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Transcendence, Truth, and Argumentation

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According to Thomas Nagel we have a natural impulse to transcend our personal point of view. However, it appears to be difficult to give this notion of transcendence any real content while maintaining a connection with everyday speech and behaviour. In this essay I show that the description of what happens in a discussion when a speaker convinces a listener suggests an interesting interpretation of transcendence. The notion of ‘truth’ linked to the listener who is being convinced introduces a normative dimension in argumentation. This inescapable normative stance of the listener saddles her with the obligation to answer all credible objections against all arguments she has accepted. The evaluation of the arguments is not reserved for the participants of a discussion. Nothing more is required. For instance, the notion of a universal consensus has no place in the analysis of argumentation. If there is a universal dimension in argumentation and discussion, it is because there is no way of telling where convincing objections may come from.

Is it possible to determine when a listener should accept the arguments a speaker is making?¹ This is the sort of question a normative theory of argumentation should be able to answer. The aim of such a theory is to distinguish between convincing and sound argumentation. To do this, the evaluation of the argument should not be limited to the actual participants involved in the discussion. In this sense a normative theory of argumentation presupposes a perspective on the argumentative interaction which *transcends* it.

Whether there are norms for argumentation has been an important philosophical question since Plato and Aristotle. This not only means that philosophers are supposed to argue for their opinions and that these arguments must meet certain standards. The study of argumentation is important because it may provide a viable interpretation of what Thomas Nagel has called ‘the ambition of transcendence’.² Nagel is calling attention to an important facet of human life, namely, that we are creatures with a natural impulse and capacity to transcend our personal point of view. We cannot and must not be satisfied with an individual’s perspective, relying solely on one’s subjective capacities and being influenced by personal inclinations and interests. Nagel even goes so far as to say that we must keep trying to transcend our personal perspective until we acquire a view of the world which is no longer dependent on *human* particularities. Philosophy is ‘real and important’ because it is an expression of this ambition.

However, it has become increasingly doubtful whether this need for transcendence is anything natural at all. According to critics of this idea,

transcendence is less an expression of a natural impulse than something created by a particular tradition of philosophy, and we are quite capable of making sense of our lives without such a transcendent perspective. But even philosophers such as Richard Rorty, who claim to be critical of all notions of transcendence,³ do not in fact renounce every attempt to transcend points of view which rely entirely upon subjective capacities or particular interests.⁴ Rather, it is certain *interpretations* of transcendence they criticize, such as Nagel's idea that a transcendent perspective is a point of view which is not particularly human. I think that many discussions in various fields of philosophy can be seen as discussions about what this ambition of transcendence really means.⁵

Certainly, it is far from clear that the interpretations of transcendence that have been proposed can all be laid out in a coherent way: formidable objections have been raised against each of them. Instead of summarizing those objections, in what follows I point out a common problem all the main interpretations face, each in its own way (section I). The problem is that it appears to be difficult to give the notion of transcendence any real content while maintaining a connection with everyday speech and behaviour.⁶ This suggests that it may be useful to try a new approach to find an adequate interpretation of transcendence (section II). The problem itself points to a particular approach: the description of what happens in a discussion when a speaker convinces a listener suggests a viable interpretation of transcendence (sections III–VII).⁷

I. Interpretations of Transcendence

There are three interpretations of transcendence that can be distinguished, although combinations are possible. First, there is Nagel's idea, which we have already mentioned: the ambition of transcendence requires us to try and reach a point of view that is no longer determined by the genetic make-up of our species. In this way we can reach 'a conception of the world that might be arrived at by any investigators, even if they were very different from us'.⁸ This amounts to an absolute conception of the world, a view from nowhere, or a God's-eye point of view.⁹ Secondly, the transcendent point of view can be thought of as the one we would adopt if we and the conditions in which we make decisions were epistemically ideal.¹⁰ A third form of transcendence is said to be revealed when the participants in a discussion reach agreement, in a free and open encounter, without being coerced. Transcendence in this case only requires a willingness to discuss opinions and ideas in an interaction that meets certain conditions of tolerance and fairness.¹¹

Even if we assume that these interpretations can be laid out in a coherent way, it is obvious that on the first two interpretations a transcendent

perspective is not obtainable by a fallible and finite creature. But this unobtainability does not discourage the supporters of these interpretations: even tasks which will never be successfully completed can and perhaps must be undertaken. There is a kind of heroic dignity in undertaking such impossible tasks and they may be undertaken with increasing success, as (it is argued) in the natural sciences. Nevertheless, these considerations point to a problem common to all three interpretations: these interpretations of transcendence can hardly be seen as describing ideals implicit in everyday speech and behaviour.

If an ambitious interpretation of transcendence is proposed, it is doubtful that human beings have the capacity or the desire to go that far. This is especially clear in the case of the first interpretation, where the point of view adopted is not particularly human. It is not clear why we would want this kind of transcendent point of view. Why raise neutrality to such a level as to go beyond our human point of view (beyond whatever *we* find useful or interesting)? In response to this question, it is argued that if we do reach such a view from nowhere, and only if we do, can we say that we know the world *as it really is*.¹² This answer calls for an explanation of what is meant by 'the world as it is' and we cannot rely on any preconceived notion that would equate 'the world as it is' with the world as it is viewed from nowhere.¹³

However, if we stay as close as possible to ordinary ways of talking and acting, we might ask whether what is proposed is really an interpretation of transcendence. General remarks about the importance of open and free discussions only give vague indications of how we can still talk of transcendence. While we may not want a more ambitious interpretation of transcendence, we may still want to clarify how argument and debate introduce a kind of transcendence.¹⁴

The idea of epistemically ideal conditions seems to suffer from both flaws at once. In fact, supporters of this interpretation are confronted by a dilemma.¹⁵ In order to distinguish '*ideal* rational acceptability' from 'rational acceptability here and now' it appears to be necessary on the one hand to increase the conditions of rational acceptability. But if these conditions are set too high, this interpretation of transcendence tends to slip back into that of the view from nowhere.¹⁶ On the other hand, if we want to avoid confusion with the view from nowhere interpretation, and maintain a connection with 'the various points of view of actual persons reflecting their interests and purposes',¹⁷ it is not clear in what sense the epistemic conditions can be said to be ideal.

The interpretation of the ambition of transcendence must explain how that ambition is found in everyday speech and behaviour. This suggests another approach to the whole question about transcendence from a different angle: a viable interpretation of transcendence may already exist in everyday practices such as arguing and discussing.

II. Real Talk

What is noticeable about argumentation and discussion is that they are processes which can take on values and constraints that come from outside argumentation itself; for instance, from the field or institution in which a particular discussion takes place. An example of such external constraints are the rules which govern the proceedings of a court of law. The fact that these rules are external to the argumentation and discussion as such can be seen in the fact that they are imposed on the parties involved. Indeed, an institutionalized form of the proceedings might be thought to be the best way to proceed in an investigation of the facts, even though it is not obvious that the aim of both parties is to find out the actual facts instead of just trying to win their case.¹⁸

In spite of the many different contexts in which argumentation and discussion take place, it is possible to see the various instances in these contexts as examples of one particular type (argumentation as a complex of speech-acts).¹⁹ In this paper I intend to investigate the transcendence involved in argumentation and discussion as such, whatever the context. We therefore have to try to abstract the process of argumentation from its context. Moreover, if our aim is to find a viable interpretation of transcendence by describing what happens in argumentation and discussion, we cannot begin by presupposing a certain interpretation of transcendence.

An example of an analysis that does not pay enough attention to the influence of values and constraints imposed from the outside on argumentation as such is the work of Jürgen Habermas. Habermas gives us a catalogue of rules governing all discussions which together define the conditions of an ideal speech situation. The rules of this ideal situation introduce an ambitious form of transparency and guarantee universal access to and equal opportunity in the discussion.²⁰ None the less, they are not thought of as defining an ideal form of discussion. They are 'inescapable presuppositions' of arguing and discussing in everyday life. Every participant entering into a discussion has tacitly accepted these rules. Any speaker trying to convince a listener has in principle accepted the right of every possible speaker to intervene in the discussion on an equal footing.

One of the reasons²¹ why this bold statement seems plausible to Habermas is that argumentation and discussion are for him forms of speech behaviour 'organized in the form of a cooperative search for truth'. The words 'argumentation' and 'discussion' in Habermas's work refer to this special form of argumentative interaction. Obviously, Habermas's rules for argumentation and discussion ('as such') are in fact rules for a 'truth-seeking discussion'.²²

But it is not obvious that any speaker arguing for a proposition is engaged in the search for truth. Although it may sound trivial, we should stress that the

aim of a speaker, in so far as he or she is considered exclusively as a language-user arguing a thesis in a discussion, is to *convince*.²³ It may be morally objectionable for a speaker to use arguments he himself does not consider sound, or to argue for a proposition that he does not think is true. But it does not seem to be contrary to describing oneself as trying to convince others of and arguing for something, at least not in the sense that we use 'to argue' in everyday speech.

Of course, a speaker may try to realize additional aims in arguing for a particular proposition. In a similar way, one may participate in a game in order to realize aims other than simply winning (such as making money or impressing a friend). We must distinguish therefore between the aim *of* (internal to) argumentation and any (external) aims one might want to realize through the use of argumentation (and by trying to convince someone, as when one takes advantage of someone else's mistaken decisions). A speaker may try to convince a listener of the truth of a proposition because he believes it is true or because he thinks discussing it with someone is a good way to test its truth; but, these external reasons for trying to convince someone must be disregarded in studying argumentation as such.

To say that every speaker arguing for a proposition has implicitly committed himself to the rules necessary for making the discussion a cooperative search for truth is to substitute an external aim for the internal aim of argumentation. If a normative theory involves norms for the evaluation of argumentation and rules for rational discussions, 'acceptance by the person the argument is aimed at . . . the appropriate basis of a set of criteria'.²⁴

Even from the perspective of the listener, 'the person the argument is aimed at', argumentation is not truth-seeking in Habermas's sense. This may sound surprising, since a listener prepared seriously to assess the arguments of the speaker must at least view the arguments as having a claim upon truth. The listener is the party in a discussion who has to decide whether, in his judgment, the speaker's arguments gives him any reason to suppose the proposition is true.

But this is precisely the *only* question the listener has to decide. When the arguments convince the listener of a speaker's proposition he must not be under the impression or illusion that the discussion is a cooperative search for truth. To let oneself be convinced by a speaker does not imply that one is judging the quality of the discussion. Often listeners are convinced by arguments in a discussion while they are fully aware that the discussion does not meet the standards of anything even remotely close to an ideal speech situation.²⁵ For instance, listeners usually do not have enough information to decide whether the speaker believes his or her own arguments are sound (as one of Habermas's rules demands). What is more, listeners often accept arguments uttered by speakers they know are not (always) truthful. When a real-estate agent tells me I have to hurry up and make a decision because other

people are interested in the house I like, I do not wonder whether he or she wants to tell the truth (or what he or she believes to be the truth): I know that he or she wants to sell the house. What I am wondering about is whether what he or she tells me is true: are there really other prospective buyers or can I risk looking around a little longer for a house that may be more attractive. If Habermas is claiming that a listener who is convinced by a speaker must suppose that the discussion approaches the ideal speech situation, we have to conclude that even from the perspective of the listener argumentation is only exceptionally 'truth-seeking' in the above sense. The rules of the ideal speech situation codify values or constraints that come from outside the practice of argumentation and discussion.

Obviously, Habermas has in mind a clear idea of what transcendence amounts to: he sees discussions that follow the rules of the ideal speech situation as the best approximation we can hope for to ideal epistemic conditions. But an analogous conception of argumentation follows from the first interpretation of transcendence. Simply discussing and arguing for one's beliefs seems to be an excellent way of ensuring that at least all beliefs that are unacceptable by human beings are rejected (and from there we can go on to think about creatures who would be totally different from us).²⁶ Concerning the third interpretation of transcendence, namely, that a form of transcendence is guaranteed by the fact that arguments and discussions are conducted in a fair and open way, it may be asked whether openness and fairness are not themselves also external ideals. One should first ask if fairness and openness actually come into a discussion, and, if so, at what point do they enter?

My argument is not aimed at Habermas's interpretation of transcendence, but rather his interpretation of argumentation. What I want to consider is whether argumentative discussion, when seen from the perspective of the speaker or the listener, must function as a test procedure for determining whether the proposition discussed is acceptable from a transcendent point of view (whatever view of transcendence one takes).

To make matters as clear as possible, I will adopt the following definition of argumentative discussion:

An argumentative discussion is an interaction between a language-user (functioning as the 'speaker') who intends to convince a listener by means of his arguments and a language-user (functioning as the 'listener') who has the intention of assessing the speaker's argumentation, in order to decide on the basis of that assessment whether he will allow himself to be convinced.²⁷

The practice of argumentation and discussion I want to describe has been the rhetoricians' perennial object of study since the Sophists. By accepting a rhetorical definition of argumentation and discussion, I wish to exclude all preconceived ideas of them inspired by particular interpretations of transcendence.

If I am right, then a normative theory of argumentation, as I see it, must reconcile two – at first sight – irreconcilable requirements. It must show how an *internal* analysis of the process in which a speaker tries to convince a listener could lead to a *transcendent* perspective. It must find a way to explain the relation between ‘successful’ or ‘convincing’ argumentative or discursive behaviour on the one hand and, on the other, argumentative or discursive behaviour we consider in some way to be ‘sound’ or ‘proper’.

III. Normative Theory and the Speaker

In our search for a normative approach to argumentation, we disregard all perspectives which are not internal to the argumentative interaction. This approach, starting from a participant’s perspective, gives us a choice: we can tackle it either from the perspective of the speaker or from that of the listener. The theory of argumentation by Van Eemeren and Grootendorst is an example of an attempt to formulate a code for rational conduct in discussions by adopting the perspective of a rational speaker. The code makes it possible to judge whether or not a particular discussion has reached its conclusions in a rational or ‘sound’ way (either the speaker retracting his proposition or the listener giving up his negative or sceptical stance towards the speaker’s proposition).

In contrast to Habermas, Van Eemeren and Grootendorst do not see discussion as a cooperative search for truth. They start from the idea that a speaker in an argumentative interaction is trying to convince a listener, who in turn is trying to decide whether he will let himself be convinced. Or, as they put it, the intrinsic goal of linguistic behaviour in a discussion is to resolve a dispute:

A language-user taking part in an argumentative discussion is a rational language-user if in the course of the discussion he performs only speech-acts which accord with a system of rules acceptable to all discussants which furthers the creation of a dialectic which can lead to a resolution of the dispute at the centre of the discussion.²⁸

This norm of rationality is developed into a code of conduct which prescribes certain ways of acting in discussions for rational language-users. Fallacies are condemned because they are ‘violations of the proposed code of conduct for rational discussants’. But the legitimization of the code of conduct lies in the fact that it makes for an *efficient* use of language. Fallacies are therefore characterized as and condemned for making ‘the resolution of disputes more difficult [for] either party or both at any stage of the discussion’.²⁹ Rational discussants are language-users that regulate their linguistic behaviour in order to bring about a solution to the problem at hand as effectively as possible, and without creating misunderstandings or needlessly prolonging the dispute.

This normative approach to argumentation and discussion starts from the perspective of the speaker, who is arguing for a proposition. Rational language-usage is successful language-usage: it is argumentation that convinces. The problem is, of course, that it is not possible to formulate a normative approach from the perspective of an efficient speaker *alone*. It is obvious that arguments which we do not consider sound or proper contributions to a discussion can still be used quite effectively. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst are only thinking of those cases in which the listener, feeling that his opponent is committing a fallacy, refuses to accept the argument. When a victim falls for the fallacy, the resolution of a dispute is of course accelerated.³⁰ In condemning fallacies as inefficient language-usage, Van Eemeren and Grootendorst presuppose that the listener is sharp enough not to be tricked by a fallacy.

The attempt by Van Eemeren and Grootendorst to develop a normative theory of argumentation from the perspective of an efficient speaker can only be understood if one presupposes there are conditions on the part of the *listener*. Their theory of rational argumentation presupposes a conception of the rational listener. Because a normative approach to argumentation from the perspective of an efficient speaker presupposes a conception of a rational listener, such an approach leaves the concept of rationality it is using unexplained. It therefore does not offer a viable interpretation of transcendence.

IV. The Normative Approach and the Listener

Let us then approach the problem the other way and start from the perspective of the listener. My proposed approach to the problem is thus based on the difference in positions, in an argumentative discussion, in which the speaker and the listener find themselves. The relation between success and rationality in discussion, between convincing and 'sound' or 'proper' argumentation, looks different from the perspective of the listener. This difference can be stated in the following paradoxical manner: from the position of an efficient speaker, argumentation is rational if it succeeds; from the position of a listener, argumentation succeeds because it constitutes in his view a rational argument, he thinks it *should* be accepted. It goes without saying though that switching perspectives changes the meaning of 'rationality'.

Arguing for a proposition presupposes that the partners disagree. A listener who is convinced of a proposition that *p*, acquires the belief that *p*. Being convinced by an argument implies that there is a change in the listener's set of beliefs. Belief introduces the notion of 'truth' in the argumentative situation.

Of course, some beliefs are false, but there is a conceptual link between believing a proposition and the truth of a proposition. Because of this it is

impossible to maintain something like (1*). (The asterisk signals the oddness of uttering such sentences.)

(1*) I believe that p , but it is not true that p .³¹

This conceptual link between belief and truth has two important consequences. First, the only notion of rationality appropriate to beliefs is an 'epistemic' form of rationality. The only way that a belief could be said to be 'rational' is if it is said to be 'epistemically rational'.

Secondly, from the fact that we cannot maintain a proposition like (1*) it follows that we cannot rationally entertain the possibility that there would be decisive reasons for not believing that p while still continuing to believe that p . Or, in terms of argumentation: we cannot entertain convincing arguments that deny a proposition and still continue to believe in the proposition. This means that if we believe that p , we seem rationally committed to the belief that there are no convincing arguments against p .

Naturally, to be convinced that p is not incompatible with the belief that there is a *chance* that p is not true. Most likely none of our beliefs are totally error-proof, especially those about which we have disagreements and arguments. It is less irrational to concede *in general* that there may exist convincing arguments against particular beliefs than to assume this is impossible. When we face *actual* arguments against one of our particular beliefs, however, we cannot rationally remain convinced of them. The *general* knowledge that our beliefs are fallible does not force us to give them up, but particular beliefs do not enjoy this immunity against actual decisive objections. If we believe a proposition, we may accept³² the fact that there are good arguments against this proposition, but we appear to be rationally committed to the (second-order) belief that those arguments are not good enough. This is true even if we know, as a general fact, that such (second-order) beliefs may be wrong.³³

These remarks show that our paradox concerning the different positions of the speaker and the listener was only apparent. In some circumstances it can be rational (in the sense of efficient) for a speaker to use arguments which he himself thinks objectionable. This of course happens often and, although it may be morally objectionable, if we look at it according to the aim of the argumentation it is perfectly permissible.³⁴ As long as his arguments are acceptable to the other party, a speaker can choose between arguments he thinks acceptable and arguments he judges not to be.

This choice, however, is not open to the listener. The listener cannot make a statement to himself like (2*):

(2*) With the arguments $u_1, u_2, \dots, u_n$ the speaker has convinced me that p (while I previously thought that not- p), but $u_1, u_2, \dots, u_n$ are not sound arguments for p .

The listener cannot escape a normative approach to argumentation. A listener must judge the arguments on their epistemic value: to be convinced by an argument is to accept it as sound. In being convinced by an argument in favour of a certain proposition the listener used to think was dubious, the listener trades in her doubt for belief in the proposition. The reason why she changed her belief is the argument. After this, she cannot doubt that the argument is sound.

This inescapable normative dimension of the listener's position results from the link between truth and belief. A listener who changes his or her mind from believing not- p to believing that p on the basis of arguments $u1, u2, \dots un$ and yet acknowledges that $u1, u2, \dots un$ are not good reasons for believing that p , by implication also acknowledges that he or she believes that p , but (there is a big chance that) it is not *true* that p – which would be irrational. In other words, if the listener says (2*), she also says (1*), and therefore it would be irrational to say (2*). All of this does not mean that people always have (good) reasons or arguments for their beliefs; my claim is only that if they have reasons or arguments for changing their beliefs they must think they are good reasons.

It may be helpful to clarify three points before continuing. First, (1*) and (2*) are sentences in the present tense. What I have in mind is that a person who acquires a new belief because of an argument is rationally committed to the judgment that this argument is sound, so long as she continues to hold that belief and to hold it because of that particular argument. The commitment is clearly limited in time; it is not inconsistent with the possibility that we may come to regard the beliefs to which we were once committed as ludicrous.

Secondly, it is possible for a listener to agree with a speaker and yet admit (or at least hint) that he does not think the speaker's arguments are (very) sound. He can therefore say something like (3):

- (3) This speaker's plea was so compelling (moving, beautiful) that I cannot but agree with him.

The question here is with what exactly does the listener agree? For instance, we might let ourselves be talked into buying something from a salesman whose entertaining sales talk we appreciate more than the product he is selling. It is not absurd to say that in that case we have bought the product without being convinced of the salesman's proposition that the product is really exceptional. Obviously, there can be many wrong reasons for agreeing with a speaker,³⁵ but these cases are not counterexamples of what I have proposed above, since there is never any question of believing the proposition.

The third and perhaps most important point is this: although my analysis rests on the idea of a rational listener, it does not idealize the argumentative

interaction. 'Rational' here means nothing more than that the listener believes a proposition, because he has reasons for believing it: according to the listener there is something to be said in support of her belief. Rationality in my analysis does not imply exceptional abilities, such as infallibility or acuity, as it does in the theory developed by Van Eemeren and Grootendorst. The assumption that the listener is rational – in my *limited* sense – is justified because it is assumed by any speaker arguing for a proposition, however shrewd or unscrupulous.³⁶

If we return to Habermas's theory of argumentation for a moment, we can see that he not only disregards the difference between truth-seeking argumentation and argumentation as such, but also the difference between listener and speaker. A clear example of this is another argument that Habermas offers in favour of his thesis that the rules of the ideal speech situation are inescapable. Habermas places two statements side by side which can 'be read as someone's report on the outcome of a discourse':

(4*) Using lies, I finally convinced *H* that *p*.

(5*) Having excluded persons *A*, *B*, *C* . . . from the discussion . . . we were able to convince ourselves that *N* is justified.

Habermas points out that (4*) and (5*) are paradoxical and that the paradox in (4*) can be resolved by restating it as (4):

(4) Using lies, I finally talked *H* into believing that *p*.³⁷

This shows that the paradox in (4*) stems from the fact that the verb 'to convince' is used. Habermas argues that the meaning of the expression 'to convince someone of something' is internally connected with 'to come to a reasoned agreement about something'. If Habermas's interpretation of the verb 'to convince' is correct, the paradox of (4*) and (5*) comes down to this: (4*) and (5*) imply 'that *H* has formed his opinion under conditions that simply do not permit the formation of convictions'.³⁸

Habermas analyses (4*) and (5*) *together*. Yet there is an important difference: (4*) is a report about the outcome of a discussion by a speaker who has secured the agreement of *H*, while (5*) is uttered by a participant in the discussion who has him- or herself come to believe that *N* is justified. (5*) is paradoxical for the same reason that (1*) and (2*) are paradoxical: a person who utters (5*) declares that he believes that *N* is justified, while admitting there are (very probably) good arguments against *N* that have not been considered (why else exclude *A*, *B*, *C* and the others in the first place?). It would be odd hearing someone make a statement like (5*), because one would be admitting one has not acquired one's belief in such a way as to be able to prevent it from being untrue. But the same does not go for (4*). By uttering (4*), the speaker is making comments about the beliefs of the listener he has convinced, and there is no reason why he must think those justified. A speaker trying to convince someone knows only one rule: his arguments must

convince the listener. There is no reason to think that (4*) is paradoxical even if it is a cynical utterance.

In thinking that (4*) and (5*) are paradoxical for the same reason, Habermas erroneously attributes the listener's normative situation to the speaker.³⁹ Because of the inescapable normative stance of the listener, the argumentative interaction is asymmetrical in an essential way. This asymmetry may be obscured if the argumentation is seen as a form of cooperation in some cognitive enterprise.

V. Argumentation and Universal Consent

There is an alternative to Habermas's way of arguing for a universal dimension to argumentation. Our analysis above of argumentation shows how important the notion of truth is in understanding what happens when a listener becomes convinced. It could be argued that the very fact that a listener has to deliberate about the truth (asking himself 'What should I think about the truth of the speaker's proposition?') obliges him to take anyone's opinion into account, or at least as many people as possible. Bernard Williams clarifies this point:

The question 'What should I think about this question?' could as well be 'What should anyone think about this question?'. This is so, even when it means 'What should I think about this on the evidence I have?'. This must ask what anyone should think about it on that evidence. Equally, what anyone truly believes must be consistent with what others truly believe, and *anyone deliberating about the truth*, is committed, by the nature of the process to the aim of a consistent set of beliefs, one's own *and others*.⁴⁰

It would seem to follow from this passage that a listener who has been convinced of a proposition by an argument has to be willing to convince everyone the argument is sound and the proposition true. For Habermas, this means that, while his argument may be confused because he sees argumentation as an interaction organized as a cooperative search for truth in which the universal acceptability of a proposition can be tested, none the less his universalism remains essentially correct. Universal consensus comes into argumentation not because of the speaker's aim, but because of the position in which the listener finds him- or herself. Moreover, it only comes into it secondarily: a rational listener convinced by an argument in a discussion is committed to answering objections in *further* discussions. Habermas demands universal consensus in either the wrong place or at the wrong time (in the discussion where the listener has just been convinced, instead of future discussions, the listener may join in to defend the argument).

If Williams is right, the listener is committed to obtaining the consent of any third party, and thereby obtaining universal consensus.

As it stands, I do not believe this conclusion follows. Obviously, all true beliefs must be consistent, no matter who believes them. It can even be argued that most of the beliefs people actually have are true and must therefore be consistent or shared. But certainly not everything that is believed (to be true) *is* true and consistent. In general, we know – just as with particular beliefs – that people hold many false beliefs. Therefore, if we aim for a set of beliefs consistent with what others believe, we may wind up with false beliefs.

Of course, we may have a *moral* duty to inform the uneducated; but why would we be committed to obtaining the consent of everyone by the very fact that *we deliberate about what to believe*? Even if it would not be very considerate to let people go on believing falsehoods, I cannot see why it would be irrational.⁴¹ In actual practice we usually ignore many of the disagreements of others: no biologists have doubts about evolution just because supporters of creationism cannot be made to agree.⁴²

These considerations call for further explanation concerning the connection between truth and universal consent. The connection is not self-evident and quite a few philosophers have cast doubt on it. Of course, it is hard to argue that something (contingently) is not the case (thus I cannot argue there is absolutely no link between truth and universal consent). There is one promising argument for showing that deliberating about truth commits one at least to trying to obtain universal consent; but I will show that this argument is not convincing.

Such an argument might start from the fact that belief is an explanatory notion – at least in everyday life.⁴³ When we see a man first stepping onto a rickety bridge and then quickly jumping back from it, we might say he doesn't want to fall. But, we say this because we assume he believes the bridge is unsafe. And the best ground we have for this assumption is that (we know that) the bridge *is* unsafe and you cannot step on to the bridge without noticing this. What I know to be true explains the man's belief, which in turn explains his behaviour. Our explanation of the man's behaviour rests on the assumption that he is a rational being in the sense we adopted in our analysis of argumentation: he adapts his beliefs to the situation in which he finds himself. Or, in other words, our explanation rests on the assumption that 'his beliefs aim at truth'.⁴⁴

In interpretation we are led from assumptions about truth to the beliefs of an agent. This is only possible if the truth of beliefs is not *solely* dependent on the agent's judgment or will. If the truth of the belief *s* must be able to lead a listener to the content of the belief *s*, the truth of *s* cannot be determined by the capacities of the speaker alone. There must be a link between the situation as the interpreter sees it and the truth of the agent's belief. Moreover, the interpreter assumes that the agent's beliefs respond to a situation which is not

just accessible to the agent. To assume this is to assume that the agent apprehends a truth that is there to be apprehended by others. From this it follows that there must be a connection between truth and consent. David Wiggins has pointed out that the notion of truth must have certain identifiable properties, or 'marks', if it is to be useful in explaining behaviour as we have suggested. One of these marks must be the following: 'If *s* is true, then *s* will under favourable circumstances command convergence, and the best explanation of the existence of this convergence will require the actual truth of *s*.'⁴⁵

It is this mark of truth which supports the claim that deliberating about truth commits a person to obtaining universal consensus. Or, as Wiggins puts it: 'Suppose I am convinced that something is so. Then it is disturbing to me if nobody else can be brought to agree with me. Why? Well, if something is so either it must be capable of impinging on others in the way it impinged on me or I shall have in principle to account for its inaccessibility to all others.'⁴⁶

In fact, this connection between truth and universal consent does not follow. Even if the truth is there to be apprehended by others it does not follow that it *is* apprehended. The mark of truth I am considering here only entails that it must be disturbing, for a person who is convinced of the truth of something, if nobody else can be made to agree. However cursory my summary of Wiggins's remarks is, it is clear that there is no need for universal consensus: it is, of course, disturbing if I cannot get even one person to agree; but then 'disturbing' here only means 'the kind of thing that calls for an explanation'. To establish a connection between truth and universal consent we must look elsewhere.⁴⁷

VI. Transcendence in Argumentation

So far I have only shown that there is an asymmetry in argumentation, and that this asymmetry can only be described in terms of a normative approach: the listener is the one who has to evaluate the arguments. As I noted, one of the objections against Habermas is that he disregards this asymmetry. But, pointing to this asymmetry would not seem to clarify the distinction, presupposed by a normative theory of argumentation, between argumentation that is convincing and argumentation that is 'proper'. For a listener takes all arguments that convince him or her to be sound or proper.

Imagine a mother responding to her little daughter's doubts with the following argument: Of course there is a Santa Claus. But he just doesn't bring any presents to children who don't believe in him. The little girl (we will call her 'Virginia') is convinced that Santa Claus exists because, to the best of her knowledge and according to the most stringent criteria she has, it seems to be epistemically rational to accept the argument. I have borrowed

this argument from Michael Wreen.⁴⁸ One feature of his interesting and amusing analysis is particularly striking: although Wreen does consider the argument fallacious, he does not criticize Virginia for accepting, nor her mother for offering the Santa Claus argument. It is not irrational for the mother to offer the argument, because she knew she would be able to reinforce Virginia's belief in Santa Claus. Virginia is not irrational for believing the argument; the reasons for condemning the Santa Claus argument are not reasons Virginia could reasonably be expected to know. Indeed she has every reason to think that the argument is proper: it is her mother's argument and parents are usually a reliable source of information.

The only conclusion Wreen seems willing to draw is that the argument does not convince *him*. He could not rationally accept the Santa Claus argument.⁴⁹ The question we still face is: why should this judgement of the analyst of argumentation imply that the argument was not really sound? That, according to rationality, Virginia should not have accepted the argument?

To answer this question, we must look to what happens *after* a listener is convinced, to his or her commitments in future discussions. The mother, arguing for the existence of Santa Claus, is very successful: Virginia's doubts are removed, her belief in Santa Claus is once again unshaken. The argumentation is then analysed by an analyst or theorist of argumentation called Michael Wreen. The only way he can judge the argumentation is on the basis of *his* knowledge, *his* notion of what is good evidence, on the basis of *his* criteria of argumentation. If he hadn't believed there was a convincing proposition that could defeat the argument of Virginia's mother, he would have accepted the argument and, like Virginia, the existence of Santa Claus. He would have judged the argumentation to be proper because it would have been convincing to him. In fact, of course, Wreen does not accept the argument. In his article he formulates convincing objections to the argument.⁵⁰ We can even imagine that he would enter the discussion and express his criticism.

The important thing is that Virginia must take Wreen's rejection of the argument into account if she is epistemically rational. To be convinced by the argument that Santa exists is to believe that the Santa Claus argument ought to be accepted, that there aren't any convincing objections to the Santa Claus argument. The normative dimension linked to the position of the listener commits Virginia to answer any objections coming from a third party (such as Wreen is to Virginia). So she has to deny that Wreen's criticism of the Santa Claus argument is correct, and she places herself under the obligation to defend her mother's argument against Wreen. Otherwise she would commit herself to a statement like (1*) or (2*).

When a listener decides to believe a proposition that *p* because of the speaker's arguments consisting of '*u*1, *u*2, . . . *u**n*', she makes the decision at the same time that there are no other propositions '*o*1, *o*2, . . . *o**n*' which are

both uncontroversial for the listener to assume and which are such that ‘*o1, o2, . . . on*’ defeat the arguments ‘*u1, u2, . . . un*’ in favour of the proposition that *p*.⁵¹ If convincing objections such as ‘*o1, o2, . . . on*’ are formulated, the listener must respond, in so far as they are convincing.

Interestingly, Virginia’s mother is not under this obligation to defend her own argument – so long as Virginia is out of hearing range. Most probably she would agree with Wreen’s criticism (while being rather annoyed with this meddling theorist of argumentation). Criticism of argumentation is only relevant from the perspective of a rational listener.

To ignore objections to an argument the listener accepts as sound would be epistemically irrational. But the listener is only committed to coming up with answers to objections which are convincing *to him- or herself*. The difference between Habermas’s position and the remark by Williams, on the one hand, and the position I am trying to present here, on the other, is precisely the difference between ‘answering objections’ and ‘obtaining consent’. The listener is *not* rationally committed to convincing any third party that his or her answer to the objections is sound. Virginia’s answer to Wreen’s objections should not be convincing to Wreen. The only function Wreen seems to have is as a possible source of objections.

The brief consideration above of the explanatory uses of truth and belief shows that truth commands agreement but not universal agreement. The position of the listener who is convinced by arguments is only an instance of the general case of all believers. If Virginia really believes ‘Santa Claus exists’ there must be some people whose opinion on the question of Santa Claus’s existence matters to her (for instance, her older brother – older brothers often speak with authority on these matters). In terms of argumentation, if Virginia comes to believe that Santa Claus exists because of the Santa Claus argument, there must be somebody – her older brother perhaps – whose opinion on the argument must matter to her. If there is nobody whose agreement matters, it might be doubted whether Virginia truly believes in Santa Claus. ‘Truth’ introduces a normative dimension such that listeners cannot keep the evaluation of the argumentation for themselves. This does not mean, however, that Virginia must really care about obtaining the consent of just anyone, such as Wreen. If Wreen’s criticism of the argument does not really disturb Virginia we might ask her for an explanation but such an explanation is easily found.⁵² So there is no way to tell which persons or how many people a listener should consult. There is thus no way of telling whether someone’s beliefs are in this sense deficient.

Nevertheless, the fact that somebody’s evaluation of the argument matters to Virginia does give Wreen’s criticism of the argument more weight than we have acknowledged up to now, even though his personal opinion is of no concern to Virginia. Imagine a situation in which Wreen’s objections appear ridiculous to Virginia and not worth replying to, while having an impact on

her brother. The brother starts doubting all over again. The fact that *his* opinion matters to Virginia forces her to answer Wreen's objections to the Santa Claus argument. (Of course, her confidence in her brother's judgment may be affected by his credulousness). What Wreen thinks about her reply to his objections doesn't matter, only what her brother thinks matters. She only has to answer to reinforce her *brother's* belief in Santa Claus.

We can then say that there is a universal dimension in arguing and discussing: a listener is committed to defending the arguments ' $u_1, u_2, \dots u_n$ ' against all convincing objections, from anyone. This sensitivity to objections, this fragility of the judgment of the listener (or of a person or persons whose judgment matters) also explains why discussion can never end in a final agreement: new objections may always be forthcoming. It is the rationality of the listener, who has been convinced by the arguments of the speaker, that makes it possible for the discussion to restart at any moment. In spite of the fact that Wreen's opinion does not matter at all, his objections do interfere: they upset either Virginia's own beliefs or the beliefs of someone whose opinion matters to her (or both).

VII. Conclusion

I have adopted a rhetorical definition of argumentation with as few epistemological presuppositions as possible: argumentative discussion is analysed as an interaction in which the listener acquires a belief because of the arguments of the speaker. Argumentation and discussion are considered on their own terms and not as a means to reach a preconceived transcendent point of view.

Nevertheless, this analysis of what happens when a listener is convinced by arguments does yield an interpretation of transcendence. The notion of 'truth' linked to the listener who is being convinced introduces a normative dimension in argumentation. The inescapable normative stance of the listener saddles her with the obligation to defend all arguments she has accepted and the evaluation of the arguments thus is not reserved solely for the participants of a discussion.

The transcendence internal to argumentation and discussion is a form of transcendence linked to the position of a particular person in his or her interaction with others. Moreover, the conception of time that rational argumentation presupposes is curiously mixed: transcendence in argumentation is 'momentary' (in the double sense this word has in English). After the speaker has given his arguments, the listener cannot postpone judgment. He is either convinced by the argument or not (to suspend judgment is a way of not being convinced). He has to 'decide' *now* to accept the argument and the proposition argued for. But this decision to accept a defended proposition

engages the listener for a period of time to come (until he revokes his decision).

It is easy to overstate this transcendence internal to argumentation and discussion: this tendency comes from the fact that our evaluations (of the speaker's arguments) may always be in jeopardy. Nothing more is required. For instance, the notion of a *universal* consensus has no place in the analysis of argumentation. If there is a universal dimension in argumentation and discussion, it is because there is no way of telling where convincing objections may come from.

Obviously, it is doubtful whether the normative dimension we have identified in argumentative interaction can be developed into a normative *theory* of argumentation. It is perhaps even more doubtful whether this approach to argumentation will ever yield norms for the evaluation of concrete arguments. Hence, there is little hope of being able to ground principles that would determine whether arguments or the proposition argued for should be rationally accepted or whether they will be accepted from a transcendent point of view (whatever the interpretation of transcendence).

The ambition of transcendence does not demand a view from nowhere, nor some view obtained under ideal epistemic conditions. Transcendence does not require a transcendent point of view that would be obtained by leaving the personal and involved perspective of an individual behind. Transcendence does not even demand a standpoint. It consists merely in the duty to answer all credible objections against our own personal and involved point of view.⁵³

NOTES

- 1 This is the way that de Pater formulates the problem (1982, p. 380). Compare Toulmin (1986, pp. 70–71); Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1988, p. 507); Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1987, p. 291).
- 2 Nagel (1986, p. 9): 'It is necessary to combine the recognition of our contingency, our finitude and our containment in the world with an ambition of transcendence, however limited may be our success in achieving it'; Nagel (1979, p. 197); Putnam (1981, p. 74).
- 3 Rorty (1991a, pp. 6–12).
- 4 This is how I understand remarks like the following by Rorty: 'There are two principal ways in which reflective human beings try, by placing their lives in a larger context, to give sense to those lives. The first is by telling the story of their contribution to a community. This community may be the actual historical one in which they live, or another actual one, distant in time or place, or a quite imaginary one, consisting perhaps of a dozen heroes and heroines selected from history or fiction or both. The second way is to describe themselves as standing in immediate relation to a nonhuman reality' (Rorty [1991c, p. 2]).
- 5 An indication of this is the wide range of issues addressed in books such as Nagel's *The View from Nowhere* or John McDowell's *Mind and World*, which are quite clearly devoted to a certain interpretation of transcendence.
- 6 Putnam remarks that the traditional interpretations of the notion of truth face the same problem, see Putnam (1994, pp. 500–1).
- 7 When I speak of 'the listener' or 'the speaker', I am assuming we are dealing with 'single, simple' discussions. I am using these terms as introduced by (Van Eemeren and Grootendorst [1984, p. 80]): in a 'single, simple' discussion 'a single positive or negative

- point of view in respect of a single expressed opinion is advanced'; see also Walton [1990, p. 410]).
- 8 Williams (1985, p. 139). To put it in less metaphorical terms, transcending is seen in this first way as a continuous process of elimination: we start from our personal point of view and then try gradually to subtract from it all beliefs which are tied to 'the way the world seems peculiarly to us' (1985, 31, p. 139); see also Nagel (1986, pp. 5, 14–15, 70–71, 96–97).
- 9 The term is to be found in Putnam (1981, p. 74) and Putnam and Conant (1990, p. 5); see also Williams (1978, p. 21); Nagel (1986, p. 130).
- 10 Putnam (1981, p. 55); Habermas (1973, 51, pp. 174–83); Apel (1973, pp. 423–9)
- 11 Rorty (1991b, p. 37): 'Another meaning for "rational" is, in fact, available. . . . It names a set of moral virtues: tolerance, respect for the opinions of those around one, willingness to listen, reliance on persuasion rather than force. These are the virtues which members of a civilized society must possess if society is to endure. In this sense of "rational", the word means something more like "civilized", than like "methodical".'
- 12 Williams (1985, pp. 135, 139); Williams (1978, pp. 64–65); Nagel (1986, p. 5); see also Nagel (1979, p. 208).
- 13 McDowell (1979); McDowell (1983, p. 9); Taylor (1989, p. 56). This solution also calls for an explanation of what it means *to know* the world as it is. That explanation must not rely on the idea that there are statements or beliefs which *represent* or *correspond with* the world. If one insists on using such phrases (Williams [1985, pp. 136, 138]; Nagel [1986, pp. 91–92]), one has to explain what such statements or beliefs are supposed to represent (Davidson [1990, pp. 303–4]; Putnam and Conant [1990, p. 17]). Unanswered questions of this kind invite the conclusion by Rorty and others that this interpretation of transcendence rests on a dubious philosophy of language or belief and an unfortunate conception of truth (Rorty [1991a, pp. 4–6] [1991c, pp. 22–23]), see also Putnam (1981, p. 51) and Putnam (1994, p. 449).
- 14 Critics of Rorty have not only tried to answer his objections to the first two interpretations, they have also argued that Rorty's plan for how culture and philosophy should proceed after these interpretations have been rejected is 'to put it mildly, schematic' (Williams [1983, p. 26]; Putnam [1992, p. 68]), if not self-defeating (Williams [1985, p. 137]; Putnam [1992, pp. 69–71]).
- 15 Davidson (1990, p. 307); Putnam (1994, p. 462).
- 16 Rorty (1991c, p. 27): 'What is (positing ideal conditions) supposed to do, except to say that from God's point of view the human race is heading in the right direction?'; see also Rorty (1993, pp. 451–3), (1991c, pp. 38–9), (1989, p. 84).
- 17 Putnam (1981, pp. 55–56); see also Putnam (1994, p. 447).
- 18 See Habermas (1971, pp. 200–1).
- 19 For the idea that argumentation is a complex of speech-acts rather than one kind of speech-act, see Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984).
- 20 Some of these rules include Habermas (1983, pp. 97–99), (1990, pp. 87–89): '. . . (2.1) Every speaker may assert only what he believes. . . . (3.1) Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part. . . . (3.2) a. Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatever. b. Everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatever . . .'; Habermas (1983, p. 99), (1990, p. 89): 'Rule (3.1.) defines the set of potential participants. It includes all subjects without exception who have the capacity to take part in argumentation. Rule (3.2) guarantees all participants equal opportunity to . . . put forth their own arguments.' Cf. Goldman (1994, p. 35), (1997, pp. 162–3); Biro and Siegel (1992, pp. 96–99).
- 21 In support of his conception of argumentation, Habermas has developed a sophisticated 'transcendental-pragmatic' position that can be summarized as two arguments. The second argument (Habermas [1983, pp. 100–1], [1990, pp. 90–91]) revolves around the verb 'to convince' and will be considered below. His first argument (1983, pp. 90–93), (1990, pp. 80–83) is aimed at an opponent who denies that the rules of the ideal speech situation are tacitly accepted by any speaker who enters into a discussion. To make his denial heard, the opponent has to demand the right to participate in a discussion about the merits of Habermas's theory of argumentation and thus he has already acknowledged the rule that

- nobody may be excluded from the discussion. There seems an obvious way out, though, for Habermas's opponent. The opponent may grant that he has claimed certain rights, but the rules he has acknowledged in claiming these rights are the rules of a truth-seeking discussion (which is part of a philosophical or scientific discipline called the study of argumentation). His point is that the rules of truth-seeking argumentation are stricter than the rules (if any) of argumentation and discussion as such. The fact that this objection to his argument does not even occur to Habermas shows that he does not distinguish between argumentation conceived as a cooperative search for truth and argumentation and discussion as such.
- 22 Walzer (1989–90).
 - 23 Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984, pp. 42–43).
 - 24 Hamblin (1970, p. 242).
 - 25 Ackerman (1989, p. 8), Walzer (1989–90, pp. 189–91).
 - 26 See implicitly Nagel (1979, p. 208) and Williams (1985, p. 139).
 - 27 See Van Eemeren (1987, 121, p. 39).
 - 28 Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984, p. 18).
 - 29 Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984, pp. 188, 151).
 - 30 de Pater (1982, p. 380); see also Goldman (1994, pp. 31–32).
 - 31 This is a version of what has been called 'Moore's paradox'; see Baldwin (1990, pp. 226–32); Moore (1959, p. 175); see also Williams (1973, pp. 145, 136).
 - 32 There is no need, for the purposes of this article, to distinguish between 'to accept' and 'to believe'; see Cohen (1989, pp. 367–89).
 - 33 Perhaps this position is not entirely consistent, but it could be said that this is a case in which the inconsistency itself is a sign of wisdom, see also Geach (1976, pp. 97–98): 'There is however perhaps something to be said on behalf of inconsistency: witness the so-called Paradox of the Preface. Authors very often admit in prefaces that despite revision some errors remain in the book. If there were no error in the book before, including such a preface ensures the presence of error; the whole corpus, text *plus* preface, is necessarily inconsistent. No paradox so far; the odd thing is, however, that we judge the writing of such a preface to show greater wisdom than saying in the preface something like "I thank all my kind friends who have suggested corrections, but I remain convinced that everything I have said in this book is true" . . . although [the author of this last sentence] unlike his more modest rival has not run into any inconsistency.'
 - 34 Hamblin (1970, p. 242); Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1952, p. 19).
 - 35 Walzer (1989–90, p. 184).
 - 36 Foley (1991, p. 372): 'In an effort to persuade you, we point out the reasons that you have to believe it. But for the purpose of getting you to believe something that you do not now believe, the citing of practical reasons is ordinarily ineffective. Even if we convince you that you have good practical reasons to believe a proposition, this is ordinarily not enough to generate belief. Offering you a million dollars to believe that the earth is flat may convince you that you have good economic reasons to believe this proposition, but in itself it won't be enough to persuade you that the earth is flat. By contrast, if you become convinced that you have good intellectual reasons to believe something—in particular good evidential reasons—this ordinarily is enough to generate belief'; see also Williams (1973, pp. 149–51). The influence of Donald Davidson's ideas about the rationality presupposed in interpretation by virtue of a principle of charity in interpretation is clearly evident here.
 - 37 The translator notes that the contrast is more emphatic in German (*überzeugen/überreden*) than in English (*convince/talk into believing*), because '*überzeugen*' implies the use of argument, while 'to cause to believe by argument' is one but not the only meaning of 'to convince', see Habermas (1990, p. 113, n. 73).
 - 38 Habermas (1983, p. 100), (1990, p. 90).
 - 39 The same remark can be made about the following argument by Goldman to support his claim that the fundamental goal of argumentative discourse is to persuade people of *truths* (Goldman [1994, pp. 29–31, 37]): 'The existence of deliberately deceptive speech and careless disregard for truth is apparent. But although such abuses may be prevalent, *criticism* of them is equally widespread, which testifies to the existence of the norms. These norms require speakers to have informative intentions and to behave accordingly'

(Goldman [1994, p. 33]). The last sentence does not follow: the fact that listeners evaluate and criticize the epistemic value of arguments does not imply that they suppose the speaker means to tell the truth. Of course, *moral* criticism of speech behaviour would be able to show the existence of norms requiring speakers to be truthful (cf. Goldman [1994, p. 37, n. 16]). But these norms are not the subject of a theory of argumentation.

40 Williams (1985, p. 68, see also p. 69). Remarkably, Rorty agrees with Williams on this: 'For pragmatists the desire for objectivity is not the desire to escape the limitations of one's community, but simply the desire for as much intersubjective agreement as possible, the desire to extend the reference of "us" as far as we can' (see Rorty [1991c, p. 23]). Rorty agrees with Williams that seeking truth entails seeking as large a consensus as possible; what they differ on is how far this is in fact possible (see Williams [1985, p. 31, n. 13]).

41 This remark is inspired by Williams's own interesting observation that the claim that racism or sexism is simply irrational is less straightforward than we would think, no matter how morally unacceptable these ideas and practices are (1985, pp. 115–17).

42 Indeed science in general would provide an interesting counterexample to Williams's point. Scientific arguments seem to claim universal agreement because they are addressed to an audience, the members of which are expected to abstract from the cultural values that are part of their lives and identities outside of science. But Stanley Cavell makes the following highly relevant point: 'It could be said of science . . . that it has no audience at all. No one can share its significance who does not produce work of the same kind. The standards of performance are institutionalized; it is not up to the individual listener to decide whether, when the work meets the canons of the institution, he will accept it – unless he undertakes to alter those canons themselves' (Cavell [1979, p. xxvii]). I was referred to this by Redding (1989, pp. 28–29).

What is important here is to recognize the fact which Cavell points out that no one can share the significance of scientific results who does not produce work of the same kind. This fact severely limits the audience whose agreement is sought in making scientific claims and arguments. The only audience that is addressed by these claims and arguments consists of a highly trained, highly constituted elite: 'Science *can* have an audience of non-practitioners, but the existence of such an audience is not central to the continuing production of scientific truths. . . . The institutionalization of scientific rationality is a process which necessarily involves the formation of a highly trained, highly skilled elite who can, by virtue of their commitment to shared criteria which unify them into type of composite subject of the knowledge they produce, embody of rationality we see in normal science' (Redding [1989, p. 29]).

43 Williams (1973, p. 144).

44 Williams (1973, p. 137).

45 Wiggins (1987, p. 147).

46 Wiggins (1987, p. 149).

47 Yet, this mark of truth is not without substance: someone who has come to believe that a sentence is true is not indifferent to the assent of others. What is more, the convergence must be epistemic; it cannot be just an accidental agreement or a consent exacted by force: 'we have the kind of convergence in belief that truth commands, where the best explanation of the agreement in belief that *p* is inconsistent with any denial on the explainer's part that *p*' (Wiggins [1987, p. 151]).

48 Wreen (1987).

49 Wreen (1987, pp. 33–35).

50 According to the most plausible reconstruction, Virginia's mother commits – by offering the Santa Claus argument – two fallacies at the same time. Her argument is then construed as going like this: 'If Santa learns you do not believe he exists any more' – that presupposes he exists: *begging the question* or *petitio principii*; 'he won't bring you any presents' – which delivers a threat: *argumentum ad baculum* or *appeal to force* (Wreen [1987, p. 32]). Wreen, however, correctly remarks that the argument is not so easy to criticize. The argument can be construed as explaining away contrary evidence now at Virginia's disposal ('My friends think there is no Santa Claus') by citing a fact about Santa Claus that the child was not previously aware of ('He doesn't give presents to people who don't believe in him') and that effectively discredits the contrary evidence ('Your friends don't believe in

Santa Claus because they don't get any presents, but their not receiving presents is not the result of there not being a Santa Claus, but of their not believing'). The argument explains why Virginia's friends would believe that Santa does not exist, and why the belief they have is ill-founded (Wreen [1987, p. 33]).

- 51 For this formulation see Foley (1987, pp. 62–67). It is important to note how general this commitment is that the listener enters into. She makes a sort of gamble that she will not be proved wrong. She decides that there are no defeating propositions. If she only claims that there are no defeating propositions *that she knows of*, she would only be claiming that the argument is not in contradiction with other things she knows. This would amount to claiming consistency, not truth.
- 52 Wreen knows this (1987, p. 35): 'it would be reasonable for her to believe that Santa exists, and that the . . . argument is a good one. Her parents are more reliable sources of information *than anyone else*, are older and know more than children. . . .'
- 53 This paper is a much rewritten version of the fifth chapter of the dissertation I wrote under the supervision of Professor Dr. Wim A. de Pater. An earlier version was read at the Second International Conference on Argumentation organized at the University of Amsterdam in June 1990. Thanks are also due to Wilfried Goossens for inspiration during almost daily conversations.

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