

## Can Argumentation Deal With World-View Dissensus?

I wish to consider today a striking case of world-view dissensus between Satan and the archangel Abdiel over the nature of the Diety, occurring in Book V of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Milton sets the scene—The Almighty before a convocation of all angels has decreed his Son their Lord and has mandated that “to him shall bow/All knees in Heav'n, and shall confess him Lord” (V, 607-608) This decree prideful and envious Satan could not abide. He resolves to rebel, never bending the knee, nor, if he can persuade them, will any of the angels under his command, whom he in turn has assembled in convocation. Milton ascribes to him words of great rhetorical power, not least to arouse in those gathered that same feeling of envious hurt. But his discourse contains an argument. After characterizing the Almighty's decree as imposing a yoke, Satan proceeds

Will ye submit your necks, and choose to bend

The supple knee? ye will not, if I trust to

know ye right, or if ye know yourselves

Natives and Sons of Heav'n possest before

By none, and if not equal all, yet free,

Equally free;...

Who can in reason then or right assume

Monarchy over such as live by right...

In freedom equal? or can introduce

Law and Edict over us, who without law

Err not? much less for this to be our Lord,

And look for adoration to th'abuse

Of those Imperial Titles which assert

Our being ordain'd to govern, not to serve?

(V, 787-792, 794-795, 797-802)

Although it may seem barbarous to extract an argument from Milton's glorious language, our interest in this passage is as argumentation theorists. How then may we extract Satan's reasoning?

- (1) Prior to this decree, all Natives of Heaven (including the Almighty and his Son) have been equally free.
- (2) No one has a right to assume monarchy over one's equals in freedom. Hence
- (3) The Almighty has no right to proclaim this decree. Furthermore
- (4) We angels need no law to direct us in doing right. So
- (5) The decree is unnecessary. Finally
- (6) We are ordained to govern, not serve, since
- (7) Our imperial titles attest to this fact.
- (8) Requiring governors to give adoration treats them as servants.
- (9) Treating governors as servants is abusive. So
- (10) The decree abuses us. Therefore
- (11) The decree is without force and our refusing to obey it justified.

We shall return to the evaluation of this argument shortly, but we shall do this in light of Abdiel's counterargument and Satan's rejoinder.

Abdiel turns his critical attention exclusively to the first strand of Satan's argument. He concedes premise (2) but challenges premise (1), first explicitly rejecting the implicit conclusion (3):

... unjust thou say'st

Flatly unjust, to bind with Laws the free  
 And equal over equals to let Reign, ...  
 Shalt thou give Law to God, shalt thou dispute  
 With him the points of liberty, who made  
 Thee what thou art, and form'd the Pow'rs of Heav'n  
 Such as he pleas'd, and circumscrib'd thir being?  
 Yet by experience taught we know how good,  
 And of our good, and of our dignity  
 How provident he is, ...

... But to grant it thee unjust,

That equal over equals Monarch Reign:  
 Thyself though great and glorious does thou count,  
 Or all Angelic Nature join'd in one,  
 Equal to him begotten Son, by whom  
 As by his Word the mighty Father made  
 All things, ev'n thee, and all the Spirits of Heav'n  
 By him created in their bright degrees,  
 Crown'd them with Glory ...

(V, 818-820, 822-828a, 831-839)

Abdiel's argument can be laid out quite straightforwardly:

- (1) The Almighty created you and indeed all the spirits of heaven, and endowed all with their

glory. Therefore

- (2) Neither you nor all angels taken together are equal to the Almighty. Therefore
- (3) You have no right to enter with God in determining what are the laws or principles governing your relation.<sup>1</sup> Therefore
- (4) The Decree of the Almighty is just.

As Abdiel proceeded by arguing against Satan's basic premise (1), so Satan replies first by questioning Abdiel's basic premise, and then arguing against it:

That we were form'd then say's thou? ...

... strange point and new!

Doctrine which we would know whence learnt, who saw

When this creation was? remember'st thou

Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being?

We know no time when we were not as now;

Know none before us, self-begot, self-rais'd

By our own quickening power....

Our puissance is our own, our own right hand

Shall teach us highest deeds, by proof to try

Who is our equal: ...

(V, 853, 855-861, 864-866)

Satan is playing two dialectical roles in this discourse. When asking questions, he is playing the

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<sup>1</sup> That is, Satan has no right to expect that the Almighty will enter with him into a Rawlsian original position in which the two as equals (with the other angels) will choose from behind a veil of ignorance the basic principles of justice to govern their relations.

opponent's role to Abdiel's proponent. But when making declarative assertions, Satan is playing the proponent role. His assertions support an implicit conclusion that we are not creatures of or subordinate or inferior to the Almighty. Satan ends his discourse by ordering Abdiel quickly to report his sentiments to the King. Abdiel complies after proclaiming it no longer safe to be in the company of those doomed to immanent destruction. Satan and Abdiel end the dialectic at this confrontation stage. Is there anything which might allow them to proceed to the further states of a critical discussion? The literary critic and legal scholar Stanley Fish replies negatively, and his argument raises very interesting questions for whether argumentation can deal with world-view dissensus. However, before examining Fish's argument, let us frame Satan's and Abdiel's contrasting world-views, at least as concerns the nature and composition of the spiritual realm, as contained in these passages.

For Satan, this realm consists of beings who by nature are governors, attested by their titles, who also by nature flawlessly exercise their power and authority. Furthermore, although there are hierarchies among the angels, not all exercise the same power or authority, all are equally free. Furthermore, the scope of what the angels have directly "experienced," either through sense perception—or some angelic analogue—memory, introspection constitutes the scope of being. All explanations are to be sought in this realm. Thus, Satan's world-view contains an ontology with epistemological ramifications. By contrast, Abdiel, although recognizing the hierarchy of spiritual beings, recognizes one—the Almighty—as preëminent through having created the others together with their inherent powers. As dependent creatures, all are not equally free vis-a-vis their Maker. Although we did not have direct experience of our making, we do have experience of the Almighty's benevolent providence, from which we may infer an ultimately

benevolent creator. The point is that knowledge or justified belief extend by inference beyond what we have directly experienced. Again, we see both ontological and epistemological aspects to Abdiel's world-view. Given their distinctly contrasting world-views, is there any way Satan and Abdiel might have proceeded to resolve their dissensus over whether the decree of the Almighty concerning his Son was just?

In arguing that this is impossible, Fish focuses on Satan's asking Abdiel to show that we are created beings and construes the passage

We know no time when we were not as now;

Know none before us, self-begot, self-rai'd

as an argument, our self-creation being inferred from our lack of knowledge of a time when we were other than as now. Fish asks us to contrast this argument with that of the newly created Adam, aware for the first time both of his surrounding world and its beauty and of this body with its powers:

But who I was, or where, or from what cause

Knew not, ...

... how came I thus, how here?

Not of myself; by some great Maker then,

In goodness and in power preëminent;

(VIII, 270-271, 277-279)

Fish sees Adam arguing from the premise that he does not know how he came into being to the conclusion that he owes his being to a Maker first in goodness and power. Adam and Abdiel's world-views are clearly consonant on this epistemological point: Our inferences may pass beyond

the realm of experience in finding an explanation of the experienced realm. Adam infers a Maker first in goodness and power from his experience of the world upon first becoming conscious after his creation. Abdiel makes an analogous inference about the Almighty from his experience of the Almighty's providence. By contrast, Satan's world-view rules out both inferences *a priori*.

Fish sees both arguments as incompletely stated, both lacking a first premise. Given recent work on enthymemes,<sup>2</sup> I believe it better to say that both arguments instance substantial, as opposed to formal, inference rules or warrants.

Satan's warrant:

Given that  $x$  does not remember how  $x$  got here

One may take it that  $x$  is self-created

Adam's warrant:

Given that  $x$  knows not how  $x$  got here

One may take it that  $x$  is the work of a Maker unsurpassed in goodness and power

This construal is not fair to Adam, given the context of his discourse in Book VIII of *Paradise Lost*. When Adam says that he knew not how he came here, "here" refers to a surrounding of preëminent beauty and possessed of a body blessed with health and vigor. It seems far more accurate to formulate his warrant this way:

Given that  $x$  knows not how  $x$  got to this place of preëminent beauty possessed of a  
body of preëminent vitality

One may take it that  $x$  is the work of a Maker unsurpassed in goodness and power.

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<sup>2</sup> For our analysis of enthymemes and references to related literature, see our (20xy), Chapter 7.

Fish now makes a crucial point for his argument that this exchange between Satan and Abdiel cannot go beyond the confrontation stage:

Since the first premise is what is missing, it cannot be derived from anything in the visible scene; it is what must be imported—on no evidentiary basis whatsoever—so that the visible scene, the things of this world, can *acquire* the meaning and significance they will now have. (1996, 19, italics in original)

It is a commonplace that corresponding to an argument is a conditional statement, the conjunction of the premises being the antecedent, the conclusion the consequent. As Hitchcock (1985) has shown, arguments which some analyze as first-order enthymemes assume more than this associated conditional, namely some universal generalization of that conditional. As we have argued (20xy), this universal generalization must be nomic, supporting subjunctive conditionals, and not merely accidental. It is never a description, an extensional statement whose truth conditions concern just the actual world. In many instances, it is an interpretation,<sup>3</sup> an intensional statement whose truth-conditions involve considering other possible worlds.<sup>4</sup> Hence, if to be derived from the visible scene means simply to describe some aspect of one's surroundings of which one is aware just through sense perception, we agree with Fish that the first premise cannot be derived in this way. We also agree that in the light of interpretive generalizations, certain descriptive features acquire meaning (or their meaning becomes disclosed). This point may be appreciated better in connection with warrants. Consider again Adam's warrant.

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<sup>3</sup> For our definition of interpretation as a type of statement and our distinction of the basic types of statements, see our (2005a), Chapter 5.2, especially p. 105.

<sup>4</sup> The types of associated conditionals assumed parallels the types of warrants an argument may involve. For a discussion of these types, see our (2005b).

Although the premise is an aesthetic evaluation rather than a description, in light of this warrant Adam does not see himself in a randomly beautiful world but in one whose beauty is attributable to conscious agency. But if one has an explanation for some event or condition, that event or condition has meaning, at least in some sense or to some degree. Likewise, Satan's warrant is interpretive. It associates a meaning, being self-created, with the non-remembrance of one's origin.

Fish elaborates his position that first premises—alternatively warrants—cannot be based on evidence by saying

In the absence of a fixed commitment—of a first premise that cannot be the object of thought because it is the enabling condition of thought—cognitive activity cannot get started. One's consciousness must be grounded in an originary act of faith—a stipulation of basic value—from which determinations of right and wrong, relevant and irrelevant, real and unreal, will then follow. (1996, 19-20)

Let us refer to this as the Miltonian position. This formulation involves an ambiguity. Does the view hold that each warrant, as corresponding to a first premise, is an act of faith or is there one or more fundamental first principles, not subject to support through evidence, from which warrants follow? In the end, it may not matter, if one holds that ultimately our warrants are not based on evidence. Let us, then, investigate first the version which asserts that by virtue of our warrants, we recognize what is relevant to what, that something's possessing a certain property is evidence that it possesses some further property, but that these warrants as principles of evidence are not themselves defensible through evidence. They are and must be accepted on faith, the faith constituting one's world view.

Continuing within the framework of the Toulmin model, we see another point at the core of the Miltonian position. Recall that non-demonstrative warrants are open to rebuttal. We have already seen that it is part of Satan's world view to recognize as real only what is disclosed by such descriptive belief-generating mechanisms as perception, memory, introspection. Hence, any warrant permitting us to infer something non-observable from what is observable must be rejected. The principle identifying "experience" with being is a blanket rebuttal of all such warrants. Again, such a rebuttal cannot be defended with evidence, but derives from the basic act of faith which stipulates what is real and unreal. Warrants, then, as constituting principles of evidence, and rebuttals, as principles invalidating putative principles of evidence, are parts or consequences of one's world-view.

Fish sees in this picture of the structure of cognitive activity a challenge to the liberal ideal of open mindedness to all positions, including those incompatible with one's cherished opinions, an open mindedness including a willingness to revise one's viewpoints in light of argumentation. As such, the picture challenges much of the argumentation community's understanding of the practice of argument and its ideal conditions. For example, consider the pragma-dialectical code of conduct for rational discussants. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst require that "the discussants must be able to advance every point of view and must be able to cast doubt on every point of view" (1984, p. 154). If asked, a party advancing a standpoint must defend it with cogent argument. If the defense fails, the proponent must retract the standpoint. If it succeeds, the challenger must retract her doubt. (Compare Rules 2 and 9 in (1992), pp. 208-209.) Clearly, on Fish's picture if one tried to argue for a claim expressing the propositional content of one's originating act of faith, one would be arguing in a circle. Since the originating

act determines what is deemed relevant or irrelevant, the very warrants one's argument would instantiate would depend for their backing ultimately on the originating act of faith and thus on the claim one were trying to justify. Any proponent who realizes this realizes that he cannot argue cogently for that claim.<sup>5</sup>

Even if the proponent failed to realize the circularity of his attempted argument, it is hard to see how the discussion could ever proceed to the argumentation stage. This stage presupposes agreement on the rules of discussion. But if proponent and challenger have different, indeed incompatible originating acts of faith, their very inference rules and rebuttals, grounded in the originating acts, will differ and essentially differ. Remember these originating acts of faith are not subject to rational appraisal. Even if the parties attempted to bypass agreement on rules and proceed to argumentation, I do not see how the proponent could realize that his argument failed, if it did, or the challenger realize that the proponent's argument was successful, if it was. The discussion could never reach the concluding stage. A critical discussion in the pragma-dialectical sense is impossible on the Miltonian position.

Again, the Miltonian view seems to wreck havoc with Johnson's theory of argument as manifest rationality. For Johnson, "if argumentation is to be properly understood, it must be seen as the exhibition of rationality" (2000, p. 13), where "rationality is the ability to engage in the practice of giving and receiving reasons" (2000, p. 14). But if cognitive activity begins in an originating act of faith, which determines what is deemed relevant or irrelevant, there can be no giving or receiving of reasons between persons not sharing the originating act (at least to the extent that their originating acts do not overlap). A proponent cannot offer reasons to a

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<sup>5</sup> He realizes this unless, of course, his originating act sanctions circular inference.

challenger not sharing the originating act of faith and she receive them, because she cannot see them *as* reasons for the claim the proponent is trying to defend.

This position also wrecks havoc with Siegel's considerations for a theory of rationality in (1988). Siegel specifically raises the question of justifying rationality, where rationality "is to be understood as being 'coextensive with the relevance of reasons'" (1988, p. 33, quoting I. Scheffler, *Conditions of Knowledge*, p. 107). Implicit in Siegel's discussion is the understanding that reasons are reasons *simpliciter*. That *A* is a reason for *B* is an objective fact about how *A* and *B* are related. True, someone may fail to recognize that *A* is a reason for *B* or fail to be moved by that reason. We might say that *A* does not count as a reason for *B* from that person's perspective. But if *A* *is* a reason for *B*, it makes no sense to relativize that to any person, or to ask for whom it *is* a reason. The Miltonian position holds all reasons as relative to a person's originating commitments, which are made without any reason whatsoever. "Why should one be moved by reasons?" Unless one's originating commitment constituted a given claim *A* as a reason for the claim that one should be moved by reasons, the question is meaningless. If the originating commitment did in fact constitute *A* as a reason for the claim, the question whether *A* is a good reason for that claim would seem ultimately unanswerable. It goes back to why one should accept the originating commitment, for which there is no answer. The value of reasons would be sharply reduced. Rationality might have the value of consistency. It is hard to see how it could have much more or to see how reasons could have objective force to be recognized and reckoned with.

For the Miltonian, the belief expressing the faith of the originating act constitutes what is understood as reasonable by the person making that act of faith. Any viewpoint challenging that originating belief will be dismissed as unreasonable. "A reasonable mind is a mind that refuses to

be open” (Fish, 1996, 20). The Miltonian position does not entail that the originating act of faith need be totally idiosyncratic. Persons may share commitments and thus share a faith common, at least in part. Fish sees this Miltonian stance as typifying religious commitment, the shared faith of a religious community. Indeed, we might see it as typifying ideological commitments in general, and more generally as typifying world-view commitments. For the adherents of a religious tradition or an ideology with a core creed, challenges to the tenets of that creed might seem impossible. Again, a challenge to one facet of one’s world-view would seem absurd.

The liberal stance presupposed by argumentation theory’s very understanding of argument as dialectical seems incompatible with the Miltonian stance of commitment. To seek to resolve a difference of opinion through argument, the parties must agree on the principles of evidence certifying the outcome. But if the difference concerns some opinion central to the world-view of one of the parties to the discussion, and world-views determine principles of evidence, a dialectical discussion seems impossible. But to what extent are difference of opinion the result of differences over principles of evidence? Perhaps not all differences of opinion involve such differences, and this leaves a door open for the liberal view of argument.

One way for the advocates of argument to deal with this plurality of world-view commitments would be to rule out argument over those commitments or over opinions essentially deriving from them, and to rule out appealing to any principles of evidence essentially dependent on them in any dialectical exchange, at least in any dialectical exchange having a bearing on the *polis*. Although this accords with a liberal stance, Fish argues that it itself actually expresses a core ideological commitment of liberalism:

Liberalism rests on the substantive judgment that the public sphere must be

insulated from viewpoints that owe their allegiance not to its procedures—to the unfettered operation of the market-place of ideas—but to the truths they work to establish. (1996, 22)

Liberalism presupposes that at least some issues of fact and principles of evidence can be disentangled from issues of ideology. That “a stage of perception...exists *before* interest kicks in” is a “prime tenet of liberal thought” (Fish 1996, 25). For liberalism, we might say, a viewpoint not justifiable through principles independent of ideological commitments cannot be taken seriously. It is as unreasonable from the liberal point of view as the viewpoints challenging that view are unreasonable from the viewpoint of those committed to that view.

If this characterization of liberalism is correct and the argumentation community is committed to the liberal stance, then it would seem that the argumentation community is intolerant of ideological commitment, including religious commitment. Such commitments are irrational and attempts to resolve them through argument futile. Such a viewpoint cannot fail to have negative social consequences for the argumentation community. It is saying that most of the commitments by which persons see meaning and value fail to be rational, with all the negative emotive force of that characterization. Those with world-view commitments who might take umbrage over being characterized as irrational have a riposte. Liberalism’s commitment to principles of evidence regarded as independent of world-view commitments and rejection of ideologically dependent principles is simply part of *its* ideological commitment! Liberalism is an ideology on all fours with other ideologies, but involving this distinct paradox: Liberalism’s core principles concerning evidence are originating ideological commitments not subject to justification through evidence and therefore contradictory to those very principles themselves!

How may we come to the rescue of argumentation?

Let us say first that Fish's epistemological view contains a very important insight, one which I believe he shares with Peirce.<sup>6</sup> Peirce analyzes belief as a habit which develops under the stimulation of various experiences and the pathways we find most successful in dealing with these irritations. One type of belief-habit conveys us from one judgment, the premise, to another judgment, the conclusion, i.e. the belief-habit allows us to *infer* the conclusion from the premise. Clearly, since the experiences of different individuals will be different, we may expect them to develop different habits, including different inferential belief-habits. These differences will affect intuitions of what counts as a reason for what, intuitions of relevance. Hence we find Fish on solid ground when he allows that different persons will recognize evidence differently. To be able to infer a conclusion from a premise is to recognize that the premise or what it expresses has a certain *meaning*. Different persons then will recognize meaning differently and interpret situations differently. *A fortiori*, members holding different world views will recognize meaning differently. But we cannot agree that the first premise of any argument is imported or must be imported "*on no evidentiary basis whatsoever.*" Taking the assumption as a warrant rather than a premise, Fish in effect is claiming that such warrants cannot be backed, in Toulmin's sense, alternatively that their associated nomic universal generalizations are immune to logical or epistemological evaluation. Is this true? Are they simply matters of faith?

By including backing for warrants in the layout of arguments, Toulmin is allowing that warrants or their corresponding universal conditionals, are subject to evidentiary support. *Pace* Fish, we can subject both Satan's and the second formulation of Adam's warrant to rational

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<sup>6</sup> See "What is a Leading Principle" in (1955), pp. 129-134.

scrutiny. Consider the premise of Satan's warrant:

$x$  does not remember how  $x$  got here.

Substituting for 'x' a referring expression denoting some being with a capacity for memory, the intended domain of this warrant, produces a logically consistent statement. There is nothing self-contradictory in saying

John does not remember how John got here.

But consider the conclusion. Is the notion of a self-created being logically consistent? Although this, like all substantive philosophical positions, is open to debate, common sense might vote that self-creation is not coherent.<sup>7</sup> But surely a warrant allowing one to pass from a consistent statement to one metaphysically incoherent is totally unreliable, if not invalid. By contrast, Adam's warrant is abductive, passing from a description to an explanation. But one can certainly argue for an explanation by arguing that it is superior to its plausible alternatives. Such an argument, better the evidence included in the premises of the argument, constitute backing for the warrant. Although Adam may reason according to his warrant without reflection, this *in itself* does not show that his warrant can only be accepted on faith.

Fish may now object that the critique betrays a superficial understanding of his position. Satan's warrant derives from his "faith" that the limits of his experience determine the limits of reality. This faith is essential to Satan. "The habit of identifying the limits of reality with the limits of his own horizons defines Satan—it makes him what he is" (1996, 19). Since you do not

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<sup>7</sup> To our knowledge, only one philosopher has challenged this view, Quentin Smith, in connection with arguing against a divine cause of the universe. But Menssen and Sullivan in (2007) have pointed out a very serious lacuna in his argument. If not logically true, we are in sympathy with them that asserting nothing causes (or creates) itself has high probability.

share Satan's essential commitment, you may judge that Satan's warrant may be rebutted. But you yourself have essential commitments, or at least commitments to one or more overarching basic or first principles, not open to *your* consideration because they determine the very structure of your rationality, including your capacity to critique other viewpoints.

Fish endorses this position in a striking epistemological statement:

Evidence is never independent in the sense of being immediately perspicuous; evidence comes into view (or doesn't) in the light of some first premise or "essential axiom" that cannot itself be put to the test because the protocols of testing are established by its pre-assumed authority. (1996, 23)

Is *this* true? Let us return to the confrontation between Satan and Abdiel. Could they not agree on any statement and if asked, agree on the evidence which might support it and that this evidence does support it? Since the Deity has called a convocation of *all* angels, they were both present when he appointed his Son their Head. Could they not agree that their experience—whatever that might mean for an angel—constitutes evidence, indeed all the evidence they need, that the Almighty had made this proclamation? Suppose one angel has lost his way and arrived at the convocation late. Could not both Satan and Abdiel relate what the Almighty had done and would not both regard their testimony as providing evidence that the Almighty had published this decree? Should the angel remain doubtful, could they not urge him to consult other angels in the confidence that their convergent testimony would constitute evidence sufficient to convince rationally? Is not the evidential value of this first hand experience and testimony transparent? How does it derive from some originating commitment?

For Satan the Almighty's proclamation means a power grab, which it certainly does not

for Abdiel. They differ radically on the meaning of the event and thus on whether their experience constitutes evidence for their contrary interpretations. Now there is a profound epistemic difference between saying that the Deity made a certain proclamation and saying that by making this proclamation the Deity made a power grab. The first is a simple description of a publically observable event. The second is a claim about the intentions of the Deity, not open to public inspection. The Deity, presumably, has introspective awareness of his intentions. He may also declare his intentions to others, giving them testimonial evidence of these intentions. But for anyone else, coming to believe that the Deity has these intentions is a matter of interpretation on their part. An interpretive belief habit has let them pass from certain of their beliefs to the belief that the Deity is attempting a power grab. That Satan's and Abdiel's different views on the intentions of the Deity are due to fundamental differences in their originating commitments constitutes a plausible explanation. By virtue of their different originating commitments, they interpret experienced features of reality differently. Could one amend the Miltonian claim to allow that principles of evidence for descriptions of public events may be independent of any originating commitment, but that principles of evidence involving interpretive principles, including evidence for those principles themselves, are consequent upon an originating commitment?

Such an amendment constitutes a significant concession for the Miltonian to liberalism. Some principles of evidence may be disentangled from ideology. But if our examples of experimental evidence or considerations of the incoherence of self-causation are cogent, we do have some sources of objective evidence or the objective critique of principles of evidence. Hence, although we can agree with Fish that many rules of evidence one person acknowledges

may differ from the rules of evidence acknowledged by someone else, and we can also agree that a person's commitments, especially in connection with value, ideology, and world view, issue in a set of inference habits specifically reflecting those commitments, we do not agree that these need to constitute the entire set of evidence principles and inference habits a person employs.

However, such a liberalism seems quite thin. Do most arguments in the *polis* confine themselves just to descriptions or assertions about formal logical relations and consistency? Are all interpretive principles derivative from originating commitments and immune to objective criticism? Likewise are all evaluative principles, principles in particular allowing us to ascribe intrinsic goodness or badness, right or wrong, virtue or vice, matters of some originating commitment made or held without evidence and immune to criticism? In argumentation one may appeal to such interpretive and evaluative principles as warrants, allowing one to see certain reasons *as* reasons, in part determining what one recognizes as "right and wrong, relevant and irrelevant" (Fish 1996, 20). The question is whether one's interpretive and evaluative warrants must all "be grounded in an originary act of faith—a stipulation of basic value" (1996, 20) as Fish puts it, or whether such warrants—some at least—may be justified. The plausibility of Toulmin's model shows Fish wrong here. Given a warrant, we can ask about its conditions of backing and rebuttal, i.e. we can carry on a critical appraisal of that warrant and its employment in licencing a particular inference. Consider the simple causal dispositional statement "Sugar is dissoluble in water," i.e. "If anything were a lump of sugar and were placed in water, it would dissolve." Clearly, corresponding to this generalized subjunctive is the warrant

Given that  $x$  is a lump of sugar and  $x$  is placed in water

One may take it that  $x$  dissolves

How may this warrant be backed? Clearly, instances of lumps of sugar being placed in water which subsequently dissolve constitute backing evidence. Further, if known relevant variables which might be causing the dissolving rather than being placed in water are suitably varied, if our backing evidence is both appropriately large and appropriately varied, then we may rightly judge that our warrant is properly backed. The backing evidence renders both the warrant and the corresponding causal dispositional statement acceptable. But since the statements is an interpretation, the warrant is interpretive also. Hence given a causal warrant, we can ask for the body of evidence supporting its corresponding nomic generalization. Given a legal warrant (Toulmin's famous from  $x$  was born in Bermuda, infer  $x$  is a British subject), we may ask to read the statute on which it is based. A *prima facie* evaluative warrant such as

From  $x$  is a pleasurable activity

One may take it that  $x$  is (*prima facie*) intrinsically good

may be self-backed as immediately evident. Again, in applying a causal warrant, we may ask whether the operation of some relevant variable constitutes a defeating exception in this particular case. Although for a given individual, such warrants may be consequences of some "originary act of faith," it still makes sense to ask whether they are backed or rebutted, apart from any such commitment. Indeed, we can see such evidentiary relations independently of any "originary act of faith."

Should a Miltonian cannot concede this last point, he or she would have conceded a lot more than just that the principles of evidence for descriptions or statements ascribing logical properties or relations are objective, independent of world view commitments. Argumentation in the *polis* is much more robust. But must the Miltonian abandon his or her position completely?

We have spoken of *prima facie* evaluative warrants, but there are also higher-order principles, such as rules of priority for adjudicating conflicts of duties or certain principles seen as basic, such as Mill's principle of utility or Rawls' first two principles of justice.<sup>8</sup> Have we at last come to principles which cannot be justified but must be accepted on faith? Neither Mill nor Rawls take this attitude toward their first principles. Mill devotes an extended discussion to justifying the principle of utility in *Utilitarianism*. Rawls explicitly defends his basic principles by arguing that they would be accepted by the parties in the original position, who choose the basic rules regulating their life together from behind a veil of ignorance concerning their particular natural endowments or social privileges. Nor does Rawls leave his model of the original position unjustified. He believes "that there is a broad measure of agreement that the principles of justice should be chosen under certain conditions" (1971, p. 18), demonstrably those of his original position.

The Miltonian can still reply. True, you have shown that there are principles of evidence independent of originating commitments. But, with the exception of evaluations, these principles concern evidence for descriptions, scientific generalizations, for consequences of the rules of some institution. By contrast, with the big existential questions, are not these claims superficial? Even evaluations backed from below in many cases state simple *prima facie* judgments. Contrast

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<sup>8</sup> We may characterize the principle of utility as asserting that "an action is right if, and only if, it brings about a greater balance of good over bad consequences than any other act open to the agent" (Schneewind 1967, p. 319). Rawls formulates his two principles of justice as

- (1) Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others.
- (2) Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all. (1971, p. 60)

these concerns with the commitments of Satan and Abdiel. For Satan, the world, as disclosed to us by our experience, is all there is, and this experience, in itself, discloses no being on whom the world is metaphysically dependent. This standpoint is at the core of his originating commitment. But this core determines his refusal to acknowledge any creaturely dependence. The only being his experience discloses on whom he might depend for his life and being is himself. Hence any worship of another is “prostration vile” (V, 782). By contrast, at the core of Abdiel’s world view is acknowledgment of creaturely dependence on the Almighty and trust in his providence. Are not these contrasting world views each the product of radially different originating commitments? But why should we regard their contrasting metaphysical beliefs as immune to scrutiny on the basis of commonly recognized epistemic principles of evidence? Do ideological or metaphysical commitments and what they entail always lie outside what can be subject to critical discussion? Can argumentation play no role in adjudicating Abdiel’s dispute with Satan?

Interestingly, the words Milton gives to Abdiel in his first reply to Satan suggest an answer. Here Abdiel claims that the goodness and providence of the Almighty are matters *known by experience*. In a later reply to Satan, Abdiel begins

O alienate from God, O Spirit accurst,

Forsak’n of all good (V, 877-878)

In other words, unless our belief forming mechanism is not functioning properly, we recognize good when we meet with it. To be more precise, we can recognize the intrinsic goodness of states of affairs we encounter and we can form experientially grounded beliefs concerning the moral qualities, including the virtuousness, of the character of others. By addressing Satan as “alienate from God, Forsak’n of all good,” Abdiel is making an epistemological point. Satan is alienated

from the evidence of the Almighty's goodness, evidence supporting the belief in the Almighty as providential creator. Thus the core constitutive beliefs of Satan's and Abdiel's world views concerning the origin of heaven and the character of the Deity *are* open to experience and, if so, open to test through argumentation. Although Satan claims the burden of proof is on Abdiel to show that the heavens and all the powers therein are created, Abdiel can claim that the burden is on Satan to rebut the force of all the evidence of the Almighty's goodness. Such a rebuttal cannot consist merely in raising the question of whether such goodness is the deceptive ploy of a self-centered, power-hungry tyrant. Without some further evidence, Satan's claim as a rebuttal of Abdiel's case for the Almighty's goodness is nugatory.

Argumentation then may enter into Satan and Abdiel's dispute at the level of their world views, provided one will grant that one can reliably recognize value, at least intrinsic and moral value, apart from having a world-view commitment. What may we say of this proviso for disputation? First, what may we say of recognizing actual as opposed to *prima facie* goodness or badness, apart from world views? Such recognition may involve either an intuitive balancing of *prima facie* goodness against *prima facie* badness or an appeal to higher-order moral principles, for whose justification we may ultimately have to appeal to models. But cannot one weigh *prima facie* good against *prima facie* bad apart from expressing one's world view? How is world view involved in recognizing that enduring a small amount of inconvenience is better than risking a greater amount of lasting pain? Now consider Rawls' portrayal of the parties to the original situation, where the fundamental principles of justice, the core of the social contract, are framed and agreed to. Besides stipulating that the parties choose freely from behind a veil of ignorance, Rawls characterizes them as equal and interested in identifying the best means to further their

own interest. Is Rawls here expressing, at least in part, his world view? When he claims that his model of the original situation accords with certain presuppositions about what is an appropriate situation in which questions of justice arise, are not these presuppositions or intuitions expressions of a certain world view with a distinct viewpoint on human nature? Yet must one share Rawls' world view to accept those presuppositions and to see some plausibility in Rawls' account of justice?

Consider a critical discussion over whether same-sex marriage should be a legal option. Suppose the discussants are a libertarian, seeking to maximize individual liberty, and a divine command theorist, who holds on the testimony of the scriptures of his tradition that the Divine has proscribed same-sex relations. Could the divine command theorist ever consider God entering the original position behind the veil of ignorance? Would God no longer be God? The position seems absurd. Do we have opposing world views here, rationally irreconcilable? One may see contrast in world-view underlining a number of current hot-button issues. The creationist parent sees the world as the work of God, a view not shared by the materialist. Again, Fish points out "A pro-life advocate sees abortion as a sin against a God who infuses life [by direct agency] at the moment of conception; a pro-choice advocate sees abortion as a decision to be made in accordance with the best scientific opinion as to when the beginning of life, as we know it, occurs" (1996, 24). Given the passions that these controversies arouse, expecting that these differences of opinion in general could be resolved through some persuasion dialogue is naive. But this is beside the point. The issue is whether commitments to a world view are made completely independently of evidence and are immune to confirmation or modification through evidence.

To give a comprehensive answer with some confidence concerning how persons come to form their world views requires a separate study in its own right. The following considerations must suffice for now. Let us now set aside Satan, Abdiel, and Adam. In many instances, we expect the creationist and the materialist acquired their contrasting world views by taking the word of different communities, a conservative religious community versus a thoroughgoing secular culture. We expect this is also true of the pro-life versus the pro-choice advocate. Now, as recent work in epistemology has emphasized, we accept many of our beliefs on the word of others, including the word of various communities to which we may belong. Taking one's word is as much a belief-generating mechanism as is sense perception. Also, both generate basic beliefs, as opposed to beliefs we reach as conclusions from premises. The question is when such beliefs are properly basic,<sup>9</sup> i.e. when we are justified in holding them, barring awareness of some defeater.

In (2005a), we suggested that when someone's word constituted genuine testimony—i.e. when the person addressed recognizes signs that the proponent is vouching for the claim asserted and signs that “the proponent has the requisite competence, authority, or credentials to state” that claim truly (2005a, p. 291)—accepting that word was justified. If the word of a community vouches for the occurrence of some historical event or some scientific or practical generalization, where these are part of its stock of common knowledge, surely it has the competence to make these claims. The testimony is evidence enough to justify acceptance, again barring defeaters. But when a specific community seeks to transmit not common knowledge but a world view, in a pluralistic society, such defeating would seem to abound in the divergent world views current

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<sup>9</sup> For Plantinga's definition of a belief's being properly basic, see (1993), p. 20n.

within the society. How can one be justified in accepting the world view commitments of one's community in light of the conflicting commitments of some other community? Would such acceptance be an unjustified and unjustifiable leap of faith, as Fish suggests is true of our originating commitments?

Can one, in some sense, give evidence for these core commitments? Let us approach that question by considering their function. We may see the contents of these commitments providing an overall, overarching, or comprehensive explanation, investing events in the world with meaning or value, or setting limits on the scope of any explanation. Thus, for the materialist, there can be no explanation of events beyond the interplay of purely material forces and factors. A theist, by contrast, can respect materialist explanations but allow for understanding some aspects of the world as expressions of agency, including divine agency, or as revelations of the nature of the Ultimate. We have already seen how Satan's view of himself and his angels as self-made led to radically different value commitments from Abdiel's view of the world's creaturely status. World views may further address questions of meaning and value at an existential level and, what perhaps is deeper yet, threats to such meaning and how such threats may be overcome. Can one see oneself as having a place and value in the "grand scheme of things"—at least to hold it as a working hypothesis that such a place can be found? How can one hold that there is such a place, given the threats to meaning from life's contingencies, from one's own failures or shortcomings, and in face of one's death? One does not simply accept an answer to such questions, as one would accept a statement describing some event or the covering law of some explanation. One is *committed* to answers to world view questions. A belief that one has found one's place in life or that finding one's place is a task of preëminent importance will be life

directing. Are all such commitments arbitrary leaps of faith perhaps, in the end, comforting but totally wishful thinking?

We contend that such beliefs may be based on a special type of evidence. Humans are confronted with existential questions and may receive answers from certain communities to which they belong. Already the community's answer introduces the question of evidence. We can certainly ask whether the community's answer constitutes testimony. Remember that we distinguish between receiving one's word and receiving testimony. A person may give his word by simply vouching for some statement, but for example, should that statement be a description of an aspect of some event where we may reasonably expect that the person has witnessed that event, the person's word constitutes testimony. About what is this community giving its word? In the case of at least some communities, it purportedly concerns an event, the Israelites Exodus from Egypt for example, witnessed by the first members of the community, seen as meaning-disclosing by them by revealing how certain existential threats have been overcome, such as the threat of meaninglessness imposed by slavery being overcome through liberation and incorporation into a people, and transmitted and made present to succeeding generations of the community in a way allowing them to understand the meaning disclosed and to appreciate that meaning through commitment.

This word of the community immediately raises at least three evidential-critical questions. Does the community's word that the originating event reported by the founding community constitute genuine testimony that the event occurred? Did the founding community correctly recognize the meaning-disclosing features of the event for themselves? Does this event have an ongoing meaning-disclosing application for current members of the community? We

cannot here go into the epistemology of recognizing meaning within such an existential dimension, whether a particular faculty is involved and, if so, whether there is a presumption for that faculty. Concerning whether the word of the community constitutes testimony for the originating event, the question is whether the community has the authority to vouch that its originating event actually happened. If so, the community's word is testimony and that testimony is evidence, defeasible but evidence nonetheless. Now if one's commitment is consequent upon accepting this testimony and recognizing the meaning the event testified to discloses, then one's commitment is not arbitrary but based on evidence. If the meaning recognized allows one to make meaning of one's own experiences, that very fact constitutes further evidence for the commitment.

What are the implications of these considerations for argumentation? When there is a critical discussion over some disagreement ultimately deriving from a difference in such world view commitments, those holding the divergent points of view may be invited to present a statement of the meaning such experiences disclose and an account of how the experience discloses it. Hence instead of finding themselves at the end of dialogue over some world-view divergence, the participants find themselves with a way to continue it. The critical questions we suggested one might answer before making a commitment may become the questions a challenger might raise in a critical discussion. Why should one afford a presumption to the word of the community either when it vouches for the historicity of its originating event or for its ongoing meaning? Especially in connection with the latter, if one could argue that the recognition came through a meaning intuiting experience which was analogous to other experiences for which there are presumptions, such as seeing natural kinds in the world defined by certain

essential properties,<sup>10</sup> would that not count toward showing the presumptive reliability of this mode of intuition in this employment? A challenger may further ask how comprehensive is the meaning disclosed? Here the discussants make contact with plausibility considerations, as they might in critically discussing an explanation.

Admittedly, adequately addressing the issues raised here calls for a study in its own right. But if our contention is correct, then not even at the level of divergent world views have we arrived at a point where the giving of reasons and concomitantly the evaluative response to those reasons is out of place. Those with different world view commitments can nonetheless argue that assertions proffered as evidence *are* evidence and that there are world view independent criteria for assessing that evidence.

Surely world views will not be given up or revised lightly in light of just any critical exchange. But commitment revision may not be the point of a critical discussion over such issues. The goal may be to test whether a commitment and indeed a whole world view is a viable position among a plurality of world views. This does not mean that those holding a world view are asked to no longer regard it as literally true or to otherwise modify or attenuate their commitment. Their critical discussion may instance a distinct use of argument which theorists have yet to recognize adequately. Rather than being a truth-seeking dialogue or even a persuasion dialogue, the exchange may be a viability seeking dialogue, where the goal, in the words of the skeptical realist Marilyn McCord Adams, is to identify positions which “commend themselves on the basis of their internal clarity, consistency, and coherence; on the basis of their explanatory power and fruitfulness” (2006, p. 11). Of course, critical scrutiny might show that certain world

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<sup>10</sup> Kornblith develops this view of natural kinds in (1993), especially Chapters 3 and 4.

views could not have these virtues, even if revised. It would be interesting to know whether there would be a correlation between commitment to such world views and fanaticism. But those confident that their commitments are viable need not fear dialogue with those holding other positions as somehow showing the non-viability of their views. By replying to other positions, one's views might even grow in the virtues constituting viability. Entering such a dialogue may lead to a deeper understanding of one's world view and a more mature commitment to it. Hence we have not found any reason to refuse to invite those with divergent world view commitments or indeed with any difference in viewpoint over significant, existential issues into a critical discussion.

The question, of course, is whether they will accept the invitation. Satan certainly would not. If one's world view denies that there can be evidence of a certain type, or claims that certain explanations which in open court might be judged best explanations are not viable at all or that certain values are genuinely positive but rather perverse, there may simply be nothing to say to that person in a critical discussion aimed at showing the viability of one's world view. Argumentation is limited by the willingness to enter into such dialectical exchanges. But for those who do accept the invitation, critical discussion offers a way of at least appreciating others' world views, and quite possibly of deeper understanding and refinement of one's own.

We find this recognition of limits and possibilities very significant for discerning the place of argumentation (and thus the importance of argumentation theory) for the present time with its deep cultural differences, which militants may seek to exploit, even violently. Such militants may be closed to entering a critical discussion. But this is not because their world view commitments and those whom they oppose are based on originating commitments which for all

parties are arbitrary and immune to evidential support. Their refusal in no way shows that the invitation to inquiry was conceptually incoherent or critical discussion an impossibility. By contrast, if critical discussion is a genuine possibility, then there is at least one place where divergent cultures in this pluralistic world may meet to critically examine their differences in peace with the promise of growth on all sides. If it is the role of argumentation to provide the framework for such meetings, let us not forget that we in the community of argumentation theorists are the stewards of that framework. In its ever deeper investigation and ongoing transmission, we may find our place in this currently troubled world.

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