the circumstances fallacious or not. Our verdict may depend on the particular circumstances, but the principles we use to evaluate it do not vary with the subject matter of the argument. But then we do not have the kind of relativity the contextualist claims we do.

A brief look at scientific reasoning yields the same conclusion. Of course, the conventions governing the presentation of arguments, whether in writing or at scholarly gatherings, differ considerably from those that prevail in the law (or in philosophy, for that matter). But here, too, we evaluate the arguments presented independently of these conventions, even if it takes effort to disentangle the former from the latter.

Once we have extracted the argument, we ignore the manner of its presentation and focus on its epistemic properties. Since it is obvious that the function of the arguments scientists give in favor of a theory or claim is to provide reason for accepting these as true, they are judged to be bad arguments if they fail to do so. We criticize them in the same ways as we do any other argument. We may find a logical fallacy (deductive or inductive); we may accuse it of being irrelevant or question-begging; we may, that is, judge that the premises fail to provide independent support for the conclusion. As in other contexts, we accept some appeals to authority and some *ad* arguments and reject others. When we dismiss claims out of hand as pseudo-scientific (from UFOs to ESP), we implicitly rely on arguments of this sort.

Just as the assessment of scientific arguments is independent of the conventions governing scientific argumentation, so it is independent of considerations of persuasiveness. It is a commonplace of the history of sci-

¹² Here, too, there is a background premise, one that an opponent of democracy will reject.

ence that revolutionary theories find it hard to gain acceptance. (This is the other side of the coin from the legitimate appeals to normal science and to scientific consensus of the sort just mentioned.) What can someone who insists on the relevance of persuasiveness say about this? Suppose his claim is that an argument's being persuasive is a necessary and sufficient condition of its being good. There are two ways to interpret 'being persuasive.' We can say that an argument is persuasive only if it actually persuades, that is, if it has been accepted (by all, by the majority, by the experts, or whatever). Or we can say that an argument may be persuasive and yet fail to actually persuade, at least for a time. On the first interpretation, we end up putting the cart before the horse: arguments turn into good ones as a result of being accepted, rather than being accepted because they are recognized (perhaps slowly) as being good.¹³ On the second, we have to explain what it is for an argument to be persuasive whether or not it has been accepted. Saying that it is having the potential to be accepted is of no help: the question is precisely what property of the argument gives it that potential. The answer the epistemic account gives is that it is the fact that it can help a rational person to extend his knowledge (or set of justified beliefs). One who rejects that answer must offer another. Whatever that is, it must allow for the possibility of a bad (by epistemic standards) argument's being persuasive. But that is tantamount to conceding the independence claim.

4. Support: How Much Is Enough?

A further worry is that the degree of support an argument needs to be judged good itself varies by context. Richard Rudner offered a classic statement of this worry in a quite different philosophical context:

Now I take it that no analysis of what constitutes the method of science would be satisfactory unless it comprised some assertion to the effect that the scientist as scientist accepts or rejects hypotheses.

But if this is so then clearly the scientist as scientist does make value judgments. For, since no scientific hypothesis is ever completely veri-

¹³ Here we are echoing Socrates' complaint about Euthyphro's definition of piety as that which is dear to the gods.

fied, in accepting a hypothesis the scientist must make the decision that the evidence is *sufficiently* strong or that the probability is *sufficiently* high to warrant the acceptance of the hypothesis. Obviously our decision regarding the evidence and respecting how strong is ‘strong enough’, is going to be a function of the *importance*, in the typically ethical sense, of making a mistake in accepting or rejecting the hypothesis. (Rudner, 1953, p. 2, emphases in original)

Rudner’s argument is made in the context of a philosophical dispute concerning scientific methodology and the metaphysical status of the so-called ‘fact/value’ dichotomy. His claim is that *the degree to which a body of evidence must support a hypothesis in order for that hypothesis’ acceptance to be warranted is relative to context*: whether or not the evidence is strong enough to warrant acceptance of the hypothesis will vary contextually. He offers several examples, one of which involves the toxicity of a drug: we demand that the relevant body of evidence confer a very high degree of support before we accept that a drug is safe, because the cost of getting it wrong is so high (people could die if we do). That is, we regard the evidence as sufficiently strong only if the risk of mistake is very low. The acceptance of other, less dramatic, hypotheses (e.g., that a new acne cream will not cause skin dryness) will require a relatively less powerful case – that is, a weaker evidential case – because the cost of being wrong is smaller.

Rudner’s worry concerns the degree of evidential support required for the acceptance of a scientific hypothesis. A parallel claim about argument goodness has been made by Geoff Goddu, who argues that “the correct evaluation of an argument is context dependent” (Goddu, 2003, p. 381), because

when evaluating an argument...we must take into account not only the actual support that the premises provide, but the degree of support the premises *need* to provide as well. We need to know if the actual degree of support is *enough* and what support is enough will change from context to context. (Goddu 2004, p. 30, emphases in original, note deleted; cf. also p. 33)

Goddu illustrates his claim with several suggestive examples. The most straightforward is that of the same argument, drawing on the same evi-

dence, put forward by the prosecution in a civil trial and in a criminal one. In the former, the argument is adequate if it establishes the defendant's guilt by a preponderance of evidence; in the latter, the evidence must establish guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. If the argument establishes that the probability of the defendant's guilt is .6, it is strong enough to warrant a guilty verdict in the context of the civil trial but not in that of the criminal trial.

We think that Rudner and Goddu are right: how strong the evidence for a hypothesis must be to warrant its acceptance, how high the degree of support the premises must provide to warrant acceptance of the conclusion, can vary from context to context. This is especially so when a substantial risk is involved in making a mistake in accepting a hypothesis or conclusion. But we do not think this upends our main point. While the answer to 'How much support is enough?' may vary with context, how much support the evidence/premises actually provide for the hypothesis/conclusion is determined in the normal way, on the basis of the usual inductive and deductive canons and in accordance with the usual epistemic criteria. A look at Goddu's example makes this clear. While establishing that the probability of the defendant's guilt is .6 is sufficient to warrant conviction (i.e., finding the defendant guilty) in the civil trial but not in the criminal one, whether the evidence establishes that the probability of guilt is .6 is not itself context-dependent. The degree to which the evidence establishes the probability of the defendant's guilt is strictly a function of the epistemic relationship between the body of evidence and the proposition that the defendant did it, that is, a function of the relation of support that obtains between the evidence and the proposition.

5. What Counts as Evidence?

A further apparently contextually sensitive criterion of argument quality, especially in legal contexts, concerns *evidence admissibility*. Suppose that during a trial a recording emerges in which the defendant apparently admits to the crime: 'I did it, and I enjoyed watching the blood spurt after cutting off his arm!' Expert forensic testimony establishes that the voice on the tape is indeed that of the defendant. Moreover, the fact that the

victim's arm was severed was not made public; only the perpetrator (and perhaps his accomplices) and the investigating officers were aware of this grisly aspect of the crime. These facts together constitute strong evidence of the defendant's guilt; they establish that the defendant probably did it. However, after this evidence is presented, the defense establishes that the recording was obtained by way of an illegal wiretap and is consequently ruled inadmissible. Here we seem to have a contextually sensitive criterion of argument evaluation: in the courtroom the argument/evidence does nothing to establish the defendant's guilt, while outside the courtroom it provides considerable support for that conclusion.¹⁴

We certainly agree that the rules of evidence are of crucial legal importance, and that those rules can render strong cases outside the courtroom inadmissible inside it. Nevertheless, we think it is a mistake to regard them as constituting a contextual criterion of argument evaluation. Rather, the rules reflect one of the key features of the law: an overriding concern for the fair treatment of defendants, who must be regarded as innocent until proven guilty and must be protected from entrapment and other unsavory tactics of law enforcement and prosecutors. Given the purposes of the law, some good arguments must be excluded from legal proceedings. But this does not make them bad arguments, rather than merely inadmissible ones. The evidence in question does not fail to support the defendant's guilt. That it supports it is compatible with its inadmissibility. As with our earlier examples, we must distinguish the quality of the argument *qua* argument from the purposes of arguers in advancing it. The argument advanced by the prosecution in this example does not accomplish the prosecutors' purpose, namely, to gain a conviction, even though it strongly supports the defendant's guilt. The legal system willingly runs the risk of letting the guilty go free as a consequence of restrictions on the admissibility of evidence in order to reduce the probability of the innocent being wrongly convicted. This may well be the right thing to do, both legally and morally. But it does not make otherwise strong arguments weak.

¹⁴ Of course it does not prove it: for example, the defendant may have merely witnessed the crime (and so was aware of the severed arm), not committed it.

6. Conclusion: Epistemic, Rhetorical, and Other Dimensions of Argument Evaluation

If we are right, what looks like contextual variation in norms of argument quality is actually something else: variation in purpose, variation in manner of presentation, variation in circumstances of use, variation in degree of support required for the inference to be good, etc. If so, we have no reason to think that the norms of argument quality are anything other than those allowed by the epistemic view.

Let us suppose that we are right in claiming that the intrinsic function of arguments is the same whatever the context and that the standards we use to evaluate them are so as well. None of this is to deny that arguments have rhetorical, dialectical and other uses. Nor is it to say that understanding those uses is not just as important in a theory of argumentation as understanding the epistemic one we have emphasized. Insisting that it is the epistemic dimension that is relevant to understanding and evaluating arguments should not be seen as slighting the importance of those other dimensions. Conventions governing quarrels in different domains are of great sociological and practical interest. The strategies and tactics that best yield persuasion are the proper business of psychology and rhetoric, as those that best yield consensus are the proper business of pragma-dialectics. We have insisted only that the assessment of arguments, as distinct from that of argumentation, is the province of epistemology. Understanding argumentation in all its aspects requires a division of labor, and we should therefore adopt an ecumenical attitude in the theory of argumentation.¹⁵ But adopting such an attitude is not the same thing as mistaking one aspect of the phenomenon for another or reducing one to another. Ironically, contextualism, while claiming the opposite, does just this by refusing to recognize the common epistemic standard for the evaluation of arguments in all contexts, no matter how diverse.¹⁶

¹⁵ We urged just this sort of ecumenicism in Biro & Siegel (2006).

¹⁶ This paper was presented as a keynote address at the *Fourth International Congress on Argumentation, The Psychology of Reasoning and Critical Thinking*, Santiago, Chile, September 2015. We are grateful to Cristián Santibáñez for the invitation and to the conference participants, especially Hans Hansen, for helpful comments and suggestions.

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