

# ISSA Proceedings 2010 - Can Argumentation Really Deal With Dissensus?



## 1. *A Case of Unreconciled Dissensus*

Book V of Milton's *Paradise Lost* presents a striking dissensus between Satan and the Archangel Abdiel over the nature of the Deity. Each presents an argument for his view which - not unsurprisingly - the other rejects. 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 Satan cannot abide. He resolves to rebel, never bending the knee, nor, if he can persuade them, will any of the angels under his command. Paraphrasing to bring out the underlying argument, Satan first proposes

- (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.

Although Satan offers two further arguments, Abdiel turns his critical questions exclusively to Satan's first. Again paraphrasing, his 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) Justice gives you no right to enter with God in determining what are the laws or principles governing your relation. Therefore
- (4) The Decree of the Almighty is just.

Satan replies first by questioning Abdiel's first premise. What evidence is there for this creation, he asks. Who observed it? Do you remember your own making? Satan then continues

We know no time when we were not as now;  
Know none before us, self-begot, self-rai'd

By our own quickening power....

(V, 859-861)

These observations bear on his assertion that "Our puissance is our own," i.e. 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. The dialectic thus ends at this confrontation stage.

With passions running as high as Milton portrays them, one wonders whether the argument could be advanced to a further stage. However, even assuming dispassionate interlocutors, the literary critic and legal scholar Stanley Fish has argued that it could never proceed to a rational resolution. Since his argument presents a challenge to the whole enterprise of argumentation, it deserves the attention of argumentation theorists.

## *2. Fish's Challenge to Argumentation*

In arguing that rational resolution of their dispute is impossible, Fish focuses on Satan's asking Abdiel to show that we are created beings and construes the passage, already quoted,

We know no time when we were not as now;

Know none before us, self-begot, self-rai's'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 his 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. In the context of his argument that all the angels are creatures of the Almighty, Abdiel has made a remark whose relevance he might have highlighted should Satan have permitted him to give evidence of that claim:

Yet by experience taught we know how good,  
And of our good, and of our dignity  
How provident he is, ...  
(V, 826-828)

Adam and Abdiel's reasoning share this epistemological point: Our inferences may pass beyond the realm of experience in finding an explanation of the experienced realm or seeing some significance, e.g, the Deity's benevolent nature, which it points to. By contrast, Satan rejects both inferences *a priori*.

Fish sees both arguments as incompletely stated, both lacking a first premise. Given recent work on enthymemes, **[i]** 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 is consciously aware of no time when x was other than as now nor of any predecessor or progenitor of x  
One may take it that x is self-created

Adam's warrant:

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.

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. (Fish 1996, p. 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 (2011), 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, **[ii]** an intensional statement whose truth-conditions involve considering other possible worlds. **[iii]** 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. Although the premise involves an aesthetic evaluation rather than a mere 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-awareness of one's origination or of any originating progenitor.

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 ordinary act of faith - a stipulation of basic value - from which determinations of right and wrong, relevant and irrelevant, real and unreal, will then follow. (Fish 1996, pp. 19-20)

Following Fish, let us refer to this as the Miltonian position. Hence we understand the position asserting 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 and thus not defensible through argument. They are and must be accepted on faith, the faith constituting at least part of one's world view. One might say that warrants used in particular arguments derive in some sense from some fundamental warrant or warrants. But those basic warrants are not based on any evidence, their

acceptance being an act of faith.

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 epistemological stance to recognize as real only what is disclosed by descriptive belief-generating mechanisms analogous to 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 ruling out certain inferential moves, are articles of faith, not subject to critical scrutiny or support through argumentation.

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 a warrant one accepts, one would at best be arguing in a circle. Since the warrant determines what is deemed relevant or irrelevant, the very warrants one's argument would instantiate would ultimately be acts of faith. Any proponent who realizes this realizes that he cannot argue cogently for that claim. **[iv]**

Even if the proponent failed to realize the futility 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 concerning their warrants, their very inference rules and rebuttals, grounded in

such originating acts of faith, 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. If the proponent's argument depends on an inference rule the challenger does not accept or the proponent would not recognize the force of the challenger's rebuttal, the discussion could never reach the concluding stage. A critical discussion in the pragma-dialectical sense is impossible on the Miltonian position.

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, p. 20). 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 any 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 especially if the difference concerns some opinion central to the world-view of one of the parties to the discussion, and world-views determine the acts of faith which determine principles of evidence, a dialectical discussion seems impossible. But to what extent are differences 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 dissensus over 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 in the public sphere. Not only does this accord 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 procedure - to the unfettered operation of the market-place of ideas - but to the truths they work to establish. (Fish 1996, p. 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, p. 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 viewpoint.

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 beyond the pale of argumentation and attempts to resolve them through argument futile. Such a viewpoint may well have negative social consequences for the argumentation community. It suggests that most of the commitments by which persons see meaning and value fail to be rationally grounded, with all the negative emotive force of that characterization. Those with world-view commitments who might take umbrage over this characterization 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?

### *3. Is Argumentation Caught in a Dilemma?*

Let us say first that Fish’s epistemological view contains a very important insight, one which I believe he shares with Peirce. (See “What is a Leading Principle” in (1955), pp. 129-134.) 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. 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 no warrants can be backed, in Toulmin's sense, more generally that they and 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 are subject to evidentiary support. As is well known, given his notion of argument fields, Toulmin allows distinctly different types of such evidentiary support. **[v]** But this does not gainsay the fact that warrants can be supported with evidence. Indeed the very considerations showing that Peirce and Fish would agree that different persons reason according to warrants belonging to different classes also shows that they would disagree on warrants not having evidentiary support. The experiences which led to the formation of the belief-habit constitute evidentiary backing for it. Furthermore, as Toulmin has taught us, not only can warrants be backed, they can be rebutted. But this is to bring negative evidentiary considerations to bear on evaluating the reliability of the warrant. Further yet, a challenger may raise the question of whether a rebuttal holds and a proponent may show that it does not, thus giving a further type of evidentiary support to the warrant.

*Pace* Fish, we can subject both Satan's and Adam's warrants to rational scrutiny. Consider the premise of Satan's warrant:

x is consciously aware of no time when x was other than as now nor of any predecessor or progenitor of x.



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 is consciously aware of no time when John was other than as now nor of any predecessor or progenitor of John.

But consider the conclusion—John created John. 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. But surely a warrant allowing one to pass from a consistent statement to one metaphysically incoherent is totally unreliable, if not invalid. That no being can create itself constitutes a serious rebuttal to Satan's warrant. By contrast, Adam's warrant is abductive, passing from a description/evaluation to an explanation. But one can certainly argue for an explanation by arguing that it is superior to its alternatives, which constitute possible or potential rebuttals. Such an argument, better the evidence included in the premises of the argument, constitute evidence 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 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? Suppose one's experience leads to forming an inferential belief-habit expressible as a warrant. Suppose one meets another whose stock of inference

habits does not include this warrant. If one presents the evidence or paradigm instances of the evidence which led to the forming of one's belief habit, why cannot the other appreciate that they constitute positive evidence for that warrant, and indeed may even constitute sufficient evidence for acceptance? How is some essential axiom necessary to recognize this evidence *as* evidence? Again, on what essential axiom does one's recognition of the incoherence of a self-created being rely? The newly created Adam could have entertained an additional hypothesis in considering how he came to be in the environment in which he found himself with his body having the powers he is aware of. It all just popped into existence by chance. Does Adam need an originating faith to see which hypothesis he is aware of has higher probability? What essential axiom is necessary for him to see that given two rival hypotheses, the one with the greater likelihood is the one better supported by the evidence—the prime principle of confirmation?

Let us return to the confrontation between Satan and Abdiel. Satan believes he is the equal of the Almighty, at least in freedom. Abdiel believes he is a creature of the Almighty, and thus not equal. These "articles of faith" have a bearing on why Satan accepts the warrant

Given that  $x$  has declared the son of  $x$  Lord over all  $Y$ 's

One may take it that  $x$  has made a power grab

while Abdiel does not. Satan and Abdiel thus 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. That Satan's and Abdiel's different views on the intentions of the Deity are due to fundamental differences in their originating commitments over their creaturely status constitutes a plausible explanation for their dissensus. By virtue of their different originating commitments, they interpret experienced features of reality differently. Could one amend the Miltonian claim to allow that accepting principles of evidence for descriptions of observable events may be independent of any originating commitment, together with recognizing when broadly logical concepts hold and making judgments or estimations of probability, but that accepting principles of evidence involving interpretive principles, including evidence for those principles themselves, is

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 experiential backing for warrants, considerations of the incoherence of self-causation, or best explanations for evidence are cogent, we do have some sources of objective evidence and 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, excluding argumentation from a significant role in the areas of meaning and value may make its role and the liberalism it expresses seem quite thin. Do most arguments in the *public sphere* confine themselves just to descriptions and the generalizations they support, assertions about broadly logical relations, or estimations of probability and their epistemic consequences? Do not the balance of arguments in the public sphere concern meaning and value? The Miltonian can urge: True, you have shown that there are principles of evidence independent of originating commitments. But by contrast with the big existential questions, are not the issues of these arguments superficial? Contrast such 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 core commitment determines his refusal to acknowledge any creaturely dependence. 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 if you concede that argumentation cannot deal with dissensus over such world-view issues, you have made a great concession to my Miltonian position.

But why are Satan's and Abdiel's contrasting metaphysical beliefs 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 such disagreements? We turn to that issue in the next section.

#### 4. *Can Argumentation Not Deal With Certain Cases of Dissensus?*

As Fish has indicated, these metaphysical commitments constitute “an originary act of faith” from which judgments of meaning and value follow. The propositional content of such an act of faith is some ultimate premise or “essential axiom.” The warrants we apply in the “lower level” arguments we have been considering or the associated universal generalizations of these warrants are consequences of these essential axioms. It is by virtue of subscribing to some essential axiom that we recognize some statement as evidence for some other. In addition to the examples of evidentiary relations we have been considering – particular instances supporting and thus backing generalizations, recognition of broadly logical entailment and related concepts such as coherence or incoherence, recognition of relations of conditional probability – we may add recognition that certain descriptive properties such as having made a promise are relevant to certain evaluative properties, here being morally bound to fulfill it.

As we have seen, our previous considerations here cast real doubt on Fish’s claim that recognizing relevance, i.e. recognizing what constitutes evidence for what, is dependent on originating commitments. We can raise the same issue for Fish over lower level arguments of value. How are originating commitments involved in seeing that my making a promise is a reason why I am bound to keep it, at least a *prima facie* reason from which my obligation follows *ceteris paribus*? If someone disagreed about the obligation or just failed to see it, one might invite the person to carry out a thought experiment, imaginatively entering into a situation with the same deontically relevant properties, where that person would admit that the obligation was binding. But where does some essential axiom enter into this argument? The burden of proof, we may urge, is on Fish to show in all these lower-level cases how the recognition of evidential relevance derives from some essential axiom and would be impossible without the recognition of such an axiom. In light of the fact that expecting agreement over relevance in many lower-level cases seems straightforward, Fish has a heavy burden of proof. We shall see the import of this point shortly.

One strategy Fish might use to discharge this burden of proof would be to argue that we are being provincial. We are simply assuming that our recognitions of evidentiary relevance are universal. The fact that we can confidently expect

agreement on judgments of relevance only shows that we have confined our circle of acquaintance to those sharing our originating act of faith or some basic principle overlapping with it significantly. That explains our intuitions of relevance and expected consensus. But imagine someone who holds that our making a promise is not much of a reason for saying we are obligated to keep it. Indeed, suppose the person held that our perceiving where making a promise with no intention to keep it would advance our self-interest in a given situation, we have reason to do just that. Now we are faced with someone with a different essential axiom from which it does *not* follow that making a promise is relevant to keeping it, or that self-interest always trumps moral regard for others. How would you argue with that person?

This question gains significant poignancy in light of our diverse world. People do disagree on fundamental commitments—for or against democracy as the proper form of government, for or against seeing the human individual as having a value superior to the human collective, for or against seeing facts in the world having a transcendental import. Can argumentation deal with dissensus over such commitments, which we may call world-view commitments? It is here that our considerations on recognizing evidentiary relations independently of world-view commitments come to the fore. We may see world view commitments providing an overall, overarching, or comprehensive explanation, investing events in the world with meaning, or setting limits on the scope of any explanation. We have already seen how Satan's view of reality as co-extensive with experience and of himself and his angels as self-made led to radically different value commitments from Abdiel's view of his creaturely status. Given conscious recognition of a world-view, then, one is confronted with two sources for one's judgments of evidentiary relevance – one's individual recognition of relevance apart from any world – view commitment and judgments deriving from that commitment. Where such judgments agree, they are mutually reinforcing. Where they do not, adjustment either on the part of the world-view commitment or on the part of certain individual judgments or both is required to maintain consistency. The goal is to reach what Rawls calls reflective equilibrium. The point is that when in reflective equilibrium, there is a mutually reinforcing evidentiary relation between the world-view commitment and the individual judgments of relevance. "From below," the individual judgments support the "essential axiom" of the world-view commitment. "From above," that the individual judgments may derive from such an axiom supports such judgments. World-view commitments may then

be supported by evidence and it seems we may recognize these support relations independently of the commitment.

We may now address the question of what should be the function of argumentation when dealing with world-view dissensus. Clearly, although complete reflective equilibrium may be an ideal, we expect that in actual cases equilibrium will be a matter of more or less. The more equilibrium, the greater the evidential support, the less the lower. Clearly also, *ceteris paribus*, reflective equilibrium is a sign of the reasonableness of both the fundamental commitment and the individual judgments, and a system in which there is greater reflective equilibrium is one with greater reasonableness. When persons or cultures with divergent world-views meet, they may be able then, to recognize the reasonableness of each other's world view commitments through recognizing degree of reflective equilibrium. An argument which *prima facie* showed why one's world view commitments functioned as basic principles for one's judgments of meaning and value would be a case for the *prima facie* reasonableness of both the world view commitments and the judgments of meaning and value. Surely such an argument could be appreciated as *prima facie* reasonable by someone not sharing those commitments, and indeed such an appreciation would be an act of respect and deepening respect for those who do hold these commitments. But here is an obvious role for argumentation.

The role of argumentation goes further. Those holding one world view might come to recognize that the basic commitment, essential axiom of those in some other culture may possibly be in better reflective equilibrium or hold promise of better reflective equilibrium with their own individual judgments than their own basic axiom. Greater reflective equilibrium would be possible by either accepting the other culture's basic axiom or by modifying their own essential axiom to approximate that of the other culture. But this is tantamount to arguing for an essential axiom. That individual judgments are better accommodated constitutes evidence for the basic commitment.

Furthermore, this new essential axiom may account for individual judgments which the old did not. Consider a materialist and a theist with their contrasting world views. Could not both agree that human beings have human rights? Could not both substantially agree on what are those rights? But is it not conceivable that given one's world view, one might construct a *prima facie* more reasonable or otherwise better explanation of why humans have rights and justification for

respecting those rights than one might be able to construct given a contrasting world view? Might this not move an adherent of the other world view, at least in some way, to reconsider her world view commitments? That is, has the dialogue not taken a step toward the resolution of the disagreement through argument? Again, we are speaking quite generally here, surely could not a *prima facie* acceptable explanation of human equality in one culture on the basis of its world view commitments influence the ongoing argumentation in another culture whose world view commitments may not provide an equally *prima facie* adequate explanation of human equality? Could not such ongoing argumentation lead to an increased convergence of points of view between the two cultures? At the least, entering such a dialogue may lead to a deeper understanding of one's world view and a more mature commitment to it.

Surely, it is plausible that dialogues involving cross-cultural argumentation might lead to such an outcome. But such dialogues have a necessary condition - the participants must be genuinely open to valuing reasonableness. But need this always be the case? Our considerations here have not shown 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 that certain values are not genuinely positive but rather perverse, or claims that certain explanations which in open court might be judged best explanations are not viable at all, there may simply be nothing to say to that person in a critical discussion aimed at showing the reasonableness 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 the reasonableness of others' world views, and quite possibly of deeper understanding and refinement of one's own. Issues of fundamental commitments, essential axioms, world-views are not then beyond the realm of argumentation. These claims are subject to support through argumentation where the recognitions of evidentiary relevance are independent of originating acts of faith. We see Fish's skepticism of argumentation not justified on any level.

What then is 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 rational evaluation. 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 in this pluralistic but currently increasingly polarized world where divergent cultures may meet to critically examine their differences in peace, where argumentation provides the framework for such meetings.

## NOTES

**[i]** For our analysis of enthymemes and references to related literature, see our (2011), Chapter 7.

**[ii]** 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).

**[iii]** The types of associated conditionals assumed parallels the types of warrants an argument may involve. For a discussion of these types, see our (2005b).

**[iv]** He realizes this unless, of course, his originating act sanctions circular inference.

**[v]** Some argumentation theorists have found Toulmin's notion of field problematic. In (2005b), we argue for replacing this notion with an epistemic classification. The points are still the same. Warrants can be backed, albeit in different ways, and different persons may develop different bodies of warrants.

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