

## RATIONAL ARGUMENTATION AND THE DIALECTICAL TIER

RATIONAL ARGUMENTATION

AND

THE DIALECTICAL TIER

By

AMY OHLER, B.A.

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AUTHOR: Amy Ohler, B.A. (University of Windsor)

SUPERVISOR: Professor David Hitchcock

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## **Abstract**

In *Manifest Rationality: A Pragmatic Theory of Argument* (2000), Ralph Johnson claims that the practice of argumentation, of giving and receiving arguments, is characterized by manifest rationality: argumentation must appear to be rational to all the participants involved. Because argumentation is characterized by manifest rationality and because the purpose of argumentation is rational persuasion, Johnson proposes a two-tier definition of ‘argument’, the product of argumentative practice. In addition to an ‘illative core’ composed of premises offered in support of a conclusion, Johnson claims that an argument must possess a ‘dialectical tier’, in which the arguer anticipates and responds to objections, criticisms, alternative points of view, and the consequences and implications of his or her own view. However, Johnson’s definition of argument, and his claim that argumentation is characterized by manifest rationality, rest on the specification of rationality as using, giving, and/or acting on the basis of reasons. I argue that this specification of rationality provides inadequate justification for his insistence that an argument must have a dialectical tier and empties of substance his claim that argumentation is manifestly rational.

As a remedy to these problems, I supplement Johnson’s conception of rationality in argumentation with Chaim Perelman’s conception of reasonableness. Because what counts as reasonable is a function of the historical and contextual situation of the audience we seek to persuade, in constructing an argument, appeal to the audience is justified. Thus an arguer engaged in the task of rational persuasion must appeal to the

expected position of the audience, with respect to the topic under discussion, and the current standards for argument and argumentation the audience holds.

This revised conception of rationality not only justifies more adequately the addition of the dialectical tier to the definition of argument and provides a richer interpretation for the claim that argumentation is characterized by manifest rationality but also provides the resources to solve two problems for the dialectical tier raised by critics: infinite regress and discrimination.

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## Introduction

*“We can't know what we're about,  
or whether we're telling ourselves too many lies,  
unless we can see or hear one another think out loud”*

Lewis H. Lapham

*Gag Rule: On the Suppression of Dissent and the Stifling of Democracy*

To argue for a claim is to assume that the claim in question is controversial, that the matter at hand is subject to debate. To offer an argument is to assume that the recipient of the argument *needs* persuading. Argumentation – the practice of giving and receiving arguments – presupposes a background of controversy, assuming that others may not readily agree with our claims, that it is possible different positions on the issue at hand exist. Anticipating and responding to the views of others, views that may be different from our own, is a familiar feature of argumentative practice. From the early beginnings of an education in philosophy, students are instructed to consider objections to their arguments. Similarly, in scientific writing, the presentation of experiments and results is followed by a ‘Discussion’ section, in which the methodology and the conclusions drawn from results are defended, alternative explanations of the results considered, and consequences discussed. In political and legal argument, opponents often attempt to anticipate and discount the positions of their competitors. Ordinary, everyday argument often develops in light of the concerns raised by those we engage. Yet historically, the role of dissenting opinion in the practice of argumentation has been neglected by philosophers who conceptualize ‘argument’ in terms of a reasons-claim, or premise-conclusion, complex.

Controversy and dissent are recognized as essential characteristics of the practice of argumentation in Ralph Johnson’s *Manifest Rationality: A Pragmatic Theory of*

*Argument* (2000). Johnson recognizes that success at rational persuasion, which he takes to be the function of argument, often requires the arguer not just to present good reasons for her claim but also to defend herself against objections and criticisms raised by others, as well as respond to those who take a different position on the issue. Thus, instead of conceptualizing 'argument' solely in terms of a premise-conclusion complex, Johnson proposes a re-definition of argument that insists that the dissenting voice is recognized, and is offered a response. For Johnson, an argument consists of a premise-conclusion complex, its so-called 'illative core', plus what he calls a dialectical tier, in which the arguer anticipates and responds to objections, criticisms and alternative points of view, and discusses the consequences and/or implications of his or her own view.

Insisting that an argument possess a dialectical tier encourages the arguer engaged in the task of rational persuasion to attempt to understand the current situation of those she seeks to persuade, with respect to the issue at hand. The dialectical tier requires that the arguer discover what positions others have taken on the issue, thus increasing the arguer's understanding of other minds. The dialectical tier also encourages the development of an intellectual imagination in anticipating objections, as well as encouraging flexibility, in terms of what an argument should address. In the process of building the dialectical tier, the arguer may find her own position becomes clearer, or needs to be adjusted in light of objections, criticisms, alternative points of view, and the consequences and implications of her own view, helping to clarify and solidify the arguer's own position.

By introducing a two-tier analysis of argument, Johnson draws attention to the role of dissent in argumentation but also to the relationship between argument and

rationality. For Johnson, an essential feature of the practice of argumentation is that it is characterized by manifest rationality: argumentation must appear to be rational to all the participants involved. Because rational persuasion requires the addition of a dialectical tier to the premise-conclusion complex, Johnson's work is to be praised for forcing the reader to consider the relationship between argument and rationality. However, in *Manifest Rationality*, I shall argue, Johnson operates with a specification of rationality that does not adequately support the addition of the dialectical tier to the definition of argument. I argue that Johnson's proposed re-definition of argument finds stronger justification from a situated, contextual understanding of what counts as rational, like that found in Chaim Perelman's conception of 'reasonableness'. Adopting the revised conception of rationality in argumentation I will endorse offers stronger justification for Johnson's revised definition of argument, the means to better defend the concept of the dialectical tier from criticism, and more substantive understanding of the claim that argumentation is characterized by manifest rationality.

In Chapter One, I argue that Johnson's specification of rationality does not provide adequate justification for the inclusion of the dialectical tier in the definition of argument. In Chapter One, I also inquire into how his specification of rationality affects the reader's understanding of what Johnson calls the essential features of argumentation: that argumentation is dialectical and is characterized by manifest rationality.

In Chapter Two, I turn to Chaim Perelman's conception of 'reasonableness' as an alternative conception of rationality in argumentation, one that might provide Johnson with the means to justify his insistence that an argument must possess a dialectical tier.

To be rational in the mode of reasonableness is to recognize the central role of the audience in argumentation and so to allow the audience to affect the content and structure of argumentation. What counts as reasonable will be contextually driven: what counts as reasonable conforms to a time and to a place, and is reasonable given the historical position of the audience.

In Chapter Three, I propose my own conception of rationality in argumentation. The conception of argumentative rationality I endorse is the result of combining Johnson's specification of rationality with Perelman's conception of reasonableness. Here I provide an argument for the appeal to the audience as a legitimate and necessary move for the arguer engaged in rational persuasion. Perelman's conception of reasonableness, working in tandem with Johnson's structural view of rationality, allows Johnson to generate all features of his revised definition of argument, and also allows for better understanding of his claim that argumentation is characterized by manifest rationality.

Chapter Four is comprised of discharging my dialectical obligations – the objections, criticisms, alternative points of view, and the consequences and implications of my position that require a response. Here I make the case that Johnson's claim that a dialectical tier is a necessary component of an argument, and his claim that argumentation is characterized by manifest rationality, are supported by audience-centered considerations, providing further support for the adoption of my revised conception of rationality in argumentation. I also show how my revised conception of rationality aids Johnson in responding to two important criticisms of his definition of

argument as including a dialectical tier, the problem of infinite regress and the discrimination problem.

## **Chapter One: Manifest Rationality and the Redefinition of Argument**

### **1.1 Introduction**

In *Manifest Rationality: A Pragmatic Theory of Argument*, Ralph Johnson seeks to illuminate the connection between argument and rationality and in so doing, provide a theory as to what should count as an argument, as arising out of the practice of argumentation. Though *Manifest Rationality* takes as its main concern argument as a product, in order to fully understand what is an 'argument', it is necessary to situate the product within the context from which it arises, the practice of argumentation. 'The practice of argumentation' Johnson understands as "the sociocultural activity of constructing, presenting, interpreting, criticizing, and revising arguments" (Johnson 2000, 12). For Johnson, "if argumentation is to be properly understood, it must be seen as an exhibition of rationality" (Johnson 2000, 13). The multiple connections between the practice of argumentation and rationality inform Johnson's stipulative definition of argument. For Johnson, by definition, an argument is rational.

It is my contention that in *Manifest Rationality*, Johnson operates with a specification of rationality that does not allow for the generation of one of the features essential to his stipulative definition of argument, the dialectical tier. Johnson offers a stipulative definition of the term 'argument' by isolating three essential features of the practice of argumentation. The assumption underlying this thesis is that when discussing the nature of rational argument, we should have at our disposal a conception of rationality that is rich enough to account for all those elements of an argument that we want to say make it a rational argument. In the first part of this chapter, I situate Johnson's text

within the context of the field of argumentation theory. I then analyze Johnson's claim that argumentation is teleological and explain how the purpose of argumentation informs his stipulative definition of argument. The remaining sections of this chapter apply Johnson's specification of rationality to his definition of argument. I argue that, given Johnson's specification of rationality, an illative core is necessary for an argument to count as rational, but that the same cannot be said for the necessity of the dialectical tier. That is to say, Johnson's specification of rationality does not provide justification for the inclusion of the dialectical tier as an essential component of an argument. Having made the case that Johnson's specification of rationality is undernourished, I close this chapter by inquiring into how this specification of rationality affects the reader's understanding of the essential features of argumentation as dialectical and as being characterized by manifest rationality.

## **1.2 Johnson on Argument and Argumentation**

Johnson begins chapter two of *Manifest Rationality* by distinguishing between argumentation theory and the theory of argument. According to Johnson, "*the theory of argumentation* [or argumentation theory] is that inquiry that studies the practice of argumentation. This study has normative, empirical, and conceptual dimensions" (Johnson 2000, 31). Argumentation theory is a multidisciplinary field of inquiry "involving logic, rhetoric, speech communication, composition, psychology, and so on" (Johnson 2000, 31). Johnson's concern is that much of the recent work in argumentation theory has been centered on the process of *arguing* rather than the product that results from the practice of argumentation, the *argument* itself. "The study of the product

(argument) of that practice [of argumentation] ... is what I call the theory of argument” (Johnson 2000, 30). The theory of argument studies arguments as artifacts alone, abstracted from the process of arguing. Johnson subdivides the theory of argument into the theory of argument analysis and the theory of argument appraisal. The theory of argument analysis takes as its object such issues as the definition of argument, typologies of argument, the interpretation of arguments and the structure of arguments, while the theory of argument appraisal is subdivided into theories of argument evaluation and argument criticism. *Manifest Rationality* is firmly situated by Johnson as a text within the realm of the theory of argument (Johnson 2000, 30), which aims to contribute to both the theory of analysis and the theory of appraisal. However, for Johnson, in order to understand argument itself, it is necessary to understand the practice from which it arises. “I believe it is crucial to understand that this product emerges from the practice of argumentation and must be understood in that context” (Johnson 2000, 144).

Johnson asserts that “the central thesis of [*Manifest Rationality*] is that to properly understand the practice of argumentation, we must view it as an exercise in manifest rationality” (Johnson 2000, 144). Not only is an argument a rational product, but it is a product which clearly displays its rationality, it appears to be rational. To require that rationality be made manifest is to require that the participants (the arguer and the audience) accept the claim being argued for because they recognize it has been defended by rational means. Although Johnson's main interest is in the product of argumentation, the argument itself, his position is that we must understand the argument as arising out of the practice of argumentation. Hence, the requirement of manifest rationality takes both

the argument as a product and the practice of argumentation into account. Both aspects inform Johnson's theory of what counts as rational in argumentation.

### **1.3 Argumentation as Teleological**

According to Johnson, previous theories of argument have not been viable because none have begun with an adequate conception of argument (Johnson 2000, 143). As Johnson sees it, "the theory of appraisal should be based on the theory of analysis" (Johnson 2000, 143). As such, Johnson begins building toward a more adequate conception of argument by adopting a pragmatic approach to the analysis of argument. A pragmatic approach seeks to define what purpose(s) arguments serve and what function(s) arguments have. The revised definition of argument "will be stipulative" (Johnson 2000, 146) in that it will define how the term 'argument' should be used, what elements must be present in order for a piece of text to be recognized as an argument. As well, a "good definition will stress both the function of argument and its rational nature" (Johnson 2000, 146). The rational nature of argument is exhibited by its fundamental purpose. Johnson notes the many different purposes and functions for which arguments are used, yet holds that "preeminent among them is the function of persuading someone... of the truth of something... by producing a set of reasons whose function is to lead that person rationally to accept the claim in question" (Johnson 2000, 149).

According to Johnson, the first of the three essential features of the process of argumentation is that it is teleological. The fundamental purpose of argumentation is rational persuasion. Rational persuasion is defined as "persuad [ing] the Other to accept the conclusion on the basis of the reasons and considerations cited, and those alone"

(Johnson 2000, 150). The purpose of argumentation as rational persuasion informs Johnson's definition of argument in that form follows function. As the product of the practice of argumentation, the purpose of an argument itself is also rational persuasion. Firstly, "because I wish to persuade the Other by reason, I recognize that the claim I make must be supported by reasons or evidence of some sort" (Johnson 2000, 150). Hence the premise-conclusion structure of the product of argumentation, what Johnson calls the 'illative core' of an argument. The illative core of an argument, what Johnson terms "the structural view" (Johnson 2000, 148), is uncontroversial. The structural view is the logic textbook understanding of argument (Johnson 2000, 146), but also finds a home in contemporary theory of argument<sup>1</sup>.

However, "the significant limitation of the structural view is that it ignores this important aspect – purpose or function" (Johnson 2000, 148). The illative core alone does not capture the full sense of the product of an argument as arising out of the practice of argumentation. To engage in the practice of argumentation is to offer arguments in support of a position and respond to criticisms, questions and complaints, to respond to the arguments of other people in addition to advancing reasons in support of a claim. This is to emphasize the fact that the practice of argumentation presupposes some disagreement and/or controversy surrounding the claim in question.

"To argue is... to enter into a space shared by many others also interested in the same issue, many of whom take a different position" (Johnson 2000, 150). For Johnson,

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<sup>1</sup> See Johnson 2000, p 148 for examples of contemporary theorists who hold this view of argument.

the premise – conclusion structure of an argument is just the beginning of a definition of argument. Where a homogeneous community of minds does not exist, there will be controversy concerning the claim being argued for, in the form of objections and alternative points of view, as well as consequences and implications of the claim advanced, that need to be addressed in order for the Other to be persuaded of the claim.

If argumentation is to be an exercise in rationality, the arguer has an obligation to take into account the positions of others who have also taken a rational position because to fail to do so would not be rational. More important, to fail to do so would not be in keeping with the very nature of argument as a display of rationality. If the arguer takes seriously the positions of others and in the course of his own argument addresses himself to them, the result is a display that not only is rational, but is also one that appears to be rational (Johnson 2000, 150).

This taking into account the positions of others in the form of objections or alternative positions, or anticipating the consequences and implications of one's position, comprises the second level of Johnson's definition of argument, what he calls the dialectical tier.

An argument, if it seeks to persuade an audience rationally, must be comprised of both an illative core and a dialectical tier<sup>2</sup>.

An argument is a type of discourse or text – the distillate of the practice of argumentation – in which the arguer seeks to persuade the Other(s) of the truth of a thesis by producing the reasons that support it. In addition to this illative core, an argument possesses a dialectical tier in which the arguer discharges his dialectical obligations (Johnson 2000, 168).

As Johnson puts it, “arguments...are outcomes within the practice [of argumentation] that are dialectical in nature and characterized by manifest rationality” (Johnson 2000, 178).

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<sup>2</sup> Johnson's proposed redefinition of argument and specifically the concept of the dialectical tier has been the site of much controversy. Govier (1999) has identified the discrimination problem and the problem of infinite regress. Freeman (2003), Hansen (2002, 2003), Hitchcock (2002) and Tindale (2002) also weigh in on these issues.

#### 1.4 The Specification of Rationality

What is unclear at this point is what exactly Johnson means when he uses the terms 'rational' and 'rationality'. Once the conception of rationality in use is understood I will return to the components of his definition of argument, the illative core and the dialectical tier, in light of this definition of rationality. I hope to show that when Johnson claims that the inclusion of a dialectical tier is a necessary component of a rational argument, he must mean much more than his specification of rationality allows.

In Chapter One of *Manifest Rationality*, Johnson discusses the “strong and multiple” (Johnson 2000, 161) connections between the practice of argumentation and rationality. The practice of argumentation Johnson understands as “the sociocultural activity of constructing, presenting, interpreting, criticizing and revising arguments” (Johnson 2000, 12). At this point Johnson indicates that the connection between argumentation and rationality will become clear when he discusses the three essential features of the practice of argumentation (Johnson 2000, 12). In Chapter One, Johnson recognizes that “there are multiple approaches to rationality” (Johnson 2000, 13) and chooses to follow Harvey Seigel (1988) in rejecting a means-end approach to rationality in argumentation. A means-end approach to rationality is rejected for two reasons. First, the means- end “approach tends to undercut the distinction between what is prudent and what is moral” (Johnson 2000, 14), and second, the means-end approach “is incapable of taking into account the role of character” (Johnson 2000, 14). According to Johnson, “because the theory proposed here will have a moral dimension” (Johnson 2000, 14) and because “the rules that govern the arguer and his behaviors are such that for the arguer to

satisfy them, certain character traits appear to be necessary” (Johnson 2000, 14), a means-end approach to rationality is not appropriate for Johnson’s theory. In Chapter One, Johnson adopts as a preliminary specification of rationality “the ability to engage in the practice of giving and receiving reasons. Accordingly, to be rational means to be able to engage in the giving and receiving of reasons” (Johnson 2000, 14). In discussing the three essential features of the practice of argumentation and his new definition of argument, Johnson returns to specifying what he means by ‘rationality’. Here, Johnson reiterates his belief that no means-end approach or instrumental theory of rationality will suit his purposes and adds “nor can I offer further clarification here regarding the nature of rationality. I must bypass the fascinating theoretical debates about the nature of rationality” (Johnson 2000, 161). Instead, building on his previous “bare bones specification” (Johnson 2000, 14) Johnson states that “rationality can be understood as the disposition to, and the action of, using, giving, and-or acting on the basis of reasons” (Johnson 2000, 161). In footnote fourteen in this section (Johnson 2000, 161), Johnson indicates that his specification is informed by Habermas’ view of rationality, stating that his own view “would be that the kind of rationality both presupposed and in turn furthered by argument is theoretical rationality” (Johnson 2000, 161) as opposed to practical or instrumental rationality. Johnson leaves the discussion as to the nature of rationality here. What remains to be seen is whether the revised definition of argument can be supported by this ‘bare bones’ specification of rationality.

### **1.5 Rationality and the Illative Core**

Johnson asserts that “the practice of argumentation is characterized by three features” (Johnson 2000, 159) it is essential to understand in order to explain what is an argument. The first feature is familiar to us now. The practice of argumentation is teleological in the sense that it has a purpose: rational persuasion. Given that rational persuasion has been defined as the attempt to persuade an audience on the basis of the reasons offered, the inclusion of the illative core (the reasons-claim or premise-conclusion complex) as a component of a rational product of argumentation, fits with the specification of rationality as the disposition to and action of using, giving, and/or acting on the basis of reasons. An argument must possess an illative core in order to be a rational product. However, it is not altogether clear that the inclusion of the dialectical tier as a component of an argument as a rational product fits as easily with this understanding of rationality and the definition of rational persuasion.

### **1.6 Rationality and the Dialectical Tier**

According to Johnson, because the purpose of argumentation is rational persuasion, the dialectical tier is also required. Because the practice of argumentation presupposes controversy, the audience will know “that there will likely be objections to the arguer’s premises” (Johnson 2000, 160). Typically, an arguer anticipates and defends herself against common objections or alternative positions in the course of arguing. “If the arguer does not deal with the objections and criticisms, then to that degree, the argument is not going to satisfy the dictates of rationality” (Johnson 2000, 160). Typically, the audience will also be aware of common objections and criticisms to a

position. “Hence, if the arguer wishes to persuade Others rationally, the arguer is obligated to take account of these objections and opposing points of view” (Johnson 2000, 160). However, can the necessity of responding to objections and alternative positions be understood as arising out of Johnson’s specification of rationality? If we take literally his understanding of rationality to be “the disposition to, and the action of, using, giving, and-or acting on the basis of reasons” (Johnson 2000, 161), then it seems we must accept the dialectical tier as a necessary component of rational argumentation because of its inclusion of *more* reasons at play. The dialectical tier in considering criticisms and objections must be understood as considering *reasons* for or against the premises used to argue for the conclusion, and alternative positions construed as *reasons* not to accept the conclusion, if we are to attempt to understand the necessity of the dialectical tier as following from Johnson’s specification of rationality. The inclusion of the dialectical tier is necessary for rational argumentation because it puts more reasons into operation. If the quantity of reasons considered is what makes one argument more rational than another, Johnson has succeeded in generating the requirements for a rational product out of his specification of rationality. However, it seems wrong-headed to suggest that one argument is more rational than another by virtue of the *number* of reasons in play. At the very least, it seems we should want to say something about the reasons that *are* put into play. It seems that there should be some reason why *these reasons* were offered to the Other. It seems reasonable to expect that there would be some consideration that makes the inclusion of these particular reasons necessary in order to rationally persuade the Other. My claim is that Johnson’s specification of rationality

does not rule out the kind of interpretation I presented above. That is, a rational product considers many reasons. This may very well be something we want to accept. But I would also argue that we want our conception of rationality to tell us what sorts of reasons need to be considered<sup>3</sup>. To be charitable, it is not at all clear that this ‘quantity of reasons’ is the conclusion Johnson wants us to draw. Consider the claim that “to ignore them [objections and opposing points of view], not to mention them, or to suppress them – these could hardly be considered the moves of someone engaged in the process of rational persuasion” (Johnson 2000, 160). It is not at all clear that Johnson wants us to accept the above claim on the grounds that not enough reasons are considered by the argument. It seems that with this remark, Johnson is operating with a different sense of ‘rational’, perhaps as a value term. It seems to be that another, richer understanding of rationality is at play here, rather than just the giving and receiving of reasons. To say that ignoring or suppressing criticisms or alternative points of view is not the move of someone engaged in rational persuasion seems to imply that the Other is somehow cheated by the argument that does so. A dialectical tier that responds to objections, criticisms, alternative points of view, and implications of the illative core results in a *better* case for the conclusion because the Other requires the dialectical tier in order to be persuaded. I would suggest that the actualities of the Other, the audience, or the topic under discussion must inform the *content* of the dialectical tier. My claim here is that

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<sup>3</sup> Hitchcock (2002) agrees that Johnson requires a further specification of rationality, but claims it is necessary in order to rule out the construal of trickery and threats as reasons.

content more than structure may be what Johnson is driving at. This aspect of the content of the dialectical tier is diminished if we construe rationality as Johnson has specified. I will return to this point shortly. For the sake of being thorough, I want to briefly mention Johnson's second feature of argumentation – that argumentation is dialectical – in light of his conception of rationality.

### **1.7 Argumentation as Dialectical**

According to Johnson, “an exchange is dialectical when, as a result of the intervention of the Other, one's own logos (discourse, reasoning, or thinking) has the potential of being affected in some way” (Johnson 2000, 161). It is possible to understand the *actual* response of the Other in the form of objections, criticisms and opposing points of view resulting in a better argument, “a more rational product” (Johnson 2000, 161) in light of Johnson's specification of rationality, as putting more reasons into play, because here it is the real reactions of the Other which must be addressed. Johnson's conception of rationality works in answering real reasons that require a response in order to persuade the Other. However, there is a difference between the actual or real responses of the other as compared to those the arguer attempts to anticipate in constructing an argument. This is a point that must be recognized, given that Johnson's approach takes as “its dominant concern ... written text” (Johnson 2000, 156). Text is preferred to oral argument because “written argument is the most stable form of argument and therefore a more suitable candidate as the foundation of the practice” (Johnson 2000, 156). While Johnson's conception of rationality works for oral argumentation or dialogue, where the arguer has access to the actual responses of the

Other, it is not at all clear that it works for written texts, in which the arguer must anticipate the responses of the Other. On its own, Johnson's specification of rationality does not aid the arguer in deciding what the Other might require a response to, and thus what should be included in the dialectical tier.

### **1.8 Argumentation as Manifest Rationality**

Johnson identifies the final feature of the practice of argumentation as manifest rationality. In the preamble to his explication of manifest rationality, Johnson discusses five aspects of the connection between argumentation and rationality. I will briefly discuss each here, in light of his specification of rationality. First, argumentation embraces rationality. This is to say, argumentation requires “that nothing be accepted but what is shown to have reason [or more charitably, reasons] behind it” (Johnson 2000, 162). Second, argumentation depends on mutual rationality, a claim that is uncontroversial – we need a partner or Other who also shares the disposition to use, give, and act on the basis of reasons. Third, argumentation increases rationality, resulting in participants that are more rational. The participants in the practice of argumentation become better reasoners. Fourth, argumentation exhibits rationality in the public performance of reasoning. And lastly, rationality is “the glue that binds” (Johnson 2000, 163) argumentation and rhetoric. The rhetor, who takes as her goal effective communication, *is* rational, using reasons to support her position and persuade her audience. However, “what separates rhetoric from argumentation is that the latter is bound by the requirement of manifest rationality” (Johnson 2000, 163). The rhetor may ignore objections to her argument “if ignoring the objection will lead to a more effective

communication, and if doing so is *rational*” (emphasis mine) (Johnson 2000, 163). I must admit to being confused by this variant use of ‘rational’ in Johnson’s theory. The most charitable interpretation suggests that here Johnson has in mind a means-end conception of rationality, where what is an effective means to our present goal is what is rational. While rhetoric is also a rational activity, seeking to effectively communicate and persuade by using reasons, argumentation proper is bound by Johnson’s third and final feature of the practice of argumentation, manifest rationality.

“To say that the practice of argumentation is characterized by manifest rationality is to say that it is patently and openly rational” (Johnson 2000, 163) to all those involved, arguer, critic or audience. “They agree to do nothing that would compromise either the substance or the appearance of rationality” (Johnson 2000, 163). This may be best understood as stipulating that all parties involved agree to remove from consideration anything that cannot be supported by reasons. “This clothing of rationality, is what makes argumentation more than just an exercise in rationality. Manifest rationality is why the arguer is obligated to respond to objections and criticisms from others and not ignore them or sweep them under the carpet” (Johnson 2000, 163-4). To not answer to objections and criticisms “would not only not **be** rational; it would not **look** rational” (Johnson 2000, 164). The requirement of manifest rationality is this: argumentation is rational, and it must *appear to be rational* to all the participants involved. An argument can display its rationality by responding to objections, criticisms, alternative points of view and the consequences and implications of the claim for which the illative core is offered. An argument displays its rationality by being comprised of both an illative core

and a dialectical tier. And here, Johnson seems to be in keeping with his specification of rationality. Here, the bulk of reasons considered results in a more rational product, for “the requirement of manifest rationality explains why the arguer must respond even to criticisms that are believed (or known) to be misguided” (Johnson 2000, 163). A misguided criticism, even though misguided, is still another reason for the argument to consider. However, we may of course ask, *who* believes or knows the criticism to be misguided? For the arguer to have to respond to criticisms he or she believes or knows to be misguided is in one important sense of the word quite *irrational*. Rather, it must be that *the Other* is unaware that the criticisms are misguided. Further in this section Johnson appears to restrict the above claim by referring to “well-known objections” (Johnson 2000, 164). As I have argued above, it would be much preferred if our conception of rationality itself could provide the means for including the dialectical tier in content, beyond the structural requirement of considering as *many* reasons for and against a position as possible.

### **1.9 Conclusion**

Johnson requires a conception of rationality that emphasizes the necessity of allowing the Other, or audience, to guide the content of the dialectical tier. Johnson seems to be aware of this point. In a footnote Johnson states that “the idea of rationality alone cannot illuminate the practice of argumentation; without the rationality being manifest, there cannot be the common knowledge required for the practice” (Johnson 2000, 164). The rationality of an argument is made manifest if all the participants are able to see the argument's rationality, to follow the reasoning of the argument, to

understand the value and necessity of responding to objections and criticisms of the illative core, alternative positions on the issue at hand, and the consequences and implications of the claim being argued for. The practice of argumentation as Johnson conceives it, presumes that the arguer and the Other share the reasoning tools and the knowledge of the issue at hand necessary to engage in the practice. Yet the necessity of shared knowledge, how to determine the content of the dialectical tier, that is to say, what it should be comprised of, is absent from Johnson's specification of rationality. A conception of rationality in argumentation like that found in the writings of Chaim Perelman, privileges the role of the audience, or Other, by building the necessity of the Other's knowledge into the very theory of how argumentation is a rational activity. It is exactly this knowledge required for the practice that must be privileged if we are to understand the importance of the dialectical tier, and to understand what drives the requirement that rationality be made manifest. However, to do so, we need a richer conception of rationality than just the giving and receiving of reasons. We need a conception of rationality that fleshes out the argumentative space one enters into when offering an argument for another's assent. Perelman's goal was to endorse argumentation as an exercise of human rationality; his concern was to show that argument too is rational, alongside mathematics and traditional logic. Therefore, it makes sense to turn to Perelman's conception of 'reasonableness' as a potential supplement to Johnson's structural sense of rationality.

## Chapter Two: An Alternative Sense of Rationality - Perelman's Reasonableness

### Introduction

Perelman introduces *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* as a “break with a concept of reason and reasoning due to Descartes which has dominated Western philosophy for the last three centuries” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1958, 1)<sup>1</sup>. What Perelman breaks with is the conception of reason that is closely tied to truth and necessity, that emerges in both the rationalist and empiricist tradition of philosophy on the sciences. According to Perelman, philosophy's limited conception of reason has led to unreasonable conclusions, namely, that we cannot argue about issues we do in fact argue about, for example, questions of value. Perelman's break with the history of philosophy is to broaden the concept of reason to include the reasonable, as well as the Rational<sup>2</sup>. The distinction between the two serves the purpose of justifying argumentation as a rational activity. Perelman's extension of the concept of reason is inextricably connected to his theory of argumentation, most notably the concept of the universal audience, appeal to which constitutes for Perelman the final ground to reason.

Perelman begins his essay, “The Rational and the Reasonable”, by noting that the two terms both designate “a conformity with reason” (Perelman 1979a, 117),

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Although *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (1969) was co-authored with Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, it is common in argumentation theory to refer to the rhetorical side of the work as Perelman's alone (see van Eemeren et al. 1996, p 93). For clarity's sake, within the text of this thesis, the theoretical work in *The New Rhetoric* is taken to be Perelman's alone.

Where “rational” appears capitalized, i.e. Rational, I am referring to Perelman's conception of how rationality has been conceived in the Western philosophical tradition.

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they cannot be used interchangeably and therefore cannot be synonymous. For instance, philosophers may refer to rational (not reasonable) principles or axioms, while in legal contexts, the defense must show reasonable (not rational) doubt of a defendant's guilt. "To take into account the difference which separates the rational from the reasonable we have to admit that if the two conform to reason, it is because the idea of reason can be taken in at least two diametrically opposite ways" (Perelman 1979a, 117). I plan to show how Perelman distinguishes between the Rational and the reasonable in terms of their relation to truth and method. What is Rational, according to Perelman (and the philosophical tradition), seeks necessary truths and so favors classical demonstration and modern formal logic, the methods of proof. The reasonable aims for the probable and, as such, requires argument, the method of "using discourse to influence the intensity of an audience's adherence to certain theses" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 14).

In the first section of this chapter, I explain Perelman's understanding of how philosophers have traditionally conceived rationality, and the problems this narrow conception of reason presents. Section two turns to Perelman's characterization of the reasonable and how it is an extension of the concept of reason such that the term 'rational' embraces both the Rational and the reasonable. Rational argumentation, or 'argumentative rationality' is constituted by the reasonable. In section three, I turn to the concept of the universal audience, and how understanding this concept in light of the distinction between the Rational and the reasonable indicates how Perelman's theory can be defended against the common charge of relativism, properly the topic of Chapter Four.

## 2.2 The Rational

“From a traditional point of view, philosophical discourse is discourse addressed to reason, the latter being considered a faculty illuminated by divine reason or at least modeled on it – a non-temporal and invariable faculty, common to all rational beings, and constituting the specific characteristic of all members of the human race” (Perelman 1979b, 47). In the Western philosophical tradition, reason is that faculty the possession of which makes us human. Rationalism takes accord with reason to be the only reliable source of knowledge. Descartes' goal was to 'discover' that which could not be called into doubt, modeling his epistemology on the mathematical sciences, in which systems are built from a very few axioms, starting from that which is certain and therefore necessarily true. “The *rational* corresponds to mathematical reason, for some a reflection of divine reason, which grasps necessary relations, which knows *a priori* certain self-evident and immutable truths” (Perelman 1979a, 117). The truths grasped by reason are at the same time both individual and universal “because by being revealed within a single mind, it [Divine Reason] imposes its themes on all beings of reason” (Perelman 1979a, 117). What is discoverable by reason “owes nothing to experience or to dialogue, and depends neither on education nor on the culture of a milieu or an epoch” (Perelman 1979a, 117). Universality, necessity and self-evidence become the hallmarks of the Rational. What is Rational is what anyone who reflects would come to conclude independently of other inquirers.

“It is thus that self-evidence as experienced by a single attentive mind, suffices as an index of truth of the self-evident proposition”(Perelman 1979b, 48), and I as a thinker

can be assured that so long as you possess the same faculty, you will come to the same conclusions as I. What is self-evident to one mind should be self-evident to all minds.

This view is exemplified by the following passage from Descartes' *Rules for the*

*Direction of the Mind*, often quoted by Perelman:

Now whenever two ... men are carried to opposite conclusion regarding one and the same matter, one at least must be in error; indeed, neither of them, it would seem, has the required knowledge. For if the reasoning of either of them were certain and evident, he would be in a position to propound it to the other in suchwise as to convince him also of its truth (Perelman 1979c, 111).

If in fact one inquirer disagrees, or cannot see the self-evidence of a given proposition, it is likely that subjective or psychological factors have gotten in the way of reason's apprehension of the truth. At such times, a proposition may then be proven from what the critic agrees is a self-evident proposition.

It is rather easy to characterize the Rational as just what the rationalists take reason to be. However, Perelman's break with the concept of reason is a break with the empiricist tradition as well. For the classical empiricist, knowledge comes to us through experience. In order for a proposition to count as knowledge, it must conform to the facts in the world. For both the rationalist and empiricist traditions then, what is Rational is closely tied to truth. For rationalists, what is Rational must be self-evident, or capable of being reduced to what is self-evident and so necessary. In a similar sense, empiricism embraces the standard of self-evidence in the form of knowledge conforming to the world, in a kind of 'pointing' to facts that cannot be denied. I think it is permissible then, certainly in terms of Perelman's critique, to characterize the Rational as that which is self-evident, and so necessarily true.

“What conforms to the scientific method is rational” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 2) for both the rationalist and the empiricist. The method of demonstration and deduction of conclusions from self-evident propositions becomes the height of rationality. Through analysis of the proofs used in the mathematics, “modern formal logic became...the study of the methods of demonstrations used in the mathematical sciences”<sup>3</sup> (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 10). The system of the propositional calculus may be taken as an example of a modern formal system. Arguments are reduced to a series of statements, one of which is the conclusion. The statements are reduced to propositions, then represented by variables. The validity of an inference from the statements or premises to the conclusion is decided by the rules of the propositional calculus, and the validity of an argument is decided in virtue of form alone. It is not difficult to see how modern formal logic seems to embody the character of the Rational; once accepting the rules of inference and argument forms that are valid for the system, it is possible for any inquirer to see the necessity in the link from premises to conclusion<sup>4</sup>. Yet Perelman doubts the usefulness of formal logic for expressing arguments concerning practical matters:

It can be shown that the practical reasoning involved in choice or decision making can always be expressed in the form of theoretical reasoning by

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<sup>3</sup> In *Manifest Rationality: A Pragmatic Theory of Argument*, Ralph Johnson spends a good deal of time discussing what he calls “the mathematization of logic” (Johnson 2000, 104) and its implications for the theory of argument.

<sup>4</sup> Perelman’s critique of the role of deductive formal logic in the study of argument is contentious. It appears Perelman had a somewhat limited conception of the ability of formal logic to aid in argumentation theory. However, the position that formal logic is not enough on its own do justice to argumentation is popular in contemporary argumentation theory and informal logic. See Johnson (2000, 57-90) and Tindale (1999, 28-37) for more robust analyses of problems with the formal deductive logic approach.

introducing additional premises. But what is gained by such a move? The reasoning by which new premises are introduced is merely concealed, and resort to these premises appears entirely arbitrary, although in reality it too is the outcome of a decision that can be justified only in an argumentative, and not in a demonstrative, manner (Perelman 1979d, 27).

What corresponds to the Rational as Perelman conceives it is what is universal. Being universal, apprehensible to all that inquire, it is abstract, transcending individual, historical concerns. The Rational is closely aligned with the ideal of self-evident truths, truths that go beyond particular contexts, a very powerful ideal, indeed. However, Perelman takes issue with such a *narrow* conception of reason. The question becomes, what exactly are we missing out on if the realm of reason is comprised of only the Rational so understood?

“The post-Cartesian concept of reason obliges us to make certain irrational elements intervene every time the object of knowledge is not self-evident” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 38). This is to say that whenever certain knowledge of an object of inquiry is not possible, philosophers have had to deny its rationality, or have had to characterize as irrational that which does not lend itself to quantification and calculation. What this amounts to is the denial of rationality when it comes to values, in moral and political contexts. Man can be rational only by suppressing his other faculties. Desires, motives, passions and interests strip us of all rationality, that is, render the faculty of reason useless against them. Where we do want to talk rationally about values, it must come in the form of adherence to abstract rational principles. Reason run amok culminates in the project of the logical positivists who argued that for a proposition to be meaningful it must be logically valid or empirically verifiable. The logical positivist's

narrow conception of meaning and rationality led to the rejection of metaphysics, aesthetics and ethics as devoid of meaning and the determination of ethical judgements as merely expressions of personal tastes, rather than rationally arguable propositions.

“It is the idea of self-evidence as characteristic of reason, which we must assail, if we are to make place for a theory of argumentation that will acknowledge the use of reason in directing our own actions and influencing those of others” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 3). For Perelman, philosophers need to extend the concept of reason to include justification in addition to demonstration, the probable in addition to the certain, if we are to be able to argue rationally about values. While questions of value may not be reducible to demonstrations, they are in fact debated. Perelman seeks to show that debate and argumentation are activities utilizing reason as much as demonstrative proof. In one sense, using arguments themselves logicians and philosophers owe it to themselves to consider the rationality of nonformal argumentation. “To the extent that philosophers appeal to reason and use, to win over an audience, a whole arsenal of arguments which ought to be accepted by everyone, just so must they broaden their conception of reason so as to demonstrate the rationality of argumentative techniques and rhetoric, as a theory of persuasive discourse” (Perelman 1982, 161).

### **2.3 The Reasonable**

The terms “rational” and “reasonable” both designate conformity with reason. Perelman’s distinction between the two may be understood as providing a justification of argumentation as a rational activity. The task for Perelman is not to show that the Rational and the reasonable are separate entities, but rather that the reasonable *is* rational,

that it is necessary to broaden the conception of reason. Perelman's explication of what counts as reasonable is a theory of rationality, the mode of rationality that is to be found in the practice of argumentation. For Perelman, to engage in argumentation is to be rational in the mode of reasonableness. What will count as reasonable is a function of the historical and contextual concerns of the audience. Generally speaking then, to be rational in argumentation is to recognize the contextual and historical situation of the audience, to allow context to drive argumentation.

The Rational and the reasonable are set apart by virtue of the truth criteria of each – self-evidence versus what is probable, as well as by virtue of method – what all beings can arrive at upon private investigation through demonstration, versus what it makes sense to believe given our community of beliefs, through discourse. Absolute, timeless truth is not the realm of the reasonable. Such a strict criterion of truth is not applicable to all human endeavors, but in no way deprives such endeavors of all rationality. What is considered to be reasonable is reasonable given a context. The reasonable man does not strive for abstract universality but is one “who in his judgements and conduct is influenced by *common sense*” (Perelman 1979a, 118). What is reasonable conforms to a time and a place. “The reasonable of one age is not the reasonable of another: it can vary like common sense” (Perelman 1979a, 119). The reasonable can vary because it does not aim for absolute truth, but rather for what is acceptable to the community. “The reasonable of today is not the reasonable of yesterday, but is more often an effort toward more coherence, toward more clarity, toward a more systematized view of things which is at the base of change” (Perelman 1979a, 119). What is reasonable is not certain, and

cannot be determined independently of context, that is, of other minds and thus, of other opinions to consider or react against. Where we must choose between opinions, where the object of inquiry is not self-evidently true, and therefore where deductions have no place, we are out of the realm of 'the rational' as it has been traditionally conceived. "The very nature of deliberation and argumentation is opposed to necessity and self-evidence, since no one deliberates or argues against what is self-evident" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 1). The reasonable is the domain of the methods used to secure the adherence or agreement of minds, rather than the methods to prove Truth. "The domain of argumentation is that of the credible, the plausible, the probable to the degree that the latter eludes the certainty of calculations" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 1). The reasonable presents a different kind of ideal than the Rational. What is considered reasonable is not an abstraction from all contextual concerns, but can only be found within particularities. The reasonable is complementary to the Rational, the latter being too narrow to encompass all human activities. The reasonable is based on the assumption that in questions of value, we can come to reasoned decisions or conclusions.

Rationality in argumentation is constituted by the reasonable. To be clear, for Perelman, the reasonable is in accordance with reason, such that the reasonable can be considered rational. Because it is not possible to argue about what is certain, what is rational in argumentation is to aim for what is acceptable, what is probable. What will be accepted as probable by an audience is a function of their situation in the world, their experiences and belief systems, as well as historical and contextual concerns. What will be considered reasonable to an audience will be a function of their beliefs and

experiences, the knowledge they possess. It should also be noted that what makes up the realm of the reasonable, *itself* may arise out of the practice of argumentation. Thus, what we come to believe through argumentation may not be valid for those outside our context, nor remain valid for our context indefinitely. The reasonable allows for an understanding of rationality that is contextualized, that is flexible and plastic, one that affords the appeal to our circumstance as a necessary, rational appeal. Perelman's theory of argumentation reflects this plasticity and this conception of rationality in argumentation.

#### **2.4 The Universal Audience**

Part and parcel of the 'theory' of reasonableness is Perelman's theory of argumentation. "All intellectual activity which is placed between the necessary and the arbitrary is reasonable only to the degree that it is maintained by arguments" (Perelman 1982, 159). Perelman's task is to follow the revolution in modern logic and develop a theory of argumentation "by analyzing the methods of proof used in the human sciences, law, and philosophy" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 10), argument outside the realm of certainty. "Logicians owe it to themselves to complete the theory of demonstration obtained in this way by a theory of argumentation" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 10). Logicians owe it to themselves to study arguments where they live. Perelman's theory of argument and the taxonomy of arguments that make up the bulk of *The New Rhetoric* are offered as a complement to formal logic to complete the modern revolution. It is essential for discussion of the reasonable to understand Perelman's theory of argument as a kind of theory of reasonableness.

“The object of the theory of argumentation is the study of the discursive techniques allowing us to induce or *to increase the mind's adherence to the theses presented for its assent*” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 4), which is to be contrasted with demonstration, which only shows or displays the truth of propositions and their necessary connections. “When the demonstration of a proposition is in question, it is sufficient to indicate the processes by means of which the proposition can be obtained as the final expression of a deductive series” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 14). In contrast to demonstration, argumentation “assumes the existence of intellectual contact” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 14). It is the contact of minds that influences Perelman’s decision to place his theory of argument within the rhetorical tradition. Though his “analysis concerns the proofs which Aristotle termed ‘dialectical’” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 5), the art of reasoning from accepted opinions, Perelman’s theory is a ‘new rhetoric’. Perelman presents a ‘new rhetoric’, rather than a ‘new dialectic’ because “this idea of adherence and of the minds to which a discourse is addressed is essential in all the ancient theories of rhetoric” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 5). The adherence of a mind to a thesis can be of a greater or lesser intensity, as determined by the individual mind that adheres. The audience plays an important role in Perelman’s rhetoric because argumentation is always directed to an audience for their acceptance or rejection, and “it is in terms of an audience that an argumentation develops” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 5).

What I would like to stress at this point is that audiences are not passive recipients of the arguments presented for their approval. We can be assured that the audience

already holds some attitudes or beliefs, which will certainly play a role in what they will come to accept. From the very first then, we are not in the realm of abstraction. We are in the concrete world of actual argument. However, the speaker must write or construct her or his argument before facing the audience. As such, “the audience...is always more or less a systematized construction” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 19) of the speaker, who must imagine who his actual or potential listeners might be. In order for argumentation to be successful, “care must be taken to form a concept of the anticipated audience as close as possible to reality” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 20). If the goal of argumentation is to increase the mind’s adherence to theses presented to it, “it is indeed the audience which has the major role in determining the quality of argument” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 24). The audience’s role in determining the quality of argumentation is a form of relativism. The quality of the audience determines the quality of the arguments offered in that argumentation should always be appropriate. For example, my paper on the Rational and the reasonable in Perelman’s philosophy will contain different arguments if I am presenting it to a class of undergraduate philosophy students than if I am presenting it to a conference of argumentation theorists. Presumably, the arguments used to persuade a group of professional theorists would be of a higher quality than those used to address a group of students. Yet this is not a point that should be too strongly emphasized. Presumably, if I were to use ‘conference-quality’ arguments to a group of undergraduate students, I should not succeed in persuading them, as it might be expected that the students would not be in a position to follow the reasoning of the paper, appreciate references and the like. However, we may ask

Perelman to respond to one concern. This is, from a rhetorical theory of argumentation which emphasizes the importance of the audience throughout, how are we to consider argumentation that is intended to be valid for all of humankind, for example, in the philosopher's appeal to reason? What sense can be made of an audience that may be so wide ranging as to include thousands of particularities yet contains arguments that claim to be valid for all? Perelman's response to this question is to offer the concept of the universal audience.

The universal audience is defined as “the whole of mankind, or at least of all normal, adult persons” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 30), but like any other audience, it too is a construction of the speaker. The agreement of the universal audience refers “to a universality and unanimity imagined by the speaker, to the agreement of an audience which should be universal” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 31). The concept of the universal audience is perhaps best understood in light of how Perelman conceives of the difference between persuading and convincing. “Discourse addressed to a specific audience aims to persuade, while discourse addressed to the universal audience aims to convince” (Perelman 1982, 18). The difference between persuading and convincing for Perelman is then a technical issue, a matter of the audience addressed, rather than turning on epistemological or veritistic criteria. Further, “a convincing discourse is one whose premises are universalizable, that is, acceptable in principle to all the members of the universal audience” (Perelman 1982, 18). If the universal audience is to accept the argumentation, then it can be said to be convincing, because accepted by all inquirers. Between the particular and the universal, persuading

and convincing, “the nuance involved is a delicate one and depends, essentially, on the idea the speaker has formed of the incarnation of reason” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 28). Because the universal audience is the construction of the individual speaker, “each speaker’s universal audience can, indeed, from an external viewpoint, be regarded as a particular audience, but it none the less remains true that, for each speaker at that moment, there exists an audience transcending all others, which cannot easily be forced within the bounds of a particular audience” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 30). The universal audience can only be distinguished from the particular in terms of the intent of the speaker. If the speaker aims to persuade any listener who may be a part of his or her audience, then he or she will construct the argument with the universal audience, as they conceive it, in mind.

Audiences are not independent of one another, the particular concrete audiences are capable of validating a concept of the universal audience which characterizes them. On the other hand, it is the undefined universal audience that is invoked to pass judgement on what is the concept of the universal audience appropriate to such a concrete audience, to examine, simultaneously, the manner in which it was composed, which are the individuals who comprise it, according to the adopted criterion, and whether this criterion is legitimate (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 35).

The particular and the universal audience pass judgement on one another in the sense that arguments for a specialized audience (for example, an audience of professional philosophers) lend themselves to a universal audience. The specialized audience is addressed as if it were the universal audience, the arguer “supposes that everyone with the same training, qualifications, and information would reach the same conclusions” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 34). In this way arguments aimed at the particular

audience (a specific audience) may very well be valid for the universal audience, and vice versa. Indeed, if we each construct the universal audience from our own experiences and knowledge base, there will be overlap. The difference between the two is a matter of the speaker's intent. What, then, are we to make of the philosopher's appeal to reason?

According to Perelman, all "argumentation is made relative to the adherence of minds, that is, to an audience, whether an individual deliberating or mankind as addressed by the philosopher in his appeal to reason" (Perelman 1979d, 30). The philosopher's appeal to reason, insofar as she engages in argumentation, must be understood as an appeal to a "privileged audience" (Perelman 1979b, 48), the universal audience, that is all men who are "competent with respect to the issues that are being debated" (Perelman 1979b, 48). Even the philosopher's universal audience is a construct, such that "in the course of history each philosopher has been able to conceive of this audience in a different way" (Perelman 1979b, 48). Each philosopher constructs different universal audiences because each exists in a historical context, a time and a place. "Everyone constitutes the universal audience from what he knows of his fellow men, in such a way as to transcend the few oppositions he is aware of. Each individual, each culture, has thus its own conception of the universal audience" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 33). Even in his appeal to the reason of all men, the philosopher submits his theses to the approval of his colleagues. "In philosophy, opposing points of view must be heard, whatever their nature or their source. This is a fundamental principle for all philosophers who do not believe that they can found their conceptions on necessity and self-evidence; for it is only by this principle that they can justify their claim to universality" (Perelman

1980, 71) by seeking universal agreement. The universal does reflect the particular, and even Descartes must respond to his critics. For Perelman, we cannot escape our context to the extent that even our imagined universality will still reflect our conception of reasonableness, of what we deem acceptable to offer as a reason for a conclusion, given our time and place, and our background of beliefs, including what we understand a 'good' argument to be.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

Rationality in argumentation is constituted by the reasonable. Argumentation assumes the intellectual contact of minds, which is why the audience plays a central role in both Perelman's theory of argumentation and his description of reasonableness. To say that it is rational in argumentation to aim for what is reasonable is to aim for what is probable, plausible, or acceptable to an audience rather than to aim for the rationalistic standard of certain truths. What an audience considers to be reasonable to accept conforms to a time and a place and will be a function of the beliefs, experiences, and knowledge of that audience. What it is reasonable to believe is reasonable only to the degree that it is arrived at through discourse and maintained by argument. In the next chapter, I hope to show that by combining elements of Perelman's conception of reasonableness and Johnson's specification of rationality, it is possible to generate a conception of argumentative rationality that will insist on the necessity of an argument's possession of a dialectical tier.

## Chapter Three: Manifest Reasonableness

### 3.1 Introduction

In Chapter One, I argued that in *Manifest Rationality*, Ralph Johnson's specification of rationality is undernourished, such that he cannot claim the necessity of the inclusion of a dialectical tier in his definition of argument. I argued in Chapter One that by understanding 'rationality' differently, the necessity and content of the dialectical tier may be generated. Chapter Two presented Chaim Perelman's conception of reasonableness as a candidate for a fuller conception of rationality for the practice of argumentation. In this chapter, I propose my own conception of rationality in argumentation, what might be called 'argumentative rationality'. The conception of argumentative rationality I will endorse is the result of combining Johnson's specification of rationality with Perelman's conception of reasonableness. The conception of rationality I will endorse is meant to be descriptive. I seek to describe the necessary conditions for rationality in argumentation. My task is to describe what must be present in a conception of rationality in argumentation. My conception provides the necessary but not sufficient conditions for argumentative rationality because I do not engage in any normative issues concerning the product of argumentation, the argument itself, that is, issues concerning argument appraisal. My immediate goal is to provide justification for the necessity of an argument to possess a dialectical tier, generated from a conception of argumentative rationality. Issues of argument appraisal surrounding what constitutes a 'good' argument, or a rational argument understood in an *evaluative* sense are beyond the scope of this thesis. I do not pretend to present a *complete* theory of rational argument.

Rather, I will propose a conception of rationality in argumentation that may act as a foundation for a complete theory of argument. My claim is that Johnson's definition of argument is better justified if we understand 'rationality' in argumentation to mean the giving and receiving of reasons, in light of the expected position of the audience with respect to the topic under discussion, and the current standards for argument and argumentation the audience holds.

The first section of this chapter outlines Perelman's conception of reasonableness. Central to Perelman's conception of reasonableness is the role of the audience in argumentation. Reasonableness articulates the role of the audience, or Other<sup>1</sup>, in argumentation. Similarly, Johnson's requirement that an argument possess a dialectical tier, and the claim that argumentation is characterized by manifest rationality implicitly afford an important role to the Other we seek to persuade by rational means. Adopting the audience-centered conception of reasonableness allows for the implicit in *Manifest Rationality* to become obvious. Section three narrows the scope of what follows. Here I make the case that, because the goal of this thesis is to justify the dialectical tier, I will not discuss how understanding rationality as reasonableness might affect justification for the illative core. Because of the centrality of the role of the audience in Perelman's conception of reasonableness, in section four I provide an argument for the appeal to the audience as a legitimate and necessary move for the arguer engaged in rational persuasion. Section five presents the marriage of Johnson's conception of rationality

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<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I use the terms 'audience', 'Other' and 'reader' interchangeably, in all cases, to indicate both the actual and intended recipient of an argument.

to Perelman's conception of reasonableness. Section six returns to Johnson's definition of argument and section seven to how argument is manifestly rational. I hope to show that not only does the conception of reasonableness, working in tandem with Johnson's structural view of rationality, allow Johnson to generate all features of his revised definition of argument, it also allows for better understanding of that essential feature of argumentation – manifest rationality.

### **3.2 Reasonableness Reconsidered**

Perelman presents his distinction between the Rational and the reasonable in order to justify the practice of argumentation as a rational activity. Argumentation is rational, according to Perelman, but rather than aiming for the *rationalistic* standards of universality, necessity, self-evidence and incontestable truths, those engaged in argumentation should aim for what is probable, for what it is reasonable to believe or accept, given the argument in question. To argue is to be rational in the mode of reasonableness.

What Perelman provides with his conception of reasonableness is a picture of the argumentative space one enters when offering an argument to persuade an audience. Argumentation “assumes the existence of intellectual contact” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 14). According to Perelman, we do not argue about claims we take to be certain – to argue is to assume controversy of some kind in place, or to introduce controversy into a discussion taken to have achieved some kind of consensus or stability. This is an idea echoed by Johnson, when he states that “to argue is... to enter into a space shared by many others also interested in the same issue, many of whom take a different

position” (Johnson 2000, 150). In order to theorize about ‘rational argument’ it is necessary to recognize the potential rationality of opinions already in place, at the very least, the potential rationality of the position of the audience we wish to persuade, with respect to the topic being addressed by the argument. Perelman’s standard of reasonableness provides the means to do so. For Perelman, “all intellectual activity which is placed between the necessary and the arbitrary is reasonable only to the degree that it is maintained by arguments” (Perelman 1982, 159). What counts as reasonable for an audience is itself the result of argumentation, rather than, for example, adherence to authority, or belief without justification. To take what is currently reasonable to an audience as a guide in constructing an argument, is to assume a reasonable audience, an audience comfortable with, and at the very least competent in, argumentation. In relation to Johnson’s definition of rational persuasion cited above, I understand Perelman’s conception of reasonableness as drawing out and highlighting the position of ‘the Other’ we seek to rationally persuade.

What counts as reasonable will be contextually driven. What counts as reasonable for an audience will conform to a time and to a place. What will count as reasonable is reasonable given the historical position of the audience, and their place in the world. To put flesh on this idea is to understand the beliefs, experiences, and knowledge of the audience in question, as being more or less shaped by their background as relevant to the topic under discussion. It is also to understand the position of the audience as one possible stage in the evolution of thought on a topic. This is to recognize

that what will count as reasonable can and does change over time, and varies from audience to audience.

To be rational in the mode of reasonableness is to recognize the central role of argument in arriving at and maintaining beliefs. To be rational in the mode of reasonableness is to assume intellectual contact with other minds, to recognize and respond to others who have taken a position on a given issue. To be rational in the mode of reasonableness is to recognize that what counts as reasonable is what is reasonable for a given group of people, at a time in a place, and is subject to change. To be rational in the mode of reasonableness is to allow the audience to affect the content and structure of argumentation.

### **3.3 Reasonableness, the Illative Core and the Dialectical Tier**

Up to this point, I have been expressing Perelman's view, but now would like to narrow the scope of this thesis. In one sense, it seems unreasonable to allow audience-centered considerations to drive argumentation in the way Perelman endorses. I say this because very often an arguer constructs an argument without a particular audience in mind. Very often, it seems, we construct the illative core of our argument, and then turn to consider our dialectical obligations, where the audience has a more obvious role to play. Though the illative core must be acceptable to the audience, and the premise-conclusion structure must withstand the reader's criticisms, the audience is often absent from the arguer's mind at this stage in the construction of an argument. It seems that the audience, or reader, begins to play a larger role when we come to consider the dialectical tier of an argument. The illative core of an argument of course assumes a reader or

audience. The illative core is, of course, contextually driven, in terms of the audience's acceptance of it being a function of their beliefs and knowledge of the premises in question. However, because we often construct the illative core without reference to the audience, and because the illative core is often separable from the dialectical tier, it seems prudent to understand Perelman's conception of reasonableness in a limited sense. Reasonableness is a conception of rationality in the practice of argumentation, yet seems to better fit with regard to the dialectical obligations of the arguer. In considering his or her dialectical obligations – objections, criticisms, alternative points of view, and implications of his or her view – an arguer does, and must, consider the audience or reader to whom an argument is addressed, at the very least in deciding which positions to respond to. While it may be the case, and I do suspect, that the illative core would benefit from understanding rationality in argumentation as reasonableness, for the purposes of this thesis, the main point of which is to justify the necessity of the dialectical tier, I will limit my analysis to how understanding rationality as reasonableness benefits Johnson's theory in terms of the dialectical tier and manifest rationality alone.

### **3.4 The Rationality of the Appeal to the Audience**

The purpose of this section is to provide an argument for the claim that it is necessary for an arguer engaged in rational persuasion to appeal to the expected position of the audience with respect to the topic under discussion, and to the current standards for argument and argumentation the audience holds. Rational persuasion is defined as “persuad[ing] the Other to accept the conclusion on the basis of the reasons and considerations cited, and those alone” (Johnson 2000, 150). The argument for appeal to

the audience as a move of one engaged in the task of rational persuasion will become the justification for combining 'reasonableness' with Johnson's structural view of rationality.

I will first present the argument for the rationality of the appeal to the audience, then discuss each premise in turn, drawing on Perelman's conception of reasonableness. The premises of the following argument refer to 'what counts as reasonable' for an audience because the argument is intended to highlight the fact that the audience judges whether an argument addressed to it, is reasonable. The argument is intended to emphasize the role of the audience in argumentation. However, audiences can and do accept arguments that on later reflection, or by the intervention of someone else, they come to see they should not have accepted. For this reason, I choose not to express my argument in terms of 'what *is* reasonable' for an audience. To make the argument in terms of 'what *is* reasonable' for an audience implies that part of the reasonableness of an argument is its being *judged* reasonable by the audience. While this may be true, it is not within the scope of this thesis to discuss. Because my conception of rationality in argumentation is intended to describe the necessary, but not sufficient conditions for argumentative rationality, I want to make it possible for an arguer to adopt almost any theory of argument appraisal, in terms of the evaluation and criticism of arguments, to supplement the conception of rationality described here.

The Argument for the Rationality of Appeal to the Audience<sup>2</sup>:

*Because,*

1. What counts as reasonable is a function of the knowledge and expected positions of the audience being addressed, *and,*
2. What counts as reasonable is a function of the current standards for argument and argumentation the audience holds,

*Therefore;*

The arguer engaged in the task of rational persuasion must appeal to the expected positions of the audience with respect to the topic under discussion and to the standards for argument and argumentation the audience holds, for guidance as to what should be included in the argument.

Discussion:

*Premise One:* What counts as reasonable is a function of the knowledge and expected positions of the audience being addressed.

*Support:* Unlike the rationalistic model which takes universality, necessity and self-evidence to be hallmarks of success, what counts as reasonable conforms to a time and a place. The actual situation of the audience determines what counts as reasonable for them. What is reasonable for an audience will be a function of their beliefs, their awareness of the history of and expertise in the topic under discussion. Reasonableness requires investigation into received opinions on a given topic or issue in order to determine the history of a discussion, and thus what a particular audience should or would require addressing. The arguer interested in rational persuasion must investigate

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<sup>2</sup> The premises of the following argument speak of the standard of what counts as reasonable, rather than rational, in order to highlight the fact that these ideas come from Perelman. However, because for Perelman the reasonable is rational, I use rational in the title and will revert to the term rational after marrying Johnson's and Perelman's views on rationality in argumentation.

and discover what her audience currently believes or knows, in order to rationally persuade them.

The arguer “constructs the argument in accordance with the audience’s knowledge, background, and so forth” (Tindale 1999, 41). Recall that for Perelman, “people who argue do not address what we call ‘faculties’, such as the intellect, emotion, or will; they address the whole person, but depending on the circumstances, their arguments will seek different results and will use methods appropriate to the purpose of the discourse as well as to the audience to be influenced” (Perelman 1982, 13). As Tindale sees it, the emphasis Perelman places on the ‘whole person’, “develops a model of the arguer and audience as ‘reasonable’, a model characterized by its concern for people. This is particularly important given the traditional conception of rhetoric as advocating the exploitation of audiences to achieve its ends, of making the weaker argument appear stronger and thereby deceiving the audience” (Tindale 1999, 17). “What begins to emerge is a model of argumentation concerned not just with the adherence of minds to claims put forward but also the improvement of those minds” (Tindale 1999, 17).

To adopt a ‘reasonable’ approach to rational argumentation, in recognizing that what will count as reasonable is a function of the audience, is to require that the arguer who takes rational persuasion as his goal do his homework. The arguer must research the argumentative space he or she enters into when offering an argument for an audience’s approval. If what will count as reasonable is a function of the knowledge, beliefs, and experiences of the audience, it is incumbent on the arguer to investigate the knowledge,

beliefs and experiences of the audience he faces that are relevant to the topic under discussion. Aiming for what will be reasonable to his audience requires that the arguer endeavor to discover what the audience currently believes with respect to the argument in question. The discovery of other opinions on a given topic is how argumentation assumes intellectual contact. The arguer himself may become more firmly convinced of the 'rightness' of his position or may have to change his position in light of what he learns about current opinions on the topic. The key point to be made is that the arguer recognizes the potential *value* of opinions already in place, and so, in the course of his or her argument, *speaks to* opinions that are currently part of the argumentative space. If the arguer seeks to persuade any audience – Perelman's universal audience – and so seeks to transcend the particularities of any one audience, the arguer cannot succeed in his task until he discovers the particularities he seeks to transcend. In such cases, the intended audience is entirely the construct of the arguer, and the argument is constructed from the arguer's own incarnation of reason. However, it is misguided to suggest that, because the arguer constructs the audience himself, the arguer is not bound by *any* normative constraints on argument and argumentation. Arguers themselves are trained within the context in which they operate. Arguers, like audiences, exist at a time in a place. Arguers, like audiences, may receive formal training within a discipline, for instance, biology or philosophy. Such disciplinary training imposes rules or standards for argument upon arguers, like the requirement in philosophy classes that the student consider an objection to their position. The standards of argument, though they may be relative to a certain discipline, are not without justification, and become the guide for the

arguer who seeks to persuade anyone competent with respect to the issue at hand. This leads nicely to premise two.

*Premise Two:* What counts as reasonable is a function of the current standards for argument and argumentation the audience holds.

*Support:* Reasonableness recognizes the argumentative tradition and training of both the arguer and the audience as being relevant to the task of rational persuasion, because reasonableness assumes a capable audience. The practice of argumentation makes sense only if the arguer assumes the audience has at least minimal competence operating with arguments. Thus, to be rational in the mode of reasonableness assumes that the audience in question holds some standards of argumentation. To say that what counts as reasonable is a function of the standards for argument and argumentation is to assume that the audience possesses a theory of argument appraisal. By this I do not mean to suggest that the audience must possess a rigorous theory of argument appraisal in the philosophical sense of belonging to a school of thought. What I do mean to suggest is that the audience has an idea of what criteria a 'good' argument must satisfy. To say that reasonableness is a function of the standards for argument and argumentation that the audience currently holds is to assume that what the audience currently believes or knows with respect to the topic under consideration is itself reasonable, to the degree that it is maintained by argument. It is to take seriously the current position of the audience, which is to assume an audience that is competent with respect to the issue at hand, and able to decide whether or not an argument should be accepted. Perelman's new rhetoric is intended to *privilege* the audience, not to persuade through trickery or threats. It is the privileging of the audience that indicates we are engaged in a philosophical enterprise,

concerned with best practices, rather than the philosophically less lofty goal of effective persuasion. Because what will count as reasonable is not certain, and is never static, minds can and do change as arguments are offered for their assent. As new ideas enter into a discussion they make reference to the old in order to persuade the audience that the new ideas are reasonable. In addition, reasonableness requires recognizing that a form of argument that is persuasive for one claim may not be a persuasive argument form for another claim, depending on the audience's familiarity with the issue and the argument form in use.

If the audience has standards for argument appraisal that the arguer finds to be less than the audience is capable of holding, the standard of reasonableness implicitly assumes that minds can be changed to accept higher standards of what should count as reasonable for them. Indeed, an arguer might also find it necessary to attempt to lower the audience's standards of argument and argumentation in order for the audience to see the reasonableness of an argument. However, what it means to 'raise', or 'lower', the standards of an audience requires a theory concerning what counts as a 'good' argument, and so crosses over into the realm of argument appraisal, the theory of what an audience *should* or *should not* count as a reasonable argument. The theory of argument appraisal is, again, beyond the scope of this thesis. The point to be stressed is that the standard of reasonableness assumes that even standards for argument appraisal, are subject to change over time, through argument.

To recapitulate, the argument for the rationality of appeal to the audience is as follows:

*Because,*

1. What counts as reasonable is a function of the knowledge and expected positions of the audience being addressed, *and,*
2. What counts as reasonable is a function of the current standards for argument and argumentation the audience holds.

*Therefore:*

The arguer engaged in the task of rational persuasion must appeal to the expected positions of the audience with respect to the topic under discussion and to the standards for argument and argumentation the audience holds, for guidance as to what should be included in the argument.

The assumption of the above argument is that what counts as reasonable is a function of the audience being addressed. Taking the goal or purpose of an argument to be rational persuasion, the above argument highlights the role of ‘the Other’, or audience we seek to persuade with the argument offered. *Someone*, a person, decides whether or not an argument is rational to accept. How persuasive an argument is, is determined partly by the arguer that constructs it (else she would not offer the argument to the Other), but is also determined by the audience or Other to whom it is offered. This, it should be noted, is not intended to imply that the audience is the *only* standard by which an argument should be judged. I leave Perelman’s company on this point. However, it is to state that the quality of an argument cannot be decided independently of other minds.

The arguer engaged in the task of rational persuasion must appeal to the expected positions of the audience and the standards for argument and argumentation the audience holds, in order to rationally persuade them. The arguer must appeal to the knowledge and expected positions of the audience because the current situation of the audience shapes what counts as reasonable for them, and what will count as reasonable for them. The

arguer must also appeal to the current standards for argument and argumentation the audience currently holds because the current standards of the audience will guide what forms of argument and practices of argumentation count as reasonable for them and what will count as reasonable for them.

From the above argument, it also follows that the audience to which an argument is addressed will determine the quality of an argument in that argumentation should always be appropriate to the audience. This is an idea found in Perelman's work. In a normative sense, the determination of how 'good' an argument is can only be decided in relation to the audience the argument is intended to be persuasive for. Therefore, an argument may very well be reasonable for one audience, but not for another. This is a point I alluded to in Chapter Two when discussing the variations in arguments we do often in practice make. To be reasonable in argumentation is to recognize that the audience determines whether or not an argument is reasonable for them to believe. Thus, to be successful in the task of rational persuasion, the arguer necessarily, and legitimately, appeals to the audience for guidance.

### **3.5 A Revised Conception of Rationality**

In order to construct a solid theory of argument, it is necessary, for Johnson, to understand the practice of argumentation from which an argument arises: "it is crucial to understand that this product [the argument itself] emerges from the practice of argumentation and must be understood in that context" (Johnson 2000, 144). Perelman's conception of reasonableness, in illuminating the argumentative space one enters into when presenting an argument, recognizes the rationality of appealing to the situation of

the audience with respect to what they currently believe regarding the propositions in question, and the current standards for argument and argumentation they adhere to, in order to present a rationally persuasive argument. It is rational to appeal to the current situation of the audience, because Perelman's conception of rationality in argumentation assumes a competent audience, whose current situation with respect to the issue at hand is *itself* reasonable. The current situation of the audience is itself reasonable to the degree that it is maintained by arguments. Reasonableness is a better guide, a better conception of rationality to underlie Johnson's theory of argument because it emphasizes that a rational argument can only be rational for someone to believe or accept. There is an 'Other' or audience that we seek to persuade by rational means, and Perelman's conception of reasonableness firmly entrenches the rationality of recognizing the Other's role. Recall that, for Johnson, "to argue is... to enter into a space shared by many others also interested in the same issue, many of whom take a different position" (Johnson 2000, 150). Perelman's conception of reasonableness, in fleshing out the argumentative space entered into when presenting an argument, recognizes and emphasizes the potential rationality of these different positions, *and* the necessity of speaking to them in the course of an argument, in exactly the way Johnson requires an argument to respond to dialectical considerations.

I view the adoption of the standard of reasonableness to be supplementary to Johnson's work. Adopting reasonableness is literally supplemental in that I do not believe that Johnson need abandon his specification of rationality. It seems correct to say that rationality may be partly defined as "the disposition to, and the action of, using,

giving, and-or acting on the basis of reasons” (Johnson 2000, 161). Johnson’s specification of rationality justifies the claim that an argument must have an illative core, as I argued in chapter one<sup>3</sup>.

I propose the following specification of rationality for the practice of argumentation:

Rationality in argumentation consists of the action of using, giving, and/or acting on the basis of reasons, and appealing to the expected positions of the audience with respect to the topic under discussion and to the standards for argument and argumentation the audience holds, for guidance as to what should be included in the argument.

The above specification of rationality applies specifically to the practice of argumentation. It is intended to delineate only what must be present to be rational in the practice of argumentation.

### **3.6 Reasonableness and the Inclusion of the Dialectical Tier**

I argued in Chapter One that in order for Johnson to insist that an argument must possess a dialectical tier on the basis of the structural view of rationality, we must understand the dialectical tier as being comprised of more reasons to accept the claim argued for. Responding to the objections, alternative points of view and the consequences and implications of one’s view, is a necessary move of one engaged in rational persuasion on the ‘bare bones’ specification of rationality, because more reasons

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<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, in what follows, I only consider the effect of the revised conception of rationality on the inclusion of the dialectical tier because I consider the illative core to be adequately justified by the ‘bare bones’ specification of rationality. This is not to suggest I would consider the illative core unaffected by the revised conception of rationality I will propose, but I do not discuss the illative core on its own because the task at hand is to provide the means to insist on the inclusion of the dialectical tier in the definition of ‘argument’.

are being offered for the conclusion of the argument. My 'quantity of reasons' understanding of the dialectical tier seems to be supported by Christopher Tindale's view, that the requirement that the arguer discharge his dialectical obligations "implies that rational persuasion can be by degrees, and the more rational, the better the argument" (Tindale 2002, 302). In terms of my critique, Johnson's specification of rationality can insist on the necessity of a dialectical tier because an argument which is comprised of both an illative core and a dialectical tier considers many reasons. However, adopting the standard of reasonableness allows for a far richer understanding of why the dialectical tier is a necessary component of a rational product. Adopting the standard of reasonableness as a complement to Johnson's specification of rationality allows for the role of the Other in Johnson's theory to come to the forefront.

I argued in Chapter One that even if the dialectical tier is understood as considering more reasons, it should be possible to say something *about* the reasons, why the inclusion of *these* reasons were offered to the Other in order to rationally persuade them. With Perelman's conception of reasonableness in hand, it is now possible to do so.

A dialectical tier is a necessary part of a rational argument because it appeals to, and is comprised of, the expected knowledge of the audience with regards to the topic under discussion. The dialectical tier recognizes and responds to the likely position of the audience with respect to the claims being argued for, positions which are a function of the knowledge they currently possess. The expected knowledge of the audience is comprised of what they take to be reasonable, and at the same time is assumed to be

reasonable, in order to be successful in the task of rational persuasion. The dialectical tier responds to the expected knowledge the audience holds.

The second of the three fundamental features of argumentation, according to Johnson, is that argumentation is dialectical. “The root meaning of dialectical is dialogue – a logos (which I take to mean ‘reasoned discourse’) that is between two (or more) people” (Johnson 2000, 161). An argument requires a dialectical tier because the practice of argumentation is dialectical; it presupposes an Other, or audience, to which the argument is addressed. This is not to suggest that the Other or audience is a passive, inactive recipient of the argument. Rather, “genuine dialogue requires not merely the presence of the Other, or speech between the two, but the real possibility that the logos of the Other will influence one’s own logos. An exchange is dialectical when, as a result of the intervention of the Other, one’s own logos (discourse, reasoning, or thinking) has the potential of being affected in some way” (Johnson 2000, 161). That argumentation is dialectical is the basis for Johnson’s claim that argumentation depends on mutual rationality (Johnson 2000, 162). The arguer and the Other must agree in some preliminary sense as to what counts as rational in order to affect each other’s thinking. One’s own logos has the potential of being affected by the Other when “the arguer agrees to let feedback from the Other affect the product. The arguer consents to take criticism and take it seriously” (Johnson 2000, 161), that is, to respond to it. “If (as is likely) the arguer now modifies that argument as a result of the intervention of the Other, the result is an improved product – a better argument” (Johnson 2000, 161). When constructing an argument as a text, that is, without the benefit of an *actual* exchange, the

arguer must endeavor to discover what criticisms of his or her argument might be forthcoming. In this way, the dialectical tier appeals to the audience as a potential critic, and as a resource for what are the objections, alternative positions, and criticisms available, given the topic under discussion.

Thus, reasonableness provides a way of deciding what should be included in the dialectical tier in terms of content. The objections and opposing points of view considered in the dialectical tier are required to relate to what the audience considers reasonable. That *many* points of view, *many* reasons be discussed is not necessary. What matters is that the views addressed relate to what the audience can be expected to know, and the standards that they accept. In composing an argument the author is in a position to know what is held to be common knowledge or received opinion on the topic under discussion, and what alternative positions there are concerning the issue at hand. Operating with the conception of reasonableness, it is possible to avoid Johnson's counter-intuitive claim that in order for an argument to count as rational, it must address even objections that are 'known to be misguided'. It is now possible to say that the argument must address those objections and alternative positions that are known to be misguided by the arguer, but that the audience may still hold. If both the arguer and audience believe some objections and alternatives to be misguided, then it will be permissible to exclude them from the text.

Johnson's position might be re-written as follows:

The fundamental purpose of argumentation is rational persuasion. To persuade someone rationally is to persuade the Other to accept a conclusion on the basis of the reasons and considerations cited and those alone. To this end, we provide an argument. The argument consists of an illative core – a set of reasons to accept

the conclusion. The argument is also comprised of a dialectical tier – in which the arguer appeals to the anticipated knowledge of the audience – in order to respond to objections to the illative core, alternative viewpoints, and the consequences and implications of the conclusion that the audience is likely to require addressing.

### **3.7 Reasonableness and Argumentation as Manifest Rationality**

Johnson asserts that “the central thesis of [Manifest Rationality] is that to properly understand the practice of argumentation, we must view it as an exercise in manifest rationality” (Johnson 2000, 144). “To say that the practice of argumentation is characterized by manifest rationality is to say that it is patently and openly rational...to the participants, whether they be arguer, critic, or those interested in the issue” (Johnson 2000, 163). The participants in argumentation agree to be bound by the practice of giving and receiving of reasons, “they agree to do nothing that would compromise either the substance or the appearance of rationality” (Johnson 2000, 163). The requirement of manifest rationality then recognizes the integral role of the Other, or audience, to the practice and process of argumentation. “Manifest rationality is why the arguer is obligated to respond to objections and criticisms from others and not ignore them or sweep them under the carpet” (Johnson 2000, 164). On one hand, the requirement that rationality be made manifest is a necessary feature of the practice of argumentation because without the participants being seen to exercise their rationality, there could not be the common knowledge required for the practice. However, “it is not just that to do so [to ignore objections and criticisms from others] would not be rational or would not be in keeping with the spirit of the practice. It is that it would be an obvious violation of it – and it would be seen to be such” (Johnson 2000, 164). Johnson, then, privileges the Other, or the audience, in a way similar to Perelman. The requirement of manifest

rationality assumes a competent audience; it privileges the Other in the sense that those we seek to rationally persuade *require* that the rationality of an argument be made manifest. The Other we seek to persuade would *notice* that we have not met our dialectical obligations. Indeed, in discussing the role of the arguer and the Other in the practice of argumentation, Johnson asserts that “an argument depends on the Other for its success and well-being” (Johnson 2000, 158). If an arguer is to be successful in the task of rational persuasion, “the argument must be appraised by the Other and pass scrutiny” (Johnson 2000, 158). The Other will not be in a position to scrutinize and comment on the argument if the requirement of manifest rationality is breached. “As a result of joint efforts, a deeper understanding or truer position may be reached as a result of criticism” (Johnson 2000, 158). However, Johnson takes as his primary concern argumentative texts, rather than debate or discussion. If the arguer is to present an argument that will rationally persuade the Other, the arguer must endeavor to become the Other, to investigate and discover what the likely positions and criticisms of the Other might be, aspects of rationality in argumentation that now find expression in our revised conception of rationality.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have attempted to describe what must be present in a conception of rationality in argumentation. The argument for the rationality of the appeal to the audience firmly entrenches the importance of the role of the audience in the practice of rational argumentation. The appeal to the audience for guidance in what an argument should address is a necessary and legitimate move for the arguer engaged in the task of

rational persuasion. By combining the audience-centered conception of reasonableness with Johnson's specification of rationality, the implicit role of the audience *in Manifest Rationality* has become obvious. My revised specification of rationality for the practice of argumentation allows Johnson to insist that a dialectical tier is a necessary component of an argument and provides better grounds for the claim that argumentation is manifestly rational. In the next chapter, I turn to matters dialectical.

## **Chapter Four: Dialectical Matters**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In Chapter Three, I argued that a conception of rationality in argumentation that insists on appealing to the audience provides stronger justification for Johnson's revised definition of argument. Now I turn to the dialectical considerations my position requires addressing. A critic might object that Johnson and Perelman are, fundamentally, philosophically at odds, such that any marriage between the two would be impossible, because of irreconcilable differences. First, Johnson's work is logical (though the logic is informal), while Perelman is a confirmed rhetorician. Second, Johnson provides a theory of argument evaluation and principles for argument criticism in *Manifest Rationality*, while Perelman offers few standards or guides for argument evaluation beyond its acceptability to the audience.

The first objection I will consider to my position is that Perelman's conception of reasonableness introduces an unnecessary relativism into Johnson's theory. In the second section of this chapter, I consider van Eemeren and Grootendorst's claim that Perelman's conception of reasonableness is extremely relative. I respond to this charge with the help of Christopher Tindale, to insist that the standard of reasonableness is better understood as a form of pluralism.

Second, a critic might object that Perelman's conception of reasonableness is far too rhetorically driven to be of much use to Johnson's theory. I have shown in Chapter One that Johnson is careful to distinguish the practice of argumentation from rhetoric; however, there are aspects of Johnson's theory that have drawn the attention of some

commentators on the grounds that they are rhetorical. In the third section, I make the case that Johnson's claim that a dialectical tier is a necessary component of an argument, and his claim that argumentation is characterized by manifest rationality, are supported by audience-centered considerations. If my proposed conception of rationality in argumentation can be characterized as a rhetorical conception of rationality, highlighting the rhetorical, audience-centered aspects of *Manifest Rationality* supports my marriage of Johnson and Perelman.

Lastly, even if my argument for the justification of the dialectical tier is accepted, a critic might wonder if adopting my revised conception of rationality is of any other use to Johnson's theory. After all, I do take pains to insist that my conception of argumentative rationality does not pretend to offer principles for argument appraisal, while Johnson provides a theory of argument evaluation and principles for argument criticism. However, I plan to show that my revised conception of rationality does aid Johnson's theory in answering two criticisms of his revised definition of argument, first identified by Trudy Govier: "the Regress Problem" (Govier 1999, 232), and "the Discrimination Problem" (Govier 1999, 228). The regress problem pertains to the claim that a dialectical tier is a necessary component of an argument. The regress problem arises because, in the dialectical tier, an arguer might respond to an objection to the illative core, or alternative point of view, by providing an argument against it. However, a premise – conclusion structure, or illative core, in the dialectical tier would require its *own* dialectical tier responding to objections and criticisms, which would require another illative core, which would require a dialectical tier, and so on, and so on, implying an

infinite regress. The problem is how the apparent infinite regress is to be avoided. I hope to show that my revised conception of argumentative rationality helps to take some of the force out of the problem of infinite regress. The discrimination problem asks how to select which objections, criticisms, and alternative positions the arguer is obligated to deal with in the dialectical tier. In the fourth section of this chapter, I hope to show that my revised conception of rationality aids Johnson in providing a better justification for the beginnings of an answer to the discrimination problem.

#### **4.2 Reasonableness and Relativism**

Perelman's conception of reasonableness is often taken to be rhetorical in nature. Reasonableness is understood to be rhetorical because of its dependence on the appeal to the audience, and because an argument must be considered reasonable by the audience it attempts to rationally persuade. As such, the standard of reasonableness requires that arguments appeal to the standards of the audience. This does not mean that the audience cannot be persuaded to change their conception of what counts as reasonable for them. Indeed, it seems that a lot of at least philosophical argumentation does this very thing. For a classic example, consider Descartes' first meditation, "Concerning Those Things That Can Be Called Into Doubt", in which he teases out the admission that it might be possible that an evil demon is controlling your senses. Here, Descartes challenges what currently counts as reasonable for his audience. Surely an evil demon is *not* controlling your senses, yet Descartes draws out the admission that it *may* be possible. Herein lies the beauty and value of reasonableness as a standard; it is flexible and plastic. Yet this flexibility and this plasticity become grounds for critique, resulting in the standard charge

against Perelman's theory of argumentation: it is relativistic. True, there are few, if any, normative constraints placed on arguments in *The New Rhetoric*. It is necessary to answer the charge of vicious or unproductive relativism as it relates to Perelman's conception of reasonableness, in order to highlight the positive value of understanding Perelman's relativism as a form of pluralism.

In *Fundamentals of Argumentation Theory: A Handbook of Historical Backgrounds and Contemporary Developments* (van Eemeren et al. 1996), the charge of relativism is leveled against the standard of reasonableness itself, rather than against his theory of argumentation. "Perelman's view of rationality aims to do justice to the diversity of values which characterizes social reality" (van Eemeren et al. 1996, 93n1); accordingly, "Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca offer a rhetorical concept of rationality in which the soundness of argumentation is equated with the degree to which argumentation is well suited to those for whom it is intended" (van Eemeren et al. 1996, 119). Because soundness is relative to the audience, "the norms of rationality that prevail are relative to a more or less arbitrary group of people. Ultimately, there can be as many rationality concepts as there are audiences – or even more, in view of the fact that audiences can change their norms in the course of time" (van Eemeren et al. 1996, 119). Perelman does not provide one hard and fast conception of reasonableness and as such, very few normative restrictions on argument – by far the most serious complaint charged against his theory of argumentation.

In "Perelman and the Fallacies", Frans van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst again charge Perelman with relativism. Here, van Eemeren and Grootendorst's task is to show

that, because Perelman's theory is relativistic, the new rhetoric cannot offer grounding for a theory of fallacies. Because the adherence of minds to the theses presented for their assent is the mark of successful argumentation, van Eemeren and Grootendorst characterize Perelman as putting forth "a rhetorical concept of reasonableness that fits in with an anthropological standard of reasonableness" (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1995, 124). Van Eemeren and Grootendorst correctly note that, since what is acceptable for one audience may not be acceptable to another, "this means that the standard of reasonableness is extremely relative. Ultimately, there could be just as many definitions of reasonableness as there are audiences (and since audiences can change their minds in the course of time, in practice, even more)" (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1995, 124). For van Eemeren and Grootendorst, this relative standard of reasonableness found in Perelman is inadequate for developing a theory of fallacies based on the new rhetoric. The concept of the universal audience does not offer enough constraint, because the speaker always constructs the universal audience from his or her own particular conception of what counts as reasonable.

In a sense, van Eemeren and Grootendorst are correct in claiming that the standard of reasonableness is relativistic. It is true that what counts as reasonable for an audience may only be reasonable 'for them', and may not be recognized as reasonable for another audience. Yet, in another sense, van Eemeren and Grootendorst have somewhat missed Perelman's point. Insofar as Perelman is reacting to the rigidity of formal logic and the traditional conception of reason found in Western philosophy, it seems wrongheaded to criticize him for not providing rigid standards for argument evaluation.

At the same time, within the scheme of the new rhetoric, there is no reason to suspect that fallacies could not be accommodated into a particular conception of reasonableness.

After all, my version of the universal audience could be one in which all traditional fallacies are recognized as problematic.

Christopher Tindale in *Acts of Arguing: A Rhetorical Model of Argument*, offers an excellent response to the charge of relativism. Tindale takes issue with van Eemeren and Grootendorst's claim that because what may be acceptable to one audience may not be acceptable to another "*the standard of reasonableness is extremely relative*" (emphasis mine) (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1995, 124). For Tindale, this statement "ignores the distinction between *the* standard of reasonableness in the model [of argumentation] and the individual applications of that standard. The standard of the universal audience as a standard of reasonableness will be invoked in different ways for different audiences in different contexts. But the *exercise* of universalizing and basing judgements of acceptability on the universalization remains the same" (Tindale 1999, 96). For Tindale, the point is that arguments that appeal to the universal audience engage in the act of universalization, they aim for the highest standards they possibly can. In the act of universalization, however, all argumentation that does not depend on the purely logical (though of course choice of system or language will be reflective of a time and a place), reflects the particular standards of the arguer. This is so even of the philosopher's appeal to reason. "'Reasonable' in a philosophical discourse affirms the agreement of the universal audience, as conceived by the philosopher rooted in her or his time and place.

Hence, ... the pluralism in philosophy and the absence of incontestable truth” (Tindale 1999, 92).

What Tindale wants us to see is that,

While being a hypothetical construction, then, the Perelman model [of the universal audience] is not, on this reading, an ideal model. What this allows us to do is keep our focus on the immediate audience with its particular cognitive claims, while recognizing a standard of reasonableness that should envelop that audience and that it should acknowledge whenever recourse to the universal audience is required. In this way we can understand Perelman's repeated insistence that the strength of an argument is a function of the audience, and that in evaluating arguments we must look first and foremost at the audience (Tindale 1999, 92-93).

However, it is not the task of this thesis to provide an endorsement of the totality of Perelman's theory of argumentation. I do not claim that part of the reasonableness of an argument is the audience's having judged it to be reasonable. Audiences can, and do, make mistakes in accepting arguments. My purpose in adopting Perelman's conception of reasonableness is to bring to the forefront the role of the audience in argumentation. In describing the rational nature of the appeal to the audience, I did not claim that an audience's acceptance of an argument as reasonable was sufficient for its *being* reasonable. It was my intent to describe only what *must be* present in a conception of argumentative rationality, and at the same time to leave room open for theories of argument appraisal, that is, theories of argument evaluation and criticism to be added on at a later date. My position does insist, however, that any theory of argument appraisal consider the audience to whom the argument is addressed.

In place of the rationalistic model of certainty, “Perelman proposes a community –oriented ‘reasonable’ person. This gives reasonableness/rationality over to the

diversities and differences that exist among people, arguers and audiences...arguers address the whole person, not the isolated intellect or emotion, and they consider as a natural course the circumstances and differences involved” (Tindale 1999, 201). Though there is truth to the claim that Perelman’s conception of reasonableness is relativistic, it is not the best way to express the diversity of beliefs the standard of reasonableness endorses. Instead, reasonableness should be understood as a form of pluralism. In addressing the diversities and differences that exist among audiences, I take the multiplicity of what may count as reasonable to be a good thing, significantly, when the task at hand is to understand why an audience accepts what it does. Reasonableness may prove to be an invaluable guide to understanding the belief systems of people different from our own belief systems, most especially those of a different culture, or religious background. The *limits* to the pluralism reasonableness endorses, I leave to the theory of argument appraisal.

#### 4.3 Rhetorical Aspects of *Manifest Rationality*

In commenting on the conference paper that was the inspiration for this thesis, Michael Leff claims,

Ohler argues – quite rightly in my opinion – that a theory of dialectic must encompass the social dimension of argumentation if it is to provide normative criteria adequate to the type of rationality demanded by dialectical practice. For this reason, she turns to the ‘reasonable’ and Perelman’s conception of grounded, social rationality. Significantly, however, she does not use the term ‘rhetoric’, and perhaps this omission indicates a reluctance to connect her contextual rationality with the instrumentalism associated with rhetoric (Leff 2003, 5).

I am wary of connecting my conception of argumentative rationality with rhetoric for *exactly* the reason Leff has noted. I do not want to endorse the position that what is

effective in gaining an audience's assent is automatically rational. A complete theory of rational argumentation, which I do not attempt to provide, would insist on normative constraints for arguments. Though the conception of rationality I endorse might be understood as contextual, social, or anthropological, my position is best understood as a rhetorical conception of rationality in argumentation, because I provide an argument for the rationality of the appeal to the audience. My account is rhetorical insofar as I claim that a rational argument must appeal to audience-centered considerations. However, a critic might object that, because Johnson is careful to distinguish between argumentation and rhetoric (Johnson 2000, 163), it makes little sense for his theory to embrace a rhetorical conception of rationality.

The apparent problem disappears if we distinguish between how Johnson understands rhetoric, and how my conception of rationality is rhetorically driven. Johnson clearly understands rhetoric to concern itself with “effective communication” (Johnson 2000, 163). It is the instrumentality of rhetoric, the emphasis on effectiveness, which initially gave me pause when deciding whether or not to accept the characterization of my conception of rationality in argumentation as rhetorical. However, my conception of rationality is rhetorical, insofar as it brings to the forefront audience-centered considerations. As I argued in Chapter Three, adopting the revised conception of rationality I propose brings the role of the audience in *Manifest Rationality* to the forefront. This is to say, there are at least two very important, rhetorical, audience-centered aspects to Johnson's theory.

First, in justifying the necessity of an argument being comprised of both an illative core and a dialectical tier, Johnson writes, “The participants [in argumentation] know that there will likely be objections to the arguer’s premises. Indeed, the arguer must know this, so it is typical that the arguer will attempt to anticipate and defuse such objections within the course of the argument” (Johnson 2000, 160). The knowledge of the participants that there are likely to be objections to the arguer’s premises *requires* the arguer to ‘anticipate and defuse’ objections.

For those at whom it [the argument] is directed, those who know and care about the issue, will be aware that the argument is open to objections from those who disagree with its reasons, conclusion, and-or reasoning. Hence, if the arguer wishes to persuade Others rationally, the arguer is obligated to take account of these objections and opposing points of view (Johnson 2000, 160).

An argument must be comprised of both an illative core and a dialectical tier if it is to be rationally persuasive because *the audience requires* both an illative core and a dialectical tier in order to be persuaded. Insofar as audience-centered considerations are rhetorical considerations, the requirement that an argument possess a dialectical tier, is a rhetorical requirement.

Second, “to say that the practice of argumentation is characterized by manifest rationality is to say that it is patently and openly rational. To whom? To the participants, whether they be arguer, critic, or those interested in the issue” (Johnson 2000, 163). Argumentation must appear to be rational to all the participants involved. Again, *the audience requires* that rationality be made manifest: without the rationality of the argument made manifest, there could not be the common knowledge required for the practice of argumentation. Without the rationality of the argument made manifest, the

Other, or audience, could not be rationally persuaded. Thus, the requirement of manifest rationality, insofar as the audience requires that the rationality of an argument be made manifest in order to be rationally persuaded, is a rhetorical requirement.

In “An Exploration of Johnson’s Sense of Argument”, Hans V. Hansen also argues that the requirement that the rationality of the argument be made manifest is a rhetorical requirement (Hansen 2002, 273). The standard of manifest rationality appears to be a rhetorical requirement “first, because it [the standard of manifest rationality] has to do with the presentation of reasoning, not with the quality of the reasoning itself” (Hansen 2002, 273). That is, the reasoning of an argument might be made manifest to the reader without being sound and vice versa – the reasoning might be sound without the soundness being made manifest to the reader. Second, manifest rationality requires not only that we respond to objections to our argument that we take to be damaging, but also that we respond to objections “which we do not take to be damaging to our position, but are perceived to be so” (Hansen 2002, 273). Here, Hansen is referring to Johnson’s claim that the arguer but not the rhetor “must respond even to criticisms that are believed (or known) to be misguided” (Johnson 2000, 164), a claim offered by Johnson as the distinction between argumentation and rhetoric. According to Hansen, “that the rational persuader must address even the misguided objection to his view shows that persuasion must be tailored to its intended audience, and that is a rhetorical rather than a logical demand” (Hansen 2002, 274).

In “A Concept Divided: Ralph Johnson’s Definition of Argument”, Christopher Tindale suggests yet another rhetorical aspect to Johnson’s theory concerning the

dialectical tier and which objections should or should not be included within it. For Johnson, addressing the dialectical obligations may be viewed “contextually in terms of the arguer’s recognition of obligations” (Tindale 2002, 306). Yet for Tindale, this answer is unsatisfactory. “But surely we could take things further by observing that the context restricts the possible objections and alternatives to those relevant for the audience in question and so likely to be raised by that audience?” (Tindale 2002, 306). Though not explicitly stated, Tindale’s approach – an approach very much like the one I endorsed in Chapter Three – might be characterized as rhetorical, insofar as he takes the audience to which an argument is addressed as a fundamental concern. In “Manifest Rationality Reconsidered: Reply to my Fellow Symposiasts”, Ralph Johnson picks up on the above suggestion from Tindale, as a possible answer to the question, “what are the arguer’s dialectical obligations and what must he or she do to satisfy them?” (Johnson 2002, 326). Tindale’s proposal – that context restricts the objections and alternatives to be answered to those relevant to the audience to whom the argument is addressed – draws the following response: “I like the sound of this suggestion, but cashing it in is another matter entirely” (Johnson 2002, 327). Indeed it is. For such an approach to work, Johnson would have to alter his theory to embrace the rationality of appeal to the audience. The beginning of what is needed to make such an approach feasible, is a different conception of rationality, like the one I endorsed in Chapter Three, one that makes appeal to the audience a rational appeal. Embracing my revised conception of rationality helps to partly determine how an arguer is to identify his or her dialectical obligations, discussed in the last section of this chapter.

In the same essay, Johnson responds to the comments from Hansen and Tindale that indicate rhetorical aspects of his work. “It seems to me that the real issue raised by Hansen ... is whether my approach is *really* rhetorical in character” (emphasis mine) (Johnson 2002, 327). While noting that rhetoric may be understood in many different ways (Johnson 2002, 328), Johnson’s response to the work of his commentators is to state that mere mention of the audience does not make a theory rhetorical. Johnson wants to make it quite clear that his theory is not rhetorical, as exhibited in his distinction between rhetoric and argumentation, and his reluctance to refer to the ‘audience’ of an argument, preferring instead the term ‘Other’. “If Hansen (and others) take the view that any reference to audience is sufficient to render a view rhetorical, I have some questions for him” (Johnson 2002, 329). For instance, “if the mere mention of the audience is sufficient to make an approach rhetorical, then it would seem to follow that (for Hansen) the mere mention of validity should make an approach logical, from which it follows that Pragma-dialectics is really a logical approach, since validity is part of its canonical apparatus” (Johnson 2002, 329). According to Johnson, “this is obviously not the way to think about these matters which deserve continued study”(Johnson 2002, 329).

Johnson is strongly opposed to the suggestion that there are rhetorical considerations in play in *Manifest Rationality*. Yet the rhetorical considerations pointed out by Hansen and Tindale support the proposed marriage of Johnson and Perelman, insofar as I stress the role of the audience in constructing an argument. As well, as I have shown in Chapter Three, Johnson’s definition of argument and the requirement of manifest rationality benefit from my ‘rhetorical’ conception of rationality.

#### 4.4 The Regress Problem

The regress problem arises directly out of Johnson's proposed redefinition of argument. Recall that for Johnson an argument is comprised of both an illative core and a dialectical tier:

This means that every arguer has a dialectical obligation to buttress his or her main argument [illative core] with supplementary arguments [a dialectical tier] responding to alternative positions and objections. Supplementary arguments, being also arguments [having an illative core], would appear to require supplementary arguments [a dialectical tier] addressing alternatives and objections ... this line of reasoning can clearly be continued. Thus Johnson's view seems to imply an infinite regress (Govier 1999, 233).

According to Govier, the apparent regress is a serious problem for Johnson's theory, as "the dialectical tier would not be a tier; it would be a staircase that mounts forever" (Govier 1999, 233). Govier appears to have pinpointed a serious flaw in Johnson's definition of argument. It follows from Johnson's definition of argument that if a premise – conclusion complex appears in the dialectical tier, it should also be supported by its own dialectical tier. It can be asked, however, whether the regress problem really poses practical issues for Johnson's theory.

First, it is possible for an arguer to respond to an objection, criticism, or alternative position in the dialectical tier without the use of a premise – conclusion complex or illative core. An arguer may use an explanation (for instance, an explanation of a key term used in a premise) to respond to an objection. In this case, the inference from clarifying a key term to discharging an objection need not be stated explicitly in terms of a premise – conclusion complex, or illative core. Thus there is no reason to assume that the dialectical tier *must* contain arguments. To my knowledge, nowhere in

*Manifest Rationality* does Johnson claim that the dialectical tier must contain arguments. Johnson speaks in terms of “tak[ing] account of ... objections and opposing points of view” (Johnson 2000, 160), elsewhere, that the arguer must “deal with objections and criticisms” (Johnson 2000, 160), or, that the arguer must “address these dialectical dimensions” (Johnson 2000, 165). Indeed, in his revised definition of argument Johnson states “an argument possesses a dialectical tier in which the arguer discharges his dialectical obligations” (Johnson 2000, 168). So, Govier may well err when she insists that the dialectical tier be comprised of supplementary arguments. Johnson certainly does not claim anything of the kind.

Though the dialectical tier need not *always* be comprised of arguments, that is, sets of illative cores with their required dialectical tiers, it is the case that full-fledged arguments can appear in the dialectical tier. The arguer may then ask, when can the argument stop?

I think that it is reasonable to assume only one dialectical tier is really necessary. For Johnson, “an argument is a type of ... text ... in which the arguer seeks to persuade the Other(s) of the truth of a thesis by producing the reasons that support it” (Johnson 2000, 168). The emphasis, here, is on the truth of the conclusion, or thesis being argued for. “In addition to this illative core, an argument possesses a dialectical tier in which the arguer discharges his dialectical obligations” (Johnson 2000, 168). The dialectical tier, though an important part of an argument, is secondary in importance to the conclusion or thesis being argued for. The purpose in offering an argument is to rationally persuade the Other of the truth of the conclusion, thus as the argument moves further away from the

illative core, emphasis on the claim being argued for is lessened. One could reasonably say, then, that the regress goes on only as long as it is possible to continue responding to dialectical considerations, while at the same time keeping the focus of the argument on the original thesis for which the argument was offered. Yet this still offers only sketchy guidance to the arguer who wishes to adopt Johnson's theory.

Appealing to my revised conception of rationality provides a much more specific answer as to when to 'stop' the regress.

*Rationality in argumentation consists of the action of using, giving, and/or acting on the basis of reasons, and appealing to the expected positions of the audience with respect to the topic under discussion and to the standards for argument and argumentation the audience holds, for guidance as to what should be included in the argument.*

For the arguer engaged in rational persuasion, the regress ends in relation to the audience. Recall that what may count as reasonable for one audience may not count as reasonable for another audience. If a particular audience has especially demanding standards for argument evaluation, and thus what counts as reasonable, then perhaps the regress should be allowed to reach two or three levels. If the audience has low standards that are less demanding, then the arguer may only present the initial illative core and dialectical tier. If the arguer has no particular audience in mind, and seeks to persuade anyone who may come into contact with his or her argument, and so constructs his or her own view of the audience, then the regress should be continued to the level that the arguer deems appropriate.

#### 4.5 The Discrimination Problem

What remains to be seen is whether my revised conception of rationality aids Johnson in any other aspect of his theory of argument, beyond requiring that rationality be made manifest and requiring that an argument possess a dialectical tier. In this section, I show how Johnson and I come to similar positions regarding what the dialectical tier must necessarily consider.

Trudy Govier poses two difficult questions for Johnson's conception of the dialectical tier to answer:

First, which alternative positions does the arguer have a dialectical obligation to consider, and on what basis are these selected as requiring attention? Secondly, which objections does the arguer have a dialectical obligation to consider, and on what basis are those objections deemed to require attention? (Govier 1999, 223).

Taken together, these two questions comprise the discrimination problem: how does the arguer decide which objections and alternative positions to respond to in the dialectical tier? In *Manifest Rationality*, the question as to what, exactly, should be contained in the dialectical tier, Johnson terms "The Specification Problem" (Johnson 2000, 327). The specification problem asks "how many and which objections must be dealt with in the dialectical tier, and how does the arguer determine which ones to deal with?" (Johnson 2000, 328). In *Manifest Rationality*, Johnson restricts his answer to the specification, or discrimination problem, to objections. In a footnote (Johnson 2000, 328), he notes that while the arguer must also respond to criticisms and alternative positions in the dialectical tier, how the arguer is to determine which of these to respond to, is a slightly different matter than choosing between objections.

Johnson uses his response to the specification problem as an opportunity to discuss what might make up the content of the dialectical tier. “To develop this notion [of a dialectical tier] a bit further, let us say that a dialectical field takes shape around a certain issue” (Johnson 2000, 327). Imagine the conclusion of an argument as a point in a given field of discussion. “The various positions on those issues ... can be represented as points in the neighborhood of the issue. From each of these locations, there will very likely be objections and criticisms directed at the argument” (Johnson 2000, 327). The concept of a dialectical field resembles what I called the ‘argumentative space’ in Chapter Three, section two, in presenting a coherent picture of Perelman’s conception of reasonableness. Accordingly, in formulating a response to how the arguer is to determine which objections and criticisms to respond to, in order to rationally persuade an audience, we might return to my revised conception of rationality in argumentation, which grows out of Perelman’s conception of reasonableness. It is difficult, when theorizing, to answer how the expected positions and argumentative standards of the audience *specifically* determine the alternative positions, objections, and criticisms that should be addressed in the dialectical tier. It is difficult to offer specifics, because what should be addressed must be decided on a case-by-case, audience-by-audience, basis. However, my revised conception of rationality can at least justify appeal to the audience for guidance, and how appeal to the audience begins to specify what an argument should address.

Rationality in argumentation consists of the action of using, giving, and/or acting on the basis of reasons, and appealing to the expected positions of the audience with respect to the topic under discussion and to the standards for argument and argumentation the audience holds, for guidance as to what should be included in the argument.

My revised conception of argumentative rationality allows for, and in fact insists on, appealing to the audience for guidance in terms of what an argument should address, in order to be rationally persuasive. A critic might here object that my conception of rationality is only useful if we can be reasonably sure of the actual composition of the audience. By way of response, I first note that very often we can be reasonably sure who our audience is. At the very least, the arguer can reasonably assume that those reading the argument are interested in the issue (else, they would stop reading). Even if the constituents of the audience are unknown, or held in mind, it is still possible to determine which alternative positions there are on a given issue by understanding the potential audience's position as being representative of the dialectical field, or argumentative space, surrounding an issue. The arguer, though psychologically unaware of a particular audience in constructing an argument, still affords the audience an integral role, in choosing from the dialectical field which objections require a response. Premise one of the argument for the rationality of the appeal to the audience, presents some guidelines as to what an argument should consider, by stating that what counts as reasonable will be a function of the knowledge and expected positions of the audience being addressed. The first step in determining what objections and criticisms an arguer should respond to, then, is investigation into received opinions on the topic of the argument, in order to determine the history of discussion, and thus what an audience can be expected to know. The history of the discussion and the expected knowledge of the audience illuminate what an audience would require be addressed by the argument. If what will count as reasonable

is a function of the current situation of the audience, the arguer must speak to the current situation of the audience in the course of her argument.

The requirement that the arguer endeavor to discover the history of the discussion is not a particularly onerous requirement. Often, an arguer is well aware of other opinions on the topic he or she is addressing. Often, disagreement with someone else becomes the very genesis of an argument. By investigating other opinions, the arguer gets a sense of what the audience can be reasonably expected to know, and thus what the arguer will have to make reference to, in order to rationally persuade them. The dialectical field one enters into when offering an argument may be understood as being comprised of the audience's knowledge and expected positions on a given issue. This goes both ways – the audience's knowledge and expected positions on a given issue also comprise the dialectical field. At the risk of being branded elitist, consider the practice of philosophy.

To rationally persuade an audience of philosophers, the arguer must respond to others who have taken a position on the same issue. Responding to other positions situates the arguer within the history of the discussion, and similarities and differences between two positions may provide support for the argument. To satisfy this requirement requires that the arguer do his or her research. However, responding to others also relates to how the expected standards of the audience shape what will count as reasonable for them. Recall that the standards of the audience might be construed as the expected standards for argument appraisal the audience holds. Often, commentary on philosophical writing grows out of the work of certain commentators whose particular

criticisms of a theory are understood to be serious, or important. The consensus of the audience recognizes the particular contribution as being an important part of the dialectical field surrounding an issue. The arguer who wishes to further the discussion on a given topic must offer a response to such important criticisms, not only because responding will help support the arguer's position, but also because the audience requires that these commentators be responded to, in order to be rationally persuaded by the argument. For instance, Trudy Govier's criticisms of the dialectical tier, in the form of the discrimination problem and the problem of infinite regress, are considered to be strong, important objections to Johnson's theory by the standards of the audience engaged in the theory of argument, such that anyone who writes on the dialectical tier, not only Johnson himself, must offer a response to these problems. As an example, though I, myself, do not consider the regress problem to be particularly damaging to Johnson's theory, I must still respond to it in the course of this thesis, because my audience demands that I do so.

It is possible then to answer the problem of discrimination by responding that the dialectical tier must respond to the objections, criticisms, alternative points of view, and implications of the conclusion, that the audience requires addressing. What an audience will require an argument address will be a function of the audience's knowledge, beliefs, and experiences, as relevant to the topic under discussion and as required by the audience's standards for argument and argumentation. Therefore, which positions the arguer is obliged to respond to in the dialectical tier will be a function of the audience.

In *Manifest Rationality*, Johnson comes to a similar conclusion. As an option for determining which objections must be dealt with in the dialectical tier, Johnson considers the position that “the arguer should address all those objections that the audience will want to see addressed” (Johnson 2000, 328). Johnson argues that to do so is required, that “there is little doubt [this option] states a necessary condition” (Johnson 2000, 331). That is, a dialectical tier must respond to those objections the audience will likely *require* be addressed. However, “the problem would be if it [this option] were interpreted as a sufficient condition” (Johnson 2000, 331). Though the sufficient conditions for argumentative rationality are beyond the scope of this thesis, I find myself in agreement with Johnson on this point. It may be the case, for example, that the arguer is aware of an objection, criticism, or alternative position, of which the arguer is reasonably sure the audience is not aware. In such cases, the arguer may be reasonably convinced that *if* the audience *were* aware of it, they would require the arguer’s response. In such cases, it seems reasonable to include the objection. My revised conception of argumentative rationality allows for this kind of consideration, by understanding the objection unknown to the audience as still part of the dialectical field or argumentative space the argument enters into. First, it may be the case that the objection is recent, perhaps found in a yet to be published work. In this case, it is reasonable to expect that the audience will become aware of it, and so the arguer should offer a preemptive response. For another audience, however, the objection might distract attention away from the original argument, and so it may be best left out of the argument. In this way, the argumentative standards of the audience also shape what an argument should address. If according to the theory of

argument appraisal the audience holds, all objections should be considered by an argument, the arguer must offer a response.

The point to stress is that Johnson and I come to a similar conclusion with regard to what should comprise the content of the dialectical tier. My position follows directly from my conception of rationality and both premises of the argument for the rationality of the appeal to the audience. If Johnson were to adopt my revised conception of argumentative rationality, the means to partly determine the content of the dialectical tier, and so work toward an answer to the discrimination problem, may be generated out of the conception of rationality in play, thus resulting in better justification for his answer to the discrimination, or specification, problem.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

My revised conception of rationality cannot be very specific in how the arguer may deal with the problems of discrimination and infinite regress. To a large extent, the resolution of these two problems requires a theory of argument evaluation and a theory of argument criticism, both of which are beyond the scope of this thesis. The resolutions of the discrimination problem and the regress problem require a theory of argument evaluation because how to adequately deal with the dialectical obligations of an argument requires a theory as to what counts as a good argument. My task here is only to state the necessary conditions for argumentative rationality. Appeal to the audience is a necessary condition for rational argumentation because it is the audience who ultimately determines what counts as reasonable for them. Thus, the conception of rationality in argumentation must recognize the integral role of the audience in the practice of argumentation. The

apparent relativism introduced by appeal to the audience need not be understood as a negative. Rather, the allowance for many different conceptions of what counts as reasonable should be seen as an endorsement of pluralism, and a benefit to theories of argument interpretation.

## Conclusion

In this thesis I have shown that Ralph Johnson's revised definition of argument, as found in *Manifest Rationality*, is not adequately justified by his specification of rationality. I argued that, given Johnson's specification of rationality, a dialectical tier is a necessary component of an argument because it is comprised of *more* reasons to accept the conclusion being argued for. Johnson's specification of rationality diminishes the importance of the *content* of the dialectical tier, an essential aspect of how argumentation is manifestly rational.

I turned to Chaim Perelman's conception of reasonableness, as an alternative conception of rationality in argumentation. What counts as reasonable for Perelman is a function of the historical and contextual situation of the audience we seek to persuade, justifying appeal to the audience in constructing an argument. Building on Perelman's conception of reasonableness, I argued that it is necessary for the arguer engaged in the task of rational persuasion to appeal to the expected position of the audience with respect to the topic under discussion and the current standards for argument and argumentation the audience holds.

With the argument for the rationality of the appeal to the audience in hand, I then proposed my own conception of rationality in argumentation, the result of combining Johnson's structural specification of rationality and Perelman's substantive conception of reasonableness. Johnson's addition of the dialectical tier to the definition of argument is shown to be necessary because the dialectical tier appeals to the expected knowledge and

standards of the audience addressed. As well, the claim that argumentation is characterized by manifest rationality now receives richer interpretation.

The requirement that an argument possess a dialectical tier, and the claim that argumentation is characterized by manifest rationality, are shown to be supported by audience-centered considerations, resulting in a stronger defense for my marriage of Johnson and Perelman, and yet another reason for Johnson to adopt my more substantive conception of rationality in argumentation. Additionally, I have shown that my conception of rationality in argumentation aids Johnson in answering criticisms of the dialectical tier, providing the means to better respond to the problems of infinite regress and discrimination.

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